

The Gazelle and Cargo

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SooperKanoon Citation : sooperkanoon.com/85817

Court : US Supreme Court

Decided On : Nov-26-1888

Appeal No. : 128 U.S. 474

Appellant : The Gazelle and Cargo

Judgement :

The Gazelle and Cargo - 128 U.S. 474 (1888)

U.S. Supreme Court The Gazelle and Cargo, 128 U.S. 474 (1888)

The Gazelle and Cargo

No. 73

Argued November 9, 12-13, 1888

Decided November 26, 1888

128 U.S. 474

APPEAL FROM THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE UNITED

STATES FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

SYLLABUS

A charter party of a vessel to a

"safe, direct Norwegian or Danish port, as ordered on signing bills of lading, or as near thereunto as she can safely get and always lay and discharge afloat"

requires the charterer to order her to a port which she can safely enter with cargo, or which at least has a safe anchorage outside, where she can lie and discharge afloat.

Findings of fact by the circuit court in admiralty that a port to which charterers have ordered a vessel is one having a bar across its mouth which it was impossible for her to pass either in ballast or with cargo, and that the only anchorage outside is not a reasonably safe anchorage nor a place where it is reasonably safe for a vessel to lie and discharge are not controlled or overcome by a statement in the findings that many vessels have in fact discharged their cargoes at that anchorage.

The omission of the circuit court in admiralty to make any findings upon a fact put in issue by the pleadings can only be availed of by bill of exceptions.

A charter party of a vessel "to a safe, direct Norwegian or Danish port, or as near thereunto as she can safely get and always lay and discharge afloat" cannot be controlled by evidence of a custom to consider as safe, within the meaning of such a charter party, a particular Danish port which in fact cannot be entered by such a vessel and has no anchorage outside where it is reasonably safe to lie and discharge.

If a charterer prevents the performance of the voyage by refusing to order the vessel to such a port as is designated in the charter party, and the

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master files successive libels for demurrage accruing under it until the charterer files a cross-libel contending that the master had committed a breach of the charter party, and it is found at a hearing upon all the libels that the time required to perform the voyage stated in the charter party would have been about the same

as elapsed before the vessel procured another charter, that another charter was procured as soon as possible, and that the expenses of the vessel in port were not less than on the voyage, the shipowner is entitled to the whole of the stipulated freight.

This was an appeal from a decree in admiralty on cross-libels for breaches of a charter party of the Norwegian bark *Gazelle*, by which, on June 16, 1881, Herman Brun, her master, chartered her to Meissner, Ackermann & Co. for a voyage from Baltimore

"to a safe, direct Norwegian or Danish port, as ordered on signing bills of lading, or as near thereunto as she can safely get, and always lay and discharge afloat"

on the terms, among others, that the charterers should furnish a full cargo of refined petroleum in barrels, and pay freight of three shillings and three pence sterling a barrel; that the vessel should be loaded by July 6th, and that demurrage of eleven pounds sterling should be allowed for each day's detention by their default.

On July 11th, and August 1, 9, and 22, the master filed successive libels against the cargo setting forth the making and the principal provisions of the charter party and annexing a copy thereof, and further alleging that the vessel was duly loaded by July 6, and on that day the charterers tendered to the master for signature bills of lading ordering her to the port of Aalborg, in Denmark, as the port of discharge, "to be landed at Aalborg, or as near thereto as the vessel can safely get;" that the master refused to sign the bills of lading for the reason that Aalborg was not a safe port, and it was impossible for a vessel to enter it with cargo or to land her cargo at the port or at any anchorage or landing place near it, so as

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always to lay and discharge afloat, and that he expressed to the charterers his willingness to perform the charter and requested them to name a safe port, but they refused.

Each of those libels claimed demurrage according to the charter, amounting in all to \$2,070.20; the fourth libel claimed also \$400 for the expenses of taking out most of the cargo, and each libel contained a prayer for general relief.

The charterers filed answers admitting the making of the charter party and the refusal of the master to sign bills of lading; alleging that the port of Aalborg is a safe port, well known to commerce, especially in the petroleum trade, and one to which vessels of deeper draught than the *Gazelle* are habitually dispatched under charter parties of like terms with that in controversy, and further alleging that, by the established and uniform usage and custom of trade between Baltimore and other Atlantic ports of the United States, and ports of Norway and Denmark, the port of Aalborg is recognized as being, and understood to be, a safe, direct port of Denmark within the terms and provisions of such a charter party, denying that there is no safe place or anchorage outside that port where the vessel could always lay afloat and discharge her cargo or that there had been any detention of the vessel by their default, and alleging that the entire delay and the damages, if any, resulting therefrom were due solely to the default of the master.

On August 20th, the charterers filed a cross-libel against the vessel alleging the same matters as in their answers to the other libels and claiming \$8,000 damages for breach of the charter party, and general relief. The master filed an answer to the cross-libel presenting the same issues as the other libels and answers.

The district court sustained the libels of the master and dismissed that of the charterers, and entered decrees accordingly. 11 F. 429. The charterers appealed to the circuit court, which consolidated the cases, and made the following findings of fact:

"On June 16, 1881, the bark *Gazelle*, a sailing vessel of 571 tons burden, then in the port of Baltimore, Maryland, was

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chartered by Herman Brun, her master, to Meissner, Ackermann & Co., of New York, for a voyage, as stated in the charter party"

"to a safe, direct Norwegian or Danish port, as ordered on signing bills of lading, or as near thereunto as she can safely get, and always lay and discharge afloat."

"Exhibit accompanying the libel is the said charter. Cargo of 3,131 barrels of refined petroleum was put on board by charterers at Baltimore, and on July 6, 1881, the charterers tendered the master bills of lading ordering the vessel to the port of Aalborg, on the eastern coast of Denmark."

"The master refused to sign the bills of lading on the ground, as stated by him to the charterers, that Aalborg was not a safe port for a vessel of the tonnage of the *Gazelle*, and that no vessel of such tonnage could enter the port, even in ballast, and that there was no anchorage near the port where he could with safety lay and discharge. The charterers refused to order the vessel to any other port. Conversations and correspondence took place between the master and charterers and their agents. In all these, the master insisted that he could take the cargo to the port of Aarhus, which he said was the only safe Danish port for a vessel of such tonnage as the *Gazelle*, but he could not discharge at Aalborg, or convey the cargo there. The charterers, on the contrary, insisted that he could and was bound to discharge at Aalborg. During this discussion between the parties, and on one day, the master said he would sign bills containing the words 'as near thereunto as the vessel can safely get, and always lay and discharge afloat,' but on the same day, upon the charterers assenting to this, he refused, saying in effect that as he knew the fact to be that there was no place near Aalborg where he could safely lay and discharge, and as he knew beforehand that he would have to go to the nearest safe port, he would not sign any bills of lading which might in any way commit him to anything else. The charterers all this time insisted that he should discharge at Aalborg, and did not agree to any receding from this in assenting to add the above words on the bills of lading, but still insisted on their right to have the vessel discharged at Aalborg. Nothing was done in consequence of this proposition

of the master or of his subsequent refusal as aforesaid which in fact altered the position of the parties in any way."

"The tonnage of the *Gazelle* was 571 tons, and she drew, when loaded, sixteen feet three inches, and in ballast, twelve feet. The port of Aalborg is in Denmark, on the south bank of the Limfiord, about seventeen miles from its mouth at the Cattegat Sea. At the mouth there is a bar about 2,000 feet wide on which there is ordinarily ten feet of water and never more than eleven feet. Off the mouth of the Limfiord there is no sheltered bay, nor any indentation of the coast, but the coast runs in a straight north and south line. It was not possible for the *Gazelle* to pass the bar, either in ballast or with cargo, and the only place of anchorage for a vessel which cannot cross the bar is in the Cattegat Sea, off the mouth of the Limfiord, and the only mode of discharge at said anchorage is into small sailing coasters, which can pass the bar to the port of Aalborg and carry the cargo. A considerable commerce has been carried on with the port from time immemorial by vessels of small draught, able to cross the bar when loaded."

"Some steamers of larger draught have in late years traded regularly with the port from England. These have lighters expressly made for their purpose, which they take in tow going out, receiving from them part of their cargo when over the bar, and in returning discharge into them sufficiently to lighten to ten feet, and then tow the lighters in with them."

Thirty-one cargoes of petroleum and grain have been exported to Aalborg from the United States since 1876, none before that time. Many of these were in vessels of such size as to be able to cross the bar after lightening a reasonable amount. Of these thirty-one vessels, two or three in all, of large size, have discharged their whole cargo outside.

"There existed at the time of the making of the charter a general custom in the Atlantic ports of the United States with reference to charters similarly worded that a ship may be ordered to any safe port within the range where commerce is carried on, whether she can get into it or not, provided there is an anchorage near the port, customarily used in connection

with it, and where it is reasonably safe for the ship to lay and discharge."

"The port of Aalborg and the Limfiord inside the bar are safe for vessels that can get into them and lay afloat. The water inside the bar in the Limfiord is deep, except at or near the Town of Aalborg, but the said anchorage outside the bar in the Cattegat is not a reasonably safe anchorage, nor a place where it is reasonably safe for a ship to lay and discharge."

"The amount of freight under the charter for the cargo loaded was \$3,285.60. The master incurred expense of \$507.03 in removing and storing the petroleum cargo after the refusal of the charterers to order the vessel to any other port than Aalborg, and \$17.50 for wharfage, and \$16 for necessary towing."

"The time required to perform such a voyage as that stated in the charter would have been about the same time as elapsed before the vessel procured another charter, which other charter was procured as soon as could have been done, and on September 2, 1881, the vessel was ready to load under the recharter, and the expenses of the vessel in port were not less than on the voyage."

The circuit court stated as conclusions of law that the master was entitled to recover, for breach of the charter party, damages in the sum of \$3,826.13, with interest from September 2, 1881, and that the libel of the charterers should be dismissed, and that they should pay the costs in both courts, and entered a final decree accordingly; from which the charterers appealed to this Court.

MR. JUSTICE GRAY, after stating the facts as above, delivered the opinion of the Court.

The jurisdiction and authority of this Court in passing upon this appeal are defined by the Act of February 16, 1875, c. 77, 1, by which the circuit court, in deciding admiralty causes on the instance side, is required to state its findings of fact and

its conclusions of law separately, and a review of its decrees by this Courts is

"limited to a determination of the questions of law arising upon the record, and to such rulings of the circuit court, excepted to at the time, as may be presented by a bill of exceptions prepared as in actions at law."

18 Stat. 315. The limit thus prescribed has been steadfastly upheld by this Court against repeated attempts to escape from it. *The Abbotsford*, [98 U. S. 440](#) ; *The Benefactor*, [102 U. S. 214](#) ; *The Annie Lindsley*, [104 U. S. 185](#) ; *The Francis Wright*, [105 U. S. 381](#) ; *Sun Ins. Co. v. Ocean Ins. Co.*, [107 U. S. 485](#) ; *The Adriatic*, [107 U. S. 512](#) ; *The Connemara*, [108 U. S. 352](#) ; *Merchants' Ins. Co. v. Allen*, [121 U. S. 67](#) .

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The record in this case consists of the pleadings, the findings of fact, the conclusions of law, and the final decree.

By the express terms of the charter party, the charterers were bound to order the vessel "to a safe, direct, Norwegian or Danish port, or as near thereunto as she can safely get, and always lay and discharge afloat." The clear meaning of this is that she must be ordered to a port which she can safely enter with her cargo, or which at least has a safe anchorage outside where she can lie and discharge afloat. *Dahl v. Nelson*, 6 App.Cas. 38; *The Alhambra*, 6 P.D. 68. The charterers insisted upon ordering her to the port of Aalborg. The circuit court has found that Aalborg is in a fiord or inlet having a bar across its mouth, which it was impossible for the *Gazelle* to pass either in ballast or with cargo, and that the only anchorage outside the bar is not a reasonably safe anchorage nor a place where it is reasonably safe for a vessel to lie and discharge.

These positive findings of essential facts are in no way controlled or overcome by the other statements (rather recitals of portions of the evidence than findings of fact) that large English steamers habitually, and thirty-one American vessels in the course of several years, had in fact discharged the whole or part of their cargoes

at that anchorage without accident or disaster. A dangerous place may often be stopped at or passed over in safety. The evidence on the other side is not stated in the findings, and if it were, this Court, in an admiralty appeal, has no authority to pass upon the comparative weight of conflicting evidence.

The circuit court has found that

"there existed at the time of the making of the charter a general custom in the Atlantic ports of the United States, with reference to charters similarly worded, that a ship may be ordered to any safe port within the range, where commerce is carried on, whether she can get into it or not, provided there is an anchorage near the port customarily used in connection with it and where it is reasonably safe for the ship to lay and discharge."

But the only anchorage near the port of Aalborg not being a reasonably safe place to lie and discharge at, that custom has no bearing on this case.

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It has been strenuously maintained in behalf of the appellants that the circuit court erred in not making any finding upon the distinct issue, presented by the pleadings, whether by the uniform and established custom of trade between Baltimore and other Atlantic ports and the ports of Norway and Denmark, Aalborg was recognized as being, and understood to be, a safe, direct port of Denmark, within the meaning of such a charter party.

The answer to this position is two-fold:

1st. It does not appear on this record that there was any proof of such a custom. If the appellants did offer such proof, and it was rejected or disregarded by the court, their remedy was by tendering a bill of exceptions and thus making their offer and the action of the court thereon part of the record, which has not been done. *The Francis Wright*, [105 U. S. 381](#) , [105 U. S. 387](#) .

2d. Evidence of a custom to consider as safe a particular port which in fact is not reasonably safe would directly contradict the charter party, and would therefore be incompetent as matter of law. *Barnard v. Kellogg*, 10 Wall. 383; *The Alhambra*, 6 P.D. 68; *Hayton v. Irwin*, 5 C.P.D. 130.

The charterers, having refused to order the vessel to such a port as the charter party called for and having insisted on ordering her to a different one, were rightly held to be in default and answerable in damages, and the subject remaining to be considered is the amount of damages awarded against them, consisting of the whole amount of freight, and of the expense of taking out the cargo, and of wharfage and towing.

The material facts appearing upon the record bearing upon this subject are as follows:

The charterers, having detained the vessel by their persistent refusal to order her to such a port as was described in the charter party, the master, as he had a right to do, treating the charter party as still existing, filed successive libels, claiming demurrage accruing under it, until the charterers filed a cross-libel contending that the master (who had only maintained the just rights of the owners) had committed a breach of the charter party. It being then hopeless that the charterers

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would perform the charter party on their part, the master proceeded to take out the cargo, and the owners were entitled to freight. The circuit court has found simply that the time required to perform such a voyage as that stated in the charter would have been about the same time as elapsed before the vessel procured another charter; that another charter was procured as soon as could have been done, and that the expenses of the vessel in port were not less than on the voyage.

Nothing, therefore, is shown to take the case out of the general rule that a ship owner who is prevented from performing the voyage by a wrongful act of the charterer is *prima facie* entitled to the freight that he would have earned less what it would have cost him to earn it. *Kleine v. Catara*, 2 Gall. 61; *Ashburner v.*

Balchen, 7 N.Y. 262; *Smith v. McGuire*, 3 H. & N. 554, 27 L.J.(N.S.) Exch. 465.

It is further contended that the court erred in awarding as damages the whole freight, amounting to \$3,285.60, under libels claiming only demurrage and expenses to the amount of \$2,470.20. But those libels set forth all the material facts ultimately found by the court, and each libel contained a prayer for general relief.

In the courts of admiralty of the United States, although the proofs of each party must substantially correspond to his allegations so far as to prevent surprise, yet there are no technical rules of variance, or of departure in pleading, as at common law, and if a libellant propounds with distinctness the substantive facts upon which he relies and prays, either specially or generally, for appropriate relief (even if there is some inaccuracy in his statement of subordinate facts, or of the legal effect of the facts propounded), the court may award any relief which the law applicable to the case warrants. [*Dupont v. Vance*](#), 19 How. 162; [*The Syracuse*](#), 12 Wall. 167; *Dexter v. Munroe*, 2 Sprague 39; *The Cambridge*, 2 Lowell 21.

Decree affirmed.