

LONDON TO NEW YORK BY STEERAGE.

By FRED. A. MCKENZIE.

A JOURNEY of nearly four thousand miles, with food and sleeping accommodation for eleven days, for considerably less than the cost of a third class ticket from London to Aberdeen is surely a record-breaker even in these days of cheap travel. A few years ago the ordinary steerage fare from Liverpool to New York was five guineas. By degrees it came down to about half that sum, and it was for a time generally agreed that even the severe competition between the various Atlantic steamship companies could not bring it much lower. Then certain German lines heavily subsidised by their own Government, entered into a rate-cutting campaign. This led to fresh reductions, and the bottom was not reached until one American line, anxious to finish the fight, offered to convey passengers from London to New York, *via* Liverpool and Philadelphia for £1 16s., with a kit provided free. Being anxious to learn how such a thing could be done, and what kind of accommodation was provided for the travellers, I paid my thirty-six shillings and became for the time an amateur emigrant.

The would-be steerage passenger to the United States has to go through many forms and ceremonies before he is allowed to set out on his journey. First an official document must be filled up, giving minute details of oneself and one's affairs. I was required to declare if I was in possession of any money, and, if so, how much; if I had ever been in prison, in an almshouse, or supported by charity; if I could read or write; if I was a polygamist, and many other equally flattering things. Happily my answers were deemed satisfactory, so my ocean ticket was issued; and I was given a free railway pass to Liverpool, where I was informed that I would have to submit to a medical examination before going on board ship.

There was a cheer at Euston as the

midnight emigrant train set out for the north. Every third class carriage was filled with men and women bound for the same destination as myself. Most of us were too excited to sleep, and we spent hour after hour telling each other all the wonderful stories we had ever heard of the Land of Promise. As the night passed on we grew more and more confidential. One passenger, a well-dressed elderly Russian, surprised me by drawing from his pocket two or three valuable clusters of diamonds, and at first I wondered what a man with property worth so much was doing amongst us. The mystery was quickly explained. He was a modern smuggler, anxious to avoid paying duty on his collection; and he thought he would be better able to get through the American Customs safely by going steerage.

At Liverpool came the medical examination. A card was given to each of us, with directions printed on it in seven languages, and this had to be stamped by a special doctor and then delivered up by the bearer on arrival at Philadelphia. A cheery young Irish-American surgeon came into the shed where we were waiting before embarkation, and was at once surrounded by hundreds of us, all clamouring to have our papers endorsed. "Stand back, boys," he cried, "stand back. You won't get to Philadelphia any the earlier for all your pushing." For a few minutes we pressed on him so closely that he could do nothing, but after a time the ship's officers arranged us so as to pass in front of his table in single file. As we passed we laid our cards in front of him, and he endorsed them as quickly as possible with a rubber stamp. He did not even lift his eyes to look at us, and the examination of the whole party was finished in a very few minutes.

As soon as this farce was over and we were permitted to go aboard, we all

hurried to secure our berths. Our vessel was one of the older and smaller liners, of only a little over three thousand tons register; and we learnt that she would take at least ten days to make the trip. She carried no saloon passengers, but

light and no windows of any kind except the port holes opening into the sleeping berths. A few very feeble electric lights were lit at meal times and in the evenings; at other times we had to be satisfied with such daylight as came over the tops of the



THE THIRD DAY OUT ; GETTING BETTER.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

only second-class and steerage. The former were given the middle of the ship, while the steerage were divided into two lots, married couples and single women going to the fore part and single men to the stern.

"English to the right Germans to the left," was the cry as we descended to the common cabin below. For the moment I was half-blinded by the change from sunlight to semi-darkness, but gradually the outlines of the room became visible. It was long and narrow, running one-third the length of the vessel, and divided in the centre by a flight of steps leading up to the deck. Narrow deal tables ran lengthwise along it, and on either side of them were unbacked benches to serve as seats. The sleeping apartments were all around and were fenced off by stone-coloured wooden partitions. There was no sky-

partitions, through the deck doorway and through a half-uncovered hatchway.

I looked with considerable interest at the sleeping rooms provided for us. The cabin in which I was located was at the extreme end of the ship, and was about fourteen feet long, twelve feet broad, and nine or ten feet high. Two rows of berths ranged on either side, and each row held five men, so that twenty of us were accommodated in this little apartment. The berths consisted of a wooden framework, about a foot high to which was fastened a bottom of sacking. A straw mattress, a straw pillow and a small brown blanket made the furniture of each bunk complete. There were no sheets or pillow covers; and the blanket was, to use the metaphorical language of a man in my cabin, "just about large enough to cover half a feller's eye."

The whole ship was in the utmost confusion, and to one fresh from shore the appearance of everything seemed to be indescribably dreary and depressing. For a moment I felt tempted to then and there abandon my investigation, and take the next train back to London. A few hours later, when we got somewhat settled down, things did not seem quite so bad; but unquestionably the sleeping accommodation was the worst thing we had to put up with. The cabins were insufficiently ventilated, and on warm nights the odours arising from so many packed as tightly together as we were, were enough to upset the strongest stomach. Many of the blankets were not so clean as they might have been, and those of us with sensitive skins were tortured all the way by the attentions of some very lively

upper bunk gave clean away, and its occupant fell with a thud on the man beneath him. The latter suddenly aroused from his sleep by the shock, made sure that his last hour had come. "My God!" he cried, struggling fiercely. "I'm dying. The ship is sinking and I'll be drowned. Help! Help!"

His horror was all the greater because of the darkness of the room. No artificial light whatever is provided in the sleeping cabins, and we had to leave our doors open so that a few rays might come from the electric lamps in the common chamber.

We left Liverpool on Wednesday afternoon, and during Thursday most of us took very little interest in anything except our own personal sufferings. There was a slight roll on as we got out of the Irish



OUTSIDE THE CABINS.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

insects. The bunks were not over strongly built, and there was no railing or anything of the kind for one to hang on to during a storm. The flimsy construction of the berths led to incidents that were sometimes amusing. One night an

Sea into the Atlantic, and it was then that I learnt the very real advantage of being in the steerage. The cabin passengers have attentive stewards to look after them when they are ill, and they can stay down in their well-ventilated berths in

peace. Emigrants must look after themselves. I knew that if I stayed down below for any length of time, I would be knocked up altogether, for the atmosphere there was such as to prevent any one from recovering; so I strained every nerve to remain on deck. For hours I lay on the hatchway not daring to move, and hardly caring what happened. But the result of this was that by Friday morning I was practically well again: though had I been a cabin passenger, able to humour my own fads and fancies, I would no doubt have been ill for half the voyage. On

margarine. But these were exceptions. For breakfast, at seven o'clock, we were given coffee, small rolls of fresh bread, margarine and either Irish stew or porridge. The stew was warm and savoury, and the porridge clean and well cooked, though no seasoning or sweetening was given with it; while the bread was quite equal in quality to that provided by the average baker on shore. Dinner, at noon, usually consisted of three courses, soup, meat and potatoes, and a sweet.

This was the best meal of the day. Whether it was that my appetite had be-



A MORNING ON DECK.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

Thursday most of us ate nothing: on Friday morning some kindly soul brought me a ship's biscuit, and I discovered to my surprise, that it was very nice. After that, it was not long before I began to take a healthy interest in the ringing of the dinner bell.

The food provided was practically unlimited in quantity, and on the whole excellent in quality. The drinks dignified by the name of tea and coffee were, it is true, anything but palatable, and for butter was substituted a poor quality of

come sharpened by the sea-breezes, I cannot say; but I will admit that I have rarely tasted better flavoured soup than that served in the steerage. The meat was—on most days—boiled, corned, or preserved beef; and on Fridays salt-fish was substituted for it. The potatoes were steamed with their jackets on. Of the last course I cannot speak much from personal experience. It was usually either plum-pudding or rice, and those who took it enjoyed it immensely, but a mouthful I had one day was sufficient to

check my craving for it. The last meal, at five o'clock, consisted of tea, bread and margarine, and, on most nights, jam or porridge.

It must not be imagined that our food was issued out to us after the ordinary

"Gangway" and carrying in front of them immense tins full of food. These were placed in a convenient corner, until samples had been given to a smart young waiter to take into the doctor. Then the six or eight attendants started serving out



WORKING ONE'S WAY OUT.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

manner of civilised society. At the beginning of the voyage each of us was given a tin plate, a tin mug, a large spoon, and a rusty knife and fork. These we were required to keep clean and to use as our crockery. About half-an-hour before the dinner hour we would begin to assemble in the cabin, bringing our dishes with us. The tables could not hold all, and those who were not able to obtain seats would either have to go in their bunks, or else stand about in any convenient corner. Some passed the time by beating tattoos on their plates, others started up songs, and for a time the din and confusion would be deafening. At last the steward who looked after us rang a bell, and a number of roughly-clad assistants came marching in from the cook's galley, shouting

as quickly as possible. It was mere chance which course one got first; usually they came altogether, though sometimes the pudding arrived a few minutes before the soup. The soup men had long tin ladles, with which they measured out about half-a-pint into each bowl. The meat had previously been cut into slabs, and each of us had one put on to his tin plate, while the guardian of the potato bucket would pick out four or five potatoes with his hand, and drop them alongside of the meat. Potatoes, meat and pudding had all to go on the same plate, at the same time, so the raisins would sometimes become mixed with the mustard, and the sweetened rice with the boiled beef.

After each meal we had all to wash our own dishes, so as to make them fit for the

next. Whatever of the food served to us had not been eaten we threw overboard, and then we rinsed the tins in a big iron dish of hot water placed on the deck. By the time a few hundred tins had been scoured in this, the water would be fairly full of grease; so many of us managed to obtain a little clean water from the ship's boy in order to supplement the first wash.

On shipboard it is not long before strangers get acquainted, and in a few days most of us knew all about each other. We were probably as cosmopolitan a throng as had ever been brought together in so small a space. Quite a score of languages and dialects were spoken in our little company. In the morning we could see the Jewish rabbi, attired in pontifical robes and with his porthole open towards

the direction of the land from whence they had come.

There were many Germans and Jews amongst us. One finely built young fellow had been turned out of Russia in the Exodus of 1888. He was usually calm and good-natured, but one only needed to talk of modern Russia to stir the hidden volcano in him. "The Czar is a beast" he exclaimed to me. "He is a man without feeling, without kindness, bah! he is not a man at all! Every night I pray that the same fate may happen to him as fell on his father. Every night I pray for it. And it will! One effort may fail, another may fail, but at last we shall succeed. Mark my words! Alexander will never die in his bed."

This Jew was a clean and cultured specimen of his race, and could speak



RECREATIONS ON BOARD.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

Jerusalem, going through his devotions. In the evening two or three Eastern Christians would get together by the steering house, and sing softly among themselves Turkish hymns, while their eyes were cast back, dimly and wistfully in

English perfectly, but a number of the German and Polish Jews amongst us, were about as dirty and untidy as it is possible for human beings to be. They would stay in their bunks all day eating bloaters, of which they had brought a large stock on

board. The poor Englishmen who chanced to be placed in the same berths as they had a very bad time of it, and many were their complaints.

Several of the English-speaking passengers were either going on or returning

sons in our ranks. One of these had run through £250 in six months, and was now setting out to starve in Philadelphia with less than three dollars in his pocket.

One particularly interesting character was a young Austrian tailor's cutter, travel-



A FAMILY GROUP.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

from pleasure trips. One lad, a Pennsylvanian mechanic, had saved up his beer and tobacco money for a year, in order to have an English holiday. He had worked his way over to London in a cattle boat, had spent a fortnight in seeing the sights, and was now returning with his bag full of little presents for those at home. Another young American had found life in London somewhat more expensive than he anticipated, and woke up one morning to realise that his purse was empty. He pawned his jewellery, raised enough to take him to New York, and so made one of our company. Then there were a few prodigal

ling from country to country to perfect his knowledge of foreign languages. He had been in Paris for five years, and acquired French thoroughly, and although he had only been in England four months, he could already speak our language very fairly. He was now bound for New York to study the American methods of business, and soon he intends to settle down. He told me that when he knows German, French, and English perfectly, he will be able to get a post as master cutter from £10 to £25 a week wages; this latter sum being paid by several first class firms to their head men. He was an



Photo by J. Byron, New York.

POSING FOR A PICTURE.

Swamp

unceasing chatterer, for, as he said, "the only way to learn is to talk and to ask."

There is no better place for studying dialect than the steerage of an Atlantic liner. Some of the Orientals amused themselves by trying to teach us westerners the exact pronunciation of certain Turkish letters. We nearly cracked our throats in our efforts to imitate them, but without success. An American tried to learn a Turkish phrase, and after he had repeated it over to one Armenian for a score of times, he marched up to another and addressed his carefully rehearsed remark to him.

The Armenian looked up in surprise. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "I did not hear you."

The youth proudly repeated his phrase. "What language are you talking?" the puzzled Oriental asked.

"Why Turkish, of course," the American replied. "Don't you know your own tongue?"

This was too great a strain even on eastern politeness, and the Armenian burst into a loud laugh. "You must excuse me, sir," he said, when he recovered breath, "but I really cannot help it. Whoever told you that was Turkish told you a lie. Turkish? Ho, ho, ho!"

After that we thought it would be better to go through a course of Sanskrit or Arabic before attempting modern eastern tongues.

On most Atlantic liners, the male and female steerage passengers are able to be together during the whole of the day, and need only remain in their own quarters at night. In our ship this was not so. Men could go over to the fore part of the ship between eight and half-past eight in the morning, and remain there for three hours; or they could go immediately after dinner, and remain there till tea-time. But there could be no running to and fro between the two quarters, and those who once went over had to remain the full three hours. The reason of this was that the only road between the stem and stern was over the deck devoted to cabin passengers, and it was desired that we should cross this reserved ground as little as possible.

One unfortunate result of this rule was that we had not nearly so many amusements organised amongst us as is usually the case. Our chief recreations were gambling and singing. Almost all day and far into the night, little groups would

sit absorbed in the fascinations of "banker." The game started with half-penny and penny points, but soon many of the stakes were silver. Two or three of our company were cleared out of every penny they possessed. Their savings did not, it is true, amount to much, but such as they were, they were all that they had to start themselves with in a new country. The more sober spirits amongst us were surprised that the captain did not, at the beginning of the voyage, place his veto on playing for money. It would have saved infinite trouble and innumerable quarrels had he done so.

Every evening we got up a concert amongst ourselves. There were one or two trained singers in our party; and one of these, a good-natured banjo player and negro comedian, was the life of the whole company. The performance would commence a little before sunset, on the open deck; and every one who had the slightest vocal power was pressed into service. A raw, ragged Irish lad, fresh from Kilkenny, would sing of the woes of "Erin's green flag"; a little lad from Dublin, about ten years old, was ever ready to repeat the latest music-hall songs; some of the crew helped with plantation melodies, and our programme was generally of a most varied character. Sometimes audience and performers would stop to rush to the side to see a whale blowing in the distance, or a school of porpoises gambolling just by. And as the brief Atlantic twilight died away and night came on, one after another would walk slowly away from the noise and the music to look at the sparkling phosphorescent glow on the surface of the water, or to watch the movements of the tossing waves churning into masses of white foam under the slightest breeze.

When Sunday came most of us expected that the captain would summon us to service, but evidently it is thought that cabin passengers alone require religious consolation on the Atlantic, for no summons came. In the evening we resolved to hold a meeting of our own. Our singers formed themselves into a choir, and an Englishman led the proceedings, assisted by an American and an Armenian. I shall not soon forget the sight of the faces in the crowd around the hatchway that Sabbath night. We were surrounded by a thick fog, and on all sides nothing could be seen but heavy masses of white cloud. A heavy wind had come up during the afternoon, and every now



YOUNG EMIGRANTS.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

and then a sudden lurch would throw us all together. The shrill shriek of the steam whistle pierced the air at regular intervals, drowning our voices with its overpowering cry. But we sang on, choosing hymn after hymn that most of us had known since childhood. More than one heart beat quicker at the sound of the familiar strains, and the ministry of song roused some who had thought themselves indifferent to the call of the most strenuous evangelist.

We had not been many days on board before a suspicion arose that there was a thief among us. Little things began to unaccountably vanish. One man lost his towel, a second found his slippers disappear, a third had a tin of fruit he had left open half eaten, and so on. We all united in suspecting one lad, a handsome-looking curly-haired, blue-eyed mechanic, about eighteen years old, from a Midland town. Story after story was told of the

youth's impudence and meanness. He had been found loafing around other men's bunks; he was suspected of cheating at cards; and every one felt convinced that he was the guilty party. At last we were able to prove it. He tried to borrow some keys to open another man's bag, some papers belonging to the man who slept next to him were found in his trunk, and other things were hidden under his mattress.

It was felt that, for the honour of the steerage, these offences could not be passed over. None of us wished to complain to the captain, so we resolved to arrest him ourselves and try him before a court of our own.

A jury was selected from the English-speaking passengers, and a judge, council for the prosecution and defence and two constables were formally appointed. The trial took place on the upper hatchway after dinner. The judge was enthroned

on a sack of potatoes; the prisoner, pale but smilingly defiant, was held firmly in his place by the constables; and a crowd of emigrants, sailors and firemen stood watching the court. The proceedings were rather irregular. The counsel for the defence opened the case by admitting the thefts, but pleading that the things taken were of no value, and that as the prisoner was young he ought to be let off. Counsel for the prosecution followed with a plea for a salutary and exemplary sentence; and then evidence was taken

here to the stern of the ship, and back again, and then he was ducked three times."

The whole crowd, jurymen, council, and spectators, at once rushed on the lad and carried him along. He struggled and struck out fiercely, but there were too many on to him to permit of his escape. He kicked one bucket of water over, and, as he was being lifted off his feet, succeeded in pushing over another. His head was then shoved under a tap, the water was turned on, and he was held there for a minute or two. When allowed to get



WATCHING FOR LAND.

Photo by J. Byron, New York.

of the affair. After this the jury retired, and after a very short consultation returned with a verdict of guilty, which their foreman delivered with a solemnity befitting the occasion. Whatever appearance of joking there may have been up to this time at once ceased. The judge, an elderly man, proceeded to give the lad a long and severe lecture, telling him how he had made himself universally disliked and warning him that if he did not change his methods, he would ruin his own career. "My sentence upon you," he concluded, "is this, that you be led from

away he rushed towards the cabins, and turned on us as soon as he could recover his breath. "Thank you, gentlemen," he cried, spluttering and mopping his face with his handkerchief. "Thank you. It is the most refreshing wash I have had since I came on board."

Some of the hotter spirits were for giving him a second dose of it, but he was suffered to go below without further molestation. He did afterwards have the grace to show a little shame, but it was a commodity of which he possessed only a very limited stock.

On our second Saturday, the eleventh day from Liverpool, Cape May was sighted, and during the afternoon we steamed up the Delaware. We were hoping to land that evening, but when only twenty minutes from the landing-stage our vessel ran on shore owing to the efforts of the pilot to escape collision with an oyster boat. Two tugs could not pull us off, so we were obliged to remain in the channel the whole evening. When the tide rose we got away, and on Sunday morning we landed. Before we were allowed in the open a medical officer care-

fully scrutinised each one of us and government agents inspected our records. We were obliged to produce what money we had, and to satisfy the officials that we had the making of good citizens in us. Those who cannot pass this ordeal are sent back at the expense of the company who brought them out.

The remainder of the journey was made by rail and ferry-boat. Not many hours later we crossed the Hudson, and as we stepped ashore on Cortland Street, New York, our thirty-six shilling trip was done.

