

## THE WRECK OF THE TARARUA.

On June 3 the Court of Inquiry into the cause of the wreck delivered the following decision, and returned the certificates of the first and second officers: —

1. That the screw steamer *Tararua* was, on her passage from Port Chalmers to the Bluff, wrecked, and all on board, with the exception of twenty, lost, on Waipapa Point on a reef locally known as Otara reef.

2. That such a wreck and loss of life was primarily caused through the failure of the master, Francis George Garrard, to ascertain at 4 a.m. on the 29th April the correct position of the ship. The simple use of the lead would have told the distance off shore.

3. That the course in which the *Tararua* was steered from 1 30 a.m. to 4 a.m. (a W.S.W. course)—assuming as the evidence entitles us to do, that the compasses were magnetically correct—was an inshore course, and therefore improper, especially as the heavy swell and ebb-tide tended to set the vessel inshore.

4. That we are of opinion that the vessel at 4 a.m. had not run her distance, but was considerably to the east of Slope Point, and at comparatively speaking a short distance from the land.

5. That at 4.25 a.m., when the second officer first called the attention of the captain to the noise of breakers, the vessel was off Slope Point and in dangerous proximity thereto, on a W. course; but that the captain believed her to be off Waipapa Point. That when he altered his course from W. to W. by S.  $\frac{1}{2}$  S. he thought he was running in the direction of Toby Rock, and that fear of running on that rock caused him to alter the course in the short space of twenty minutes back to W.

6. That although it is to be regretted that the second officer did not exercise the power which he had to stop the engines if he found the ship in imminent danger, when for the second time he fancied he heard breakers, we cannot come to the conclusion that his not doing so was a negligent omission. It was reasonable for him to suppose that the captain had ascertained the position of the ship at 4 a.m., and that the lapse of time from 4 a.m. to 5.15 a.m. was sufficient, if the ship was on her proper course, to enable her to have passed all danger; and that he might thereby naturally be impressed with the idea that the hearing of breakers could be only a fancy, and took the action he did—to report to the captain—in terms of his orders. At the same time, we are of opinion that the leaving of the bridge at any time by an officer in charge of the deck when the ship is underway is fraught with extreme danger, and that Captain Garrard's orders to his officers to call him personally, involving as it did, the leaving of the bridge, were imprudent.

7. That the immediate cause of the wreck and loss of life was the negligent failure of the able seaman, Weston, to keep a proper look-out, for we are impressed with the idea that had a proper look-out been kept the broken water must have been observed some minutes before the vessel struck, and in all probability sufficient time afforded for the danger to be avoided in.

8. That after the vessel struck and filled, thereby becoming a total wreck, the captain, in our opinion, committed an error in judgment in not placing his passengers in the boats, particularly as the tide was ebb (and the time morning, the most favourable to work boats on the coast of New Zealand).

9. That the captain must have failed to have noted the proximity of the wreck to two boat harbours shown on the chart—one to the E. and another to the W., the latter of which, we are of opinion, was available.

10. The Court are of opinion that the boats having been in existence before 1879, the Act and regulations were complied with, so far as their proper number and character were concerned, as also the number of life-buoys; the boats were fully equipped, with the exception of life-belts for the crew of the lifeboats required by the Act. According to the evidence, the boats would not have carried the whole number on board the vessel, but a very large proportion. The Act and regulations do not contemplate that the boats should carry all on board, however necessary it might appear under certain circumstances, nor do they make any special provision for the carrying of life-belts for the use of the passengers and crew. We cannot help stating, however, that, in our opinion, many lives would have been saved had life-belts been available for the passengers and crew in this case.

11. We are of opinion that after the vessel struck the boats were almost uselessly employed.

12. In reference to the management of the boats by the officers in charge, we are of opinion that the loss of the first officer's boat might have been avoided by more skillful management; but, although censuring the first officer for his lack of skill, we are not disposed to say that the casualty that resulted therefrom was caused by his wrongful act or default. As to the second officer's boat, we can take no exception to the way it was managed, but we are impressed with the idea that had the crew in that boat been supplied with life-belts they would have incurred greater risk in their attempts to reach the vessel after the sea began to rise.

13. From the evidence we are of opinion that after twelve noon it became a difficult and dangerous task to render external aid to those on the wreck; but we cannot come to the conclusion that it became an impossibility to render any assistance, and we think that, notwithstanding the nature of the telegrams making intimation of the accident, aid should have been endeavored to have been obtained on first notice of the casualty from Invercargill or the Bluff, the nearest ports to the wreck, the former being forty-two, the latter twenty miles distant, to give a chance of assistance reaching the wreck before dark on the 29th. For no passenger vessel on a rock can be considered in any other but a very dangerous position. At the same time we admit that every promptitude was used to send aid from Port Chalmers.

14. That we are astonished at the fact that the officers of the steamer *Tararua* were ignorant of the deviations of the compass, when it is considered that at the moment, through accident to the master, the command of the steamer might have devolved on one of the them. We are not prepared, however, on account of the peculiar discipline on board disclosed by the evidence, to say to what degree, if any, this ignorance was attributable to their own neglect.

These being our findings, we return the certificates to the officers. We are going to make the following recommendations to the Government:—

*a.* Considering the number of vessels that have been stranded on or near this Point (about ten in number) the necessity of a light in the neighbourhood to render navigation safe is urgent.

*b.* It should be made a regulation under the Shipping and Seaman's Act, 1877, that all passenger vessels trading in New Zealand waters should carry life-belts for the maximum number of passengers and crew such vessels are entitled to carry at sea.

*c.* A regulation should also be made compelling the exercise in the management of the boats at stated intervals.

W. LAURENCE SIMPSON.

WILLIAM THOMSON.

WILLIAM MACGOWAN.