In the steerage there are males and females; in the second cabin ladies and gentlemen. For some time after I came aboard I thought I was only a male; but in the course of a voyage of discovery between decks, I came on a brass plate, and learned that I was still a gentleman. Nobody knew it, of course.

In *The Amateur Emigrant*, Robert Louis Stevenson gives a vivid, sharp, and thoroughly engaging account of his (impoverished) travels to and in America, first by steamer across the Atlantic from Glasgow to New York, and thence by train across the Great Plains. This booklet contains the first five chapters of part one, “From the Clyde to Sandy Hook”, with an Introduction by Dr Julia Reid.
Robert Louis Stevenson

The Amateur Emigrant

FROM THE CLYDE TO SANDY HOOK

The Second Cabin
Early Impressions
Steerage Scenes
Steerage Types
The Sick Man
‘From the Clyde to Sandy Hook’ first published in the Edinburgh Edition of *The Amateur Emigrant*, 1895

Expanded versions of the text, on which this edition is based, were published in the Tusitala Edition (London: Heinemann, 1924) and in *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes and The Amateur Emigrant*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin, 2004)

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On the afternoon of 7 August 1879, Robert Louis Stevenson embarked on the steamship the SS Devonia, to make the ten-day passage from Greenock to New York. After the crossing, he spent one night in New York, and then began the twelve-day rail journey across the continent, arriving in California on 30 August, more than three weeks after he had left Scotland. Stevenson would fashion this voyage into a vivid, outspoken, and intimate narrative of emigration: *The Amateur Emigrant*. This work, which shocked and scandalised his family and friends, is an important text in the development of the travel-writing genre, remarkable for its provocative social commentary, naturalism, and engaging narrative voice.

Stevenson’s departure for the States marked a crisis in his personal life as well as a watershed in his development as a writer. He decided to cross the Atlantic in a desperate and impulsive attempt to pursue his thwarted relationship with Fanny Osbourne. Stevenson and Fanny, an adventurous American woman (married but separated from her husband), had been lovers since they met in France in 1876, but in 1878
she returned to her husband in California. After months of agonising uncertainty about Fanny’s intentions, Stevenson decided to follow her. Stevenson’s relations with his parents, only now recovering after the fall-out from his loss of faith, had once again been pushed to breaking point by the affair, and he left for America without telling them of his plans. Thomas and Margaret Stevenson were devastated by his decision. Ashamed by his son’s conduct and anxious for his health, Thomas tried to persuade him to return, querulously asking Stevenson’s friend Sidney Colvin, ‘Is it fair that we should be half murdered by his conduct?’

The voyage was traumatic for Stevenson, both physically and psychologically. He suffered throughout the journey from ‘the itch and a broken heart’. In *The Amateur Emigrant*, the broken heart is hidden from view, as Stevenson breathes no word of the affair which prompted the voyage, but ‘the itch’ (the colloquial term for scabies) becomes the central motif of the physical suffering which he shared with the working-class emigrants. The young writer had been keen to travel steerage class across the Atlantic, rather than by the middle-class saloon – a desire motivated partly by financial necessity and partly by curiosity (as he announced on the first page of the work, he was ‘anxious to see the worst of emigrant life’). In the end he paid two guineas extra to travel ‘second cabin’ and have a table to write at (writing and travelling were always entwined for Stevenson). However, his quarters were in the midst of the steerage accommodation, and he shared with steerage passengers many of the privations and indignities of emigrant life. He travelled incognito as a working man and claims that he ‘passed […] for precisely
the average man of the steerage’ (163). Stevenson’s narrative voice is not wholly free from the condescension of the slumming narrative, but he is sufficiently self-aware to record his ‘mingled feelings’ about crossing class borders (163).

The degrading nature of Stevenson’s emigrant experience seems to have been at the root of his father’s distaste for *The Amateur Emigrant*. Relations with his parents were patched up early in 1880. They were mollified to learn that he and Fanny were to regularise their affair (she divorced her husband and soon married Stevenson), and once more promised him an annual allowance. Yet Thomas Stevenson was implacably opposed to publishing the work. At his father’s instigation, Stevenson withdrew the book from publication in the summer of 1880 (he could hardly demur as he was financially dependent on him). The publishers, who had already set the book in proof, were refunded. *The Amateur Emigrant* has, since then, rarely been available in its original form, and its textual history is complex. The second part, narrating Stevenson’s rail journey, was abridged and published serially in 1883 and in volume form in 1892. The first part, recounting the Atlantic crossing, was not published in Stevenson’s lifetime but appeared, heavily bowdlerised, alongside the second part, in the 1895 Edinburgh Edition’s *The Amateur Emigrant*. The present edition reprints the first five chapters of Part I and includes some of the passages from the manuscript which were deleted in the Edinburgh Edition.4

Stevenson’s friends too were hostile to *The Amateur Emigrant*, their aversion arising from anxieties about class. W. E. Henley compared Stevenson’s *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1879) to *The Amateur Emigrant* in revealing
terms: ‘The one’s art, the other’s journalism’. Stevenson’s earlier travel narratives were gentle portraits of life on the open road or, in the case of *An Inland Voyage* (1878), on the canals in Belgium and France. They had captivated readers with their charm and good humour, their stylistic elegance, and the apparent intimacy of the narrative voice. They established some of the motifs which Stevenson was later to perfect, demonstrating the perception that, as he wrote in *The Amateur Emigrant*, ‘Travel is of two kinds’, combining, that is, the physical journey with an inner journey of self-discovery or self-development (161). *An Inland Voyage* highlights this idea of inward travel by evoking the stupefaction induced by a day spent canoeing: ‘This frame of mind was the great exploit of our voyage […] It was the farthest piece of travel accomplished’. These early writings show Stevenson already reveling in the loss of his customary status and identity. He becomes a ‘tramp’ in *Travels with a Donkey*, his hike through the remote Cévennes symbolising his rejection of the ‘sedentary and respectable world’. And a humorously related episode in *An Inland Voyage* sees Stevenson and his companion so persistently taken for pedlars that ‘We began to think we might be pedlars, after all’.

*The Amateur Emigrant* also recounts a journey across class boundaries, but it transposes it into a different key. Stevenson’s ‘voyage […] across the Ocean’ unites outward travel with an inner journey: “Out of my country and myself I go,” sings the old poet; and I was not only travelling out of my country in latitude and longitude, but out of myself in diet, associates and consideration’ (161). The book offers a more serious, socially engaged, and politically provocative
narrative than the earlier works. Stevenson paints here on an epic canvas, evoking first his shipmates, the men, women, and children who are emigrating from northern Europe to the United States (‘all now belonging for ten days to one small iron country on the deep’), and then his companions on the wretched ‘emigrant train’ across the continent, fellow migrants disappointed in their search for employment (107). Stevenson’s account repeatedly punctures myths of heroic emigration. Viewing the reality from steerage rather than saloon, and from the emigrant train rather than the luxurious Pullman car, he records that ‘Emigration, from a word of the most cheerful import, came to sound most dismally in my ear’ (107). His fellow emigrants, far from being heroic pioneers, are men and women ‘broken by adversity’ (108). Stevenson includes himself in this ‘company of the rejected’ (109). His identification with the steerage passengers proves unsettling for his personal identity – it is a far cry from the fun of being taken for a pedlar in An Inland Voyage. Stevenson’s experiences on the emigrant train also strip him of his youthful belief in America as a ‘promised land’ (177). He describes waves of immigrants from Europe and China meeting mid-Continent: ‘east and west had alike failed; the whole round world had been prospected and condemned; there was no El Dorado anywhere’ (218). Hopes for America as a land of equality are similarly dashed: in a chapter on ‘Despised Races’, Stevenson expresses dismay at his fellow emigrants’ treatment of Chinese immigrants and their contempt for the Native Americans, ‘over whose own hereditary continent we had been steaming all these days’ (222).
The Amateur Emigrant is a significant work in the history of travel writing: self-consciously interrogating myths of emigration, it offers its own shrewd and devastating account of transatlantic emigration, class, and identity. The work, written when Stevenson was still a young man, challenges the conventional reading of his transition from early romance to mature realism, from escapism to political engagement. Instead, we find in The Amateur Emigrant, alongside the engaging narrative persona and vibrant sketches of life aboard the steamship and the train, a sensitivity to oppression and prejudice which was to become a hallmark of his South Seas travel writing.

Notes

The textual work on which this Introduction draws was completed thanks to a period at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, where I held the 2010 Frederick and Marion Pottle Fellowship in British Studies. Unpublished material from the Stevenson Collection at the Beinecke Library is reproduced with thanks.


4 The current edition is based on the Tusitala edition (1924), but follows Christopher MacLachlan’s 2004 edition by supplementing the Tusitala text with passages from the manuscript.

5 Unpublished letter, Henley to Stevenson, 14 June 1881, Stevenson Collection, Beinecke Library, GEN MSS 664, Box 14, Folder 360.


7 Stevenson, Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes, in Travels, ed. Letley, p. 215.

8 Stevenson, Inland Voyage, in Travels, ed. Letley, p. 31.
DEDICATION

TO ROBERT ALAN MOWBRAY STEVENSON

Our friendship was not only founded before we were born by a community of blood, but is in itself near as old as my life. It began with our early ages, and, like a history, has been continued to the present time. Although we may not be old in the world, we are old to each other, having so long been intimates. We are now widely separated, a great sea and continent intervening; but memory, like care, mounts into iron ships and rides post behind the horseman. Neither time nor space nor enmity can conquer old affection; and as I dedicate these sketches, it is not to you only, but to all in the old country, that I send the greeting of my heart.

R.L.S.
1879
I first encountered my fellow-passengers on the Broomielaw in Glasgow. Thence we descended the Clyde in no familiar spirit, but looking askance on each other as on possible enemies. A few Scandinavians, who had already grown acquainted on the North Sea, were friendly and voluble over their long pipes; but among English speakers distance and suspicion reigned supreme. The sun was soon over-clouded, the wind freshened and grew sharp as we continued to descend the widening estuary; and with the falling temperature the gloom among the passengers increased. Two of the women wept. Any one who had come aboard might have supposed we were all absconding from the law. There was scarce a word interchanged, and no common sentiment but that of cold united us, until at length, having touched at Greenock, a pointing arm and a rush to the starboard now announced that our ocean steamer was in sight. There she lay in mid-river, at the Tail of the Bank, her sea-signal flying: a wall of bulwark, a street of white deck-houses, an aspiring forest of spars, larger than a church, and soon to be as populous as many an incorporated town in the land to which she was to bear us.
I was not, in truth, a steerage passenger. Although anxious to see the worst of emigrant life, I had some work to finish on the voyage, and was advised to go by the second cabin, where at least I should have a table at command. The advice was excellent; but to understand the choice, and what I gained, some outline of the internal disposition of the ship will first be necessary. In her very nose is Steerage No. 1, down two pair of stairs. A little abaft, another companion, labelled Steerage No. 2 and 3, gives admission to three galleries, two running forward towards Steerage No. 1, and the third aft towards the engines. The starboard forward gallery is the second cabin. Away abaft the engines and below the officers’ cabins, to complete our survey of the vessel, there is yet a third nest of steerages, labelled 4 and 5. The second cabin, to return, is thus a modified oasis in the very heart of the steerages. Through the thin partition you can hear the steerage passengers being sick, the rattle of tin dishes as they sit at meals, the varied accents in which they converse, the crying of their children terrified by this new experience, or the clean flat smack of the parental hand in chastisement.

There are, however, many advantages for the inhabitant of this strip. He does not require to bring his own bedding or dishes, but finds berths and a table completely if somewhat roughly furnished. He enjoys a distinct superiority in diet; but this, strange to say, differs not only on different ships, but on the same ship according as her head is to the east or west. In my own experience, the principal difference between our table and that of the true steerage passenger was the table itself, and the crockery plates from which we ate. But lest I should show myself ungrateful, let me recapitulate every
advantage. At breakfast we had a choice between tea and coffee for beverage; a choice not easy to make, the two were so surprisingly alike. I found that I could sleep after the coffee and lay awake after the tea, which is proof conclusive of some chemical disparity; and even by the palate I could distinguish a smack of snuff in the former from a flavour of boiling and dish-cloths in the second. As a matter of fact, I have seen passengers, after many sips, still doubting which had been supplied them. In the way of eatables at the same meal we were gloriously favoured; for in addition to porridge, which was common to all, we had Irish stew, sometimes a bit of fish, and sometimes rissoles. The dinner of soup, roast fresh beef, boiled salt junk, and potatoes, was, I believe, exactly common to the steerage and the second cabin; only I have heard it rumoured that our potatoes were of a superior brand; and twice a week, on pudding-days, instead of duff, we had a saddle-bag filled with currants under the name of a plum-pudding. At tea we were served with some broken meat from the saloon; sometimes in the comparatively elegant form of spare patties or rissoles; but as a general thing, mere chicken-bones and flakes of fish, neither hot nor cold. If these were not the scrapings of plates their looks belied them sorely; yet we were all too hungry to be proud, and fell to these leavings greedily. These, the bread, which was excellent, and the soup and porridge which were both good, formed my whole diet throughout the voyage; so that except for the broken meat and the convenience of a table I might as well have been in the steerage outright. Had they given me porridge again in the evening, I should have been perfectly contented with the fare. As it was, with a few biscuits and
some whisky and water before turning in, I kept my body going and my spirits up to the mark.

The last particular in which the second-cabin passenger remarkably stands ahead of his brother of the steerage is one altogether of sentiment. In the steerage there are males and females; in the second cabin ladies and gentlemen. For some time after I came aboard I thought I was only a male; but in the course of a voyage of discovery between decks, I came on a brass plate, and learned that I was still a gentleman. Nobody knew it, of course. I was lost in the crowd of males and females, and rigorously confined to the same quarter of the deck. Who could tell whether I housed on the port or starboard side of Steerage No. 2 and 3? And it was only there that my superiority became practical; everywhere else I was incognito, moving among my inferiors with simplicity, not so much as a swagger to indicate that I was a gentleman after all, and had broken meat to tea. Still, I was like one with a patent of nobility in a drawer at home; and when I felt out of spirits I could go down and refresh myself with a look of that brass plate.

For all these advantages I paid but two guineas. Six guineas is the steerage fare; eight that by the second cabin; and when you remember that the steerage passenger must supply bedding and dishes, and, in five cases out of ten, either brings some dainties with him, or privately pays the steward for extra rations, the difference in price becomes almost nominal. Air comparatively fit to breathe, food comparatively varied, and the satisfaction of being still privately a gentleman, may thus be had almost for the asking. Two of my fellow-passengers in the second cabin had already made the passage
by the cheaper fare, and declared it was an experiment not to be repeated. As I go on to tell about my steerage friends, the reader will perceive that they were not alone in their opinion. Out of ten with whom I was more or less intimate, I am sure not fewer than five vowed, if they returned, to travel second cabin; and all who had left their wives behind them assured me they would go without the comfort of their presence until they could afford to bring them by saloon.

Our party in the second cabin was not perhaps the most interesting on board. Perhaps even in the saloon there was as much good-will and character. Yet it had some elements of curiosity. There was a mixed group of Swedes, Danes, and Norsemen, one of whom, generally known by the name of ‘Johnny,’ in spite of his own protests, greatly diverted us by his clever, cross-country efforts to speak English, and became on the strength of that an universal favourite – it takes so little in this world of shipboard to create a popularity. There was, besides, a Scots mason, known from his favourite dish as ‘Irish Stew,’ three or four nondescript Scots, a fine young Irishman, O’Reilly, and a pair of young men who deserve a special word of condemnation. One of them was Scots; the other claimed to be American; admitted, after some fencing, that he was born in England; and ultimately proved to be an Irishman born and nurtured, but ashamed to own his country. He had a sister on board, whom he faithfully neglected throughout the voyage, though she was not only sick, but much his senior, and had nursed and cared for him in childhood. In appearance he was like an imbecile Henry the Third of France. The Scotsman, though perhaps as big an ass, was not so dead of heart; and I have only bracketed them
together because they were fast friends, and disgraced themselves equally by their conduct at the table.

Next, to turn to topics more agreeable, we had a newly married couple, devoted to each other, with a pleasant story of how they had first seen each other years ago at a preparatory school, and that very afternoon he had carried her books home for her. I do not know if this story will be plain to Southern readers; but to me it recalls many a school idyll, with wrathful swains of eight and nine confronting each other stride-legs, flushed with jealousy; for to carry home a young lady's books was both a delicate attention and a privilege.

Then there was an old lady, or indeed I am not sure that she was as much old as antiquated and strangely out of place, who had left her husband, and was travelling all the way to Kansas by herself. We had to take her own word that she was married; for it was sorely contradicted by the testimony of her appearance. Nature seemed to have sanctified her for the single state; even the colour of her hair was incompatible with matrimony, and her husband, I thought, should be a man of saintly spirit and phantasmal bodily presence. She was ill, poor thing; her soul turned from the viands; the dirty tablecloth shocked her like an impropriety; and the whole strength of her endeavour was bent upon keeping her watch true to Glasgow time till she should reach New York. They had heard reports, her husband and she, of some unwarrantable disparity of hours between these two cities; and with a spirit commendably scientific, had seized on this occasion to put them to the proof. It was a good thing for the old lady; for she passed much leisure time in studying the watch. Once,
when prostrated by sickness, she let it run down. It was inscribed on her harmless mind in letters of adamant that the hands of a watch must never be turned backwards; and so it behoved her to lie in wait for the exact moment ere she started it again. When she imagined this was about due, she sought out one of the young second-cabin Scotsmen, who was embarked on the same experiment as herself and had hitherto been less neglectful. She was in quest of two o’clock; and when she learned it was already seven on the shores of Clyde, she lifted up her voice and cried ‘Gravy!’ I had not heard this innocent expletive since I was a young child; and I suppose it must have been the same with the other Scotsmen present, for we all laughed our fill.

Last but not least, I come to my excellent friend Mr Jones. It would be difficult to say whether I was his right-hand man, or he mine, during the voyage. Thus at table I carved, while he only scooped gravy; but at our concerts, of which more anon, he was the president who called up performers to sing, and I but his messenger who ran his errands and pleaded privately with the over-modest. I knew I liked Mr Jones from the moment I saw him. I thought him by his face to be Scottish; nor could his accent undeceive me. For as there is a lingua franca of many tongues on the moles and in the feluccas of the Mediterranean, so there is a free or common accent among English-speaking men who follow the sea. They catch a twang in a New England port; from a cockney skipper, even a Scotsman sometimes learns to drop an h; a word of a dialect is picked up from another hand in the forecastle; until often the result is undecipherable, and you have to ask for the man’s place of birth. So it was with Mr
Jones. I thought him a Scotsman who had been long to sea; and yet he was from Wales, and had been most of his life a blacksmith at an inland forge; a few years in America and half a score of ocean voyages having sufficed to modify his speech into the common pattern. By his own account he was both strong and skilful in his trade. A few years back, he had been married and after a fashion a rich man; now the wife was dead and the money gone. But his was the nature that looks forward, and goes on from one year to another and through all the extremities of fortune undismayed; and if the sky were to fall to-morrow, I should look to see Jones, the day following, perched on a step-ladder and getting things to rights. He was always hovering round inventions like a bee over a flower, and lived in a dream of patents. He had with him a patent medicine, for instance, the composition of which he had bought years ago for five dollars from an American pedlar, and sold the other day for a hundred pounds (I think it was) to an English apothecary. It was called Golden Oil; cured all maladies without exception; and I am bound to say that I partook of it myself with good results. It is a character of the man that he was not only perpetually dosing himself with Golden Oil, but wherever there was a head aching or a finger cut, there would be Jones with his bottle.

If he had one taste more strongly than another, it was to study character. Many an hour have we two walked upon the deck dissecting our neighbours in a spirit that was too purely scientific to be called unkind; whenever a quaint or human trait slipped out in conversation, you might have seen Jones and me exchanging glances; and we could hardly go to bed in comfort till we had exchanged notes and discussed
the day’s experience. We were then like a couple of anglers comparing a day’s kill. But the fish we angled for were of a metaphysical species, and we angled as often as not in one another’s baskets. Once, in the midst of a serious talk, each found there was a scrutinising eye upon himself; I own I paused in embarrassment at this double detection; but Jones, with a better civility, broke into a peal of unaffected laughter, and declared, what was the truth, that there was a pair of us indeed.
II: EARLY IMPRESSIONS

We steamed out of the Clyde on Thursday night, and early on the Friday afternoon we took in our last batch of emigrants at Lough Foyle, in Ireland, and said farewell to Europe. The company was now complete, and began to draw together, by inscrutable magnetisms, upon the decks. There were Scots and Irish in plenty, a few English, a few Americans, a good handful of Scandinavians, a German or two, and one Russian; all now belonging for ten days to one small iron country on the deep.

As I walked the deck and looked round upon my fellow-passengers, thus curiously assorted from all northern Europe, I began for the first time to understand the nature of emigration. Day by day throughout the passage, and thenceforward across all the States, and on to the shores of the Pacific, this knowledge grew more clear and melancholy. Emigration, from a word of the most cheerful import, came to sound most dismally in my ear. There is nothing more agreeable to picture and nothing more pathetic to behold. The abstract idea, as conceived at home, is hopeful and adventurous. A young man, you fancy, scorning restraints and helpers, issues forth into life, that great battle, to fight for his own hand. The most pleasant stories of ambition, of difficulties overcome, and of ultimate success, are but as episodes to this great epic of self-help. The epic is composed
of individual heroisms; it stands to them as the victorious war which subdued an empire stands to the personal act of bravery which spiked a single cannon and was adequately rewarded with a medal. For in emigration the young men enter direct and by the shipload on their heritage of work; empty continents swarm, as at the bo’s’un’s whistle, with industrious hands, and whole new empires are domesticated to the service of man.

This is the closet picture, and is found, on trial, to consist mostly of embellishments. The more I saw of my fellow-passengers, the less I was tempted to the lyric note. Comparatively few of the men were below thirty; many were married, and encumbered with families; not a few were already up in years; and this itself was out of tune with my imaginations, for the ideal emigrant should certainly be young. Again, I thought he should offer to the eye some bold type of humanity, with bluff or hawk-like features, and the stamp of an eager and pushing disposition. Now those around me were for the most part quiet, orderly, obedient citizens, family men broken by adversity, elderly youths who had failed to place themselves in life, and people who had seen better days. Mildness was the prevailing character; mild mirth and mild endurance. In a word, I was not taking part in an impetuous and conquering sally, such as swept over Mexico or Siberia, but found myself, like Marmion, ‘in the lost battle, borne down by the flying.’

Labouring mankind had in the last years, and throughout Great Britain, sustained a prolonged and crushing series of defeats. I had heard vaguely of these reverses; of whole streets of houses standing deserted by the Tyne, the cellar-doors broken and removed for firewood; of homeless men loitering
at the street-corners of Glasgow with their chests beside them; of closed factories, useless strikes, and starving girls. But I had never taken them home to me or represented these distresses livingly to my imagination. A turn of the market may be a calamity as disastrous as the French retreat from Moscow; but it hardly lends itself to lively treatment, and makes a trifling figure in the morning papers. We may struggle as we please, we are not born economists. The individual is more affecting than the mass. It is by the scenic accidents, and the appeal to the carnal eye, that for the most part we grasp the significance of tragedies. Thus it was only now, when I found myself involved in the rout, that I began to appreciate how sharp had been the battle. We were a company of the rejected; the drunken, the incompetent, the weak, the prodigal, all who had been unable to prevail against circumstances in the one land, were now fleeing pitifully to another; and though one or two might still succeed, all had already failed. We were a shipful of failures, the broken men of England. Yet it must not be supposed that these people exhibited depression. The scene, on the contrary, was cheerful. Not a tear was shed on board the vessel. All were full of hope for the future, and showed an inclination to innocent gaiety. Some were heard to sing, and all began to scrape acquaintance with small jests and ready laughter.

The children found each other out like dogs, and ran about the decks scraping acquaintance after their fashion also. ‘What do you call your mither?’ I heard one ask. ‘Mawmaw,’ was the reply, indicating, I fancy, a shade of difference in the social scale. When people pass each other on the high seas of life at so early an age, the contact is but
slight, and the relation more like what we may imagine to be the friendship of flies than that of men; it is so quickly joined, so easily dissolved, so open in its communications and so devoid of deeper human qualities. The children, I observed, were all in a band, and as thick as thieves at a fair, while their elders were still ceremoniously manœuvring on the outskirts of acquaintance. The sea, the ship, and the seamen were soon as familiar as home to these half-conscious little ones. It was odd to hear them, throughout the voyage, employ shore words to designate portions of the vessel. ‘Co’ ‘way doon to yon dyke,’ I heard one say, probably meaning the bulwark. I often had my heart in my mouth, watching them climb into the shrouds or on the rails, while the ship went swinging through the waves; and I admired and envied the courage of their mothers, who sat by in the sun and looked on with composure at these perilous feats. ‘He’ll maybe be a sailor,’ I heard one remark; ‘now’s the time to learn.’ I had been on the point of running forward to interfere, but stood back at that, reproved. Very few in the more delicate classes have the nerve to look upon the peril of one dear to them; but the life of poorer folk, where necessity is so much more immediate and imperious, braces even a mother to this extreme of endurance. And perhaps, after all, it is better that the lad should break his neck than that you should break his spirit.

And since I am here on the chapter of the children, I must mention one little fellow, whose family belonged to Steerage No. 4 and 5, and who, wherever he went, was like a strain of music round the ship. He was an ugly, merry, unbreeched child of three, his lint-white hair in a tangle, his face smeared
with suet and treacle; but he ran to and fro with so natural a step, and fell and picked himself up again with such grace and good-humour, that he might fairly be called beautiful when he was in motion. To meet him, crowing with laughter and beating an accompaniment to his own mirth with a tin spoon upon a tin cup, was to meet a little triumph of the human species. Even when his mother and the rest of his family lay sick and prostrate around him, he sat upright in their midst and sang aloud in the pleasant heartlessness of infancy.

Throughout the Friday, intimacy among us men made but a few advances. We discussed the probable duration of the voyage, we exchanged pieces of information, naming our trades, what we hoped to find in the new world, or what we were fleeing from in the old; and, above all, we condoled together over the food and the vileness of the steerage. One or two had been so near famine that you may say they had run into the ship with the devil at their heels; and to these all seemed for the best in the best of possible steamers. But the majority were hugely discontented. Coming as they did from a country in so low a state as Great Britain, many of them from Glasgow, which commercially speaking was as good as dead, and many having long been out of work, I was surprised to find them so dainty in their notions. I myself lived almost exclusively on bread, porridge, and soup, precisely as it was supplied to them, and found it, if not luxurious, at least sufficient. But these working men were loud in their outcries. It was not ‘food for human beings,’ it was ‘only fit for pigs,’ it was ‘a disgrace.’ Many of them lived almost entirely upon biscuit, others on their own
private supplies, and some paid extra for better rations from the ship. This marvellously changed my notion of the degree of luxury habitual to the artisan. I was prepared to hear him grumble, for grumbling is the traveller’s pastime; but I was not prepared to find him turn away from a diet which was palatable to myself. Words I should have disregarded, or taken with a liberal allowance; but when a man prefers dry biscuit there can be no question of the sincerity of his disgust.

With one of their complaints I could most heartily sympathise. A single night of the steerage had filled them with horror. I had myself suffered, even in my decent second-cabin berth, from the lack of air; and as the night promised to be fine and quiet, I determined to sleep on deck, and advised all who complained of their quarters to follow my example. I dare say a dozen of others agreed to do so, and I thought we should have been quite a party. Yet, when I brought up my rug about seven bells, there was no one to be seen but the watch. That chimerical terror of good night-air, which makes men close their windows, list their doors, and seal themselves up with their own poisonous exhalations, had sent all these healthy workmen down below. One would think we had been brought up in a fever country; yet in England the most malarious districts are in the bed-chambers.

I felt saddened at this defection, and yet half-pleased to have the night so quietly to myself. The wind had hauled a little ahead on the starboard bow, and was dry but chilly. I found a shelter near the fire-hole, and made myself snug for the night. The ship moved over the uneven sea with a gentle
and cradling movement. The ponderous, organic labours of
the engine in her bowels occupied the mind, and prepared
it for slumber. From time to time a heavier lurch would
disturb me as I lay, and recall me to the obscure borders of
consciousness; or I heard, as it were through a veil, the clear
note of the clapper on the brass and the beautiful sea-cry,
‘All’s well!’ I know nothing, whether for poetry or music, that
can surpass the effect of these two syllables in the darkness
of a night at sea.

The day dawned fairly enough, and during the early part
we had some pleasant hours to improve acquaintance in the
open air; but towards nightfall the wind freshened, the rain
began to fall, and the sea rose so high that it was difficult to
keep one’s footing on the deck. I have spoken of our concerts.
We were indeed a musical ship’s company, and cheered our
way into exile with the fiddle, the accordion, and the songs
of all nations. Night after night we gathered at the aftermost
limit of our domain, where it bordered on that of the saloon.
Performers were called up with acclamation, some shame-
face and hanging the head, others willing and as bold as
brass. Good, bad, or indifferent – Scottish, English, Irish,
Russian, German, or Norse – the songs were received with
generous applause. Once or twice, a recitation, very spiritedly
rendered in a powerful Scottish accent, varied the proceedings;
and once we sought in vain to dance a quadrille, eight men
of us together, to the music of the violin. The performers
were all humorous, frisky fellows, who loved to cut capers in
private life; but as soon as they were arranged for the dance,
they conducted themselves like so many mutes at a funeral.
I have never seen decorum pushed so far; and as this was not
expected, the quadrille was soon whistled down, and the
dancers departed under a cloud. Eight Frenchmen, even
eight Englishmen from another rank of society, would have
dared to make some fun for themselves and the spectators;
but the working man, when sober, takes an extreme and
even melancholy view of personal deportment. A fifth-form
schoolboy is not more careful of dignity. He dares not
be comical; his fun must escape from him unprepared,
and above all, it must be unaccompanied by any physical
demonstration. I like his society under most circumstances,
but let me never again join with him in public gambols.

But the impulse to sing was strong, and triumphed over
modesty and even the inclemencies of sea and sky. On this
rough Saturday night, we got together by the main deck-
house, in a place sheltered from the wind and rain. Some
clinging to a ladder which led to the hurricane deck, and the
rest knitting arms or taking hands, we made a ring to support
the women in the violent lurching of the ship; and when we
were thus disposed, sang to our hearts’ content. Some of
the songs were appropriate to the scene; others strikingly the
reverse. Bastard doggrel of the music-hall, such as, ‘Around
her splendid form, I weaved the magic circle,’ sounded bald,
bleak, and pitifully silly. ‘We don’t want to fight, but, by Jingo,
if we do,’ was in some measure saved by the vigour and
unanimity with which the chorus was thrown forth into the
night. I observed a Platt-Deutsch mason, entirely innocent
of English, adding heartily to the general effect. And perhaps
the German mason is but a fair example of the sincerity with
which the song was rendered; for nearly all with whom I
conversed upon the subject were bitterly opposed to war, and
attributed their own misfortunes, and frequently their own
taste for whisky, to the campaigns in Zululand and Afghanistan.

Every now and again, however, some song that touched
the pathos of our situation was given forth; and you could
hear by the voices that took up the burden how the sentiment
came home to each. ‘The Anchor’s Weighed’ was true for us.
We were indeed ‘Rocked on the bosom of the stormy deep.’
How many of us could say with the singer, ‘I’m lonely to-night,
love, without you,’ or, ‘Go, some one, and tell them from me,
to write me a letter from home’! And when was there a more
appropriate moment for ‘Auld Lang Syne’ than now, when
the land, the friends, and the affections of that mingled but
beloved time were fading and fleeing behind us in the vessel’s
wake? It pointed forward to the hour when these labours
should be overpast, to the return voyage, and to many a
meeting in the sanded inn, when those who had parted in
the spring of youth should again drink a cup of kindness in
their age. Had not Burns contemplated emigration, I scarce
believe he would have found that note.

This was the first fusion of our little nationality together.
The wind sang shrill in the rigging; the rain fell small and
thick; the whole group, linked together as it was, was shaken
and swung to and fro as the swift steamer shore into the
waves. It was a general embrace, both friendly and helpful,
like what one imagines of old Christian Agapes. I turned
many times to look behind me on the moving desert of seas,
now cloud-canopied and lit with but a low nocturnal glimmer
along the line of the horizon. It hemmed us in and cut us off
on our swift-travelling oasis. And yet this waste was part a
playground for the stormy petrel; and on the least tooth of
reef, outcropping in a thousand miles of unfathomable ocean, the gull makes its home and dwells in a busy polity. And small as was our iron world, it made yet a large and habitable place in the Atlantic, compared with our globe upon the seas of space.

All Sunday the weather remained wild and cloudy; many were prostrated by sickness; only five sat down to tea in the second cabin, and two of these departed abruptly ere the meal was at an end. The Sabbath was observed strictly by the majority of the emigrants. I heard an old woman express her surprise that ‘the ship didna gae doon,’ as she saw some one pass her with a chess-board on the holy day. Some sang Scottish psalms. Many went to service, and in true Scottish fashion came back ill pleased with their divine. ‘I didna think he was an experienced preacher,’ said one girl to me.

Is was a bleak, uncomfortable day; but at night, by six bells, although the wind had not yet moderated, the clouds were all wrecked and blown away behind the rim of the horizon, and the stars came out thickly overhead. I saw Venus burning as steadily and sweetly across this hurly-burly of the winds and waters as ever at home upon the summer woods. The engine pounded, the screw tossed out of the water with a roar, and shook the ship from end to end; the bows battled with loud reports against the billows: and as I stood in the lee-scuppers and looked up to where the funnel leaned out, over my head, vomiting smoke, and the black and monstrous top-sails blotted, at each lurch, a different crop of stars, it seemed as if all this trouble were a thing of small account, and that just above the mast reigned peace unbroken and eternal.
Our companion (Steerage No. 2 and 3) was a favourite resort. Down one flight of stairs there was a comparatively large open space, the centre occupied by a hatchway, which made a convenient seat for about twenty persons, while barrels, coils of rope, and the carpenter’s bench afforded perches for perhaps as many more. The canteen, or steerage bar, was on one side of the stair; on the other, a no less attractive spot, the cabin of the indefatigable interpreter. I have seen people packed into this space like herrings in a barrel, and many merry evenings prolonged there until five bells, when the lights were ruthlessly extinguished and all must go to roost.

It had been rumoured since Friday that there was a fiddler aboard, who lay sick and unmelodious in Steerage No. 1; and on the Monday forenoon, as I came down the companion, I was saluted by something in Strathspey time. A white-faced Orpheus was cheerily playing to an audience of white-faced women. It was as much as he could do to play, and some of his hearers were scarce able to sit; yet they had crawled from their bunks at the first experimental flourish, and found better than medicine in the music. Some of the heaviest heads began to nod in time, and a degree of animation looked from some of the palest eyes. Humanly speaking, it is a more important matter to play the fiddle, even badly,
than to write huge works upon recondite subjects. What could Mr Darwin have done for these sick women? But this fellow scraped away; and the world was positively a better place for all who heard him. We have yet to understand the economical value of these mere accomplishments. I told the fiddler he was a happy man, carrying happiness about with him in his fiddle-case, and he seemed alive to the fact.

‘It is a privilege,’ I said. He thought a while upon the word, turning it over in his Scots head, and then answered with conviction, ‘Yes, a privilege.’

That night I was summoned by ‘Merrily danced the Quaker’s wife’ into the companion of Steerage No. 4 and 5. This was, properly speaking, but a strip across a deck-house, lit by a sickly lantern which swung to and fro with the motion of the ship. Through the open slide-door we had a glimpse of a grey night sea, with patches of phosphorescent foam flying, swift as birds, into the wake, and the horizon rising and falling as the vessel rolled to the wind. In the centre the companion ladder plunged down sheerly like an open pit. Below, on the first landing, and lighted by another lamp, lads and lasses danced, not more than three at a time for lack of space, in jigs and reels and hornpipes. Above, on either side, there was a recess railed with iron, perhaps two feet wide and four long, which stood for orchestra and seats of honour. In the one balcony, five slatternly Irish lasses sat woven in a comely group. In the other was posted Orpheus, his body, which was convulsively in motion, forming an odd contrast to his somnolent, imperturbable Scots face. His brother, a dark man with a vehement, interested countenance, who made a god of the fiddler, sat by with open mouth,
drinking in the general admiration and throwing out remarks to kindle it.

‘That’s a bonny hornpipe now,’ he would say, ‘it’s a great favourite with performers; they dance the sand dance to it.’ And he expounded the sand dance. Then suddenly, it would be a long ‘Hush!’ with uplifted finger and glowing, supplicating eyes; ‘he’s going to play “Auld Robin Gray” on one string!’ And throughout this excruciating movement – ‘On one string, that’s on one string!’ he kept crying. I would have given something myself that it had been on none; but the hearers were much awed. I called for a tune or two, and thus introduced myself to the notice of the brother, who directed his talk to me for some little while, keeping, I need hardly mention, true to his topic, like the seamen to the star. ‘He’s grand of it,’ he said confidentially. ‘His master was a music-hall man.’ Indeed the music-hall man had left his mark, for our fiddler was ignorant of many of our best old airs; ‘Logie o’ Buchan,’ for instance, he only knew as a quick, jigging figure in a set of quadrilles, and had never heard it called by name. Perhaps, after all, the brother was the more interesting performer of the two. I have spoken with him afterwards repeatedly, and found him always the same quick, fiery bit of a man, not without brains; but he never showed to such advantage as when he was thus squiring the fiddler into public note. There is nothing more becoming than a genuine admiration; and it shares this with love, that it does not become contemptible although misplaced.

The dancing was but feebly carried on. The space was almost impracticably small; and the Irish wenches combined the extreme of bashfullness about this innocent display with
a surprising impudence and roughness of address. Most often, either the fiddle lifted up its voice unheeded, or only a couple of lads would be footing it and snapping fingers on the landing. And such was the eagerness of the brother to display all the acquirements of his idol, and such the sleepy indifference of the performer, that the tune would as often as not be changed, and the hornpipe expire into a ballad before the dancers had cut half a dozen shuffles.

In the meantime, however, the audience had been growing more and more numerous every moment; there was hardly standing-room round the top of the companion; and the strange instinct of the race moved some of the new-comers to close both the doors, so that the atmosphere grew insupportable. It was a good place, as the saying is, to leave.

The wind hauled ahead with a head sea. By ten at night heavy sprays were flying and drumming over the forecastle; the companion of Steerage No. 1 had to be closed, and the door of communication through the second cabin thrown open. Either from the convenience of the opportunity, or because we had already a number of acquaintances in that part of the ship, Mr Jones and I paid it a late visit. Steerage No. 1 is shaped like an isosceles triangle, the sides opposite the equal angles bulging outward with the contour of the ship. It is lined with eight pens of sixteen bunks apiece, four bunks below and four above on either side. The companion lands about the middle of the greater length, and thus cuts the open space between the pens into two unequal compartments, as a drawing room and boudoir. Each of these is furnished with a table and fixed benches; that in the forward space being shaped to a point, a triangle within a triangle,
to fit the inclination of the ship's timbers. At night the place is lit with two lanterns, one to each table. As the steamer beat on her way among the rough billows, the light passed through violent phases of change, and was thrown to and fro and up and down with startling swiftness. You were tempted to wonder, as you looked, how so thin a glimmer could control and disperse such solid blackness. Even by day much of the steerage enjoyed but a groping twilight. I presume (for I never saw it) that some cleansing process was carried on each morning; but there was never light enough to be particular; and in a place so full of corners and so much broken up by fixtures and partitions, dirt might lie for years without disturbance. The pens, stalls, pews – I know not what to call them – were besides, by their very design, beyond the reach of bucket and swab. Each broad shelf with its four deep divisions, formed a fourfold asylum for all manner of uncleanness. When the pen was fully occupied, with sixteen live human animals, more or less unwashed, lying immersed together in the same close air all night, and their litter of meat, dirty dishes and rank bedding tumbled all day together in foul disorder, the merest possibilities of health or cleanliness were absent.

If it was impossible to clean the steerage, it was no less impossible to clean the steerage passenger. All ablution below was rigorously forbidden. A man might give his hands a scour at the pump beside the galley, but that was exactly all. One fellow used to strip to his waist every morning and freshen his chest and shoulders; but I need not tell you he was no true steerage passenger. To wash outside in the sharp sea air of the morning is a step entirely foreign to the frowsy,
herding, over-warm traditions of the working class; and a human body must apparently have been nurtured in some luxury, before it courts these rude shocks and surprises of temperature in which many men find health and vigour. Thus, even if the majority of passengers came clean aboard at Greenock, long ere the ten days were out or the shores of America in sight, all were reduced to a common level, all, who here stewed together in their own exhalations, were uncompromisingly unclean. A writer of the school of M. Zola would here find an inspiration for many pages; but without entering farther into detail, let me mention the name of sea sickness, and leave its added horrors to the imagination of the reader.

I have said that, on our voyage, the ship was a good deal below her full complement of passengers. Perhaps not half of the pens numbered their complete sixteen; and every here and there an empty bunk afforded elbow-room and something like a wardrobe to the neighbours. Steerage No. 1 was especially intended for single men; yet more than one family was here installed among the others. It was strange to note how the different nationalities had drawn apart; for all English speakers were in the foremost bunks, and Germans and Scandinavians had clustered aft into a couple of pens on the starboard side. The separation was marked and openly recognised. I remember coming down one morning to look for the Russian, and being told that I should find him ‘back there wi’ the Germans’. When Jones and I entered we found a little company of our acquaintances seated together at the triangular foremost table. A more forlorn party, in more dismal circumstances, it would be hard to imagine. The
motion here in the ship’s nose was very violent; the uproar of the sea often overpoweringly loud. The yellow flicker of the lantern spun round and round and tossed the shadows in masses. The air was hot, but it struck a chill from its fœtor. From all round in the dark bunks, the scarcely human noises of the sick joined into a kind of farmyard chorus. In the midst, these five friends of mine were keeping up what heart they could in company. They looked white and heavy-eyed; nor was it wonderful if they were indisposed; for aside from the suggestive noises which assailed the ear, there was forced upon the mind, in this quarter of the ship, a strong and almost disquieting sense of the swiftness of her advance and the rudeness of her conflict with the sea. Singing was their refuge from discomfortable thoughts and sensations. One piped, in feeble tones, ‘O why left I my hame?’ which seemed a pertinent question in the circumstances. Another, from the invisible horrors of a pen where he lay dog-sick upon the upper shelf, found courage, in a blink of his sufferings, to give us several verses of the ‘Death of Nelson’; and it was odd and eerie to hear the chorus breathe feebly from all sorts of dark corners, and ‘this day has done his dooty’ rise and fall and be taken up again in this dim inferno, to an accompaniment of plunging, hollow-sounding bows and the rattling spray-showers overhead. It seemed to me the singer, at least, that day had done his duty. For to sing in such a place and in such a state of health is cheerfully heroic. Like a modern Theseus, he thus combatted bad air, disease and darkness, and threw abroad among his fellows some pleasant and courageous thoughts.
All seemed unfit for conversation; a certain dizziness had interrupted the activity of their minds; and except to sing they were tongue-tied. There was present, however, one tall, powerful fellow of doubtful nationality, being neither quite Scotsman nor altogether Irish, but of surprising clearness of conviction on the highest problems. He had gone nearly beside himself on the Sunday, because of a general backwardness to indorse his definition of mind as ‘a living, thinking substance which cannot be felt, heard, or seen’ – nor, I presume, although he failed to mention it, smelt. Now he came forward in a pause with another contribution to our culture.

‘Just by way of change,’ said he, ‘I’ll ask you a Scripture riddle. There’s profit in them too,’ he added ungrammatically.

This was the riddle—

C and P
Did agree
To cut down C;
But C and P
Could not agree
Without the leave of G;
All the people cried to see
The crueltie
Of C and P.

Harsh are the words of Mercury after the songs of Apollo!
We were a long while over the problem, shaking our heads
and gloomily wondering how a man could be such a fool; but at length he put us out of suspense and divulged the fact that C and P stood for Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. The more I study his enigma, which is given here with critical exactitude, the more deeply I am astonished by its feebleness and historical inaccuracy. It touches moreover, in an insidious, unsettling way, on a serious problem of faith; and is probably, take it for all in all, the work of an infidel propaganda in collaboration. Or perhaps it is a memoria technica for some exceedingly complicated date? I advise the reader to get it off by heart, for someday, who knows? It might be useful to him. For my own part, I shall never forget either the riddle or the time and place in which I heard it; and as for its propounder, though I cannot think either philosophy or history to be his forte, he seemed a brave and a warm-hearted man, and he was good to hear when he spoke about his wife and children.

I think it must have been the riddle that settled us; but the motion and the close air likewise hurried our departure. We had not been gone long, we heard next morning, ere two or even three out of the five fell sick. We thought it little wonder on the whole, for the sea kept contrary all night. I now made my bed upon the second-cabin floor, where, although I ran the risk of being stepped upon, I had a free current of air, more or less vitiated indeed, and running only from steerage to steerage, but at least not stagnant; and from this couch, as well as the usual sounds of a rough night at sea, the hateful coughing and retching of the sick and the sobs of children, I heard a man run wild with terror beseeching his friend for encouragement. ‘The ship’s going down!’ he
cried with a thrill of agony. ‘The ship’s going down!’ he repeated, now in a blank whisper, now with his voice rising towards a sob; and his friend might reassure him, reason with him, joke at him – all was in vain, and the old cry came back, ‘The ship’s going down!’ There was something panicky and catching in the emotion of his tones; and I saw in a clear flash what an involved and hideous tragedy was a disaster to an emigrant ship. If this whole parishful of people came no more to land, into how many houses would the newspaper carry woe, and what a great part of the web of our corporate human life would be rent across for ever!

The next morning when I came on deck I found a new world indeed. The wind was fair; the sun mounted into a cloudless heaven; through great dark blue seas the ship cut a swath of curded foam. The horizon was dotted all day with companionable sails, and the sun shone pleasantly on the long, heaving deck.

We had many fine-weather diversions to beguile the time. There was a single chess-board and a single pack of cards. Sometimes as many as twenty of us would be playing dominoes for love. Feats of dexterity, puzzles for the intelligence, some arithmetical, some of the same order as the old problem of the fox and goose and cabbage, were always welcome; and the latter, I observed, more popular as well as more conspicuously well done than the former. A party of gentlemen (I speak in the sense of caste alone) would have excelled my workman friends at hop-step-and-jump or push-the-stick, but they would scarce have displayed the same patience in these lesser exercises of the mind. We had a regular daily competition to guess the vessel’s progress; and
twelve o’clock, when the result was published in the wheelhouse, came to be a moment of considerable interest. But the interest was unmixed. Not a bet was laid upon our guesses. From the Clyde to Sandy Hook I never heard a wager offered or taken. We had, besides, romps in plenty. Puss in the Corner, which we had rebaptised, in more manly style, Devil and four Corners, was my own favourite game; but there were many who preferred another, nameless as far as I know, which was diverting enough to the onlookers, but must have developed a tendency to headache in those who played. The humour of the thing was to box a person’s ears until he found out who had cufféd him. The harder the smacks, the better we were all pleased. I have watched it for half an hour at a time; nor do I think it was a sense of personal dignity alone, which moved me to refrain from joining.

This Tuesday morning we were all delighted with the change of weather, and in the highest possible spirits. We got in a cluster like bees, sitting between each other’s feet under lee of the deck-houses. Stories and laughter went around. The children climbed about the shrouds. White faces appeared for the first time, and began to take on colour from the wind. I was kept hard at work making cigarettes for one amateur after another, and my less than moderate skill was heartily admired. Lastly, down sat the fiddler in our midst and began to discourse his reels, and jigs, and ballads, with now and then a voice or two to take up the air and throw in the interest of human speech.

Through this merry and good-hearted scene there came three cabin passengers, a gentleman and two young ladies, picking their way with little gracious titters of indulgence,
and a Lady-Bountiful air about nothing, which galled me to the quick. I have little of the radical in social questions, and have always nourished an idea that one person was as good as another. But I began to be troubled by this episode. It was astonishing what insults these people managed to convey by their presence. They seemed to throw their clothes in our faces. Their eyes searched us all over for tatters and incongruities. A laugh was ready at their lips; but they were too well-mannered to indulge it in our hearing. Wait a bit, till they were all back in the saloon, and then hear how wittily they would depict the manners of the steerage. We were in truth very innocently, cheerfully, and sensibly engaged, and there was no shadow of excuse for the swaying elegant superiority with which these damsels passed among us, or for the stiff and waggish glances of their squire. Not a word was said; only when they were gone Mackay sullenly damned their impudence under his breath; but we were all conscious of an icy influence and a dead break in the course of our enjoyment. We had been made to feel ourselves a sort of comical lower animal. Such a fine thing it is to have manners!

One compliment I must make to the Saloon passengers: this was the only invasion of our territory that I witnessed from beginning to end of the voyage. It was a piece of very natural and needful delicacy. We were not allowed upon their part of the ship; and so they were, and ought, to be chary of intruding upon ours. Reciprocity can alone justify such a privilege. I do not say but that a cabin passenger may once in a while slink forward under cover of night, just as some careful house-holders, when the servants are once in bed, descend to the kitchen for a cigar. We also, when night had
fallen, installed ourselves along the hot water pipes with our backs to the saloon deckhouse. But except in some exceptional, anonymous or apologetic fashion, I give it as my experience, the visit of a cabin passenger, will be regarded as an intrusion in the steerage.
IV: STEERAGE TYPES

The type of man in our steerage was by no means one to be despised. Some were handy, some intellectual, and almost all were pleasantly and kindly disposed. I had many long and serious talks, and many a good bout of mirth with my fellow passengers and I thought they formed, upon the whole, an agreeable and well informed society.

We had a fellow on board, an Irish-American, for all the world like a beggar in a print by Callot; one-eyed, with great, splay crow’s-feet round the sockets; a knotty squab nose coming down over his moustache; a miraculous hat; a shirt that had been white, ay, ages long ago; an alpaca coat in its last sleeves; and, without hyperbole, no buttons to his trousers. Even in these rags and tatters, the man twinkled all over with impudence like a piece of sham jewellery; and I have heard him offer a situation to one of his fellow-passengers with the air of a lord. Nothing could overlie such a fellow; a kind of base success was written on his brow. He was then in his ill days; but I can imagine him in Congress with his mouth full of bombast and sawder. As we moved in the same circle, I was brought necessarily into his society. I do not think I ever heard him say anything that was true, kind, or interesting; but there was entertainment in the man’s demeanour. You might call him a half-educated Irish Tigg.
Our Russian made a remarkable contrast to this impossible fellow. Rumours and legends were current in the steerages about his antecedents. Some said he was a Nihilist escaping; others set him down for a harmless spendthrift, who had squandered fifty thousand roubles, and whose father had now despatched him to America by way of penance. Either tale might flourish in security; there was no contradiction to be feared, for the hero spoke not one word of English. I got on with him lumberingly enough in broken German, and learnt from his own lips that he had been an apothecary. He carried the photograph of his betrothed in a pocket-book, and remarked that it did not do her justice. The cut of his head stood out from among the passengers with an air of startling strangeness. The first natural instinct was to take him for a desperado; but although the features, to our Western eyes, had a barbaric and unhomely cast, the eye both reassured and touched. It was large and very dark and soft, with an expression of dumb endurance, as if it had often looked on desperate circumstances and never looked on them without resolution.

He cried out when I used the word. ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘not resolution.’

‘The resolution to endure,’ I explained.

And then he shrugged his shoulders, and said, ‘Ach, ja,’ with gusto, like a man who has been flattered in his favourite pretensions. Indeed, he was always hinting at some secret sorrow; and his life, he said, had been one of unusual trouble and anxiety; so the legends of the steerage may have represented at least some shadow of the truth. Once, and once only, he sang a song at our concerts; standing forth without
embarrassment, his great stature somewhat humped, his long arms frequently extended, his Kalmuck head thrown backward. It was a suitable piece of music, as deep as a cow’s bellow and wild like the White Sea. He was struck and charmed by the freedom and sociality of our manners. At home, he said, no one on a journey would speak to him, but those with whom he would not care to speak; thus unconsciously involving himself in the condemnation of his countrymen. But Russia was soon to be changed; the ice of the Neva was softening under the sun of civilisation; the new ideas, ‘wie eine feines Violin,’ were audible among the big empty drum notes of Imperial diplomacy; and he looked to see a great revival, though with a somewhat indistinct and childish hope.

We had a father and son who made a pair of Jacks-of-all-trades. It was the son who sang the ‘Death of Nelson’ under such contrarious circumstances and who contributed on many other occasions to make the voyage a happy period for all. He was by trade a shearer of ship plates; but he could touch the organ, and led two choirs, and played the flute and piccolo in a professional string band. His repertory of songs was, besides, inexhaustible, and ranged impartially from the very best to the very worst within his reach. Nor did he seem to make the least distinction between these extremes, but would cheerily follow up ‘Tom Bowling’ with ‘Around her splendid form.’

The father, an old, cheery, small piece of manhood, could do everything connected with tinwork from one end of the process to the other, use almost every carpenter’s tool, and make picture frames to boot. ‘I sat down with silver plate
every Sunday,’ said he, ‘and pictures on the wall. I have made enough money to be rolling in my carriage. But, sir,’ looking at me unsteadily with his bright rheumy eyes, ‘I was troubled with a drunken wife.’ He took a hostile view of matrimony in consequence. ‘It’s an old saying,’ he remarked: ‘God made ’em, and the devil he mixed ’em.’

I think he was justified by his experience. It was a dreary story. He would bring home three pounds on Saturday, and on Monday all the clothes would be in pawn. Sick of the useless struggle, he gave up a paying contract, and contented himself with small and ill-paid jobs. ‘A bad job was as good as a good job for me,’ he said; ‘it all went the same way.’ Once the wife showed signs of amendment; she kept steady for weeks on end; it was again worth while to labour and to do one’s best. The husband found a good situation some distance from home, and, to make a little upon every hand, started the wife in a cook-shop; the children were here and there, busy as mice; savings began to grow together in the bank, and the golden age of hope had returned again to that unhappy family. But one week my old acquaintance, getting earlier through with his work, came home on the Friday instead of the Saturday, and there was his wife to receive him reeling drunk. He ‘took and gave her a pair o’ black eyes,’ for which I pardon him, nailed up the cook-shop door, gave up his situation, and resigned himself to a life of poverty, with the workhouse at the end. As the children came to their full age they fled the house, and established themselves in other countries; some did well, some not so well; but the father remained at home alone with his drunken wife, all his sound-hearted pluck and varied accomplishments depressed and negatived.
Was she dead now? or, after all these years, had he broken the chain, and run from home like a schoolboy? I could not discover which; but here at least he was out on the adventure, and still one of the bravest and most youthful men on board.

‘Now, I suppose, I must put my old bones to work again,’ said he; ‘but I can do a turn yet.’

And the son to whom he was going, I asked, was he not able to support him?

‘Oh yes,’ he replied. ‘But I’m never happy without a job on hand. And I’m stout; I can eat almost anything. You see no craze about me.’

I should say, to finish this sketch, that he was usually more given to listen than to speak; he was indeed an indefatigable hearer, always on the edge of the group, pipe in hand, with his best ear upraised; and though unlettered and, I think, ignorant, loved to hear serious things discussed. It is strange that I should have permitted myself to use the word ignorant, about a man who understood and could successfully practise so great a variety of trades; and yet the word must remain, for there is no other to convey my meaning. Thus I have known people to declare both painters and musicians stupid, because their thoughts, lying out of the literary path, are not suited for display in company. Colours or sounds, chisels or vices, about whatever the mind may be occupied, it is still enlarged and invigorated; and yet it remains a question, whether these thoughts which cannot be clothed and rendered commonplace in words, may not be after all the most bracing and veracious. At least it would be ignorance itself to think my old acquaintance ignorant. Although one profession may be dully acquired betwixt sleep and waking, to change from
one to another implies both activity and courage of the mind. For no inducement that I can fancy, would I set myself to learn another business; because the mind has grown slothful and dreads to grapple with a mass of fresh details.

This tale of a drunken wife was paralleled on board by another of a drunken father. He was a capable man, with a good chance in life; but he had drunk up two thriving businesses like a bottle of sherry, and involved his sons along with him in ruin. Now they were on board with us, fleeing his disastrous neighbourhood.

Total abstinence, like all ascetical conclusions, is unfriendly to the most generous, cheerful, and human parts of man; but it could have adduced many instances and arguments from among our ship’s company. I was one day conversing with a kind and happy Scotsman, running to fat and perspiration in the physical, but with a taste for poetry and a genial sense of fun. I had asked him his hopes in emigrating. They were like those of so many others, vague and unfounded; times were bad at home; they were said to have a turn for the better in the States; a man could get on anywhere, he thought. That was precisely the weak point of his position; for if he could get on in America, why could he not do the same in Scotland? But I never had the courage to use that argument, though it was often on the tip of my tongue, and instead I agreed with him heartily adding, with reckless originality, ‘If the man stuck to his work, and kept away from drink.’

‘Ah!’ said he slowly, ‘the drink! You see, that’s just my trouble.’

He spoke with a simplicity that was touching, looking at me at the same time with something strange and timid in
his eye, half-ashamed, half-sorry, like a good child who knows he should be beaten. You would have said he recognised a destiny to which he was born, and accepted the consequences mildly. Like the merchant Abudah, he was at the same time fleeing from his destiny and carrying it along with him, the whole at an expense of six guineas.

As far as I saw, drink, idleness, and incompetency were the three great causes of emigration, and for all of them, and drink first and foremost, this trick of getting transported overseas appears to me the silliest means of cure. It is like turning in bed when you are down with a fever; you will find the new position as uneasy as the last. You cannot run away from a weakness; you must some time fight it out or perish; and if that be so, why not now, and where you stand? Cælum non animam. Change Glenlivet for Bourbon, and it is still whisky, only not so good. A sea-voyage will not give a man the nerve to put aside cheap pleasure; emigration has to be done before we climb the vessel; an aim in life is the only fortune worth the finding; and it is not to be found in foreign lands, but in the heart itself.

Speaking generally, there is no vice of this kind more contemptible than another; for each is but a result and outward sign of a soul tragically ship-wrecked. In the majority of cases, cheap pleasure is resorted to by way of anodyne. The pleasure-seeker sets forth upon life with high and difficult ambitions; he meant to be nobly good and nobly happy, though at as little pains as possible to himself; and it is because all has failed in his celestial enterprise that you now behold him rolling in the garbage. Hence the comparative success of the teetotal pledge; because to a man who had nothing it sets at least a
negative aim in life. Somewhat as prisoners beguile their days by taming a spider, the reformed drunkard makes an interest out of abstaining from intoxicating drinks, and may live for that negation. There is something, at least, not to be done each day; and a cold triumph awaits him every evening.

We had one on board with us, whom I have already referred to under the name Mackay, who seemed to me not only a good instance of this failure in life of which we have been speaking, but a good type of the intelligence which here surrounded me. Physically he was a small Scotsman, standing a little back as though he were already carrying the elements of a corporation, and his looks somewhat marred by the smallness of his eyes. Mentally, he was endowed above the average. There were but few subjects on which he could not converse with understanding and a dash of wit; and from these he had voluntarily abstracted his intelligence. His style of talking was remarkable; his words were selected with great discretion and out of a full possession of the English language, and he delivered himself slowly and with gusto, like a man who enjoyed his own sententiousness. He was a dry, quick, pertinent debater, speaking with a small voice, and swinging on his heels to launch and emphasise an argument. When he began a discussion, he could not bear to leave it off, but would pick the subject to the bone, without once relinquishing a point. An engineer by trade, Mackay believed in the unlimited perfectibility of all machines except the human machine. The latter he gave up with ridicule for a compound of carrion and perverse gases. He had an appetite for disconnected facts which I can only compare to the savage taste for beads. What is called information was indeed a passion with
the man, and he not only delighted to receive it, but could pay you back in kind.

With all these capabilities, here was Mackay, already no longer young, on his way to a new country, with no prospects, no money, and but little hope. He was almost tedious in the cynical disclosures of his despair. ‘The ship may go down for me,’ he would say, ‘now or to-morrow. I have nothing to lose and nothing to hope.’ And again: ‘I am sick of the whole damned performance.’ He was, like the kind little man already quoted, another so-called victim of the bottle. But Mackay was miles from publishing his weakness to the world; laid the blame of his failure on corrupt masters and a corrupt State policy; and after he had been one night overtaken and had played the buffoon in his cups, sternly, though not without tact, suppressed all reference to his escapade. It was a treat to see him manage this; the various jesters withered under his gaze, and you were forced to recognise in him a certain steely force, and a gift of command which might have ruled a senate.

In truth it was not whisky that had ruined him; he was ruined long before for all good human purposes but conversation. His eyes were sealed by a cheap, school-book materialism. He could see nothing in the world but money and steam-engines. He did not know what you meant by the word happiness. He had forgotten the simple emotions of childhood, and perhaps never encountered the delights of youth. He believed in production, that useful figment of economy, as if it had been real like laughter; and production, without prejudice to liquor, was his god and guide. One day he took me to task – a novel cry to me – upon the
over-payment of literature. Literary men, he said, were more highly paid than artisans; yet the artisan made threshing-machines and butter-churns, and the man of letters, except in the way of a few useful handbooks, made nothing worth the while. He produced a mere fancy article. Mackay’s notion of a book was Hoppus’s *Measurer*. Now in my time I have possessed and even studied that work; I found Hoppus a careful although scarce a stimulating writer; and I own he left something in my soul unsatisfied. If I were to be left to-morrow on Juan Fernandez, Hoppus’s is not the book that I should choose for my companion volume.

I tried to fight the point with Mackay. I made him own that he had taken pleasure in reading books otherwise, to his view, insignificant; but he was too wary to advance a step beyond the admission. It was in vain for me to argue that here was pleasure ready-made and running from the spring, whereas his ploughs and butter-churns were but means and mechanisms to give men the necessary food and leisure before they start upon the search for pleasure; he jibbed and ran away from such conclusions. The thing was different, he declared, and nothing was serviceable but what had to do with food. ‘Eat, eat, eat!’ he cried; ‘that’s the bottom and the top.’ By an odd irony of circumstance, he grew so much interested in this discussion that he let the hour slip by unnoticed and had to go without his tea. He had enough sense and humour, indeed he had no lack of either, to have chuckled over this himself in private; and even to me he referred to it with the shadow of a smile. Here, at least, was my contention in a nutshell: his sentiments were saddening to me, yet it was with interest that I listened to him as he
spoke; on his side, although he forgot the staff of life for the pleasure he had in continuing the dispute, he thought my views not only silly but wickedly wrong.

Mackay was a hot bigot. He would not hear of religion. I have seen him waste hours of time in argument with all sorts of poor human creatures who understood neither him nor themselves, and he had had the boyishness to dissect and criticise even so small a matter as the riddler’s definition of mind. He snorted aloud with zealotry and the lust for intellectual battle. Anything, whatever it was, that seemed to him likely to discourage the continued passionate production of corn and steam-engines he resented like a conspiracy against the people. Thus, when I put in the plea for literature, that it was only in good books, or in the society of the good, that a man could get help in his conduct, he declared I was in a different world from him. ‘Damn my conduct!’ said he. ‘I have given it up for a bad job. My question is, “Can I drive a nail?”’ And he plainly looked upon me as one who was insidiously seeking to reduce the people’s annual bellyful of corn and steam-engines. I feel there is some mistake in this alarm, and that the people could get through life perhaps with less of either. But when I hinted something of that view, and that to spend less was, after all, as good a way out of the difficulty of life as to gain more, he accused me, in almost as many words, of the sin of aristocracy and a desire to grind the masses. Perhaps there was some indelicacy on my part in presenting him with such an argument; for it is not in his class that such a movement must be inaugurated; and we must see the rich honest, before we need look hopefully to see the poor considerate.
Mackay was the very man to be reclaimed by total abstinence; and if reclaimed, would present a typical instance of those useless successes and victorious defeats which are too often the only trophies of the movement. The sort of reformation that I care about must be of a more sweeping order. I have not the least aversion to the continued poverty of many tipplers; I am far more concerned about the continued prosperity and power of many unworthy capitalists. Although I am far from cherishing unfriendly feelings towards Mackay, for the man both interested and amused me, it seems still an open question whether, for the general interests of the race, he had not better remain poor and drink himself to death. There was nothing in him worth saving but his talents, which he would be sure to misapply. He had no hope but to make money and to squander it. As he is, you have a shiftless, tippling engineer; but let him be rich, and he will be an oppressor of men. Working man and master are but John and Jack; and when Mackay bewails the hard condition of his class, he is only rejecting the legitimate course of his own philosophy. ‘Damn my conduct!’ is an agreeable and light-hearted sentiment on a man’s own lips; but it becomes practically inconvenient when it is adopted as a principle by others.

It may be argued that these opinions spring from the defect of culture; that a narrow and pinching way of life not only exaggerates to a man the importance of material conditions, but indirectly, by denying him the necessary books and leisure, keeps his mind ignorant of larger thoughts; and that hence springs this overwhelming concern about diet, and hence the bald view of existence professed by
Mackay. Had this been an English peasant the conclusion would be tenable. I was already a young man when I was first brought into contact with some of the heavy English labourers of Suffolk; and only those who have some acquaintance with the same class in Scotland, can conceive the astonishment and disgust with which I viewed the difference. To me, they seemed scarce human, but like a very gross and melancholy sort of ape; and though I may have been unfortunate in the examples that fell under my observation, the fact of my amazement is enough to my present purpose. The feeling was the more impressed on me after my return to Scotland, by a conversation with a labourer upon the shores of Fife. This man was cleaning a barge, in which I was driven to take refuge from a squall of rain; and he sat down by my side, fantastically, not to say disgustingly, bedaubed with liquid manure. But his mind was clean and vigorous and full of grave thoughts. He spoke with me of education, culture and the learned professions. ‘Aye,’ said he, ‘that’s the thing for a man to be happy. Ye see, he has aye something ayont.’ It would be hard to set forth more clearly the advantages of an intellectual life. You could not call this man uncultured; and yet his is no uncommon case among the field labourers of Scotland. A sound, sometimes even an ambitious education lays the basis; the metaphysical and sentimental turn of the race leads them, at their outdoor work, to hoard and improve on what they have learned; the Bible and even the Shorter Catechism (like it or not, as you please) are works of a high scope which stimulate the mind; and many a peasant has his own heresy or holds orthodoxy on some terms of his own. As a people, they are not ignorant, not uncultured and
certainly, you would say, not materialistic. But Mackay had most of the elements of a liberal education. He had skirted metaphysical and mathematical studies. He had a thoughtful hold of what he knew, which would be exceptional among bankers. He had been brought up in the midst of hot-house piety, and told, with incongruous pride, the story of his own brother’s deathbed ecstasies. Yet he had somehow failed to fulfil himself, and was adrift like a dead thing among external circumstances, without hope or lively preference or shaping aim. And further, there seemed a tendency among many of his fellows to fall into the same blank and unlovely opinions. One thing, indeed, is not to be learned in Scotland, and that is the way to be happy. Yet that is the whole of culture, and perhaps two-thirds of morality. Can it be that the Puritan school, by divorcing a man from nature, by thinning out his instincts, and setting a stamp of its disapproval on whole fields of human activity and interest, leads at last directly to material greed? Not in Scotland alone, but in New England also, there are features which justify the suspicion.

Nature is a good guide through life, and the love of simple pleasures next, if not superior, to virtue; and we had on board an Irishman who based his claim to the widest and most affectionate popularity precisely upon these two qualities, that he was natural and happy. He boasted a fresh colour, a tight little figure, unquenchable gaiety, and indefatigable goodwill. His clothes puzzled the diagnostic mind, until you heard he had been once a private coachman, when they became eloquent and seemed a part of his biography. His face contained the rest, and, I fear, a prophecy of the future; the hawk’s nose above accorded so ill with the pink baby’s
mouth below. His spirit and his pride belonged, you might say, to the nose; while it was the general shiftlessness expressed by the other that had thrown him from situation to situation, and at length on board the emigrant ship. Barney ate, so to speak, nothing from the galley; his own tea, butter, and eggs supported him throughout the voyage; and about meal-time you might often find him up to the elbows in amateur cookery. His was the first voice heard singing among all the passengers; he was the first who fell to dancing. From Loch Foyle to Sandy Hook, there was not a piece of fun undertaken but there was Barney in the midst.

You ought to have seen him when he stood up to sing at our concerts – his tight little figure stepping to and fro, and his feet shuffling to the air, his eyes seeking and bestowing encouragement – and to have enjoyed the bow, so nicely calculated between jest and earnest, between grace and clumsiness, with which he brought each song to a conclusion. He was not only a great favourite among ourselves, but his songs attracted the lords of the saloon, who often leaned to hear him over the rails of the hurricane-deck. He was somewhat pleased, but not at all abashed, by this attention; and one night, in the midst of his famous performance of ‘Billy Keogh,’ I saw him spin half round in a pirouette and throw an audacious wink to an old gentleman above.

This was the more characteristic, as, for all his daffing, he was a modest and very polite little fellow among ourselves.

He would not have hurt the feelings of a fly, nor throughout the passage did he give a shadow of offence; yet he was always, by his innocent freedoms and love of fun, brought upon that narrow margin where politeness must be natural to walk
without a fall. He was once seriously angry, and that in a
grave, quiet manner, because they supplied no fish on Friday;
for Barney was a conscientious Catholic. He had likewise
strict notions of refinement; and when, late one evening,
after the women had retired, a young Scotsman struck up
an indecent song, Barney’s drab clothes were immediately
missing from the group. His taste was for the society of
gentlemen, of whom, with the reader’s permission, there was
no lack in our five steerages and second cabin; and he avoided
the rough and positive with a girlish shrinking. Mackay,
partly from his superior powers of mind, which rendered
him incomprehensible, partly from his extreme opinions,
was especially distasteful to the Irishman. I have seen him
slink off with backward looks of terror and offended delicacy,
while the other, in his witty, ugly way, had been professing
hostility to God, and an extreme theatrical readiness to be
shipwrecked on the spot. These utterances hurt the little
coachman’s modesty like a bad word. His love for music was
inborn and generous; none had so ready an applause as
Barney; I have seen the delight with which he was introduced
to Scotch dance music and his silent contempt for the
melodies of the Music Hall. And it is àpropos of Barney that
I must relate the great change which overtook the organisation
of our nightly concerts. Barney had no distaste for whisky;
and he and the young Jack-of-all-Trades received many a
stiff glass from enthusiastic hearers. The fiddler, on the other
hand, being silent and almost morose, fiddled away nightly
and received no invitations to the bar. This partiality began
to prey upon his mind; and one evening he made a clean
breast of it to Jones and threatened to strike work. Here was
a bomb shell in our camp. Barney and the Jack-of-all-Trades were certainly our two most esteemed vocalists; we might have continued to run the concerts on their attraction only; but it was not to be thought of that a valued collaborator should retire under a sense of neglect. The fiddler, too, should have his whisky. It was decided to collect money, and offer a little collation upon deck to the performers in a body.

I am afraid we were all a little thoughtless, and I in the front rank; upon meeting Barney, I opened the matter to him without preparation and in terms that were perhaps too naked. He flushed to his neck. ‘Well then,’ said he, ‘I do not sing at your concerts any more’: adding he was glad enough to sing to amuse his friends, but he would not sing at all for whisky. I could only murmur that I thought he was right; and on that, he turned upon his heel and left me to my degradation. As everybody connected with the affair was now in a false position, and myself in the falsest, I retired to the cabin or, in so many words, hid myself.

What passed on deck, I never rightly knew. It appears, however, it was a scene of consternation for awhile; and Jones and young O’Reilly were cursing me for my defection. I must own I left them to bear the brunt that evening; but my time came too; for as I was sitting below and making some pretense to write my notes, I received a message that Barney wished to speak with me on deck. I went up with the resignation of the condemned criminal, feeling that if he wished my blood, it was no less than due to him, and, generally, that I had been blunt, inconsiderate and ungentlemanly. But there he was – bless his heart! – waiting to load me with apologies. He had spoken sharply; he had been impolite; he could not rest
till he was pardoned. ‘You have always been a good friend to me,’ was his humble way of putting it, when the fact was that we had been good friends together. I protested that it was I alone who stood in need of pardon; but he would hear of no such thing; and I daresay we walked half an hour about the deck, before he consented to a compromise by which we were to pardon one another.

Meantime the system of concerts had been permanently destroyed, not at all, as Barney maintained, by his pride and ill-temper, but by a general want of tact among the rest of us; and instead, a select company moved by invitation into the second cabin. It was a kind of high life below stairs, which pleased me far less than our public and open-air festivals of the past. But in this small way, they were not unsuccessful and offered some curious features. The fiddler combed his hair before appearing on this new and more select stage; and another performer, the young bride of whom the reader has been told, now lifted up a small and rather sweet pipe in little drawing-room ditties, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by her husband. But the point was the effect produced on Barney. In this small, quiet and, so to speak, genteel society, he opened like a rose. Pleasure looked out of his eyes. He seemed less merry than on deck, but his manners grew more affectionate and domestic; I have never seen a gallantry so kind as that with which he treated the ladies of this small circle; and he would have sung himself to death to give us pleasure. Nor can I find words to tell you with what enthusiasm he greeted the singing of the bride. These drawing-room songs were exactly after his heart; he delighted in that music-mistress style; I believe the very
smallness of the voice seemed to him a mark of refinement. Up to nearly midnight, he sat on deck declaring and exaggerating his delight.

His Irishisms and merry simplicities of speech were our current money and went round the steerage like the day’s news. Once, he got two pills from the Doctor, took one, and brought the other back with scorn. He was of Captain Burnaby’s mind, it appeared; nothing would please him but Corkle’s pills and not less than four of these. The Doctor protested he had but one box, which he reserved for his own use and that of the cabin passengers. ‘Sure, Doctor,’ said Barney, ‘am n’t I not the same Christian as yourself and the cabin passengers?’ I need hardly say, the pills were given. Indeed he had only to spring the brogue on any one of us, and he could command what we had.

One story more I must relate, as I have some notes of what he said, and the incident besides completes the character of Barney. I have spoken of a semi-official position, that of assistant to the Steerage steward, and how rapidly the semi-officials grew disgusted and resigned the place. The second of these had reigned, as I said, for a whole day. About noon on the morrow, a good many of us were hanging round the hatchway at the foot of companion No. 2 and 3, when round came the Steerage steward, with his white sheet of loaves girt about him, like a man going forth to sow; and behind, carrying with both hands a huge tin dish of butter, who but Barney? He was greeted with acclamation; passed among us, rosy and smiling, half amused, half gratified with the distinction; and followed his superior down one of the galleries, with an overdone air of business, like a child helping to lay the table.
Perhaps ten minutes elapsed; and then Barney reappeared at full speed out of the steerage, set the dish down upon the hatchway with a bang, and threw himself rolling on the tarpaulin.

‘The divel in your butter!’ he cried, and buried his face in his hands.

The sheeted steward now followed and looked distressfully on his assistant amid shouts of laughter. It was some time before he found anything to say, and even then his voice came hollow from a profound consciousness that he should exhort in vain.

‘Come along!’ he cried feebly. ‘Up with it, Johnny!’

‘Sorry am I that iver you took Johnny in your mouth,’ retorted Barney.

And the steward, seeing all was over, departed in search of other help; Barney had concluded his career as a semi-official; how the rations were finally served out upon that occasion is more than I can tell.

Meantime Barney picked himself up, a rueful looking Barney.

‘I must go on deck,’ said he. ‘I’m sick wid their butter. I can feel the smell of it!’

‘It’s rotten,’ struck in an old woman.

‘Rotten?’ cried Barney, brightening up. ‘Well, I’ll tell ye. I gave a Dutchman down there the full of me hat of it. He wouldn’t be plased wid less!’

And so greatly comforted by having raised another laugh and callously unconcerned at his desertion, he departed upon deck and shall disappear from these pages.
V: THE SICK MAN

One night Jones, the young O'Reilly, and myself were walking arm-in-arm and briskly up and down the deck. Six bells had rung; a head-wind blew chill and fitful, the fog was closing in with a sprinkle of rain, and the fog-whistle had been turned on, and now divided time with its unwelcome outcries, loud like a bull, thrilling and intense like a mosquito. The decks were deserted. Even the watch lay somewhere snugly out of sight. We passed the furnaces and through a blast of heat; and as we cleared the deck house, met the cold wind upon our cheek; and these alternations alone marked our promenade.

For some time we observed something lying black and huddled in the scuppers, not far from where I was wakened by the fireman. At first we made light of it; but as we passed again and again, it began insensibly to occupy our minds; and as we reached the spot, the talk would languish, the pace would halt, and our three heads would all be inclined to that side. Almost unconsciously, we were beginning to grow interested in the black bundle; and before long, by a natural process, we should have stopped of our own accord to satisfy our curiosity. But the matter was taken out of our hands; for the bundle at last heaved a little and moaned aloud. We ran to the rails. An elderly man, but whether passenger or seaman, whether beautiful or the reverse, it was impossible in the
darkness to determine, lay grovelling on his belly in the wet scuppers, and kicking feebly with his outspread toes. He had been sick and his head was in his vomit. We asked him what was amiss, and he replied incoherently, with a strange accent and in a voice unmanned by terror, that he had cramp in the stomach, that he had been ailing all day, had seen the doctor twice, and had walked the deck against fatigue till he was overmastered and had fallen where we found him.

Jones remained by his side, while O’Reilly and I hurried off to seek the doctor. We knocked in vain at the doctor’s cabin; there came no reply; nor could we find any one to guide us. It was no time for delicacy; so we ran once more forward; and I, whipping up a ladder and touching my hat to the officer of the watch, addressed him as politely as I could—

‘I beg your pardon, sir; but there is a man lying bad with cramp in the lee scuppers; and I can’t find the doctor.’

He looked at me peeringly in the darkness; and then, somewhat harshly, ‘Well, I can’t leave the bridge, my man,’ said he.

‘No, sir; but you can tell me what to do,’ I returned.

‘Is it one of the crew?’ he asked.

‘I believe him to be a fireman,’ I replied, going merely on my last experience.

I dare say officers are much annoyed by complaints and alarmist information from their freight of human creatures; but certainly, whether it was the idea that the sick man was one of the crew, or from something conciliatory in my address, the officer in question was immediately relieved and mollified; and speaking in a voice much freer from constraint, advised
me to find a steward and despatch him in quest of the doctor, who would now be in the smoking-room over his pipe.

One of the stewards was often enough to be found about this hour down our companion, Steerage No. 2 and 3; that was his smoking-room of a night. Let me call him Blackwood. I have asked myself repeatedly whether I should give his exact rank, and I find my heart fails me. If I call him Blackwood, I shall have a name answerable enough to his appearance, and leave him to the enjoyment of his privacy. I do not wish to bear tales out of school against an individual. O’Reilly and I rattled down the companion, breathing hurry; and in his shirt-sleeves and perched across the carpenter’s bench upon one thigh, found Blackwood; a neat, bright, dapper, Glasgow-looking man, with a bead of an eye and a rank twang in his speech. I forget who was with him, but the pair were enjoying a deliberate talk over their pipes. I dare say he was tired with his day’s work, and eminently comfortable at that moment; and the truth is, I did not stop to consider his feelings, but told my story in a breath.

‘Steward,’ said I, ‘there’s a man lying bad with cramp, and I can’t find the doctor.’

He turned upon me as pert as a sparrow, but with a black look that is the prerogative of man; and taking his pipe out of his mouth—

‘That’s none of my business,’ said he. ‘I don’t care.’

So far as I have gone, I have not often heard an uglier speech; the French, in their academical manner, would call it cynical; brutal and devilish must serve the turn of a homely English speaker. I could have strangled the little ruffian where he sat. The thought of his cabin civility and cabin tips filled
me with indignation. I glanced at O'Reilly; he was pale and quivering, and looked like assault and battery, every inch of him. But we had a better card than violence.

‘You will have to make it your business,’ said I, ‘for I am sent to you by the officer on the bridge.’

Blackwood was fairly tripped. He made no answer, but put out his pipe, gave me one murderous look, and set off upon his errand strolling. From that day forward, I should say, he improved to me in courtesy, as though he had repented his evil speech and were anxious to leave a better impression. But I cannot help it: I hate every button upon that man's jacket.

When we got on deck again, Jones was still beside the sick man; and two or three late stragglers had gathered round, and were offering suggestions. One proposed to give the patient water, which was promptly negatived. Another bade us hold him up; he himself prayed to be let lie; but as it was at least as well to keep him off the streaming decks, O'Reilly and I supported him between us. It was only by main force that we did so, and neither an easy nor an agreeable duty; for he fought in his paroxysms like a frightened child, and moaned miserably when he resigned himself to our control.

‘Take care of your knee,’ said I to O'Reilly. ‘I have got mine in the vomit.’

I thought the patient too much occupied to mind our observations; but he heard me, relaxed his struggles, and began to twist in a new way with his arm across his body. I could not imagine what he was at; till suddenly forth came a coloured handkerchief; and he held it out to me, saying, ‘Wipe your knee wi’ that.’
We all know about Sir Philip Sidney: here is a Roland for his Oliver. It is easier to say a fine thing on the field of honour than in such a scene of physical disgrace; and the number of persons is considerable who would be shorn of all romantic notions by having been dog-sick immediately before and on the very spot where the occasion rose. It was the unaffected courtliness of a good heart. You have wet your knee in my service; well then, here is my handkerchief! It is true the man thought he was come to his last hour: a thought to favour dignity. That was indeed his argument against our friendly violence.

‘O let me lie!’ he pleaded. ‘I’ll no’ get better anyway.’ And then, with a moan that went to my heart, ‘O why did I come upon this miserable journey?’

I was reminded of the song which I had heard a little while before in the close, tossing steerage: ‘O why left I my hame?’

Meantime Jones, relieved of his immediate charge, had gone off to the galley, where we could see a light. There he found a belated cook scouring pans by the radiance of two lanterns, and one of these he sought to borrow. The scullion was backward. ‘Was it one of the crew?’ he asked. And when Jones, smitten with my theory, had assured him that it was a fireman, he reluctantly left his scouring and came towards us at an easy pace, with one of the lanterns swinging from his finger. The light, as it reached the spot, showed us an elderly man, thick-set, and grizzled with years; but the shifting and coarse shadows concealed from us the expression and even the design of his face.

So soon as the cook set eyes on him he gave a sort of whistle.
‘It’s only a passenger!’ said he; and turning about, made, lantern and all, for the galley.

‘He’s a man anyway,’ cried Jones in indignation.

‘Nobody said he was a woman,’ said a gruff voice, which I recognised for that of the bo’s’un. But I think he must have made the remark to give himself a countenance, and because he lacked the courage of his qualities; for, far from joining against us, he helped Jones to get the lantern from the cook.

All this while there was no word of Blackwood or the doctor; and now the officer came to our side of the ship and asked, over the hurricane-deck rails, if the doctor were not yet come. We told him not.

‘No?’ he repeated with a breathing of anger; and we saw him hurry aft in person.

Ten minutes after the doctor made his appearance deliberately enough and examined our patient with the lantern. He made little of the case, had the man brought aft to the dispensary, dosed him, and sent him forward to his bunk. Two of his neighbours in the steerage had now come to our assistance, expressing loud sorrow that such ‘a fine cheery body’ should be sick; and these, claiming a sort of possession, took him entirely under their own care. The drug had probably relieved him, for he struggled no more, and was led along plaintive and patient, but protesting. His heart recoiled at the thought of the steerage. ‘O let me lie down upon the bieldy side,’ he cried; ‘O dinna take me down!’ And again: ‘O why did ever I come upon this miserable voyage?’ And yet once more, with a gasp and a wailing prolongation of the fourth word: ‘I had no call to come.’ But there he was; and by the doctor’s orders and the kind force of his two
shipmates disappeared down the companion of Steerage No. 1 into the den allotted him.

At the foot of our own companion, just where I had found Blackwood, Jones and the bo’s’un were now engaged in talk. This last was a gruff, cruel-looking seaman, who must have passed near half a century upon the seas; square-headed, goat-bearded, with heavy blond eyebrows, and an eye without radiance, but inflexibly steady and hard. I had not forgotten his rough speech; but I remembered also that he had helped us about the lantern; and now seeing him in conversation with Jones, and being choked with indignation, I proceeded to blow off my steam.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I make you my compliments upon your steward,’ and furiously narrated what had happened.

‘I’ve nothing to do with him,’ replied the bo’s’un. ‘They’re all alike. They wouldn’t mind if they saw you all lying dead one upon the top of another.’ And he made a quaint gesture with his pipe, expressive, so far as my imagination served me to interpret, of someone going up in an explosion.

This was enough. A very little humanity went a long way with me after the experience of the evening. A sympathy grew up at once between the bo’s’un and myself; and that night, and during the next few days, I learned to appreciate him better. He was a remarkable type, and not at all the kind of man you find in books. He had been at Sebastopol under English colours; and again in a States ship, ‘after the Alabama, and praying God we shouldn’t find her.’ He was a high Tory and a high Englishman. No manufacturer could have held opinions more hostile to the working man and his strikes. ‘The workmen,’ he said, ‘think nothing of their
country. They think of nothing but themselves. They’re damned greedy, selfish fellows.’ He would not hear of the decadence of England. ‘They say they send us beef from America,’ he argued; ‘but who pays for it? All the money in the world’s in England.’ The Royal Navy was the best of possible services, according to him. ‘Anyway the officers are gentlemen,’ said he; ‘and you can’t get hazed to death by a damned non-commissioned – as you can in the army.’ Among nations, England was the first; then came France. He respected the French navy and liked the French people; and if he were forced to make a new choice in life, ‘by God, he would try Frenchmen!’ For all his looks and rough, cold manners, I observed that children were never frightened by him; they divined him at once to be a friend; and one night when he had chalked his hand and went about stealthily setting his mark on people’s clothes, it was incongruous to hear this formidable old salt chuckling over his boyish monkey trick.

In the morning, my first thought was of the sick man. I was afraid I should not recognise him, so baffling had been the light of the lantern; and found myself unable to decide if he were Scots, English, or Irish. He had certainly employed north-country words and elisions; but the accent and the pronunciation seemed unfamiliar and incongruous in my ear.

To descend on an empty stomach into Steerage No. 1, was an adventure that required some nerve. The stench was atrocious; each respiration tasted in the throat like some horrible kind of cheese; and the squalid aspect of the place was aggravated by so many people worming themselves into
their clothes in the twilight of the bunks. You may guess if I was pleased, not only for him, but for myself also, when I heard that the sick man was better and had gone on deck.

The morning was raw and foggy, though the sun suffused the fog with pink and amber; the fog-horn still blew, stertorous and intermittent; and to add to the discomfort, the seamen were just beginning to wash down the decks. But for a sick man this was heaven compared to the steerage. I found him standing on the hot-water pipe, just forward of the saloon deck house. He was smaller than I had fancied, and plain-looking; but his face was distinguished by strange and fascinating eyes, limpid grey from a distance, but, when looked into, full of changing colours and grains of gold. His manners were mild and uncompromisingly plain; and I soon saw that, when once started, he delighted to talk. His accent and language had been formed in the most natural way, since he was born in Ireland, had lived a quarter of a century on the banks of Tyne, and was married to a Scots wife. A fisherman in the season, he had fished the east coast from Fisherrow to Whitby. When the season was over, and the great boats, which required extra hands, were once drawn up on shore till the next spring, he worked as a labourer about chemical furnaces, or along the wharves unloading vessels. In this comparatively humble way of life he had gathered a competence, and could speak of his comfortable house, his hayfield, and his garden. On this ship, where so many accomplished artisans were fleeing from starvation, he was present on a pleasure trip to visit a brother in New York.

Ere he started, he informed me, he had been warned against the steerage and the steerage fare, and recommended
to bring with him a ham and tea and a spice loaf. But he laughed to scorn such counsels. ‘I’m not afraid,’ he had told his adviser; ‘I’ll get on for ten days. I’ve not been a fisherman for nothing.’ For it is no light matter, as he reminded me, to be in an open boat, perhaps waist-deep with herrings, day breaking with a scowl, and for miles on every hand lee-shores, unbroken, iron-bound, surf-beat, with only here and there an anchorage where you dare not lie, or a harbour impossible to enter with the wind that blows. The life of a North Sea fisher is one long chapter of exposure and hard work and insufficient fare; and even if he makes land at some bleak fisher port, perhaps the season is bad or his boat has been unlucky, and after fifty hours’ unsleeping vigilance and toil, not a shop will give him credit for a loaf of bread. Yet the steerage of the emigrant ship had been too vile for the endurance of a man thus rudely trained. He had scarce eaten since he came on board, until the day before, when his appetite was tempted by some excellent pea-soup. We were all much of the same mind on board, and beginning with myself, had dined upon pea-soup not wisely but too well; only with him the excess had been punished, perhaps because he was weakened by former abstinence, and his first meal had resulted in a cramp. He had determined to live henceforth on biscuit; and when, two months later, he should return to England, to make the passage by saloon. The second cabin, after due inquiry, he scouted as another edition of the steerage.

He spoke apologetically of his emotion when ill. ‘Ye see, I had no call to be here,’ said he; ‘and I thought it was by with me last night. I’ve a good house at home, and plenty to nurse me, and I had no real call to leave them.’ Speaking of
the attentions he had received from his shipmates generally, ‘they were all so kind,’ he said, ‘that there’s none to mention.’ And except in so far as I might share in this, he troubled me with no reference to my services. This was a choice courtesy. I write with all measure, and except in the manner of bowing and scraping, I have never met a finer gentleman. He had the essentials of that business, in all senses of the expression, by heart.

But what affected me in the most lively manner was the wealth of this day-labourer, paying a two months’ pleasure visit to the States, and preparing to return in the saloon, and the new testimony rendered by his story, not so much to the horrors of the steerage as to the habitual comfort of the working classes. One foggy, frosty December evening, I encountered on Liberton Hill, near Edinburgh, an Irish labourer trudging homeward from the fields. Our roads lay together, and it was natural that we should fall into talk. He was covered with mud; an inoffensive, ignorant creature, who thought the Atlantic Cable was a secret contrivance of the masters the better to oppress labouring mankind; and I confess I was astonished to learn that he had nearly three hundred pounds in the bank. But this man had travelled over most of the world, and enjoyed wonderful opportunities on some American railroad, with two dollars a shift and double pay on Sunday and at night; whereas my fellow-passenger had never quitted Tyneside, and had made all that he possessed in that same accursed, down-falling England, whence skilled mechanics, engineers, millwrights, and carpenters were fleeing as from the native country of starvation.
Fitly enough, we slid off on the subject of strikes and wages and hard times. Being from the Tyne, and a man who had gained and lost in his own pocket by these fluctuations, he had much to say, and held strong opinions on the subject. He spoke sharply of the masters, and, when I led him on, of the men also. The masters had been selfish and obstructive; the men selfish, silly, and light-headed. He rehearsed to me the course of a meeting at which he had been present, and the somewhat long discourse which he had there pronounced, calling into question the wisdom and even the good faith of the Union delegates; and although he had escaped himself through flush times and starvation times with a handsomely provided purse, he had so little faith in either man or master, and so profound a terror for the unerring Nemesis of mercantile affairs, that he could think of no hope for our country outside of a sudden and complete political subversion. Down must go Lords and Church and Army; and capital, by some happy direction, must change hands from worse to better, or England stood condemned. Such principles, he said, were growing ‘like a seed.’

From this mild, soft, domestic man, these words sounded unusually ominous and grave. I had heard enough revolutionary talk among my workmen fellow-passengers; but most of it was hot and turgid, and fell discredited from the lips of unsuccessful men. This man was calm; he had attained prosperity and ease; he was a gentleman; he disapproved the policy which had been pursued by labour in the past; and yet this was his panacea – to rend the old country from end to end, and from top to bottom, and in clamour and civil discord remodel it with the hand of violence. I thought of
the Bo’swain, and wondered how such men and measures would recommend themselves to him and his like, if he had any. I thought too of the blessings of emigration: that men sufficiently instructed, who had for long times together received wages greater than many a man of letters and who yet, from drunkenness, shiftlessness and lack of balance, had failed flatly in life’s battle, could still escape and make a new beginning somewhere else. For if the polity is to be subverted and the state’s pedestals thrown down, let it be by clear-seeing people strung up by inborn generosity to the task, and not by waifs and beggars exasperated by external and perhaps well deserved reverses.
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“In the steerage there are males and females; in the second cabin ladies and gentlemen. For some time after I came aboard I thought I was only a male; but in the course of a voyage of discovery between decks, I came on a brass plate, and learned that I was still a gentleman. Nobody knew it, of course.”

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