

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE LOSS OF THE S.S. BON-ACCORD.

To the EDITOR of the DAILY FREE PRESS.

SIR,—I am reluctant to write to the newspapers with reference to the recent inquiry into the loss of the s.s. Bon-Accord off Cape Finisterre while under my command, and I would not do so were it not that, for some unaccountable reason, the Court have overlooked the facts on which their judgment should have been based. They attribute blame to me on three grounds—(First) That I was not in the engine room from the time the Bon-Accord sprung the leak until shortly before the vessel was abandoned on the evening of Sunday the 16th of March; (second) That the starboard side pocket was not cleared—at least, partially—of coals by drawing the coals up in ash buckets by the ventilators to the deck; and (third) That I did not set square sails in order to reach one or other of the two sheltered bays under Cape Finisterre, presumably for the purpose of beaching the vessel.

The last two matters are matters of opinion, and it would be out of place for me to discuss them here. If there are—as there apparently are—people regarded as skilled in navigation, who think that, with a ship rapidly filling with water, when it was essential that the full pumping power of the vessel should be utilised, it would have been a wise course to attempt to empty, by means of ash buckets, a side pocket which automatically filled itself, so that for every bucket of coals that was removed there was pouring from above an equal quantity, filling up the vacuum, and thus preventing the possibility of clearing the pocket, they are entitled to their opinion; and if there are—as there apparently are—people who are regarded as versed in navigation who think that to attempt to carry an unmanageable ship with three hands at the wheel, to steer her past the line of assistance on to a rock-studded and rock-girt coast, at the imminent risk, not only of the loss of the ship, but of every soul on board her, in the off-chance of being able to steer her into a sheltered bay where she could be beached, would have been wise, they, too, are entitled to their opinion; but in neither case, probably, will their opinion be received as of much weight.

But the third point is a matter—not of opinion, but of facts; and, so far as the decision of the Court from being founded on fact, that it is the case that between 12 o'clock on Saturday night and the time that the ship was abandoned I was in the engine-and-stoke-hole at least a dozen times, and that while there were no "formal consultations" between the engineers and me, we were in constant verbal communication during the period after the leak was sprung. The Court say that the first time I took any interest in what was going on in the engine-room was about 10 p.m. on Saturday, the 15th March, when I, being on the bridge, contented myself with looking through the grating on the roof of the stokehole. Those who knew the ship, or cared to look at the plans, know that it would have been utterly impossible for me to see anything of the water from the grating on the roof of the stokehole. The grating I referred to in my evidence was the lowest stokehole grating, about 6 or 8 feet above the place where the water was coming in through the coals; and I leave it to those who have examined the plans of the vessel to say whether that was not a place from which everything that could be seen was to be seen, and from which I could be—as I was—in communication with the engineer. I was in the engine-room while the engineers were taking off the cover of the tank. I was there again when the engineer was busy with his strums; and, as I have said before, I was repeatedly during the night at the stokehole grating—not the grating on the roof of the stokehole, but the grating I have already referred to.

As the opinion of the Court of Inquiry appears to have proceeded, therefore, wholly upon misconstruction as to the facts, I think it due to myself to make clear to your readers how the facts really stand; and, in order that there may be no suggestions that what I have said is an uncorroborated afterthought, the first and second engineers append to this letter a memorandum certifying to the correctness of the facts stated by me.—I am, etc.,

C. R. DAVIDSON, master of late s.s. Bon-Accord.

We have read the foregoing letter and certify that the facts stated by the captain are correct.

GEORGE CHALMERS, chief engineer.

HUGH JOHNSTON, 2nd engineer.