

Touching At Halifax.

Things As They Are In America.

William Chambers

1854

A VISIT to America is usually one of the early aspirations of the more impressionable youth of England. The stirring stories told of Columbus, Sebastian Cabot, Raleigh, and Captain John Smith ; the history of the Pigrim Fathers fleeing from persecution ; the description of Penn's transactions with the Indians ; the narratives of the gallant achievements of Wolfe and Washington, and the lamentable humiliations of Burgoyne and Cornwallis ; the exciting autobiography of the Philadelphian printer, who, from toiling at the press, rose to be the companion of kings—all had their due effect on my imagination, and stimulated the desire I felt to cross the Atlantic, and see the country which had been the theatre of so many interesting events, and latterly the scene of so many social developments. The ordinary occupations of a busy life, however, had dispelled this early dream. Like other ardently but vaguely entertained notions, it vanished and was forgotten, when circumstances all at once recalled it to mind, and rendered its realisation possible. In shorty towards the close of 1853, I was enabled to visit the more interesting portions of North America, where the rapid rate at which travellers whirled from place to place, left me a reasonable for observation and inquiry.

When a thing has to be brought down from the realms of fancy, to be considered in its practical details, it is astonishing how many little difficulties require to be encountered and overcome. In the present instance, I had to determine, in the first place, which route I should adopt. Should go by way of the British American provinces, or leave them to be reached after visiting the United States ? I resolved to set out direct for one of the nearest of the colonial possessions—Nova Scotia, and pass on thence to Canada, by this means taking the more northerly parts first. Perhaps, also, the fact of the Nova Scotian peninsula being ordinarily, and it may be said, unjustly, neglected by tourists, helped to fix my resolution, and accordingly I engaged a berth in the *America*, one of the Cunard line of steamers bound from Liverpool to Boston, and touching at Halifax.

It was on a dull September morning, with a thick fog overhanging the Mersey, that I found myself amidst a crowd of persons standing on the deck of a small steamer at the landing-quay of Liverpool. In the forepart of the vessel was a huge pile of boxes, bags, and portmanteaus, the luggage of the passengers ; while the middle and after parts were so thickly covered with human beings, as to leave barely standing-room. The duty of this little craft, called ' the tender,' is to carry passengers from the shore to the steam-ship that lies moored in the middle of the river, and which, having previously, while in dock, taken on board all its cargo, is now ready to start out to sea. As nine o'clock struck, the tender moved away from the shore, and in two minutes was enveloped in the fog—a most dangerous situation, for the Mersey was studded over with vessels in various attitudes, and at any instant we might rush violently against them. Such a catastrophe actually occurred. By what I must consider to have been incautious steering, the small steamer was brought suddenly into collision with the bows of a large vessel, and our instantaneous destruction seemed to be inevitable. With indescribable alarm I expected that the vessel would pass over us, and that we should all be immediately struggling beneath the flood. There was a rush to the roof of the small engine-room, as being likely to remain longest above water. I climbed to the highest point near me, and looked ahead for the coming shock. A moment of extreme excitement ensued. Crash went in the bulwarks of the tender, and down went its mast across the pile of luggage ! I thought all was

over. Fortunately, the bowsprit of the large vessel, in coming in contact with and breaking our mast, slightly turned off the collision, and we immediately lost sight of her great hull in the mist. We felt, as it were, a reprieve from death, and looked each other in the face with a feeling of congratulation. Then broke forth on the unlucky steersman a shower of those warm epithets which the English, in moments of indignation, scatter about with characteristic liberality. Idiot—ass—fool ! were pelted at him all the rest of the way ; nor did we feel safe from a fresh calamity till we were alongside of the *America*, which towered like a castle above us, and till we had our feet securely planted on her capacious poop. The tender, it is needless to say, had a very damaged appearance. Her mast and cordage lay athwart the confused mass of baggage, some of which was broken in pieces, and some had gone over-board. Whether such incidents are common at Liverpool, I do not know. It is, at all events, clear that the method of putting passengers on board American vessels, in a foggy river, by means of small and overcrowded tenders, is a very bad one ; and I have no hesitation in saying, that there is more danger to life from this practice, than in a whole voyage across the Atlantic.

The *America* did not immediately depart. The mails were still to be put on board, and these did not arrive in a subsequent trip of the tender till nearly noon. When they made their appearance, they consisted of at least two cart-loads of well-stuffed leather bags, with some boxes containing special dispatches for Canada. The whole having been transferred to the hold in the large steamer, the captain and pilot took their places on the paddle-box, the other officers went to their appropriate posts, the bell was rung, the wheels moved, and we were off. Slowly at first did the great floating mass proceed through the water. The mists which lay to seaward were not yet-quite dispelled by the sun, and to go down the Mersey required careful guidance. For half an hour, the passengers leant over the brass railings of the elevated poop, catching glimpses of the parting quays—some waving hats or handkerchiefs to friends far in the receding distance—some, myself for one, thinking of those dear to them at home, and half doubtful of our own safe return to Old England. Gradually, the ship got into greater speed ; for an instant it paused in its career, to allow the pilot to descend to his boat ; again it moved along, and we were fairly on our course. The direction it took was straight up the Channel between Ireland and the Isle of Man. It was going what is called ‘ north about,’ which is preferred to the southern passage in certain states of wind and tide.

As the vessel gained the open sea, and left nothing to look at but the wide-spread waters, one by one the passengers descended to view the nature of their own particular accommodations, or to inspect the general mechanism of the ship. To me, at least, everything was new and curious y and, for the sake of the uninitiated, I will try to give an idea of what came under my notice.

As is preety well known, there are two chief and distinct lines of steamers. One, the Cunard, so called after Mr Cnnard of Halifax, who was its projector, is exclusively British property, and has a large money-grant from our government for carrying the mails. Some of its vessels sail direct to and from New York, the remainder to and from Boston, calling at Halifax. The other line, called the Collins, is American property, and sails only to and from New York ; it is subsidised by the United States' government also for mail purposes. These two lines are in many respects rivals, but, by a judicious arrangement, the vessels depart from each port on different days of the week, so that no actual inconvenience is experienced from their competition. Latterly, there has sprung up a separate line of steamers to and from Philadelphia, and another to and from Portland ; but of these I do not need here to speak. It is by the Cunard and Collins steamers that the intercourse with North America is mainly carried on, and on both sides of the Atlantic there is much keenness of feeling as to their respective merits. The Cunards are strong and compact vessels, built wholly in the Clyde, and possess engines of the most trustworthy workmanship. They are likewise in the charge of first-rate seamen. But, from the rounded form of their bows, or some other architectural peculiarity,

they do not sail so fast as the Collins steamers, and they ship water on the decks to an unpleasant extent. They also fall considerably short of the Collinses in point of spaciousness and elegance of accommodation ; and I am sorry to say that, in the ticket-dispensing department at Liverpool, there is great room for increased attention and politeness. On calling to get my ticket on the night previous to departure, I experienced such treatment as might be expected by a pauper emigrant who went to seek an eleemosynary passage. Nor was this the worst of it ; for although paying the highest fare, £25, which I had remitted ten days previously, and although informed that one of the best berths in the ship had been assigned to me, I found that this said excellent berth was among the fore-cabin passengers—a circumstance that led to much discomfort during the voyage, as I shall afterwards have occasion to notice. I allude to these circumstances with reluctance, and only under a sense of public duty.

On board the *America*, which bears a close resemblance to the other vessels in the line, there was nothing to find fault with, but, on the contrary, much to commend. Everything in the Cunards goes on, as the saying is, ‘ like clock-work.’ In the striking of bells, changing of watches, posting of officers, throwing the log, taking solar observations, and other transactions, there is all the regularity and precision of a man-of-war ; and this imparts a feeling of security even in the worst states of the weather, by night or day. The burden of the *America* is 1832 tons, and its length about 249 feet ; it has two large engines, which act separately or together on both paddle-wheels, and in ordinary circumstances give a speed of from ten to twelve miles an hour. The quantity of fuel consumed is from fifty to sixty tons a day ; necessitating a stock on board of about 900 tons of coal for the trip, and so leaving space for 900 tons for freight and miscellaneous articles.

It is wonderful to see how much is made of the internal accommodation. A great deal is done on deck. There is really little deck visible. Along each side, adjoining the paddle-box, there is a row of small apartments, covered with wood, and over these are empty boats turned upside down, ready for launching in case of accident. In the open space beneath these boats, the cook keeps his fresh vegetables, and you occasionally see one of his assistants climbing up to clutch at a cabbage or bunch of carrots, and bring them from their repository. The apartments on the starboard side (the right side looking towards the head of the vessel) have brass-plates on the doors, with inscriptions denoting what they are. The first in the row is the cabin of the second officer ; next is the cabin of the third officer ; next is the workshop of the baker ; next is that of the butcher or flesher ; next is the house for the cow ; and farther on are sundry smaller offices. The apartments on the left side of the deck (larboard) are—first, the cabin of the surgeon ; next, that of the purser ; and further on are various places for culinary operations, stores, and so forth. Along the centre of the deck, beginning at the stern, are, first, the wheel-house, in which a helmsman is seen constantly at his post, and who has an outlook in front over the top of the saloon. At each side of the wheel-house are apartments for the captain and first officer. The saloon comes next. It is a large sitting and dining apartment for the first-class passengers, and is lighted by a row of windows on each side. Separated from it by a narrow cross-passage, and on the same line with it, is the steward’s apartment, surrounded by shelves of china and glass articles, and having in its centre a little bureau whence liquors are dispensed. Over the door of this bureau is a clock, visible from the saloon, which is altered daily in correspondence with the changing longitude. Beyond the steward’s room, towards the middle of the vessel, is a kind of apartment open at the sides, and in which stands the capstan. At its extremity is the chimney of the furnaces, by which means the enclosure is kept tolerably warm even in cold weather. Provided with seats, it forms the outdoor lounge of cigar-smokers, and those who do not know what to do with themselves. Besides being dry overhead, the capstan-gallery is kept dry to the feet by means of open wooden work laid on the deck ; so that when the sea washes over the vessel, passengers can remain here without being wetted.

Beyond the capstan-gallery is the kitchen ; adjoining is the open deck, with the ventilators for the engine-room. Clearing this spot towards the head of the vessel, we have, first, the mess-room of the officers, a small apartment erected on the deck ; and in continuation, the sitting and eating saloon for the fore-cabin passengers. This saloon is smaller than that for the first-class passengers ; but it is neatly fitted up with hair-cloth sofa seats, and has stewards for its own special attendance. Beneath it are the sleeping-berths for this department ; and from all I could see, they equal in comfort those of the higher class, with the disadvantage, however, of being exposed to the noises incidental to the working of the paddles and the concussions of the waves on the forepart of the vessel. All that part of the deck, beyond the second-class saloon, is the proper field for the sailors.

So much for what stands on the level of the deck ; and with so many incumbrances, the space left for walking amounts only to a stripe at each side of the saloon, unless we choose to mount to the poop, which is the entire roof of the saloon, steward's apartment, and capstan-gallery, united in one long sweep. The poop, enclosed with railings, and furnished with seats, affords a fine airing-ground, and from the binnacle, or stand for the compass, to the great red tube forming the engine chimney at the further extremity of the poop, there is an unimpeded view over the surrounding ocean. The indoor space is necessarily circumscribed. Below the saloon are the sleeping-berths, two beds in each, in long rows ; a certain number with a small parlour being set aside for ladies. The descent to this sleeping region is by two good stairs. The fore-cabin passengers, in like manner, occupy berths below their saloon, and in this respect, at least, enjoy accommodations no way inferior to those of first-class passengers.

The conducting of this magnificent vessel from port to port across the ocean, exhibits a remarkable triumph of human skill. A body of officers, dressed in a uniform like that of the royal navy, is charged with the management of the ship. The chief command in the *America*, for the time being, was in the hands of Captain N. Shannon, [1] a Scotsman of experienced seamanship, and most agreeable and obliging in his intercourse with the passengers. Under him are three officers. The laborious duties of the ship are performed by a boat-swain and an efficient corps of mariners ; there is likewise a head-engineer with his assistants, having the special charge of the machinery. In the ordinary working of the ship, it seems to be a rule, that two officers shall always be on the alert—one stationed on the gangway at the side of the paddle-boxes, to look sharply ahead ; the other stationed at the binnacle, to communicate orders to the man at the wheel. When an order is issued by the captain, or first officer on duty, it is repeated aloud by the second officer ; and you thus hear it rapidly echoed from point to point till acted upon by the helmsman. Orders to the engineer to slacken speed, to stop, or go on, are communicated by pulling the wire of a bell at the paddle-box ; by which simple contrivance, the movements of the ship are under the most perfect control. The watches, as must be known to many, are four hours each, and are regulated by striking a bell placed near the wheel, the sounds being answered by a bell at the forecabin. These are struck every half-hour. Half-past twelve o'clock is indicated by one blow ; one o'clock by two blows ; half-past one o'clock by three blows ; and so on to four o'clock, which is marked by eight blows. At half-past four they begin again ; and in this way the twenty-four hours of the day are divided.

Although ably assisted by his officers, the commander of a vessel of this class holds a situation requiring sleepless vigilance. I observed that in his room at night a light was kept constantly burning, to illuminate the charts, compasses, and barometers, with which the apartment is furnished ; and at various times a mariner came to report the progress of the ship, and the state of the winds. It is also noticeable, that any order despatched by the captain to the officer on duty, is given in writing, so as to avoid the mistakes incidental to verbal messages. Lately, a tell-tale compass has been invented, for the purpose of checking irregularities in sailing. By means of an ingenious kind of mechanism attached to a compass,

its dial-plate is punctured in the line of direction of the ship. Should the vessel be kept unsteadily on its assigned course, the deviations will be marked on the dial like, a cloud of zigzag punctures ; but should the vessel be kept steadily to its proper path, the punctures, accordingly, will be in a straight line. Fresh dials of paper are supplied daily. With one of these tell-tale compasses, the captain, on awaking in his berth, can discover whether his orders have been carefully attended to or otherwise.

Captains of ocean steamers differ considerably in their attention to exactness in compasses. Good compasses are doubtless furnished to all vessels of this important class ; but the very best compass may be rendered worse than useless, by a disregard of the petty circumstances on board that derange its action. Captain Shannon related to us a curious instance of a derangement in the compass, which had since rendered him punctiliously cautious. He had left Halifax with his vessel on the homeward-bound voyage ; it was during one of the cold winter months, when fogs prevail on the American coast. His directions at night to the officers of the watch were to run for a point thirty miles east-ward of Newfoundland, so as to make sure of keeping clear of its rock-bound shores ; and the point of the compass that would lead in this required direction was fixed upon. On coming on deck in the gray of the mornings what was his horror on seeing that the ship had just entered a small bay, and seemed about to be dashed in pieces on the lofty precipices that revealed themselves through the mist ! By instantaneously shouting orders to the man at the wheel, and by reversing the engines, he barely saved the vessel from destruction. After some trouble, it was paddled out to deep water. His first impression of course was, that the compass had been neglected. But to his surprise, he found that his orders in this respect had been exactly followed. The head of the vessel had been kept in the direction which, by compass, should have led to the open sea, thirty miles from land, and yet here was it running full inshore. To all concerned, the deviation seemed perfectly magical—not on any ordinary principle to be accounted for. The truth at length dawned on the captain. The error must have arisen from some local derangement of the compass. He caused all the compasses in the ship to be ranged on the deck ; and soon it was perceived that no two agreed. The seat of the disorder was ascertained to be at a certain spot close to the funnel of the stove of the saloon. Could this funnel be the cause ? It was of brass, and had never before shewn any power of distracting the needle. On looking into it, however, the captain discovered that, when at Halifax, a new iron tube had been put inside the brass one, without his knowledge, and the circumstance had never been mentioned to him ! There, in that paltry iron tube, was the whole cause of the derangement, ‘ which I speedily,’ added Captain Shannon, ‘ made to shift its quarters.’ How near was thus a fine vessel being wrecked, from a petty circumstance which no one could have previously dreamt of ; and it may be said, how many first-class steamers, assumed to be diverted towards rocks by currents, may have been led to destruction from causes equally trivial.

By a strict regard to compasses and to lights, and by careful pilotage on approaching the coast, the danger to well-built sea-going steamers is exceedingly small. Rocks, collisions, and conflagrations, are the things that need alone raise a feeling of apprehension. On board the *America*, as in similar vessels, lights are hung up at sunset on the fore-mast and on each paddle-box, so as to warn ships that a steamer is approaching, whereby collisions may be avoided ; and as regards fire, extreme care seems to be taken. All the lamps below, excepting that in the captain’s apartment, are put out at midnight ; nor is any one allowed to burn lights on his own account. There is, also, in connection with the steam-engine, a set of force-pumps, by which a deluge of water could be immediately propelled to any part of the vessel. To avert the danger and delay incidental to breakages of machinery, duplicates of various parts are kept on board, and could be substituted if necessary, without materially interrupting the progress of the voyage. Such precautionary arrangements cannot but give a certain degree of confidence to the most timid class of passengers.

The *America*, as I said, quitted her moorings in the Mersey on Saturday at noon ; and passing north about, it was not until about seven o'clock on Sunday evening that we lost sight of Ireland, and were fairly afloat on the Atlantic. Without any land in view, the ship now seemed to be moving in the centre of a circular piece of water terminating in the sky. And on and on, day after day, did the noble vessel go ploughing her way across this shifting liquid disk. Seldom did any sail make its appearance on the track we were pursuing. Our ship was seemingly alone on the waste of waters—a thing enchanted into life by the appliances of science and art, hastening across the trackless deep, and transferring a living portion of Europe to America. How suggestive, to sit down to dinner, amidst the splendours of a hotel, and to see so many refined people about you, yet know that you are a thousand miles from land—a mere speck amidst the tumultuous waves ! The greatness of this marvel is probably lessened to most minds by the pressure of common-place circumstances. The slightest touch of sea-sickness takes away the poetry of the ocean ; nor, when a man is hungry, does he indulge complacently in fanciful speculations. One of the first things which passengers do on coming on board, is to select the place where they propose to sit at table ; which they do by laying down their card at the spot. In this way, a party of persons acquainted with each other make choice of a locality ; and the seat each selects he keeps during the voyage. Let us pause for a moment on the appearance of the saloon, in its varying character of sitting and eating room.

It is one of the many well-managed matters in these vessels, that the meals are served peremptorily to a minute, according to the striking of the bells. No matter what be the state of the weather, the dishes are brought in at the appointed time ; and I verily believe that if the ship were sinking, the stewards would still be continuing to serve the dinner. The stewards, in fact, twelve in number, the whole under a *chef*, and dressed in smart blue jackets, are but a variety of the waiter genus, and know only one thing—which is to supply the wants of passengers. At eight o'clock in the morning, they ring their first bell, which is the signal for rising ; and at half-past eight they ring again for breakfast. Irish stew, cold meat, ham, mutton-chops, some kind of fish, eggs, tea, coffee, and hot rolls, are placed in profusion on the two upper tables. The tables in the saloon are eight in number—that is, four on each side, with sofa seats in red velvet plush. Seldom more, however, than the upper tables are covered for breakfast ; for the meal is drawn out till ten o'clock, and for two hours people come dropping in and going out as suits their fancy. At ten, the tables are cleared : after this, nothing hot can be obtained ; but any one at any time can have such other fare as is on board. At half-past eleven, the tables are covered to a larger extent, and the bell at twelve o'clock is the signal for lunch. This is a well-attended meal, and there is usually a considerable consumption of soup, cold beef, and roasted potatoes—the latter served with their jackets on, and a great favourite with the more moderate hands. Again the tables are cleared, and so they remain till half-past three o'clock, when they are covered from end to end in *grande tenue*, and the bell for dressing is rung. This bell might as well be spared, for not one makes the slightest preparation ; and when the bell at four o'clock is sounded, there is a general rush from the poop, smoking-gallery, and other quarters, into the saloon. The number of passengers during our voyage was a hundred and sixty, and the whole of these, with two or three exceptions, sat down to dinner daily. At the top of each of the eight tables is a silver tureen of soup, and the signal for taking off the lids is the entrance of the captain, who appears in the saloon only at this meal, and takes his seat at the upper end of the first table on the left-hand side. The stewards are drawn up in lines, and confine their attendance to their respective tables. When dishes are sent in to the apartment, they are handed from one to another along the lines, and in the same noise-less manner are they handed out—the whole thing going on silently like an adroit military manœuvre. Every day fresh bills of fare are laid on the tables for the use of the guests. Iced water is served in abundance, and it is observable that not many call for wines. Those who do, give their orders on cards furnished for the purpose, which they settle for at the end of the

voyage. For general accommodation, a shelf for bottles and glasses is suspended from the ceiling over each of the tables, and large tankards of iced water are always at hand.

The elegance and profusion of the dinners is surprising. They consist of the best soups, fish, meat, fowls, and game, with side-dishes in the French style ; followed by a course of pastry of various kinds, with a dessert of fresh and preserved fruits. How so many things can be cooked, how there can be so much pastry dressed up daily, is a standing wonder to everybody. And the wonder is greater when we know that from the same apparatus must be daily produced not only all this profusion for the saloon, but also copious dinners at different hours for the fore-cabin passengers, the officers' mess, and the working departments of the ship. Dinner in the saloon is drawn out to upwards of an hour, but towards its conclusion numbers drop off to their accustomed lounge in the capstan-gallery or on the poop. A few, here and there, linger over a bottle of wine ; some recline on the sofas ; and some take to reading. There is now a cessation in eating till seven o'clock, when the bell is sounded the last time for the day, and tea and coffee are served. For these beverages there is always abundance of milk ; the cow on board being an assurance that there will be no want in that particular. As regards this poor animal, which was certainly an involuntary passenger, I observed that she was carefully attended to in the way of food and cleanliness ; nor did she feel the want of company ; for most persons talk to her in passing her little house, over the half-door of which she keeps her head poked out to see what is going on, and to receive the caresses of the sailors. In rough weather, she lies down in a comfortable bed of straw, and is untouched by the spray of the sea ; yet, she is sometimes sick, and on such occasions, like others on boards probably wishes she were safe on dry land.

It will appear, from this brief description, that eating goes on with short interruptions from morning till night. One feels as if living in a table-d'hôte room, with the same company always sitting down or rising up ; and I should think that, if a person be at all well, he can scarcely fail to add to his weight during the voyage. At first, and for a few days afterwards, there is a general shyness ; but this wears gradually off. Persons sitting near to or opposite each other, begin to become acquainted ; cards are sometimes mutually exchanged ; and mere chance proximity leads to a lasting and valued intimacy. At tea, some do not take their accustomed places at table, but, for the sake of variety, visit acquaintances in other parts of the room. As anything is gladly hailed which will impart a degree of novelty to the scene, the passengers were one evening gratified to learn that a gentleman proposed to give a lecture on Spirit Rapping. All being assembled in their places, the lecturer, who was an American, with a singularly thoughtful cast of countenance, stood up in the middle of the saloon, and commenced his harangue. He began by narrating the spiritual agencies mentioned in the Scriptures ; was strong on the case of Saul and the Witch of Endor ; came to recent manifestations ; and ended with the clenching argument, ' that he had seen a table rise into the air and go round the room ; and that if that was not effected by spirits, he asked any one to say how it had been done ! ' He was listened to with respect, but failed, I believe, to make any converts to his real or affected belief.

Devoured by idleness, passengers sometimes practise betting to a ridiculous and mischievous extent. They will bet on anything—whether a sail will be seen tomorrow ; what day and hour the ship will reach port ; or more commonly, what number of miles will be run in the current four-and-twenty hours. Betting on this latter point admits of speedy and accurate settlement ; for every day, at noon, there is stuck up on the door of the saloon a memorandum of the ship's run, calculated from the log ; and numbers, watching for the exhibition of this piece of intelligence, enter it gravely in their note-books, and go about telling everybody how many miles have been made in the ship's course.

In tolerable states of the weather, the greater number of passengers take walking exercise on the poop, which is the great airing-ground. The younger men amuse themselves in a different manner, with games of shovel-board, on the stripes of deck outside the saloon. Here, with thin circular pieces of hardwood, they play at a game which resembles that of bowls, only that the pieces thrown are made to slide along instead of being rolled. On fine forenoons, the ladies are spectators of these games, or indulge in walking exercise, if able to bear the unsteady motion of the ship. In the saloon, much is done to kill time by card-playing, chess, and backgammon. Some keep playing on for hours, morning and evening. They have crossed the Atlantic a dozen times, and to them the whole affair is hackneyed and tame. Their only solace is whist, and accordingly no sooner is the breakfast off the table, than the cards make their appearance. At night, when the candles are lighted, these whist-parties increase in number, and to look down the room, you would imagine yourself at a large evening-party in a watering-place. Occasionally, towards ten o'clock, when certain youngsters are finishing the day with deviled legs of fowl and 'glasses of something warm to put away that nasty squeamishness,' you may hear a song break forth, and there is for a time an air of joviality among the various scattered parties. Yet, on no occasion does one ever see any approach to boisterousness; and notwithstanding the mixture of nations—English, Scotch, American, Canadian, German, and Italian—there prevails from first to last the staid demeanour of well-bred and select society.

Our voyage was rather more rough than usual. Head-winds from the west tumbled the sea about, and retarded the progress of the vessel. At starting, the ship was able to make upwards of 200 miles a day; but on Thursday, the run sunk to 101 miles; on Friday, it rose a little, being 120; and on Saturday, it was 166. During these three days, the beating of rain and wind, and the dashing of spray from the paddles, were the least of the discomforts. As the vessel ducked down in front to meet the billows, she constantly, and just as a spoon would lift water, shipped a sea, which came rolling along the decks ankle-deep, and finding only an imperfect outlet at the scuppers. The concussions of the heavy surging waves on the bows and paddles were sometimes awful, threatening, as they appeared to do, the destruction of everything that opposed the repeated shocks. Yet under these pitiless blows, the vessel scarcely quivered, so well were her timbers put together; and calmly she made her way, though at moderated speed, through the raging and foaming ocean. Now was it apparent that mere power of engine is of little avail during storms in the Atlantic, and, indeed, will only aggravate the concussions, unless the prow of the vessel be of that sharpened and vertical form that will enable it to cleave its way, and at the same time sustain a level course in the water. A vessel of this improved shape, and of increased length is, I believe, in course of construction by the Cunard Company, and it will be interesting to watch the result. Meanwhile, the frequent shipping of seas in bad weather is an intolerable nuisance. As regards myself, the deluging of the decks of the *America* poisoned the whole comforts of the voyage. In going from my berth in the morning, and returning to it in the evenings I had to walk amidst sea-water; and one night, by the plunging of the ship, I was thrown down, and braised and drenched to a serious extent. For this there was no redress. Some other gentlemen among the first-class passengers had to undergo the like torment of occupying berths in the forepart of the ship. We were in the predicament of persons who, every night after supper, and in darkness, amidst a storm of wind and rain, had to go out of doors in quest of a lodging. May our sufferings be a warning not to pay for a passage in these vessels without first seeing a printed plan, and being assured that the berth required is actually under or in connection with the saloon.

While the head-winds lasted, and kept the decks in disorder, the smoking and talking assemblages in the capstan-gallery were kept up with redoubled energy. Collected in this sheltered spot, and grouped on camp-stools, the English and Americans carried on earnest

discussions on matters of social polity : an Americanised Irish gentleman from Ohio told stories of the early settlements ; a Californian, in a shaggy pea-jacket, and with breastpins made of great nuggets of gold, related tales of Lynch-law and Colt's revolvers ; and from a grizzly-haired little man, who spoke emphatically through his teeth, the captain of a South-sea whaler, we had daily narratives of shipwreck, which would have gone far to fill a volume. It was remarkable, that during even the worst weather, and when the motion of the vessel was considerable, there was little sickness among the passengers. Altogether, I experienced no feeling of this kind except for an hour on the second day. The length and solidity of the vessel, with its power of overcoming the short broken waves, give an easiness that is wanting in the small class of steamers ; so that a voyage to America may really be attended with less painful consequences than an ordinary trip from Dover to Calais. While the bad weather lasted, only two of the passengers ventured on the poop. One of them was a grave gentleman, clothed from top to toe in India-rubber, who defied the rain and wind, and became a subject of jocularly to the young men on board. The other was a handsome young Swiss, who had never been to sea before, and was always in a state of extreme alarm lest the vessel should sink. In the midst of dinner, if there was a particularly loud concussion against the paddles, out the poor Swiss would bolt, and hurry to the furthest corner of the wheel-house, as if resolved to be among the last to perish. A hurricane of laughter from the young Nova Scotians followed these demonstrations, which were among the standard subjects of merriment.

On the eighth day out, the weather mended very considerably, and at noon our run by log was 231, miles. Being Sunday, preparations were made for performing divine service. At one o'clock, the principal steward entered the saloon with a trayful of Bibles and prayer-books, which he distributed among the passengers. He then adjusted a red-plush sofa-cushion on the inner side of one of the tables, by way of pulpit ; and after these simple arrangements, the bell on the fore-castle began deliberately to toll. Several passengers from the fore-cabin now entered along with the officers in uniform, and about a dozen sailors in their Sunday jackets. In the whole scene there was an air of considerable solemnity. The bell ceased to ring, and a perfect silence prevailed. The officiating minister now took his seat at the cushion, on which lay a large Bible and service-book. When no clergyman is on board, the service for the day is read by the captain. In the present instance, a clergyman belonging to the college of Toronto was a passenger, and by him the service was conducted according to the usual forms ; including the preaching of a sermon, which was listened to with as great attention as if delivered in a parish church. The rest of the day was spent with the ordinary decorum of Sunday in England.

On the following Tuesday, being the tenth day out, sailing vessels began to be seen on the horizon, being probably barks engaged in the fishing on the banks of Newfoundland, which we were now declared to be upon. We also enjoyed an agreeable clearing up in the sky, and the colour of the sea changed from blue to a light greenish tinge. From this time, too, more gulls were seen on the wing, and the ship had become a refuge for a flight of small birds resembling larks, which had been driven from land by stress of weather, and were glad to rest their wearied wings by perching on the more prominent parts of the vessel. This day, about noon, a large steamer from New York to Liverpool, came in sight, and was watched with deep interest by the passengers. It passed at the distance of two miles. There were, as usual, mutual greetings by signal. The system of communication at sea, by signals, is one of the most remarkable inventions of the day, and merits a word of explanation.

The inventor, or, at all events, perfecter, of the code of naval signals, was the late Captain Frederick Marryat, of the royal navy, well known as a popular novalist. By Marryat's signals, as they are generally termed, a conversation on almost any subject can be carried on between two ships, as effectually as if the respective captains spoke to each other in distinct words.

The signals employed consist of fifteen different small narrow flags, which are run up at a point over the stern, and fully visible through a glass at a distance of several miles. Ten of them represent the ten figures in arithmetic, and by these any number is expressed. The other five refer respectively to certain departments in the code, and are designed to lead at once to the subject of conversation. When a particular number is expressed, the code, which is a volume resembling a dictionary, is turned up by the party addressed, and he sees a sentence or part of a sentence opposite that number in the book. So expert, however, do mariners become in reading the signals, that they seldom require to refer to the code. On both sides, the signals are run up and pulled down, and questions asked and answered with the rapidity of ordinary conversation. In this way, vessels passing within sight of each other at sea, no longer need to bend from their course or stop in their career to put questions through speaking-trumpets. The merchant ships of nearly all countries have embraced Marryat's code, which is now therefore the universal language of the sea—a symbol of brotherhood among nations.

Thursday, the twelfth day out. The joyful intelligence of land being in sight, was reported at breakfast. Through the misty distance, rugged headlands and brown rocky hills were visible on the west. We were now going southward, down the American coast, which was kept in view all day. The prospect was not cheering, for the land facing the ocean about the Gulf of St Lawrence has a generally bare and deserted appearance. Why steamers from England to America should for the most part hold so northerly a course before running south, is not dear to the understanding of landsmen. The practice may be connected with the principle of great-circle sailings or that of crossing where the degrees of longitude are comparatively narrow. On this point there were learned but not particularly lucid discussions in the capstan-gallery ; and here also, by the older sea hands, were given accounts of the Gulf-stream, and its wonderful effects in tempering the climate of the British Islands. These and other themes of the capstan parliament, as we named it, came abruptly to a close in the evening, when the lights at the mouth of Halifax harbour shone in sight. Swiftly the entrance is made ; the lights of the town make their appearance ; mails and baggage are brought on deck ; guns are fired and rockets sent up ; lanterns flit about the wooden quay where we are to land ; ropes are thrown out ; a gangway is pushed on board ; and, along with some half-dozen fellow-passengers who go no farther, I scramble ashore, and have my foot on American soil.

The voyage, so far, had occupied nearly twelve and a half days; which, with a delay of several hours for coaling and the subsequent run to Boston, would, to the bulk of the passengers, make a voyage of fourteen days.

[1] Now in the *Europa*, to and from New York.

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