

the after deck in a state of great excitement. The captain endeavoured to put the vessel before the wind, but there being no steerage way upon her, and little or no wind, he failed. By this time the flames were issuing from the fore scuttle, and the smoke was most dense. The foresail was hauled up, and the first light wind brought the vessel head to wind, and the flames and smoke rushed along the deck aft. The second mate then went and threw the ammunition overboard. The fire-engine was got to work at once, and the passengers and crew by means of buckets and tins poured large quantities of water down the fore scuttle and hatch, but without any apparent effect. The fire increased rapidly, and men were sent to clear away the two foremost boats; while doing so the boats caught fire, and they were abandoned. The men then went to the poop to get the long-boat over—that was bottom upwards; in this they failed on account of the flames. The captain's gig, however, was picked up and thrown overboard.

The second mate next proceeded to the starboard life-boat, which was on davits, and found it filled with about eighty females; their weight bent the davits, and on the boat touching the water she capsized, and all its inmates perished. A rush was then made to the port life-boat; that was successfully lowered, with about thirty persons in her. The second mate slid down the falls into it as she touched the water. The chief mate and a female at that moment jumped overboard, and were picked up by that boat. She just managed to clear the vessel when the main-mast fell; the fore-mast having fallen just before. The vessel's stern then blew out, and afterwards the mizen-mast fell. All this occurred within the space of two hours. The port boat lay by the burning vessel during the night. About 9 a.m., the starboard life-boat, which had previously capsized, was seen full of people, floating with the mast, but without oars or gear, they having been washed away when she capsized. The people in that boat shouted to the port boat for an officer to take charge of them. The port boat immediately made towards them, and it was arranged that the second mate (McDonald) and Lewis and Cotter (two seamen), and one of the male passengers, should be transferred to her, leaving the port boat in charge of the first mate, which had three oars, a broken oar, a mast, but no sail. One oar and the broken one were put into the starboard boat, and it was agreed to keep together if possible. Just after this exchange had been made, the port boat picked up a man from the sea, making thirty-two souls in the boat, about twenty-six of whom were passengers. There were thirty persons in the starboard boat, twenty-four being passengers. Both boats were without provisions or water; the carcass of a sheep had been put into the port boat, but that had been thrown overboard to make room for saving life. These boats lay near the burning vessel till about 4 p.m. of the 19th (forty hours), when she was seen to go down. The crews of the two boats agreed to keep together, if possible, and to steer a north-east course, and they did so up to the 21st, when it began to blow; the boats were then separated, and the port boat was not seen again.

Most of those on board the starboard boat sank rapidly for want of food, and on the 25th eight only survived, three of whom had lost their senses. On the 27th, there were but five alive in the boat, when the "British Sceptre," of Liverpool, rescued them and took them on board. They were treated with all possible kindness, but shortly afterwards two others died, leaving only Henry McDonald (the second mate), Thomas Lewis (an A.B.), and Edward Cotter (an ordinary seaman) the only survivors. They were ultimately brought to London.

It appeared by the evidence as before stated, that the fore peak of the "Cospatrik" was divided from the fore hold by a wooden partition, formed of boards about eleven inches wide, nailed athwartship to the stanchions in the fore peak. The part so partitioned off from the hold was used as a coal-hole and held about fifty tons, the usual quantity carried for the ship's use being seventy tons; and it appeared to be the practice to carry the remaining twenty tons in the fore hold, close to the partition; and in order to stow them there two of the top boards from the partition were removed from the fore peak, and afterwards replaced and nailed as before. This was done previous to the last voyage. It was further stated in evidence, that when the coals in the fore peak were consumed, one or more of the lower boards were knocked away in order to get at the coals in the hold; and, at the time of the catastrophe, about one-half of those in the fore peak had been used.

Immediately over the fore peak was an open locker used by the boatswain for his stores, which consisted of paints, oil, oakum, ropes, and other articles for the ship's use, and immediately above this locker was the seamen's compartment.

The entrance to the locker, and also to the coal-hole, was by a hatch or air shaft which divided the locker from the single men's berths, which were over the fore hold. In these berths was an iron grating (sufficiently large to admit of a man's hand) for the purpose of ventilating the berths into the air shaft. This grating was nearly opposite to the boatswain's locker referred to.

The above is a short summary of the facts proved in evidence. The two important questions on which we have to report our opinion appear to us to be—

Firstly.—What was the cause of the fire?

Secondly.—Was the "Cospatrik" sufficiently found in boats, and were they promptly lowered, and proper precautions taken to prevent their being overcrowded?

Before giving our opinion on the first of these questions, it is as well to state that during the inquiry suggestions were made that the fire might have originated from spontaneous combustion of some of the various articles kept in the boatswain's locker for the ship's use, or of some part of the cargo itself.

Again, it was said that it might have been caused by a lucifer match, or the ashes of a pipe having carelessly been dropped through the open grating of the single-men's compartment into the open boatswain's locker.

After carefully considering the whole of the evidence, we cannot agree in any of these suggestions. We think that if the fire had commenced in the boatswain's locker at all, from either of the causes suggested, it must have been more speedily detected, from its proximity to the main deck, and certainly before it had gained such complete mastery over the vessel, as described by McDonald, in the very short time, some three-quarters of an hour, which had elapsed since he had gone round the decks and found no indication of smoke or fire. In addition to this, the evidence proved that a watchman