

## The Wreck of the Ventnor.

The *Sterling* arrived at 5.30 p.m. on Saturday and left immediately for the North to search for the missing boat. She made a zig-zag course up the coast, calling at Ahipara, communicating with Cape Maria, after a thorough search of Spirits Bay. She is due to return here about Tuesday. The weather was exceptionally fine and clear last week.

Under the present conditions a landing could be effected almost anywhere on this coast.

The *Ventnor's* men differ as to the probable fate of the missing boat. A Frenchman named Oheia says he jumped out of the captain's boat when the *Ventnor* was almost sinking, and picked up the third mate's boat. He states that all hands in the captain's boat excepting two Chinese and himself were drowned.

This statement the officers do not believe, as after the steamer sank somebody in the captain's boat called for a bailer.

However, it is considered that the captain's boat and its occupants may have been drawn under by suction and drowned.

A fireman named Van Poppel, who is amongst the missing, is said to be a Belgian nobleman.

The chief officer, Mr Cameron, interviewed, said:

The *Ventnor* left Wellington at 9.30 on Sunday week, with fine clear weather and smooth sea.

Early on Sunday afternoon the steamer cleared Cook Straits and a course was shaped to carry her five or six miles seaward of Cape Egmont.

At four o'clock I went on watch and at eight o'clock I was relieved by the third mate (Mr Ure). I gave Mr Ure the course. I told him to keep a look out for the light at the Cape towards the end of his watch. I then went below. At midnight the second officer went on watch.

At 1.30 a.m. I was awakened by a shock as if the steamer had struck on a rock. I jumped out of bunk and hurried on deck. I saw land ahead of me, and everybody was on deck.

The boats were lowered to the rail. The tanks and holds were sounded. Number one hold was found to be making water and rapidly filling. No. 2 tank was full, and the other tanks were gradually filling. There was a little water in No. 3 hold on the port side.

The pumps were ordered on No. 1 hold immediately after the boat struck and the engines were reversed.

Twelve minutes later the steamer came off the rocks. She was then put half speed, and it was decided to go on to Auckland, that port offering the best facilities for docking and repairs.

The vessel was not at this time considered in immediate danger.

All Sunday the pumps were constantly at work.

During Sunday night we found the water was gaining in No. 1 hold, and the pumps were unable to cope with the inflow. In the meantime water was gaining in No. 3 hold. Accordingly the pumps were transferred to that portion and were successful in keeping the water under.

At nine on Monday morning the vessel had travelled sixty or seventy miles at half speed since the mishap. She was steering well and the hope was yet entertained of reaching Auckland. She was now however, down by the head about five feet.

In the afternoon of Sunday water showed in the fore peak, and on the following morning the water had risen in the fore peak five feet.

The vessel was now down by the head as far as the 'tween decks, and water was also starting to show over the fore peak.

Shortly before six o'clock it was evident to all that the vessel was in great danger.

The captain altered his course and made for the land. The vessel was, however, unmanageable, and could only be driven at very slow speed.

The danger of the position was pointed out to the men by the cap-

tain, but all decided to stick to the ship.

Land was sighted forty miles south of Hokianga at 2 p.m. on Sunday.

Water was now beginning to wash freely about the decks, which were flush with the sea.

About five o'clock the boats were all provisioned and the men ordered to stand by them ready to let go.

About ten miles off Hokianga Heads the engines were stopped.

It was decided to wait till daylight if the vessel remained buoyant and then endeavour to go ahead.

Towards nine o'clock, however, the vessel commenced settling fast, and her main deck was almost under water.

Half an hour later all hands were ordered into the boats, and the five boats were manned.

Just about this time the side lights disappeared while the boats were still alongside, and two minutes later

Previous to the sinking of the steamer the captain stood on the port side, leaning over the rail. He said, "Shove off, boys." The vessel was then well under water.

That was the last seen of the captain by the mate. He walked round the deck house to the other side of the steamer, where two boats were.

The third mate told me that he and the captain jumped overboard together.

Thereafter there seems to be a conflict of opinion as to what occurred. It is said that the davits struck the captain's boat, which capsized.

The third mate's boat got clear and subsequently three men were picked up by the latter. Somebody was heard to call out for a bucket, but no cry for help was heard. The third mate's boat was twenty yards off when the *Ventnor* sank. Her crew sighted Hokianga light about two o'clock in the morning. They had a fearful battle in the breakers and on the bar inside the Heads. They discerned a light burning on the shore, and on landing found the small boat's crew were already ashore. They had lighted a fire and several ladies were assisting boiling coffee and drying clothes. It was about 5.30 a.m. when the third mate's boat landed, the other boat, which was a smaller one, anticipating them by half an hour. The third boat was picked up by the *Energy* ten miles north of the Heads.

Another statement is to the effect that the captain and second officer remained on deck when the steamer sank.

The second engineer, Mr Baillie, states:—After pumping several hours we found it impossible to control the water in No. 1 hold. The pumps were changed to No. 3 hold, and soon had it dry. All Monday the ship kept going half speed. Although Nos. 2, 3 and 4 holds were kept dry the water reached its own level in No. 1 hold during the afternoon. There was no change in our condition throughout the night. At daylight matters began to assume a serious state. Shortly before four o'clock I found No. 2 hold was making water, and with every hour past the angle of the deck became greater.

The leak must have increased much between eight and nine o'clock. The deck was full of water, and the steamer seemed to have lost buoyancy.

When the boats pushed off the side lights became submerged. When we were twenty yards off the steamer disappeared.

The sight was an awful one. The water gradually rose over the deck to the stoke hole, when the stern lifted, rising quicker and quicker till the steamer stood upright. Three or four seconds later she sank, with a weird, whizzing sound, accompanied by a jet of flame from the funnel.

The men were somewhat short of clothing. On landing the greater part of the day was spent before a log fire on the beach.

The course laid by the captain was the same usually set, but the tide and current caused the steamer to drift on the rocks.

Mr Baillie is of opinion that the steamer's bottom was completely perforated by striking on the rocks, and that her tanks alone kept her afloat for a considerable time before she foundered.

Arrangements have been made for the crew of the *Ventnor* to leave for Onehunga by the *Gairloch* on Tuesday.

The officers say very little with reference to the time when the men

were ordered to man the boats. The crew state that the stern of the steamer had risen out of the water when the order was given that the boats should be manned on Tuesday afternoon, as the steamer was then ready to sink.

A Frenchman named Oheia, the look-out man, states that he saw the land a little before the steamer struck the point. The light was not discernible, being low.

On Friday last there arrived in Auckland twenty-three passengers and crew, including the chief officer, Mr Cameron, and the second engineer, Mr D. Baillie, who, in addition to the third officer, third engineer and two men already here, are the only survivors from the wreck of the steamer *Ventnor*, which foundered off Hokianga Heads on Tuesday of last week. At nine o'clock yesterday morning the crew left Opononi, Hokianga, in the Northern S.S. Company's steamer *Gairloch*, and after a pleasant trip down the coast arrived at Onehunga at seven this morning, the journey thence to town being made by rail. During their stay at Hokianga the men were hospitably treated by Mrs Bryers and family, and on the whole their stay at Omapers was an enjoyable one. The officers are staying at the *Waverley Hotel*, and arrangements have been made for the crew to put up at the *Sailors' Home*.

None of the surviving officers, with the exception of the third engineer, who was below in the engine room, were on watch at the time the *Ventnor* struck on the reef running out from Cape Egmont, and as naturally they will not now speak of that which they did not see, their opinion will be obtained only at the nautical inquiry to be held shortly at either Auckland or Wellington. As stated in a previous issue, a course calculated to carry the steamer five or six miles to seaward of the cape was laid down by Captain Ferry the evening before the vessel struck, and it has since been stated that but for the setting in of a strong tide and current the accident would never have occurred. Twelve minutes after the vessel struck soundings were taken, and it was found that she had made very little water, and the fact was conveyed to the crew, who were also informed that should the water rise to any alarming extent within the next twenty-four hours all hands would be ordered to the boats.

If a statement made by one of the crew can be relied on the captain evidently did not consider the vessel in any immediate danger, as he is reported to have given it as his intention to make for Hong Kong, the original port of destination. However, after conferring with his officers, the captain decided to come on to Auckland, as he considered this the nearest port at which the vessel could be docked and repaired at reasonable cost. Some people have gone so far as to state that the captain was guilty of an error in judgment in deciding on Auckland. Questioned on this point the officers, while refusing to give a direct answer, stated that they were quite certain the captain did what was best under the circumstances, adding that there might be reasons of which the public are entirely ignorant for the captain's decision to come to this port. Both officers and men speak appreciatively of the good seamanlike qualities of their skipper, and are assured that he did all that lay in his power to save his ship, at the same time paying due precaution for the safety of all on board.

When off Hokianga Heads on Tuesday morning it was apparent to all on board that the vessel had but a short time to float. The crew approached Captain Ferry and asked him to beach the steamer, she being then waterlogged and her propeller almost out of the water, making her unmanageable. The captain seemed to think the proposal a feasible one, but being yet determined that nothing should be left undone to save his vessel he accordingly put to sea. Nine or ten miles off the land the engines stopped. It was his intention to lay by till the morning, and if the watertight bulkheads then showed no signs of giving away to resume the voyage to Auckland. The ill-fated steamer, as is well known, sank that same night.

Throughout the day the bulkheads were expected to give way at any

moment, and the crew were assembled aft in readiness to take to the boats. The tanks fore and aft were full of water, while No. 1 hold forward was also flooded. No. 2 hold and the two after holds were practically dry, and had this condition of things lasted it was confidently expected that port would yet be made in safety. About four o'clock in the afternoon the bulkheads commenced to leak, and at 8.30 they gave way completely.

In an amazingly short space of time the *Ventnor* sank from view. The suction caused by the sinking of the vessel was a source of great danger to the occupants in the small boats. The chief officer's boat, with thirteen men, and one of the smaller boats, which should have been in charge of the second mate, with four men, two firemen and two sailors, were successful in pulling away some 15 or 20yds before the steamer sank. The other two boats were less fortunate. The third mate's boat with seven men, just pushed off as the vessel was disappearing, and the captain's boat, which held 10 men, from all account was still alongside when the *Ventnor* took the final plunge. It is presumed the latter boat was capsized by the steamer's davits striking her gunwale. That subsequently the third mate's boat and the captain's boat were in close proximity is evidenced by the fact that two Chinese, who could not swim, floated alongside the former and were picked up, as was also a Frenchman. A voice which is said to have been the third engineer's, was heard to cry out for a bucket. After that all is a blank, and the officers and crew themselves consider that the boat was drawn in by the suction, and her occupants drowned. Of the other boats two effected a landing inside Hokianga Heads at Omapers Beach between two and three o'clock the following morning, and strange to say the smaller boat, which was navigated by seamen only, was the first to touch on dry land, anticipating the larger boat in charge of the first mate by about half an hour. The third mate's boat missed the Hokianga light, and was picked up at ten by the little steamer *Energy*, and also landed at Omapers. Three old and decrepit Chinamen were boarded at the Opononi Hotel, the others putting up at Mrs. Bryers' boarding-house, Omapers.

Of the three crews, the third mate's had probably the most trying experience. Being late in leaving the side of the sinking steamer they had to pull for their lives to escape destruction in the whirling waters, and to make matters worse one of the oars snapped at the critical moment. With but three oars they managed to pilot the boat out of reach of the troublesome waters. It was found that a considerable quantity of water had got on board, the boat being then half full, and the sea was almost flush with the topsides. The boat continued making water, and in this predicament a course was shaped for land. The bailer was incessantly in use, and, with only two oars the crew rowed doggedly on. They suffered greatly from privation and cold, and when picked up were completely exhausted. The courage and determination of the third mate, the officer in charge, is spoken highly of by the men.

Mr. Martin, the harbourmaster at Hokianga Heads, saw the *Ventnor* off the coast during the afternoon, and he then realised that she was in a sinking condition. Throughout the night a sharp look-out was kept, but the two red lights, the signal that a boat is foundering, were not exhibited. A steamboat was in readiness at the Heads, and would have gone out to render assistance if the signal had been hoisted. It appears that the lights were ordered to be hoisted at the masthead, but from the excitement of the moment or some other cause this was not obeyed.

In the early part of last year the *Ventnor* struck on an outlying reef in the Japanese islands, and 40 plates were considerably damaged. No. 1 hold rapidly filled with water, and in the after-hold a large quantity of water was pumped to sink the propeller. She was taken to the nearest port and docked for repairs; the estimated cost of which was £4000.