

Appendix
(W.)

22nd March.

Emigrants, and had nothing whatever to do with the relief of sickness.

At this Board we took an early opportunity of addressing a letter to all the Emigration officers in this country, warning them of the momentous nature of the season which might be expected, and stating that we reckoned upon their exertions to meet the occasion, adequately. One of our number repaired to Liverpool to inspect the manner in which the service was conducted at that great port, and to consult with Lieutenant Hodder on the best means of securing an efficient discharge of the duty throughout the harassing months which were likely to ensue. Some additional suggestions and improvements in the Passengers' Bill, which has since become law, were the fruits of this visit.

(Grants for ships put back in distress.) We were authorised to expend a moderate sum in meeting the difficulties which might be expected from vessels driven back by weather—a fund which, in some cases, we found of great service in alleviating distress, and enabling people to supply themselves with the requisites for a renewed voyage.

Information and ship regulations distributed A short and simple notice for the information of Emigrants of the humbler classes was drawn up, and we caused several copies to be put on board every passenger ship; and although there are no means of compelling the observance of discipline among the Emigrants, we ought to mention that the masters of all passenger vessels are furnished, by our desire, with certain tables of regulations, recommended by authority of this Commission for the good of all on board. We have been assured that this is calculated materially to assist commanders who wish to promote cleanliness and good order.

Instructions to land sick passengers. Nor did we think it necessary to confine ourselves within the powers strictly belonging to us by the Passengers' Act. We authorised the several officers to call in medical aid should they suspect the existence of fever, and to insist upon the landing of any infected passengers before the ship should sail, even though the law gave no positive right to make such a demand. We felt sure that, in such an emergency, no one would blame our advancing beyond mere legal powers of interference; and, in point of fact, the course we desired was acquiesced in by all concerned, from the obvious necessity of the case.

Impossibility, however, of detecting the cases of insipient disease. But unfortunately the seeds of disease were so rife, that no mere casual inspection of large multitudes of people suddenly assembled together from a distance, and whom, by the nature of the case, it was also necessary not to detain, could avail to bring the evil to light. In several of the ships which put back, fever had extensively broken out after the first day or two at sea, showing how widely spread must have been the beginnings of disease when the people started. We are convinced that in such a state of things no medical inspection could have been generally successful, unless the law and habits of this country had been such that the people could be detained for some time for observation, whether or not they wished it, in places free from the danger of new infection. But we need scarcely say this would have been impracticable. At Liverpool alone, more than 8000 would often arrive and depart in the course of a week. Setting aside all other difficulties, barracks or tents would have been necessary for at least 10,000 or 12,000 persons,

Inquiry made as to carrying Surgeons in the ships.

We anxiously inquired amongst some of the most eminent members of the medical profession whether, if the ships were prevented from sailing without surgeons, it would be possible for owners to procure them in sufficient numbers, and with sufficient promptitude, not to stop the Emigration. We have always been favourable, as Lord Grey is aware, to the measure, if it could be shown to be practicable. But we found that no one well acquainted with the circumstances would venture to recommend the introduction of such a rule this year. The rate at which people were proceeding was such that at least 622 surgeons would have been required in the course of the first six months. Nor would they all have been required at a few large towns where a considerable supply of Surgeons might more reasonably be hoped for; but some of them must have been found, without delay, at each of the various ports and creeks of England, Ireland, and Scotland, from which Emigrants may happen to proceed; and in cases where the condition could not be fulfilled, the consequence would have been, that poor people who had come from great distances to a strange port, and had parted with all their means, would have found the master of the ship unable to give them the passage for which they had contracted.

Question whether special legislation should have been tried. But even supposing it admitted that the existing law had not been neglected, and also that in ordinary years that law had been sufficient for its purpose, it may be asked whether the Government ought not to have proposed special legislation for the extraordinary circumstances of this year. This is a question which, in the main, must belong to higher authority than ours; but we will offer a few observations. We had proposed in the winter, as will be within Lord Grey's recollection, a Consolidated Act, embodying some improvements which we thought desirable, and we afterwards selected from it, by his Lordship's desire, such clauses as appeared to us to be more immediately wanted; but we cannot for a moment say, that we think that if either the longer bill had been brought into Parliament, or the shorter one had been passed at an earlier stage of the Session than actually took place, either could have prevented the sweeping misfortunes of this season. The State of this question at the beginning of the year. fact is, that, at the commencement of the year, no fever whatever having yet appeared, and the existing law having been found sufficient in the greatest seasons of Emigration—a starving people being at the same time about to fly from famine to a land which promised plenty—it is hardly to be conceived that any Government could have proposed, or that the public would ever have received, those stringent and almost prohibitory enactments which alone could have afforded even a chance of preventing the disease which appeared in the summer. The fever, as we mentioned before, frequently broke out almost immediately after departure, plainly showing that it depended on no faults within the ship, but that it was taken out from the place of departure. We doubt whether any measure whatever would have been efficient except some one which either directly or indirectly compelled the great majority of the Emigrants altogether to relinquish their purpose.

More power of control ascribed to the Government than would be possible. In the expectations of efficacy from public measures on this subject, it seems to me that we have been too often to be assumed, as is remarked before, that Emigrants to North America must in some way be selected by, or fall under the direct power of, the Government. Complaints are expressed that so many poor people go—that so many weak people go—that they are not more ef-

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