

LOSS OF THE LISMORE.

INQUIRY OPENS AT DUBLIN.

WAS THE VESSEL TENDER?

THE MASTER'S "ALL UP"
DECLARATION.

QUESTIONS FOR COURT TO ANSWER.

IN the historically grim and forbidding Dublin Castle there began yesterday an inquiry which marks an epoch in the history of the Free State Government. Within little more than a month of the foundering of the Cork Steam Packet Company's new steamer Lismore, Mr. G. Cussen opened the formal inquiry into what Mr. Swayne, K.C., for the Department of Industry and Commerce, described as, "the appalling catastrophe, which involved the loss of 18 men of the crew of 19 who were carried."

It is the first inquiry of the sort held, and it was apparent that the procedure was largely based upon that adopted at Board of Trade inquiries in England.

It was suggested that the Lismore was tender on account of shallow draft, which was adopted because of the trading in Wexford Harbour, for which she was designed, but in the evidence there was considerable disparity on this point. "Some little time before the Lismore went down," said the sole survivor, "efforts were made by blowing the whistle to attract the attention of a vessel three-quarters of a mile away, but without success."

(FROM OUR OWN REPORTER.)



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THE OPENING STATEMENT. ALTERNATIVE THEORIES OF DISASTER.

DUBLIN, Monday.

THE Irish Minister for Industry and Commerce having ordered a formal investigation into the circumstances attending the loss of the steamer *Lismore*, the inquiry was opened to-day in the Law Court in Dublin Castle, Mr. G. Cussen, L.L.B., District Justice, presiding. He was assisted by Captain J. H. Webb and Captain Louis Brady, Mr. E. G. Miller, marine engineer, and Mr. W. J. Mares, naval architect; Mr. E. A. Swayne, K.C., and Mr. Jno. Costello, B.L. (instructed by the Chief State Solicitor, Mr. Corrigan) appeared on behalf of the Department of Industry and Commerce; Mr. E. J. Smyth, B.L., of the Department of Transport and Marine, represented that department; Mr. John Horgan represented Mr. Denis Horgan, cattle dealer, who had 271 head of cattle on board; Mr. Overend appeared for the owners of the vessel, and Mr. J. H. Bennett, district secretary for Ireland of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, who desired to appear for relatives of members of the crew who belonged to the union, was informed that he could put any questions through Mr. Swayne.

MINISTRY'S COMMENDABLE PROMPTITUDE.

LOADING OF THE VESSEL.

Mr. Swayne, in his explanatory opening statement, characterised the occurrence which led to this inquiry as "the appalling catastrophe of the loss of the *Lismore*, involving as it did the loss of 18 lives of the crew of 19." It is not a case of collision between vessels or a foundering in bad weather," said he, "it is a case where a new boat lifted a cargo in comparatively fine weather and was lost through capsizing, as we believe." The Ministry, with the most commendable promptitude when a disaster of this kind had occurred, which was so difficult to explain, and did not in fact involve any of the ordinary questions of navigation directed the formal inquiry to be made.

Continuing, he said "the ship *Lismore* was built this year by the Ardrossan Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co., Ltd., at Ardrossan. Built for the coasting trade, principally for cattle from Wexford harbour, a shallow draft was required. She was delivered to the Cork Steam Packet Co. in June, and had made four voyages before she began the fatal trip. Her voyages were between Manchester or Birkenhead and Cork. Her dimensions were—length 185ft., breadth 31ft., gross tonnage 606.45, registered tonnage 238.04; her displacement was 1,051 tons, draft 19.3 forward and 13.4 aft. She had a main deck and a weather deck, along which were pens for cattle.

DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

There was some difference of opinion as to the time at which she left Cork on July 10.

"It will be for the court to determine," said

Mr. Swayne, "whether the disaster was due to something in the construction, something in the loading, the possibility of striking something, or to faulty navigation or to a combination of two or more of these.

It will be of the greatest importance to ascertain how the vessel was loaded. It appeared from the evidence of the survivor that a considerable quantity of cargo was put upon the weather deck. The cargo consisted largely of motor car parts and at Penrose she took on 271 head of cattle and some sheep, which were in pens on the weather deck. The total cargo was nearly 213 tons and there would be some evidence to indicate that the vessel had a list to port when she left.

A TREMENDOUS LIST.

Before she went down another vessel was sighted and the whistle of the *Lismore* was sounded several times, but no other sign or signal of distress was sent up. The survivor, John Carley, when he came on duty a second time, after a rest, found that the list to port which had been before visible had greatly increased. He was directed by the mate to go down to where the cattle were in pens around the main deck to clear the scuppers, because it was found there was a considerable amount of water on the main deck. Investigations showed that there were two and a half feet of water.

The vessel had a tremendous list and the master deciding that nothing could be done, ordered that the lifeboat lines should be cut so as to launch them. Before this could be done the *Lismore* turned over and went down, and Carley went down with her, but managed to extricate himself and by means of an improvised raft to save himself after 24 hours, during which he fed on seaweed.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED.

Counsel put in the following preliminary question as to which he invited the Court to give answers:—

- (a) What was the cost of the *Lismore* to her owners?
- (b) What was her value when she left Cork on her last voyage?
- (c) What insurances were effected on and in connection with the vessel?
- (a) Was the vessel in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull, machinery, and equipment?
- (b) Was the vessel properly provided with boats and life-saving appliances?
- (c) Was the vessel properly provided with light and sound signals?
- (d) Was the vessel properly manned?
- (a) What was the amount and description of the cargo carried?
- (b) Was the cargo properly trimmed and secured from shifting?
- (c) What was the amount and description of the cargo carried on deck, and was it properly stowed and lashed?
- (d) What was the quantity and description of the cattle and sheep carried, and were they properly penned, and were the fittings secure and satisfactory?
- (e) Were the Provisions and the Animals (Transit and General) (Ireland) Order of 1913 duly complied with?
- (a) Was the cargo properly stowed, and the weights so distributed as to make the vessel safe and stable?
- (b) Was the cargo properly stowed in accordance with the loading plans supplied by the builders?
- (a) Was the amount of cargo carried excessive?
- Were the hatches battened down and properly secured?
- Were the cargo doors well secured before the vessel left the port, and were the scuppers working freely?
- Had the vessel at any time during loading or before she left port—
 - A list to starboard or
 - A list to port?
- (a) Had the vessel when leaving port a list to port?
- (b) If so, what was the extent and cause of same?
- (c) Was the master justified in proceeding on the voyage without balancing steps to correct such list?

- Did the vessel take an increased list to port during the voyage?
 - If so, when and to what extent did this occur?
 - What was the cause of the vessel taking such an increased list?
 - Were prompt and proper measures then taken by the master for the safety of the vessel?
- When and where did the vessel founder?
 - What was the cause of the loss of the vessel?
 - Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
 - Was the loss of the vessel caused by the wrongful act or default of the master or other officer of the vessel?
 - To what person or persons, if any, does blame for the loss of the vessel attach?

SOLE SURVIVOR'S EVIDENCE.

LISMORE'S LIST LEAVING CORK.

The greater part of the day's hearing was occupied with the story of Mr. John Carley, the seaman who is the only man alive who is able to tell what happened on this fatal voyage. He spoke of noticing a list when the *Lismore* left Cork for Manchester, and declared that at a later stage this list to port had very greatly increased. Finally, when it was discovered that there were about two feet and half of water on the main deck and the presence of the cattle prevented any remedial measures being taken it was decided to cut lifeboats clear in order to launch them.

"The master," said Carley, "declared that it was all up, and she was going over." Soon afterwards the vessel heeled over and sank.

Witness proceeded to declare how in the darkness he came in contact with what he subsequently discovered was a hatch to which he lashed himself with his neckcloth. Then he was successful in clutching a piece of plank which he split into paddles. Later still he secured an empty packing case which he added to his raft, and in this way he drifted about for twenty-four hours, feeding meanwhile on seaweed.

Then he landed, but he had to climb a cliff in order to reach habitations. Even then his troubles were not over, for he had to make three ineffectual attempts to enlist the sympathy of the inhabitants before he finally came across some people who would believe him.

In answer to questions Carley declared that he was not conscious of the *Lismore* striking anything, and he never heard any suggestion that they had struck anything.

THE MEN IN THE BUNKS.

Replying to Mr. Awerend, K.C., for the owners, witness said no order was given to call the men who were in their bunks on to the deck. He did not know whether that would suggest that the master did not think there was any danger.

Answering queries at the instance of Mr. Bennett he expressed the personal opinion that it might have been better if they had had two more men in the crew. They would have had larger watches and the danger might have been seen sooner. Cargo and even cattle might have been sacrificed in order to save the ship.

Mr. Perry, cargo superintendent for the Cork Steam Packet Co., described how the cargo was stowed on this voyage, and said he thought the greater weight would be on the port side. Earlier there had been a slight list to starboard. He did not think the *Lismore* was a tender ship; in fact, he thought the contrary. When heavy cases were being put on board she did not yield as readily as some other vessels. The fatal voyage was the only one on which the *Lismore* had carried cargo on the forecastle deck and poop.

The court adjourned until to-morrow (Tuesday).

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