

vessel that day. How many eyes are strained after that first mere thread of smoke on the horizon! What ringing cheers as the two great steamships near each other! What an amount of anxious enthusiasm when it is known that a boat is coming off from the other vessel, and what feverish excitement to learn all the news! They may have been seven or eight days without any, and in that time what may not have occurred in the history of nations!

Then, again, the sea itself, in its varying beauty or grandeur, has for most travellers a great interest. Is there not a chance of seeing an iceberg, a whale, or even the great sea serpent?

In March-April, 1869, the writer crossed the Atlantic in splendid weather. The ocean was, for the ten days occupied on the passage, almost literally as calm as a lake; even the lady passengers emerged from their cabins two or three days before they would otherwise have ventured forth. Among them was one lady seventy-five years of age, who was running away—so she informed the passengers—from her husband, and going to join her children in the States. This female had “stood it” for fifty years, but now, she said, she was going to end her days in peace. Here was a champion of “woman’s rights!” Alas! on arrival in New York there was no one to receive her, and she was taken back on board the steamer. What became of her afterwards we know not.

The woes of steerage passengers have been graphically described by Charles Dickens. He tells us that “unquestionably any man who retained his cheerfulness among the steerage accommodations of that noble and fast-sailing packet, the *Screw*, was solely indebted to his own resources, and shipped his good humour like his provisions, without any contribution or assistance from the owners. A dark, low, stifling cabin, surrounded by berths filled to overflowing with men, women, and children, in various stages of sickness and misery, is not the liveliest place of assembly at any time; but when it is so crowded, as the steerage cabin of the *Screw* was every passage out, that mattresses and beds are heaped on the floor, to the extinction of everything like comfort, cleanliness, and decency, it is liable to operate not only as a pretty strong barrier against amiability of temper, but as a positive encourager of selfish and rough humours.” Dickens follows with a dismally correct picture of the passengers, with their shabby clothes, paltry stores of poor food and other supplies, and their wealth of family. He adds that every kind of suffering bred of poverty, illness, banishment, and tedious voyaging in bad weather was crammed into that confined space, and the picture, almost revolting in its naked truthfulness, was not overdrawn in those days. It could not be written, however, of any steerage whatever in our times, for partly from governmental care, partly from the general improvement in means of travel, partly from competition and the praiseworthy desire of the owners to earn a high character for their vessels’ accommodations, the steerage of to-day is *comparatively* decent; although it is not yet that which it should be, nor has the progress of improvement kept anything like pace with railway accommodation of the cheaper kind. Yet one would think it to the interest of owners* to make the steerage an endurable place of temporary abode.

* The late Mr. W. S. Lindsay, in his “History of Merchant Shipping,” stated that Mr. and Mrs. Inman, “greatly to their credit, made a voyage in one of their earliest emigrant steamers, expressly for the purpose of ameliorating the discomforts and evils hitherto but too common in emigrant ships.”