

The Sea Voyage.

Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration of the state of New York

Friedrich Kapp

1870

DURING the whole of the last and the greater part of the present century, the ship-owners chartered the lower decks of their vessels to agents, for the payment of a certain sum for each ton or the whole space disposed of. The agents made the needful temporary arrangements for the accommodation of the passengers, and underlet the steerage, either to associations of emigrants, or parcelled it out to sub-agents or to single passengers.

Thus the owner of the vessel had not the least concern or interest in the welfare or good treatment of the passengers ; all he looked for was the payment of the stipulated price for that part of the ship which he had let. The steerage passengers were simply additional and unwelcome freight ; they had to follow the directions of the owner, and were subordinate to what he considered his more important interests. They had to wait for their departure as long as it pleased him, and had no other right than to occupy the ten or twelve square feet which were allotted to them. To the owner, they were less than a box of goods, and handled with less care, as they did not break, nor, if injured, require to be paid for. The agents, in order to make the business lucrative, sent on board as many passengers as they could get hold of, without the smallest reference to the conveniences of the steerage, the number of berths, the separation of the sexes, or any thing except their own immediate profit. Besides assigning a space, however small, to the emigrants, they had no responsibility, and ran no risk whatever. There was no check to the over loading of the vessel. Even if it had more than double the number of passengers that it could accommodate, there was no authority to which the emigrants could apply for protection. The agents did just as they pleased. A vessel which was not good and safe enough to be used as a transport for goods and merchandise was, nevertheless, employed for the conveyance of passengers. Thus, for instance, the destruction of life by ship wrecks has been most appalling among the emigrants who have been enticed on board the worn-out vessels engaged in the Canadian timber trade ; seventeen being shipwrecked in a single season in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and more than seven hundred lives lost.

Looking at the fine and commodious ships used in our day for the forwarding of emigrants, it is hardly possible to form a correct idea of the bad construction and awkward proportions of an old merchantman carrying passengers.

A hundred, and even fifty, years ago, a sea voyage was an enterprise requiring more than ordinary courage. A person crossing the Atlantic, regularly made his last will and provided for his family. A passenger who safely returned was the wonder of his town ; and when he came back from America, his neighbors called him the “ American.” The inland people had no idea of a sea-going vessel ; in their eyes a sea voyage was synonymous with severe sickness, terrible suffering, and hardship. In descriptions of voyages, published as late as 1822, and containing engravings of the ships in which the authors crossed usually on small brigs or barks of a couple of hundred tons all the petty occurrences of the day are narrated in the journal of the traveller with minute details ; the most insignificant items of the voyage are treated as matters of great concern, and the everyday work of the sailors commands the admiration and respect of the passengers.

In fact, the first cabin of a London packet a hundred years ago was not a whit more airy or comfortable than the steerage of a large steamer of our days. The lower deck of an emigrant vessel, as late as 1819, was no better than that of a slaver or a coolie ship ; the passengers were just as crowded, and just as little thought of, as those unfortunate beings from Africa or China. Five or six feet was an extraordinary height for a steerage deck ; the common height was from four to five feet, and the lower or orlop deck, which was also used for the so-called accommodation of passengers, was not much better than a blackhole, too bad to shelter cattle. The natural consequence was a large mortality. Ten deaths among one hundred passengers was nothing extraordinary ; twenty per cent. was not unheard of ; and there were cases of 400 out of 1,200 passengers being buried before the ships left port. Other facts of the same kind are on record. Thus, of the 3,000 Palatines forwarded in 1710 by the English Government to New York, 470 died on the voyage, and 250 immediately after their arrival, of ship-fever.

John George Jungmann (1702-1802), a Moravian missionary among the Indians, and, like all Moravians, entitled to implicit confidence, in 1731 came to America *via* Rotterdam, with his father, who emigrated from Hockenheim in the Palatinate. He was first obliged to wait three weeks at the port for the departure of the vessel, and finally sailed, the ship having 156 passengers on board, and provisions for twelve weeks. She was bound for Philadelphia *via* Falmouth. At the latter port she again stopped three weeks. When she had been eight weeks at sea, the passengers were put on short allowances, and during the last four weeks of their voyage they were never able to obtain bread. Jungmann could procure no food whatever from the captain either for himself, father, or sister, and the only drink allowed them was one pint of water daily. The passengers had to live on rats and mice, which were considered dainties. The price on board for a rat was eighteen pence, and for a mouse an English sixpence. The captain was under the impression that the passengers had considerable money and valuables with them, and, believing that he might profit by it, he endeavored to reduce them to a state of starvation. He succeeded too well, for out of the 156 passengers only 48 reached America ; and not a single human creature would have been landed off the vessel, if the passengers had not revolted, arrested the captain, and put in at Rhode Island port, after a voyage of twenty-five weeks. Jungmann adds that he himself, his father, and one sister were about starved to death, that they were unable to walk erect, and obliged to creep on the ground ; while his mother, and three brothers and sisters, had died on the voyage. He concluded by saying : “ It was a shocking and heart-rending scene to see all these poor people, without the ability to succor them, to find them in the morning stiff and cold on their beds, partly eaten up by rats, and then, to see them thrown into the ocean, an occurrence which took place two or three times a day.” Indians took care of Jungmann, and nursed him and his father till May, 1732, when they sailed for Philadelphia, where they arrived on the 16th day of that month, having been more than a year on their way there.

Reverend Dr. Kunze, in an oration delivered, in 1788, before the German Society of Philadelphia, stated that of 900 passengers shipped in one vessel in that year at Amsterdam for Philadelphia, 400 had died on the way. Henry T. Vierhaus, Secretary of the same Society, in a report, dated January 22, 1818, thus describes the cause of the mortality on board the ship *April*, Captain de Groot, just arrived in the Delaware :

“ When the passengers came on board at Amsterdam,” he says, “ there were 233 *full freights*. The ship was ordered a few miles below Amsterdam to wait for more passengers, but no more came ; whereupon the house of Kress & Rodenbrock, the ship-brokers, foreseeing a loss if they did not ship more passengers, proceeded to engage passengers from other vessels which were in the same situation, waiting for freight. These vessels had lain there for a considerable time, and, owing to bad food and poor attendance, those on board were, more or less, sick and full of vermin. These passengers were put on board the ship *April*, making the whole number near 1,200 souls. The sickness brought on board by those shipped in the manner described spread rapidly through the vessel. When the whole number was crammed

into the ship, there were among them about 120 sick. Captain de Groot was ordered by Kress & Rodenbrock to put to sea, against which the captain protested, giving as a reason that he would not undertake the voyage with so many sick ; that 115 dead persons had already been sent on shore ; and that he did not think there was a sufficiency of provisions for such a large number. In consequence of this protest, the Amsterdam police sent four doctors on board, to examine into the state of the passengers and of the vessel. They found the ship in such a shocking condition that it was ordered into Quarantine at the Island of Wieringen. Here all the sick were put into the hospital, and the healthy separated from them. They remained there 19 weeks, and about 300 died, besides the 115 who were sent on shore dead.”

We shall see hereafter that this shocking mortality is not confined to remote times, and that the living generation has witnessed thousands of deaths from the same causes. To give an adequate idea of recent losses of human life on board of ill-provided, ill-ventilated vessels, it may be stated here that out of 98,105 poor Irish emigrants shipped to Canada by their landlords after the great famine of 1846, during the summer of 1847 there died 5,293 at sea, 8,072 at Gross Isle (Quarantine) and Quebec, and 7,000 in and above Montreal, making 20,365, besides those who afterwards perished whose number will never be ascertained. Thus the *Lark*, reported at Quebec on August 2, 1847, from Sligo, sailed with 440 passengers, of whom 108 died on the passage and 150 were sick, almost all of whom died a short time after landing. The *Virginus* sailed with 496 ; 158 died on the passage, 186 were sick, and the remainder landed feeble and tottering ; the captain, mates, and crew were all down. At that period, the ratio of the sick per one thousand was 30 on board British, 9 & 2/5 on American, and 8 & 3/5 on German vessels. Ship-fever and want of food were almost unheard of on board of vessels from Northern Europe, and particularly those from Hamburg and Bremen.

It has been estimated by medical statisticians that not less than 20,000 emigrants perished by ship-fever, and in the various emigrant hospitals in American ports, during the year 1847. Compared with these losses, the mortality on board the Hamburg ship *Leibnitz* of the notorious Sloman line was quite small, for out of 544 passengers (children and infants included), 108 fell victims to the bad ventilation and insufficient provisions. The fever-ship *Leibnitz* arrived at New York on January 11, 1868.

The first law which prescribed the space to be allotted to each steerage passenger was that passed by Congress on March 2, 1849, according to which a ship was forbidden to carry more than two passengers for every five tons, Custom House measure. This law, however benevolent its purpose, proved insufficient ; for it did not prohibit the orlop-deck, nor provide for proper ventilation or side-lights, nor deduct the freight-room and accommodations for the officers and first-class passengers from the computation of the total amount of tonnage. Thus a ship which measured 1,000 tons and had a steerage of only 500 tons, could nevertheless take steerage passengers for the whole tonnage, that is, 400 instead of 200. Nothing was said about the height of the steerage. It must always be borne in mind that the construction of ships for the express purpose of carrying passengers only began about the year 1830 ; that up to that time all space which could not be used for shipping merchandise was temporarily arranged for steerage passengers ; that often at the last moment, a few days before going to sea, the superfluous room was sold to an agent, and that in those days a steerage five feet high was considered fully sufficient for making two tiers of beds along their sides. And the hole beneath this hole was called orlop-deck, and likewise used for the transport of passengers.

From this the nature of the atmosphere in the steerage of an emigrant ship can readily be imagined without a minute description. We have only to consider that the room was rarely more than six feet high, had no other aperture for the admission of fresh air than the hatches, which, during the night and bad weather, were generally closed, was crowded with passengers, of whom the greater portion were strangers to the virtue of cleanliness, and many

of them down with sea-sickness or other equally loathsome diseases. What with the miasma of a damp hold, the excretions and exhalations from the bodies of the individuals thus confined, and the emanations from other and more offensive matter, an atmosphere was created which acted like poison on those who had to breathe it, and engendered ship-fever in a more or less violent degree.

The health of the passengers was further impaired by another evil which prevailed on board of all emigrant ships up to a comparatively recent time—the emigrants were expected to provide themselves with food, and to cook it as best they could. The Bremen authorities were the first which, about 1830, required masters of ships to furnish cooked provisions for their passengers. It was at the furthest only a few years before the passage of the so-called Passenger Act of March 3, 1855, by Congress, that the Havre and Liverpool vessels included the fare and cooking in the prices of their passage.

The consequences of this vicious arrangement to those poor and improvident people were self-evident. Many of them embarked without any provisions at all, and very few, if any, with a sufficient supply ; many had not the means to buy food, and others had deceived themselves as to the duration of the voyage ; hence it is doubtless true that not one of all the emigrant ships from British and Irish ports had a sufficient supply of proper food for all on board. But, supposing there were some among the cargo of passengers well provisioned for the voyage, there were no means at their disposal for having their food properly cooked. For, as the arrangements of which they could avail themselves for that purpose were insufficient even on board of the very largest and best of ships engaged in the conveyance of emigrant passengers, it can readily be imagined what they must have been on board of the fleet of vessels of an inferior class.

On the upper deck of the ship, there were two small rooms cooking, about five feet deep and four feet wide, called the steerage galley. Within was a grate corresponding to the width of the room, over which grate was fastened an iron bar, and on this there were two iron hooks, to which the emigrant hung his pot or kettle (if he had one) when he wanted to cook. These were all the arrangements for preparing meals for several hundred passengers. The result was that, except when they had nothing to cook or were sick, there was constant lighting for room near the caboose, and not one of the passengers could be sure of getting his food well cooked. The sufferings which they endured in this way embittered the emigrants one against another, and their quarrels ended when in the evening the fires were extinguished , but only to revive in the morning.

From these causes resulted not only want of sufficient and wholesome food, but also the impossibility of properly preparing what little there was. In view of this, it cannot surprise us that thousands of emigrants, greatly enfeebled already when going on board, either died on the passage or arrived with scarcely a spark of life in them.

An experience of fifty years, comprising an immigration of more than five millions, teaches us that the three diseases by which passenger-ships have been chiefly scourged are typhus or ship-fever, as it is called when it takes place at sea, cholera, and small-pox. “ Of these three”—says John H. Griscom, M D, and former Superintendent of the Commissioners of Emigration of New York, in a communication addressed on January 14, 1854, to a special committee of the United States Senate—“ that to which the emigrant is most prone is ship-fever. The extraordinary prevalence of this disease at the present time, and for the past half-century, but especially for the past seven or eight years, is an astounding phenomenon, particularly when it is remembered that we live in the midst of all the light necessary for its prevention.

“ My first practical cognizance of the horrible condition in which emigrants are frequently found on shipboard was in 1847, when, as a member of a committee of the New York Academy of Medicine, I visited the Quarantine establishment to enquire into the medical history of the typhus fever then extensively prevailing, and crowding that institution with patients. On that occasion we visited the ship *Ceylon*, from Liverpool, which had come to anchor a few hours before, with a large cargo of passengers. A considerable number had died upon the voyage, and one hundred and fifteen were then ill with the fever, and were preparing for a removal to the hospital. Before any had yet left the ship, we passed through the steerage, making a more or less minute examination of the place and its occupants ; but the indescribable filth, the emaciated, half-nude figures, many with the *petechial* eruption disfiguring their faces, crouching in the bunks, or strewed over the decks, and cumbering the gangways ; broken utensils and debris of food spread recklessly about, presented a picture of which neither pen nor pencil can convey a full idea. Some were just rising from their berths for the first time since leaving Liverpool, having been suffered to lie there all the voyage, wallowing in their own filth. It was no wonder to us that, with such total neglect of sanitary supervision, and an entire absence of ventilation, so many of such wretched beings had perished or were then ill of fever ; it was only surprising that so many had escaped.

Shocking as this case was, it has been frequently surpassed, at least as far as figures are concerned. In 1842, the ship *Eutaw* gave one hundred and twenty to the hospital on arrival ; in 1837, the *Ann Hall* sent in one hundred and fifty-eight ; while, as far back as the year 1802, one hundred and eighty-eight were taken from the *Flora*, two hundred and twenty from the *Nancy*, and two hundred and fifty-nine from the *Penelope*. In 1851, the number of deaths at sea between Liverpool and New York rose to the astounding number of 1,879, almost wholly the result of ship-fever.

“ In addition to this, the poisonous influence which becomes infused into those who have escaped death or sickness on ship board lies dormant for a few days or weeks after debarkation, and sooner or later develops itself and brings many of them to the hospital, where from fifteen to twenty per cent, more are added to the list of dead. Thus there were treated in the Marine Hospital, on Staten Island, in 1852, 3,040 cases of ship-fever, of whom seventeen per cent. died. These were all emigrants ; and we must add to these the cases of the same disease, of the same people, which were treated in the large hospitals at Flatbush, Ward s Island, and Bellevue, at the City Hospital, and at other places through out this State and the States immediately adjoining, nearly all of whom arrived at the port of New York alone.

“ In considering the hygienic aspect of emigration, we start, then, with the remarkable fact that, of those who embark upon an Atlantic voyage on any of a certain class of ships, out of every twelve one falls a victim ; that is, nearly nine per cent, either never reach the promised land or die soon after.

“ The general causes, as well as the means of prevention, of this disease are so plain as not to require a medical education for their comprehension, but may be made clear to ordinary intelligence ; and the vast importance of the subject will justify an allusion to both in this essay.

“ Ship-fever, as it is termed, from the place of its greatest prevalence, is the product of a *miasma* as distinct as that of marshes, which causes intermittent fever. This ship-miasma is itself as inevitable a result of certain conditions, as the other miasma is the product of marshes. And further, the means for its prevention are as clear and controllable in the one case as in the other. Thus, if an offensive marsh be thoroughly drained and dried, its peculiar miasma, and the disease which it causes, will disappear, and so by preventing the formation of ship-miasma (as easy of accomplishment as the other) ship-fever will in like manner be prevented.

“ What, then, are the circumstances which give rise to this typhus-breeding miasma ? There are certain conditions essential to its creation, which I will enumerate in the order of their importance, beginning with the least :

“ I. The confinement of people in apartments disproportioned in size to the requirements of wholesome respiration.

“ II. The retention in the same apartment of the excretions from the bodies of the individuals thus confined ; such as the matter of perspiration and other more offensive excretions. These, acted on by the artificial heat of the apartment, or even by the natural heat of the bodies alone, will become decomposed, and produce an effluvium which will react poisonously on the persons exposed to it.

“ III. The exclusion of pure air.

“ As to the first of these causes, the number of persons and the size of the apartment necessary to produce the miasma are merely relative. An apartment may be crowded without danger from this source, provided that from the first ventilation and cleanliness be thoroughly and constantly maintained.

“ With this brief explanation of the general causes of typhus, the reasons for its prevalence in the steerages of passenger-ships are very apparent. In great numbers of them, all the conditions enumerated above, as necessary for the creation of this disorder, are found to exist, and it is reasonable to infer the existence of some *specific* cause in addition to the general ones which have been mentioned.

“ We find ship-fever, within a few years, to have prevailed most frequently and extensively in those vessels which ply between several ports of Great Britain and this country, and this fact, together with an examination of the passengers, points unerringly to the *famine* which desolated a large section of that kingdom as the additional cause alluded to.

“ This is a direct, and at the same time an indirect cause. The infection is carried to the ship by the emigrants from a country where hunger typhus prevails ; besides, the previous exhaustion predisposes to be attacked by miasma. In connection with this branch of the subject, another source of the development of ship-fever demands notice. In the cabins and hovels—the homes of these famine-stricken people—typhus fever raged a long time, and doubtless prevails extensively yet, produced by the same general and specific causes as have been described. The emigrants leave for the seaboard, and straightway enter the ships, unpurified and unwashed, reeking with the fever miasma of their habitations. Into the crowded and confined steerage they hasten for rest and escape from starvation and death. But unconsciously they bring the enemy with them ; the fatal seeds are but sown in a fresh soil, and, as though from a hot-bed, they sprout even more vigorously. One such case on board a crowded and badly ventilated ship may cause the death of numbers.

“ The food with which these people are supplied on shipboard, even if sufficient in quantity (which it is not always), is very often so badly cooked as to operate injuriously upon them. So great is often the difficulty, among from 300 to 1,000 people, of finding a proper time and opportunity for cooking, that it is a common occurrence for them to swallow their flour or meal only half cooked, or even mixed simply with warm water, if indeed warm water can be had. The effect of this kind of diet is but to add other evils, such as dysentery and diarrhoea, to the typhus miasma with which the steerage becomes infected, the debility of the inmates rendering them more susceptible to its influence than they would be if well fed.

“ For the prevention as well as the cure of typhus, it is necessary that the physical stamina be well maintained by appropriate food, in sufficient quantity. With ordinary strength of body and elasticity of spirit, few persons can be induced to remain below deck for many hours together, and, while the pure air of the ocean directly increases animal vigor, it is also the surest preventive of typhus. Even the half-starved emigrant would find his energy and spirits revive, if compelled by a rigid sanitary police to make frequent visits to the ship’s deck.

“ Famine, therefore, though a frequent precedent and a powerful adjunct, is only an indirect cause of the fever as we find it on shipboard and in our hospitals ; but we must continue to be burdened with it so long as poverty-stricken emigrants are admitted into the transport-ships in such great numbers, with food so insufficient in quantity and quality, and with such a total absence of sanitary police during the voyage.

From what has been said, it will be readily inferred that in the prevention of typhus fever pure air possesses great value. Too much reliance cannot be placed upon it, either for this purpose or for subduing the intensity or arresting the progress of the disease. Of its efficacy as a remedial agent, a striking instance among many others that might be mentioned occurred at the New York Quarantine Hospital, under my immediate notice, during my connection with the State Emigrant Commission. A new building was erected on the summit of a hill within the enclosure, into which some forty patients were conveyed from the other overcrowded buildings. These had been kept in as good condition as possible as respects both cleanliness and ventilation. Though there were no specific provisions for the latter, yet the influence of the fresh atmosphere of the new building upon the patients was most decided and immediate ; a load seemed to be lifted off them, and several, who, it was feared, would die, began at once to improve and rapidly recover.

“ In the month of August, 1837, a number of ships with emigrant passengers arrived at Perth Amboy, from Liverpool and other ports, on board of some of which ship-fever prevailed. There was no hospital or other accommodations in the town in which the sick could be placed, and no person would admit them into private dwellings, fearing infection ; at the same time, they could not be left on board the ships. An arrangement was made to land the sick passengers and place them in an open wood, adjacent to a large spring of water, about a mile and a half from town. Rough shanties, floored with boards and covered with sails, were erected, and thirty-six patients were landed in boats, as near the spring as possible, and carried in wagons to the encampment (as it was called), under the influence of a hot August sun. Of the thirty-six, twelve were insensible, in the last stage of fever, and not expected to live twenty-four hours. The day after landing there was a heavy rain, and, the shanties affording no protection with their sail roofs, the sick were found the next morning wet, and their bedding, such as it was, drenched with the rain. It was replaced with such articles as could be collected from the charity of the inhabitants. Their number was increased by new patients to eighty-two in all. On board the ship, which was cleansed after landing the passengers, *four* of the crew were taken with ship-fever, and two of them died. Some of the nurses at the encampment were taken sick, but recovered. Of the whole number of eighty-two passengers removed from the ship, not one died. Pure air, good water, and, perhaps, the rain (though only the first thirty-six were affected by it) seemed to have effected the cure.

“ The ship was the *Phæbe*, with between three and four hundred passengers, a number of whom (twenty-seven) had died on the passage. The shanties spoken of were two in number, thirty feet long, twenty feet wide, boarded on three sides four feet up, with old sails stretched over them. The twelve who were removed from the ship in a state of insensibility were apparently in so hopeless a condition that the overseer, who was a carpenter, observed, ‘ Well, Doctor, I think I shall have some boxes to make before many hours.’ ‘ The night after their arrival at the encampment,’ says Dr. Smith, ‘ we had a violent thunder-gust, accompanied by torrents of rain. On visiting them the following morning, the clothes of all

were saturated with water ; in other words, they had had a thorough ablution ; this, doubtless, was a most fortunate circumstance. The medical treatment was exceedingly simple, consisting, in the main, of an occasional laxative or enema, vegetable acids, and bitters ; wine was liberally administered, together with the free use of cold water, butter milk, and animal broths.’ The four sailors who sickened after the arrival of the vessel were removed to the room of an ordinary dwelling-house. The medical treatment in their case was precisely similar, yet two of them died, and the others suffered from carbuncles while convalescing. The doctor adds, ‘ my opinion is, that had the eighty-two treated at the encampment been placed in a common hospital, many of them would also have fallen victims. I do not attribute their recovery so much to the remedies administered as to the circumstances in which they were placed ; in other words, a good washing to begin with, and an abundance of fresh air.’

“ It has puzzled some to understand why it is that typhus fever and many other infectious disorders are more frequent and fatal in cold than in warm weather. This fact is attributed by some to the low temperature ; but the true reason undoubtedly is, that in winter the external atmosphere is more completely excluded from our dwellings and hospitals by closing of doors and windows, which in warm weather are open and freely permit the ingress and egress of air. Hence, in winter, the greater necessity of artificial ventilation. The same reasoning applies to passenger-ships in cold or stormy weather, when the hatches are kept closed. Artificial ventilation, necessary at all times, is then more urgently demanded.

“ There is another fact connected with ships, as well as with hospitals and dwellings, which has a very important bearing on this subject. The miasma which has been spoken of has the property of attaching itself to clothing, bedding, furniture, and to the walls, ceilings, and floors of apartments. It is absorbed by them, and adheres with, considerable tenacity, whence it is ever ready, unless thoroughly destroyed and removed by cleansing and the use of disinfectants, to issue forth, and to pregnate the atmosphere again with its poisonous influence. Into a room in which a case of typhus fever has once existed, even for a short time, it is unsafe to enter, unless the room and everything in it has been first subjected to a thorough airing and purification. Here, then, is a constant source of danger, which will probably account for many instances of devastation on shipboard by this disease. A vessel in which it has once occurred will have the miasmatic poison clinging to its sides, ceilings, and floors, from which it cannot possibly be eradicated without the most thorough , airing, cleansing, and disinfecting, such as, I presume, no vessel engaged in the European passenger trade has ever received. In hospitals and dwellings, with hard-finished walls and painted wood-work, this fact is often demonstrated. In the peculiar structure of a vessel’s inner walls, without plaster, paint, or white-wash, with thousands of crevices and cracks inaccessible to the scrubbing-brush or any other purifying implement, without windows for the free circulation of air, we see the perfection of a place for the long retention of the poison, and for its propagation for months afterwards, when the steerage shall be again crowded with sure victims.

“ Moreover, the bunks or berths on these vessels are generally constructed of the cheapest kind of boards, often in the rough state, and put together without any nicety—the whole arrangement being of the flimsiest character. Nothing of the kind could be better adapted to harboring the fever miasma. At the end of the voyage, the bunks are sometimes taken down without disinfection or even washing, and, with all the filth and miasma adhering to them, stowed away, either as dunnage, amid the return cargo, or in bulk, to be appropriated to their original purpose on the next hitherward voyage. Now, it is evident that the next cargo of emigrants of such a vessel, though it may be composed of ever so healthy and cleanly people, and though the ship may be well supplied with stores, bedding, and other requisites, is yet liable to suffer from the latent seeds of disease, night and day, as the passengers are in contact with the fever-charged bunks. There is more than probability that more or less will be attacked. The pestilence once started, there is no telling where it will stop.

“ But even supposing this source of danger to be stopped by the destruction of the old bunks and the substitution of new ones after each voyage, the permanent timber of the vessel, if not disinfected, will still form a repository for the poison, whence its ravages may be renewed.

“ The second of the diseases by which passenger-ships have been infested is cholera. The open air generally puts an end to typhus or ship fever, whereas cholera is controlled by no such corrective. Although this fearful disorder confines itself to no precise localities, there appear to be circumstances under which it is peculiarly apt to make its appearance. These circumstances have been ascertained to be in a great degree similar to those which give rise to typhus fever. The poor and vicious, whose vital powers are enfeebled by want of wholesome nutritious food and close confinement or criminal excess, are found to be much more liable to become the prey of cholera than persons who have good nourishing food in abundance, take regular exercise, and abstain from indulgences that weaken the general tone of the system, whilst they add to the nervous excitability of the body. Cholera, it is true, often appears and disappears without any apparent cause, a fact the reason of which is still hidden from the eye of science, and can only be explained by time and experience. It is sufficient to know that, if the body is kept in a healthy, well-balanced condition, and its functions are not interrupted by any disturbing causes, it may, in the generality of cases, bid defiance to the assaults of the disease. The theory is entertained by some that cholera on shipboard arises from the virus of the disease having been imbibed by the persons or clothing of passengers previous to embarkation, or that it is met with in certain zones through which the ships pass in reaching the Western Continent. Concerning this it is proper to remark, that all that can, be done by the owners of passenger-ships is to prevent the existence of any exciting cause of sickness on board of them, and of any state of things by which it may be nourished and sustained if contracted elsewhere. If there be anything in the atmosphere of particular zones or belts, it must be encountered alike by ships sailing probably within a few miles of each other, propelled by the same winds, and standing on the same courses. Such, however, is not son of the case. While passengers on Liverpool vessels died by hundreds ships, from the cholera, those from Germany, who had left Hamburg and Bremen at the same time, and arrived in New York about the same period with those from Liverpool, had no sickness on board ; for the reason that they were not so crowded, that they were cleaner and healthier when they embarked, and better provided for during the voyage. The German port regulations, which compel the ships to distribute cooked provisions among the emigrants, account for their superiority in respect to health and cleanliness.”

Among twelve vessels, which arrived at Quebec on or about August 10, 1847, there were two German ships, the bark *Amy*, from Bremen, with 289 passengers, and the brig *Watchful*, from Hamburg, with 145 passengers, and one Irish brig, the *Trinity*, from Limerick, with 86 passengers, upon which there occurred neither sickness nor death during the voyage. The other vessels, consisting of two from Limerick, one from Sligo, three from Dublin, two from Liverpool, and one from Greenock, with 2,386 passengers, had together 198 deaths and 286 sick on their passage.

But even ships which leave the same port simultaneously show a very remarkable difference in the respective health of their passengers. This must be ascribed to the better condition of the same ship and of the passengers in the one case, and to the previous poverty and insufficient nourishment in the other. Thus, the ship *Lucy Thompson*, after a passage of twenty-nine days, arrived at New York, from Liverpool, on the 11th of September, 1853, with a loss of forty out of 835 passengers by cholera. The *William Stetson* arrived on the same day, after a passage of thirty-one days, with 355 passengers, having lost none on the passage. The *Great Western* arrived on the day previous, September 10, after a passage of thirty-one days, 832 passengers, no death having occurred on board. On the 19th of September, 1853, the *Isaac Webb* arrived at New York, from Liverpool, with 733 passengers,

after a passage of twenty-nine days, seventy-seven having died of cholera. On the next day, the *Roscius* arrived from the same port, with 495 passengers, after a passage of thirty-five days, six days longer than that of the *Isaac Webb*, and yet without a single death. On the 15th of October, 1853, the *Montezuma* arrived at New York, from Liverpool, in forty-one days, with 404 : passengers, and a loss of two ; while the *Marmion* arrived on the same day, after a passage of twenty-five days, with 295 passengers, and a loss of thirty-six by cholera, The *Washington*, arrived at New York on the 23d of October, 1853, after a passage of forty-one days, with 952 passengers, and a loss of eighty-one ; while the *Guy Mannering* arrived on the 25th of the same month, after a passage of thirty-seven days, with 781 passengers, and without loss.

These examples might be multiplied almost at pleasure, showing that vessels which left the same port almost at the same time, and reached the same point of destination about the same time, and consequently would be supposed to have been in the same latitudes and subject to the same winds at the same time, suffered in very different degrees. The cases presented show conclusively that the disease on board of these vessels must be attributed to some exciting cause pre-existing within them, which could not be connected with the condition of the atmosphere or the prevalence of certain winds on the ocean.

“ With regard to small-pox, the third in rank of the diseases which have affected emigrants, its nature and its means of prevention are too well known to require anything more than a single remark, viz., that the rules which apply to the prevention of typhus or ship fever and cholera are, in the main, also applicable in the case of small-pox.

The percentage of mortality among the passengers on board of New York vessels has been considerably greater than those of vessels trading to Boston, Philadelphia, and other ports. This is to be accounted for by a variety of reasons. New York being the great commercial emporium of the Union, passengers from every country in Europe have been induced to regard it as the point to which they should direct their courses. Hence the huge structures furnished by the enterprise of that great metropolis for the transportation of passengers have been crowded to excess, and, as a necessary consequence, the causes of disease have existed on board of those vessels to a greater extent than on any other. In general, the percentage of deaths is in direct proportion to the number of passengers, that is, it has been found that where passengers have been distributed in smaller numbers disease and death have been less prevalent. The smallest percentage of deaths has occurred on vessels from ports of Europe other than those of Liverpool, London, Bremen, Hamburg, and Havre, which, being off the great thoroughfares of commerce, have presented fewer attractions to the great mass of emigrants. The vessels from these ports, being less crowded, are more easily ventilated and kept clean, and present greater facilities for the proper preparation of the food of the passengers, and for their exercise in good weather.

During the four last months of 1853, 312 vessels arrived at New York from European ports, with 96,950 passengers. Of these vessels, forty-seven were visited by cholera, and 1,933 passengers died at sea, while 457 were sent to the hospitals on landing—there, in all probability, to terminate in a short time their miserable existence—making nearly two per cent, of deaths among the whole number of persons who had embarked for the New World, and nearly two and a half per cent, when including those who were landed sick. On board of the forty-seven vessels attacked by cholera, the number of passengers was 21,857, of whom 1,821 (being 9.48 per cent.) died on the passage, and 284 were landed sick, making 9.68 per cent, of dead and diseased, in an average passage of thirty-nine days.

Of the arrivals above mentioned, 112 were from Liverpool, with an average of 435 passengers on each. Twenty-four of these vessels, with an average of 577 passengers, or an

average excess of 142 passengers each over the general average of the whole number of vessels, had cholera on board.

Of twenty vessels which arrived from London, five had cholera on board. The average number of passengers on board the vessels attacked by cholera was 411 each, while that of the whole number was. but 326.

Of fifty-two vessels which arrived from Bremen, three had cholera on board. The average of passengers on board of each vessel, out of the whole number, was 201, while the average on board of those attacked by cholera was 259.

Of twenty-two vessels that arrived from Hamburg, six had cholera. Of forty-two vessels which, arrived from Havre, six had cholera. The average on board of the whole number of ships was 409, while on board of the six cholera ships the average was 561.

Of sixty-four vessels which arrived from other ports of Europe, three had cholera on board. The average of passengers on board of the whole number of these ships was 148, while that on board of the ships attacked by cholera was 185.

The average on board of the whole number of vessels (312) that arrived from Europe during the four months was 311, while the average on board of the forty-seven that had cholera was 465. The average on board of the vessels which arrived, exclusive of those with cholera, was 283, showing that the cholera vessels carried an average excess of 182 each over those that were comparatively healthy.

Of the vessels which escaped from cholera, there were thirty-three, carrying on an average 335 passengers each, on board of which deaths occurred. On these vessels, the number of deaths was 112, out of 11,044 passengers.

It appears from the above statement of facts, that the ships on board of which cholera broke out were those which were most crowded with passengers, and that the vessels on board of which deaths from other diseases occurred were the next most crowded, whilst the remainder, which were healthy, had the lowest average of passengers.

Much has been done since to alleviate the hardships connected with sea voyages. The liberal legislation of Congress, which, by the Act of March 3, 1855, first concedes and endeavors to secure the rights of the emigrants by giving to each of them two tons of space, and by providing for the proper ventilation of the ship, as well as for a sufficient amount of substantial and cooked provisions, has contributed much towards preventing the almost daily occurrence of sickness and privations on board of emigrant ships. The construction of sailing-vessels is better, but beyond this the steamers have taken the place of the former, and have begun to monopolize the transport of emigrants, of whom at present about eighty-nine per cent, arrive in steamers, while in 1856, for instance, only three per cent, of their number had availed themselves of this faster and healthier mode of conveyance. While in 1850 the average number brought by steamers was 230, against 184 in sailing-vessels ; in 1868, it was 489 to 204 ; and, in 1869, 517 to 183 ; showing an average difference in favor of steamers of 285 and 334 respectively. The comparative mortality of passengers on board sailing-vessels and steamers shows, in 1868, a very large proportional disparity in favor of the steamers. Out of 180,449 passengers in 451 steamers, 200 died ; while from among 31,953 in 200 sailing-vessels, the deaths were 393. In 1869, out of 229,190 passengers in 504 steamers, 210 died ; of 28,333 passengers in 209 sailing-vessels, 138 died ; being about one death in 1000 of the former, and 200 of the latter. There is every reason for the realization of the hope that in less than ten years the sailing-vessels, as transports of emigrants, will disappear from the ocean. There has seldom, if ever, been a complaint brought against the steamers, which make the

average of their trips in less than a fortnight, and on account of the short voyage, the plenty of good water, provisions, and fresh air, prevent their passengers from falling sick. Humanity has thus succeeded in making the exception now what was formerly the rule, and a mortality of one-fourth of one per cent, of the total number of passengers is nowadays considered a very large loss.

Much, however, as has been done, there is still ample room for greater improvement.

To remove the most pressing evils, the author of this essay, in the winter of 1868, submitted a bill to the Legislature of the State of New York, "For the more effectual protection of emigrants arriving at the port of New York." By this bill, which on June 5, 1868, became a law, the Commissioners are severally invested with the power (subject to certain conditions) of examining under oath any witness respecting complaints made by any person relative to the ship in which any emigrant may have arrived, his treatment on shipboard, and the quality of the provisions furnished; or to take testimony in reference to any death that may have occurred during the voyage; and such testimony, if made in presence of the persons complained of, may be used as evidence in any subsequent action between any of the passengers and the owner, master, or charterer of the ship. Thus offending persons will be deprived to a great extent of the chance of escaping punishment, while the emigrant will be exposed in consequence to less risk of unjust treatment, or, if aggrieved, will have a speedier and more accessible mode of redress than has hitherto existed.

The necessity of such a provision was almost immediately after its passage shown in the case of the *James Foster*, Jr., a Liverpool emigrant ship, as without it the atrocious misconduct and brutality of her officers could not have been adequately punished.

It is to be hoped, however, that our General Government, as well as the governments of Europe, will themselves initiate the necessary reforms, and follow the just example set to them by the North German Confederation. The draft of a Convention proposed between the United States and the several European governments, for the better protection of steerage passengers while at sea, prepared by Secretary Hamilton Fish, is a noble proof of the earnest desire of the United States to do their utmost in behalf of the emigrants.

It is in the interest of humanity that in future the Emigrant Courts, proposed by Secretary Fish, shall have exclusive control and power in all matters connected with the well-being of the emigrants.

Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration of the state of New York (1870)

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