

Enclosure 2 in No. 1.

Rear-Admiral ROBERT HALL to the SECRETARY of LLOYD'S.

SIR,—

Admiralty, 10th May, 1876.

With reference to your letter of the 3rd instant, drawing attention to the fact that three first-class ships, trading between Great Britain and Australia within the last nine months, are unaccounted for, and requesting that one of Her Majesty's ships should visit from time to time the islands lying in the ordinary track of vessels making the Australian voyage, or that one of the Australian squadron should be despatched on that service, I am commanded by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to acquaint you, for the information of the Committee for managing the affairs at Lloyd's, that with every wish to meet their request, my Lords are unable to give directions for one of Her Majesty's ships on the Australian station to search the outlying islands, as they are quite beyond the limits of the Australian command.

2. Orders, however, will be given for any vessel proceeding from the Cape of Good Hope to Australia, when possible, to sight the Crozet Islands sufficiently near to examine them

3. In making the communication, my Lords desire me to observe that it has come to their knowledge that ships, in making the passage from this country to Australia, appear to incur very great risk by going too far south, and making the run amongst icebergs and floating ice; and that if this is general practice, their Lordships cannot feel surprised at several vessels being now missing.

4. My Lords further desire me to call attention to the 1st page of the sixth edition of the Australian Directory, Vol. I., which directs that,—“After rounding the Cape of Good Hope, vessels bound to the south coast of Australia should run down their longitude on or about the parallel of 39° S., where the winds blow almost constantly from some western point, and seldom with more strength than will admit of carrying sail. In a higher latitude the weather is frequently more boisterous and stormy, and sudden changes of wind, with squally wet weather, almost constantly to be expected, especially in the winter season; and, after passing the islands of St. Paul and Amsterdam, islands of ice have also been encountered in these regions, as was almost fatally proved by Her Majesty's ship ‘Guardian’ striking against one in latitude 46° or 47° S., and nearly foundering in the beginning of summer.”

I am also to draw your attention to the foot-note on page 1 of the same work, indicated by an asterisk, which runs thus: “Although the parallel here assigned of 39° S., as being that where ships may safely run down their longitude, has been objected to by some writers on the ground that of late years many successful passages have been made in much higher latitudes, some even attaining the 55th parallel for the southern point of their great circle or composite route, still it has been deemed desirable to retain the directions given in former editions of this work, placing before the navigator the grounds for this decision.

“It is true that the distance from the meridian of the Cape of Good Hope to Bass Strait, or the South Coast of Tasmania, is diminished greatly as every succeeding higher parallel of latitude is adopted. For example, the 40th parallel has an advantage over the 38th parallel of 380 miles, or nearly two days' sailing; and again, the 45th parallel has an advantage over the 40th to the extent of 650 miles, the 50th over the 45th of 480 miles; and so far, the higher the latitude of the great circle or composite route adopted, the more advantageous is the route in point of distance. But the disadvantages attending the selection of any high parallel should be clearly understood by the seamen, and more especially as regards a passenger ship, a small or ill-found vessel, or one deeply laden.

“Maury, in advocating the higher parallels of latitude, says:—‘In recommending this route, which differs so widely from the favourite route of the Admiralty, I do it, not because it is an approach to the great circle route, but because the winds and the sea and the distance are all such as to make this route the quickest;’ and again, ‘the winds to the north of the 40th parallel of south latitude are much less favourable for Australia than they are to the south of that parallel.’

“The evidence of these opinions as to the winds and seas being more favourable south of 40°, appears however by no means conclusive. Many experienced navigators are of opinion that north of 40° the steadiness and comparative moderate strength of the winds, combined with the smoother seas and more genial climate, compensate by comfort and security the time presumed to be saved by the shorter route made in the tempestuous gales, the sudden violent and fitful shifts of wind, accompanied with hail and snow, and the terrific and irregular seas, which have been frequently encountered in the higher parallels adopted.

“Independently of the extreme severity of the climate occasionally experienced in high latitudes, there exists the lurking danger of disrupted masses of ice, and icebergs of large dimensions.

“The absence of approximate positions of these dangers cannot be depended on for any season of the year. They are, however, rarely encountered north of 40° S., except in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope. Between 40° and 45° S. they have been occasionally fallen in with, extending as far as the 65th meridian of E. longitude, on the 45th parallel as far as 135° E., and on the 50th parallel extending to 140° E.”

5. As an illustration of the above remarks, a chart of the Southern Hemisphere is herewith transmitted, showing the late tracks of the s.s. “_____.”

The Secretary at Lloyd's.

I have, &c.,
ROBERT HALL.