

[From the Dublin Nation, July 27.]

O'MEAGHER'S MESSAGE TO IRELAND.

PART I.

Ross, District of Campbell Town,
Van Diemen's Land,
Saturday, Feb. 16th, 1850.

MY DEAR DUFFY,—I am sure you will forgive my delay in writing to you, the moment you break the seal of this letter, and run your eye over its exceedingly liberal proportions! Of course, I do not offer any apology for having been so extremely slow, for, I am confident, you will not ascribe the fault to any discreditable cause; at all events, you will not accuse me with an unkind forgetfulness.

The fact is, I have been collecting matter for a long despatch. Every letter passing between two warm friends should be fairly proportioned, I conceive, to the distance it has to travel; and where, as in this case, sixteen thousand miles intervene, nothing short of half a quire should be attempted.

So much by way of preface: now for the narrative itself.

On Saturday, the 28th of October, 1849, between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, we reached our destination. The voyage was what they call an average one, having been accomplished in a hundred and some odd days. The weather, during it, was, generally speaking, extremely fine. From Kingstown Harbour to the Cape not more than a fortnight's rain occurred; and that, not all at once, but at intervals; three days, at a time, being the longest succession of wet weather with which we were troubled.

The passage across the Indian Ocean, however, was, on the whole, extremely unpleasant. Heavy falls of rain, accompanied by the wildest gales, frequently occurred; the latter driving us to the South, and introducing us—at a distance, to be sure, but unmistakably enough—to the white bears and icebergs of the bleak Antarctic. Add to this, that, for the six weeks we were fighting through these cold, wild waves, not a sail appeared, nor had we the faintest glimpse of land.

Yet, what with our little library, and pens, and log-books—M'Manus's backgammon box, and other harmless resources—the time went by less irksomely than you might suppose, and left us nothing very serious to complain of. Indeed, somehow or other—in sunshine and in storm—running before the wind, ten knots an hour—or rocking sluggishly in a calm—in all weathers, and with every motion of our little ship, we managed to keep alive most cheerfully, and bid defiance to all the shades of Tartarus.

Occupations like these served in great measure to relieve the monotony of our sea-life, and render it something more than endurable. Were it not for them, indeed, the voyage would have been most tiresome and insipid. Except in the coasting-trade, or for an odd cruise in the Mediterranean, I would not be a sailor for all the world. The sameness of the life would be my death before long. "As to the sea," observed Mr. Solomon Gillis to his nephew, "that's well enough in fiction, won't do in fact: Wally, but it won't do at all."

With regard to our accommodations on board, nothing could have been better. We had an excellent saloon, in which we breakfasted, dined, took tea, read, wrote, and got through a variety of other agreeable pursuits. Our berths ran along two sides of it, and were shut off from the saloon by means of sliding-doors, and pannelings of open work.

The regulations laid down for our observance, were but few, and far from being strict.

In the first place, we were forbidden to have any intercourse with the ship's company, save and except with the Captain and the Surgeon. In the next place, only two of us, at a time, were permitted to be on deck together. At nine o'clock, p.m., we were obliged to retire to our berths; at which hour the Sergeant of Marines extinguished the lamp in the saloon, saw that we were all safe and four in number, then locked the door of the saloon on the outside, and reporting "all right," delivered the key to the Captain. Outside of the quarters, a Marine was stationed, night and day, whose duty it was to report our presence every four hours, and cut off all communication between the aforesaid quarters and the rest of the lower deck. Another Marine was appointed to wait on us, and perform a variety of domestic duties: so that, in a peculiar way, and to a certain extent, he became a modern edition of Proteus; assuming different characters, presenting various appearances, and exhibiting divers accomplishments and faculties, in the course of every four-and-twenty hours; passing, with astonishing facility through the most startling transitions—from cook to butler, and from butler to chambermaid. He was an honest, active, respectable, good man, and his name was Spriggs.

As for the "Swift" herself—she was a sprightly, handsome, little brig—as steady as a rock, but as graceful as a swan. I wish you could have seen her in a storm: at no other time did she look so stoutly advantageous. With a broken, scowling sky above her, and a broken, scowling sea beneath, she gallantly dashed on. Glancing down the steepest valleys, she seemed to gather fresh force and daring from the steepness of the fall; then breasting the highest waves, she would top them with a bound, and flinging their white crests in sparkling atoms, right and left before her, spring further on—her beautiful light spars quivering like lances in the gale.

As for the officers, they were fine, generous, gallant fellows. Owing to the restrictions imposed by the Home Office, our intercourse with them, as you may easily suppose, was extremely limited; but, limited as it was, we soon were led to conceive the truest esteem for them. England may feel proud as long as she has such brave, upright, noble hearts to serve her. Their frank, generous, warm nature—their manly, gallant bearing—form a striking contrast, indeed, to the cold, cramped rigidity of some of the officials here.

The Captain was a most courteous, gentle, amiable, good man; strict, to be sure, in carrying out, in our regard, the instructions he had received; but never, in the slightest degree, inquisitive, exacting or officious. Far from it. Wherever it was in his power to be so—wherever his instructions left him to his own discretion—we found him always willing and anxious to grant us any little indulgence we asked for. I do not think that a better man could have been selected to discharge the painful duty with which he was entrusted. Very probably, you may have heard, long before this, that we were not permitted to remain more than a few hours at the Cape. On the evening of Wednesday, September 11th, between seven and eight o'clock,

we dropped anchor in Simon's Bay; but had hardly done so, when orders came from Commodore Weyl, the officer in command of the station, directing us to be off about our business next day, at twelve o'clock precisely; and, furthermore, prohibiting the slightest communication between the "Swift" and the shore.

These orders were issued in consequence of the storm which was raging at Cape Town, and which threatened to sweep Sir Harry Smith, his government and household, mounted riflemen and all, right into the sea, should any convict, political or otherwise, be permitted to set foot within the immaculate territory of the Hottentot and Boer. The result of which, so far as we were concerned, was simply this, that next day, precisely at 12 o'clock, we were running out to sea again, in a very disconsolate condition, indeed; having a very scanty supply of fresh provisions on board, and ten weeks' accumulation of soiled linen in our portmanteaus and bags.

From that day, September the 12th, until Saturday, October 27th, we saw no land; not so much as would sod a lark, as they say at home. It is true, we should, by right, have passed between St. Paul's and Amsterdam; two volcanic islands, inhabited by wild goats and pigs, lying midway between the Cape and Van Diemen's Land, and included in the dependencies of the Mauritius. The gale, however, which took us out from Simon's Bay, bore us so far astray from the direct course, that we were obliged to leave the more southerly of these islands sixty miles to the north.

Well, so much for the "Swift," and our voyage out; of which, as you cannot help remarking, I have said little. It would, however, have been difficult for me to have said much more. One day's sailing is just the same as a three months' voyage, and from a sketch of one, an excellent outline of the other may be easily conceived. Breakfast—tea, without milk, dry biscuit, and brown sugar; dinner—salt-beef, preserved potatoes, bottled porter, a joint of mutton, perhaps, and a bowl of pea-soup; shifting of sails, yarn spinning; rope-splicing; hands to quarters; hammock-scrubbing; singing, drumming, dancing, fifing, at the fore-castle; the first watch, lights extinguished—there's a complete history of a voyage round the world! So far, at all events, as my experience enables me to decide.

But, for all the dreariness of those six weeks, in our passage up the Derwent we enjoyed a delightful compensation. Nothing I have seen in other countries—not even in my own—equals the beauty, the glory, of the scenery through which we glided up from Tasman's Head to Hobart Town.

To the left were bold cliffs, compact and straight-built as the finest masonry, springing up, full two hundred feet and more, above the surface of the water, and bearing on their broad and level summits the forests of the gum-tree. To the right, eight miles away, lay the green lowlands of Tasman's Peninsula, sparkling in the clear, sweet sunshine of that lovely evening.

Then, as the little ship glided quietly and gracefully along, a signal-tower, with the Red Flag floating from it, appeared in an open space among the trees. Still further on, a farm-house, with its white walls and green verandah shone out from some cleft or valley close at hand; and the fresh, rich fragrance of flowers, and ripening fruits, and waving grass, came floating to us through the blue, bright air. By and bye, the trees became more scarce, and handsome houses rose up in quick succession, and, forming into graceful terraces, told us, by many a sign of life and comfort, that the town was near at hand, and that we should be soon at rest. Last of all, Mount Wellington, a majestic mountain, towering to the height of four thousand feet behind the town, and wearing a thin circle of snow upon its head, disclosed itself in its all greatness, grandeur, and solemnity.

These were the principal features of the scenery—the beautiful, glorious scenery—within the shade of which we passed up to Hobart Town. You can easily imagine the delight they inspired, the influence they had upon us. Gazing at them, we lost sight of our misfortunes, and the dull, cold destiny which at that moment, like the deepening twilight, fell upon our path. Gazing at them, we forgot for the while we were prisoners, destined for life to sojourn in a land in the growth of which we could take no interest—the prosperity of which would claim from us no proud congratulation—the glory of which could never stir within our hearts one glad emotion, nor win from our lip or hand the faintest recognition.

It was nearly nine o'clock when we cast anchor. The night had fallen, and all we could see of Hobart Town were the lamp-lights—up there, a lonely couple—down there, a misty group—alone there, a twinkling line—beyond there, an odd one, flickering like a candle in a wine-vault, and doing its best to keep in.

Through the darkness, however, there came a variety of sounds. Now, the clatter of a bell; a moment after, a voice exclaiming, "Peter, where are you?" then a chorus of loud laughs, shrill whistling, and the cracking of whips; all round us, the soft sighs and murmurings of the river, the creaking of cordage, the dip and splash of oars; by-and-bye, the bugle-call, filling the calm night with clear, strong notes, and the crashing of the drums in the barrack-square.

Next morning, when we went on deck, the sun was shining warmly; and in its soft radiance, the town, the noble mountain close behind it, the ships and boats, the trees, the gardens, cottages and villas all about, looked charming in the extreme. It was a beautiful, bold picture; and, it being Sunday, there seemed to be a sweet tranquillity diffused all through it, which rendered it still more enchanting.

For a good part of the day, we amused ourselves with the glasses, making the most minute observations, and curiously inspecting every object within sight. Horses, cabs, policemen, bonnets, soldiers, sign-boards, sailors, warehouses, chimney-tops, street-door knockers, wheel-barrows, church spires, flower-pots—nothing was omitted in our search. The smallest trifle became the subject of the deepest interest; and even the poor dog we caught playing amongst the bales and baulks, the casks and spars, upon the wharf in front of us, was followed through all his windings, tumblings, twists, and twirls, with the keenest curiosity.

The whole of this day, we had the "Swift." I may say, to ourselves; most of the officers, and, towards evening, most of the men, being ashore, enjoying themselves in every direction; as well they might, poor fellows! after their four months' weary work.

Of course, no communication of an official nature was made to us this day. The following morning, however, the Assistant-Comptroller, accompanied by a clerk, arrived in a whale-boat, and shortly after

their arrival, we were requested to attend the Captain to our saloon. Here we found the fashionable arrivals; and, as an indispensable part of the lugubrious ceremony of transportation, we were introduced to them in due rotation by Captain Aldham. Whereupon the chairs were taken, and Mr. Nairn, the Assistant-Comptroller, in a smooth, neat speech, opened the proceedings.

First of all, I must not omit to mention, he disengaged a yard or so of thin red tape from a bundle of long, thick-wove, blue paper; and in so doing exhibited an easy dexterity of finger, and a deep-water placidity of look. Having separated the papers, and placed them in a line along the table, one after the other, just as if he was arranging a set of dominoes, he gently fixed his elbows upon the documents, and joining his hands in a meek and devotional manner before him, begged leave to observe—

"That he was directed by His Excellency, Sir William Denison, to communicate with William Smith O'Brien, Thomas Francis Meagher, Terence Bellew M'Manus, and Patrick O'Donohoe, prisoners of state on board her Majesty's sloop-of-war, the 'Swift.' The object of his visit was to inform the aforesaid prisoners, that Sir William Denison had received certain instructions relative to them from the Secretary of State for the Home Department; that, by these instructions, Sir William Denison was authorized to grant 'tickets-of-leave' to each and all the aforesaid prisoners, provided that, in the first place, the Captain under whose charge they had been during the voyage, was enabled to speak favourably of their conduct, and that, in the second place, they pledged their honour not to make use of the comparative liberty which 'tickets-of-leave' conferred, for the purpose of escaping from the colony."

Mr. Nairn begged leave to add—

"He was happy to inform us, that Captain Aldham had reported favourably of our conduct, and, such being the case, it only remained for him now to receive our parole not to attempt an escape from the colony."

This speech being ended, a profound silence ensued, during which the Assistant-Comptroller delicately fiddled with his documents, and glided off into a serene abstraction.

I never met, in Gaol or Courthouse, in the Queen's Bench or the Henry-street Police-office, so sleek, so tranquil, so elaborate an official. His motions were most delicately adjusted, even to the opening of an eye-lid, or the removal from his forehead of a fly. His voice flowed richly and softly from his lips, like a glass of Curacao into an India-rubber flask. His fingers appeared to have been formed for the express purpose of writing with the finest steel pen, pressing the clearest cut official seal, and measuring out, for despatches on the public service, the neatest and narrowest red tape. The knot of his neck-tie was an epitome of the man. It struck one as having been put on by means of the most minute and exquisite machinery. To have accomplished such a knot by the aid of manual labour seemed at first sight impossible.

The silence was broken by O'Brien, who begged to state that he, for one, was not prepared to accept a "ticket-of-leave" on the conditions specified by the Assistant-Comptroller;—he certainly had little or no intention of escaping, but felt strongly disinclined to pledge his word to the observance of an arrangement which would preclude his availing himself of any opportunity to escape that might occur hereafter.

I took a different view of the matter. It appeared to me that, whether we pledged our honour to the fulfilment of the conditions proposed by the Government or withheld it, an escape was out of the question.

In the former case, our parole, of course, would bind us more firmly than the heaviest chains to the island. In the latter case, it was clear, the authorities would adopt such measures as to render it absolutely impracticable. It seemed to me, then, that the point at issue resolved itself simply into a choice between two evils. Our detention, in either case, being certain, I thought it much more desirable to accept a small amount of liberty, fettered only by my word of honour, than surrender myself to the confinement of a prison, and the vexatious surveillance of turnkeys and constables.

Moreover, the condition annexed to our holding "tickets-of-leave" appeared to me a fair and an honourable one; it exacted no compromise of conduct or opinion; it exacted no hypocrisy, no submission; it simply required of us not to make use of certain privileges for the purpose of effecting an escape; and going thus far, and no farther, I felt convinced, that in pledging myself to the fulfilment of it, I would do no unworthy act. In other countries, better and nobler men have not hesitated, as prisoners-of-war, to accept and fulfil a similar condition.

O'Donohoe and M'Manus took the same view, and we three, consequently, agreed to pledge ourselves to remain in the colony so long as we retained the "tickets-of-leave."

Having come to this determination, the Assistant-Comptroller requested us to put our opinions in writing, in the shape of letters addressed to him. "It would be his duty," he observed, in conclusion, "to lay them before Sir William Denison, and receive his Excellency's reply to them."

I enclose you a copy of my letter. You will perceive from it that I have accepted the "ticket-of-leave," on the condition proposed to us, for six months only. I was unwilling to pledge myself for an indefinite period: so that, at the expiration of the six months, I will be at liberty to surrender myself as a prisoner, or renew the contract.

M'Manus and O'Donohoe wrote letters to the same effect.

Two hours later, Mr. Nairn returned, and informed us that his Excellency had been pleased to grant "tickets-of-leave," on the condition hereinbefore specified, to Thomas Francis Meagher, Terence Bellew M'Manus, and Patrick O'Donohoe; that the official papers authorizing this arrangement would be sent on board next day; and that William Smith O'Brien was to be sent to the probation-station of Maria Island, and be there detained, in strict custody, during the pleasure of his Excellency.

Having made this announcement, the Assistant-Comptroller drew in his lips, economised a smile, slightly bowed, and, drawing back his hat as he inclined his head, withdrew.

Hardly had he disappeared, when another official came on board, and solicited the pleasure of our company. This gentleman was no less a personage than the Assistant-Registrar, and his business was to take an inventory of our respective heights, ages, pursuits, and families; also, the shape of our noses, the complexion of our cheeks, the color of our eyes and

hair, the character of our chins, and our general appearances as human beings. "A delicate, a very delicate business," he whispered to me as I entered, "and one, which considering our position in society, he wished to get through as delicately as possible."

Whereon he begged of me to see that the door was shut, and in a very mild manner—the mildest manner possible—commenced his observations. One would have thought we were made of down or gossamer, he looked so gently at us; and then he noted down the results of his inspection so softly, that one might have also imagined he wrote upon velvet. While this was going on, I could not help remarking to O'Donohoe that it forcibly reminded me of Mr. Pickwick's introduction to the Fleet, and the bewilderment with which he sat in the arm-chair whilst his portrait was taken.

The likeness finished, the Assistant-Registrar shut up his portfolio, expressed his regret at having troubled us so much, and backing to the door with two or three scrapes—expressive, no doubt, of high consideration and esteem—betook himself to the wharf, and from thence to his office, there to make out and distribute copies of the performance he had so nimbly and expeditiously completed.

The rest of the evening we had to ourselves. And a lovely evening it was. There we were, pacing the quarterdeck, disconsolately gazing at the poor little "Swift," which had been unrigged and dismantled in the morning, and now lay like a mournful wreck upon the brest of the calm and noble river. Oftentimes we looked out far a-head, watching every sail that made up towards us, for the news had just reached that the "Emma," from Sydney, with O'Dogherty and Martin on board, was hourly expected. At other times we turned our eyes to the shore, and found, in the passing to-and-fro of sailors, cabs, and waggon-loads, and a hundred other things, a pleasant relief from the monotony of our wooden walls.

The following day we received our instructions. I was directed to proceed next morning at half-past three o'clock, by coach, to Campbell Town—the principal town of the district which had been assigned me. M'Manus was to start at a later hour for New Norfolk. O'Donohoe was to leave in the course of the day, and take up his quarters in Hobart Town. O'Brien was to be ready to sail for Maria Island by seven o'clock.

This was Tuesday, the 30th of October. After nightfall, just as we had retired to our berths, the "Emma," dropped up the river and cast anchor close beside us.

Next morning, at three o'clock, the guard-boat came alongside the "Swift," and having wished good-bye to O'Brien, M'Manus, O'Donohoe, and the officer on watch, I got into it, and was soon on dry land once more. I arrived at the hotel as the coach was on the point of starting, and five minutes after was rattled away at a magnificent pace from the town; of which, owing to the darkness at the time, I saw little more than half a dozen lamp-lights, two or three constables, and the sentry-box at the Government House.

As the morning dawned, the fresh and beautiful features of the country gradually disclosed themselves. One by one they seemed to wake up, and, shaking off the dew and mist, scatter smiles and fragrance all along our road. There was the river breaking into sparkling life, and flowing cheerfully away, as if it had been pent up and worried all the night, and was glad to feel the warm sun once more. There were farm-houses, with cozy hay-ricks, close behind them, and fowls spreading out their wings, and, with many a light and nimble effort, shaking off their drowsiness. There was the green corn waving, and the grey clouds melting in the silver sunshine along the hills before us. There were handsome villas next, like those we had seen coming up the Derwent, with their gardens and verandas, and the blue smoke rising from their chimney tops. There was, by-and-bye, a waggon, painted blue and red, with its ponderous market-load, its fine team of horses, and a large white dog chained to the axle-tree of the hind wheels, rumbling past us, and leaving in the yellow dust broad deep tracks, and straws, behind it. There was, just a few yards a-head, a clean white turnpike, and the keeper tumbling out to open it, with his woollen nightcap on, and his braces clattering at his heels. Then came carts, and cows, and shepherds, with their kangaroo-skin knapsacks on their backs, and the night coach, with the windows up, and a thick steam upon them, hindering the faintest sight of the cramped and stifled passengers within. At last, there was the heart of the country itself, with its beautiful hills, rising in long and shadowy tiers one above the other, and the brown foliage of its woods, and the blackened stumps of many a tough old tree, and mobs upon mobs of sheep, and the green parrots, and the wattle birds, and broad lagoons, and broader plains, and ten thousand things besides!

For a long, long time I was in raptures with my drive, and almost forgot I was hurrying away still further from my own poor country, and journeying amid the scenes of a land, in the fate of which I could take no interest—for the glory of which I could breathe no prayer.

About 3 o'clock I arrived in Campbell Town, and was set down at the hotel "where the coach dined," along with my portmanteau and hat-case. After dinner, I strolled out to inspect the institutions of the place, and make myself acquainted in a general way, with its various attractions and resources.

Twenty minutes rendered me fully conversant with the subject of my inquiry. A glance, indeed, was sufficient to inform me that this celebrated town consisted of one main street, with two or three dusty branches to the left; and, at right angles with these, a sort of Boulevard, in which the police-office, the lock-up, and the stocks are conveniently arranged.

The main street has one side to it only. The ribs of this side consist of four hotels; a warehouse; a board-and-lodging house, with Napoleon upon a green lamp, just as you go in; half a dozen private residences, furnished with a ground floor, and a back and front entrance; a jeweller's shop; butcher's stall; a sign post; and two sheds. Opposite to this line of edifices, and parallel with it, at an interval of fifty feet, runs a wooden paling, which, mid-way up the town, is broken by three cottages, a hay rick and the post-office. Aloof, at the uttermost extremity, in a straight line with the paling at the post-office, and the hay rick, stands the Established Church—a gaunt structure, compiled of bricks, with facing of white stone.

Having seen so much, I thought I might as well go to bed. To bed, then, I went, and dreamed all night of Eden. Not the Eden of the Scriptures, but that social and stirring Eden so agreeably described in the history of "Chuzzlewit."

(To be continued.)