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HER MAJESTY'S SHIP "CAPTAIN."

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT MARTIAL ON THE
CAUSE OF HER LOSS.

(From the Broad Arrow.)

[CONTINUED.]

On Monday, the 3rd of October, the Court resumed:

Mr. EDWARD JAS. REED, C.B., stated that his report of the 20th of July was made to their Lordships with the full knowledge on their part, and on that of the Controller of the Navy, that he objected to the freeboard of the ship, and confined himself to the consideration of the design as a piece of naval architecture possessing a low freeboard in comparison with that which their Lordships and the Controller, as well as himself, considered essential to the absolute seaworthiness of the ship under all circumstances. His report, therefore, carefully avoided all reference to this feature of the vessel, beyond the assumption that he was to take for granted that the deck was high enough, which was precisely the condition upon which the difference between Captain Coles, the Controller's Department, and himself arose. In reporting on these designs, he felt it his duty, as their Lordships and the Controller well knew, to leave the freeboard out of consideration, and discuss the design upon the assumption that, in that respect, Captain Coles was right and we all were wrong. To the design so considered he had no other objections than those pointed out in his second report of the 2nd of August, 1866, touching the weight of the ship and stability. The influence of the deck entering the water upon the stability was not considered in the report quoted—first, because the freeboard was to be eight feet in height, and secondly, because that consideration had not been brought under notice by proposals to mast ships with low freeboards. The question of freeboard had, up to that time been regarded rather as a seaman's question than a naval architect's, but his report, nevertheless, stated that further investigations would be necessary before he could assume the responsibility of such a ship. Mr. Reed explained that before making further report (referred to on page 5 of the summary), further calculations had been made, and he then came to the conclusion that the stability of a ship of this type required thorough investigation, in view of the large surface of canvas to be spread, and on the probable position of her centre of gravity. In his further examination the witness stated that the responsibility of this

design must rest entirely upon Captain Coles and Messrs. Laird. It was out of the question to suppose that their Lordships would order £350,000 of the public money to be expended upon, and 500 lives committed to, a ship, the responsibility of which was to rest upon persons who had from the beginning believed the characteristic features of the ship to be wrong, and out of whose hands the design of the ship and the responsibility for it had been advisedly and distinctly taken, in order to put to the test the question whether our belief that a high freeboard was necessary in a fully-rigged sailing ship was a mere prejudice of ours on a scientific question. The very cause of the *Captain* being designed and of her being constructed was the assumption that the opinions of Sir Spencer Robinson and himself were not to be trusted, and that we were showing some prejudiced opposition to the views of Captain Coles. So strongly did he feel that we were clear of all responsibility for this ship, and that the time would come when it would be necessary for us to prove our exemption from that responsibility, that I forbade my assistants ever to employ the phrase "approved" even to the most minor details, and directed them never to employ a stronger phrase, even with regard to the smallest details, than that "no objection would be offered." If the word "approved," applied even to the minutest detail of the *Captain*, ever left my office, it was from an oversight, resulting from a disregard of that instruction. If, therefore, Captain Coles and Messrs. Laird were not responsible for the success and the seaworthiness of the *Captain*, no naval officer and no naval architect was responsible for it.

By the President: The responsibility of seeing that the workmanship and materials were sound was undoubtedly laid upon the Controller, but beyond that no further responsibility was laid upon him than that which arose out of the inability of Captain Coles to live at Birkenhead at certain seasons, and as the Controller did not live at Birkenhead any more than Captain Coles, the transfer of responsibility on that account must of necessity have been very small. The Controller undertook the responsibility in consequence of the modification of the contract referred to of having the ship when complete, and of regulating subject to their Lordships' approval, the payment for her by instalments; but so far as the character of the ship herself was concerned, nothing whatever was done, except with the concurrence of Captain Coles in the exercise of that responsibility which he longed to him.

Admiral Sir H. R. Yelverton: Had you at

any time from the first mention of the *Captain* being built up to the time of her loss, any misgivings as to her seaworthiness and stability?—Undoubtedly—as regards the weights to be carried the inaccuracy of the calculation became evident after the ship was afloat; but before she was commenced I twice over referred in my reports to the risk of an excess of weight being incurred, from what the design alone showed, and I specified some weights which had not apparently been considered. The grounds upon which I have believed her unseaworthy since her completion are that I believe her funnel casings, which would be subjected to such forces as no other ship that I know of is liable to, were likely to be started and even carried away in extremely rough weather. The consequence would be that the large engine and boiler hatches would be at once open to the inroads of the sea, and the ship would be liable to founder. In the next place, I believe that with little or no sail set, the *Captain*, as complete, was liable to encounter waves of her own period, to be made to roll heavily, and I am not at all sure that when so rolling, should she ship a heavy sea on the windward side, her top weights would at once be so greatly augmented as to carry her past her position of maximum stability and capsize her, this liability resulting from the absence of anything like a sufficient escape for the sea across the deck and beneath the hurricane deck. Thirdly, I cannot doubt that the *Captain* was deficient of that growing stability which a ship with a high freeboard possesses to such a degree as to bring about the accident which appears to have happened to her. All these grounds of apprehension apply to her service in times of peace. As regards her capability in action, I do not like to express to this Court the sense I feel of the fitness of a 4000-ton ship, with a deck 6½ feet high, with engine and boiler hatches protected only by their iron casings, to fight an action, with a risk of encountering a breeze of wind afterwards. These remarks apply, not to exceptional vessels where compromises are sometimes unavoidably enforced, but to the condition of a first-class ironclad sea-going frigate, fit to perform all the services which Her Majesty's navy may have to render.

On visiting the *Captain*, did it strike you at any time that she was heavily masted in every way, and that the corresponding spread of her canvas would far exceed what is usual in a ship of her size?—I should have considered the ordinary masting excessive for a ship like the *Captain*, and I have never yet been able to ascertain on what grounds any one contended, or could contend, that