

SELF-TRIMMER'S FIGHT IN GALE.

A CAPTAIN'S CONFIDENCE IN THE TYPE.

[FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.]

MIDDLESBROUGH, Friday.

A grim narrative of how the Vale of Pickering, a similar type of vessel to the John Harrison, struggled for two days in a Channel gale was related when the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the latter vessel was resumed here to-day.

Reading from the log of Captain Thomas Richard Thompson, Mr. Burton related that between 31st December, 1924, and January 2nd, 1925, the Vale of Pickering encountered a whole gale and mountainous seas, the vessel shipping solid water over all and sustaining considerable damage. She behaved well on this occasion, said Captain Thompson, considering that two seas shipped were the heaviest he had ever seen in his 26 years' experience. Her taraplins were ripped and the cabin bulkhead set back, but no water got into the holds. He managed to make Dungeness and anchor on the evening of the second day in 45 fathoms after changing the ship's course several times. His vessel was in the same gale as that during which the Hartley foundered, and she sustained no damage whatever, though only 65 miles distant at the time.

MAY HAVE STRUCK MINE.

Witness was unable to say whether the master of the John Harrison would decide to make the voyage to Amsterdam from Flamborough or to run down to Antwerp from the place where the lifeboat had been picked. He opined that she was lost S.W. of that, near the Dutch coast. She might have gone off her course on to the sandbanks in the gale, or I have encountered wreckage. It was not impossible that she had struck a mine or a sunken battleship, as he understood there were sunken battleships in the area, while mines often were released during gales.

Questioning this witness regarding the equipment of ships of the self-trimming type, Capt. Tait asked—Is there not always a danger that when considering the inexorable requirements of trade, a little bit of safety is sacrificed?

Witness.—Yes; it is the same on all lines now.

Captain Tait.—I know lines who would not have ships like that. These flat-bottomed ships are a new fashion. What deck freeboard has your vessel?

Witness.—Fourteen inches.

Mr. Butterwick, naval architect to the builders, was recalled. Replying to Mr. Burton, he said that since the loss of this ship his company were not considering the question of amending the type in any particular way, though it was possible that certain fresh details would be considered in due course, such as the provision of flush decks.

In reply to questions by Captain Tait, Mr. Butterwick said it might be advantage to have a load line on such vessels.

Captain Tait said when he was marine superintendent he found such a line checked stupid people from overloading what was known as a dangerous ship.

Mr. Burton put in evidence and depositions from several ship captains as to the violence of the gale at about the period the John Harrison is believed to have been lost. One captain described the gale as a fierce one, and added that the North Sea was not to be taken lightly on such occasions.

CAPTAIN'S CONFIDENCE.

Mr. Burton concluded the case for the Board of Trade by handing in evidence of inquiries into the loss of the Ellerray, Port Morrow, Rawlinson and Hartley, all self-trimmers.

Called by the owners, Mr. William Jones, master of the sister-ship Timberham, said he had been in many gales, and she was a very fine vessel. The lashings on the hatches were adequate, and there was never any suspicion of the cargo shifting. Two months ago he narrowly missed a mine.

Mr. Muir.—In spite of the evidence you have heard, are you prepared to go back to your ship?

Witness.—I am going back. (Laughter.)

The inquiry was closed, and judgment will be delivered on Thursday next.



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