

(No. 6800.)

"RIVERDALE" (S.S.)

AND

"ARABIA" (S.S.).

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry held at Bombay on the 24th and 28th days of March, 1905, to investigate the circumstances attending the collision between the s.s. "RIVERDALE" and the s.s. "ARABIA," in the Victoria Dock, Bombay, on the 15th March, 1905.

Bombay:  
Chief Presidency Magistrate's Court,  
28th March, 1905.

In pursuance of the directions contained in Government Resolution No. 25, dated the 18th March, 1905, Marine Department, that Court consisting of J. Sanders Slater, Esq., Chief Presidency Magistrate, F. E. Hardcastle, Esq., Marine Surveyor, and J. G. E. Metcalfe, Esq., Marine Surveyor, assembled at the Esplanade Police Court on Friday, the 24th March, 1905, and proceeded to inquire into the circumstances attending the collision between the s.s. "Riverdale" and s.s. "Arabia," in the Victoria Dock, Bombay, on the 15th March, 1905.

2. The s.s. "Riverdale" is a screw steamship of 4,206 tons gross and 2,752 tons net registered tonnage. She was built of steel, at Sunderland, in 1900, and is registered at Glasgow, her official number being 111300. Her length over all is 380 ft., and she is propelled by triple expansion engines of 351 h.p. Orders from the bridge to the engine-room are communicated by telegraph, the telegraph dial on the bridge being in the line of the ship's length. The dial in the engine-room is so situated that an operator on the working platform has his back to it, when handling the levers of the main engines. The ship is owned by the Riverdale Steamship Company, Limited, of Liverpool, and is under the command of Mr. George Gilbert Hay, who holds a Board of Trade certificate as master granted at Arbroath on the 4th December, 1891. Her chief engineer is Mr. James Simpson Macdonald, who holds a certificate of competency as first class engineer granted by the Board of Trade at Glasgow on the 31st December, 1891. Both these officers have been in the ship since September, 1900.

3. The s.s. "Riverdale" arrived in Bombay Harbour on the 2nd March, 1905, and proceeded to discharge her cargo in the stream. On the 14th March Captain Hay applied to be allowed to enter the docks on the morning tide of the 15th. The time of high water on the morning of the 15th March was 4.33, and Mr. Piper, the senior dock master, pointed out that to enter on that tide would involve bringing the ship in in the dark. On the captain stating that he must do so to save his charter permission was given, the hour for entering being fixed at 2.30 a.m., and the berth allotted to the ship being No. 7 in Victoria Dock.

4. From a plan of the docks produced by Mr. Piper, it appears that entrance to the Victoria Dock from the harbour is effected by means of gates in the eastern boundary wall of the dock. Berth No. 7 is situated on the opposite or western side of the dock, on the northern side of a jetty which projects from the western side. As it is the invariable

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custom to berth vessels with the astern inwards, it is necessary, after a ship has entered the dock, to swing her until she is in a position to be hauled stern-foremost into her berth.

5. Punctually at the time ordered the s.s. "Riverdale" was brought into the dock entrance by her pilot, who at the dock gates gave over charge of the vessel to the second assistant dock master, Mr. Arnott, who took up his position on the bridge with the captain. Mr. Piper was superintending the bringing of ships into the dock, and was stationed on the dockhead. The night was very dark, with little or no wind. On board the s.s. "Riverdale" Mr. Arnott and the captain, as already mentioned, were on the bridge, the chief officer was on the forecastle head, and the chief engineer was in charge of the engine-room and was personally working the main engines, the fourth engineer and a fireman, who was attending to the telegraph, being also in the engine-room. The ship was being manoeuvred under her own steam. Berths 12, 13, and 14 are on the inner side of the dock wall, on the port side of a vessel entering, berth No. 14 being nearest to the entrance. The Royal Mail s.s. "Arabia," belonging to the P. & O. S. N. Company, was lying alongside and made fast in berths Nos. 12 and 13. As the s.s. "Riverdale" passed through the entrance, Mr. Piper ran a line from her port bow to a ballard at No. 14 berth, 75 ft. ahead of the R.I.M.S. "Arabia," and when she had passed through and been brought up, he gave the word "all clear" and as he could then see nothing except her masthead and port lights gave over the manoeuvring of the ship to Mr. Arnott.

6. At 2.50 a.m. the engines were stopped, and the way on the ship gradually tautened the line on her port bow and swung the ship's stern round towards the west. After a while the chief officer hailed the bridge that she was getting rather close to the P. & O. steamer, and the order was telegraphed to the engine-room "slow astern." This order was promptly replied to, but as the ship appeared to be gathering way, and the chief officer again hailed the bridge that they were drawing closer to the "Arabia," the captain, with Mr. Arnott's approval, telegraphed "full speed astern" to the engine-room, the order being replied to at once. As the speed of the ship increased, the Captain repeated the orders and, with Mr. Arnott's approval, ordered the chief officer to let go the port anchor. The latter order was promptly obeyed, and the order "hold on" was also promptly carried out, but the s.s. "Riverdale" struck the s.s. "Arabia" just abaft the after funnel on her port side, cutting into her promenade deck and doing considerable damage also to her boat deck and upper works. Without any further order from the bridge, the s.s. "Riverdale" went astern and cleared the "Arabia," and was subsequently berthed without further mishap. On the captain going to the engine-room and inquiring what was the matter, the chief engineer at once admitted that he had made a mistake, and had put the engine slow ahead and full speed ahead instead of slow astern and full speed astern. On examination of the s.s. "Riverdale" it was ascertained that she had also sustained material damage to her stern and bow plates.

7. The candid and straightforward acknowledgment by the chief engineer of his mistake he has repeated here and also at the inquiry before the port officer, and he attributes this casualty entirely to his mistake. The Court is satisfied that it was entirely this mistake which caused the collision the subject of this inquiry, and that in all other respects the ship was manoeuvred in a prudent and seaman-like manner. The chief engineer can give no explanation as to how he came to make this unfortunate error in carrying out the orders from the bridge. There is no question as to his sobriety or his physical or professional fitness for his post, for Captain Hay gives convincing testimony to his competency and character; and the Court is of opinion

that the manly and frank admission which Mr. Macdonald has throughout made of his mistake is entirely in accordance with the estimate which Captain Hay has formed of his character. The Court finds that the casualty under investigation was caused by the mistake of the chief engineer in working the engine slow ahead and full speed ahead instead of slow astern and full speed astern, and that such mistake was a *bona fide* error, not due to incompetency or misconduct on the part of the chief engineer. In these circumstances the Court is of opinion that it is unnecessary to do more than

admonish him to guard against any recurrence of so unfortunate a mistake.

J. SANDERS SLATER,  
Chief Presidency Magistrate.

F. E. HARDCASTLE, }  
J. G. E. METCALFE. } Marine Surveyors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the  
19th day of May, 1905.)

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