

No. 5.

MEMORANDUM for the AGENT-GENERAL, London.

(No. 64-72.)

HAVING taken into consideration the Report of the Commission appointed to investigate the circumstances connected with the recent voyage of the ship "England," the Government desire to draw your attention to the defective arrangements which the evidence shows to have existed on board that ship, and to suggest the means which it is desirable to adopt in order to prevent their recurrence.

1. In consequence of the ship not having completed her loading at the date fixed for receiving the emigrants in London, they were subjected to great hardship during the first two days. Instead of being provided with shore accommodation, they were huddled together on board, exposed to unusually inclement weather, and irregularly supplied with food.

2. His Excellency has been requested to call the attention of the Imperial Commissioners to the laxity displayed in the Government inspection of the ship and ship's stores. It is certain that the ventilation of the "England," when inspected at Gravesend, must have been deficient, and the mortality would probably have been still more serious had not Captain Harrington taken extraordinary steps to improve it. The evidence states that no inspection of the provisions and stores took place, an omission which, fortunately, in this case did not result injuriously, as all turned out to be of excellent quality.

The attention of the Imperial Commissioners will also be called to the very formal nature of the inspection of the passengers at Gravesend. It is uncertain that the whole of them were inspected, and it is open to question whether, if that inspection had been more exact, the man in whom small-pox first appeared would have been allowed to proceed on his voyage.

3. Probably the sickness would have been greatly reduced had the surgeon not been in ill-health. It is otherwise difficult to understand how a duly qualified surgeon of the ability which the evidence shows Dr. Leigh to have at one time possessed, should have been unable to distinguish between measles and small-pox, and should have taken no steps for isolating the sick, or even been aware of its necessity.

4. The bad stowage of the cargo, or, rather, the loading with too much dead weight, which lead to the excessive rolling of the ship, and endangered its safety and that of the people.

The following are the means for preventing a recurrence of these defects, which the Government desire to bring under your notice:—

(1.) The Government have learnt from the London newspapers that there has been for some months an unusual number of cases of small-pox in London, and especially in the East End of it; and that it will therefore, for the present at least, be incurring a great risk if the ordinary lodging-houses are resorted to, should any of this season's ships be unprepared to receive the emigrants on their arrival.

But the locality of the Docks is considered an undesirable lodging-place under any circumstances, not only on account of the danger of infection, but because of the moral risk incurred by the emigrants, many of whom will be young women from the country, under no efficient control.

(2.) These twofold reasons long since induced the Imperial Commissioners to select Plymouth as the port of departure, and the Victorian Agency also adopted it. The Government are desirous that the same course should, if possible, be pursued by yourself; and now that Victoria has temporarily suspended emigration, it is not anticipated that you will find much difficulty in making arrangements for the use of the well-appointed dépôt established at that port. Its use will enable you to carry out a system of individual inspection by the ship's surgeon, as presently pointed out.

I would take this opportunity of remarking that the statement of the surgeon placed in charge of the emigrants at the Quarantine Station, relative to the sufferings of the emigrants during the passage from the Continent to London, to which I called your attention in a previous memorandum, turns out to have been wholly incorrect. You will recollect that he reported to the Board of Health that "the Scandinavian passengers declared that they were treated like so many brutes, on their passage from Copenhagen to London;" but the evidence happily establishes the fact that the between-deck passage you had arranged to provide them with was duly provided, and that Dr. Bulmer's report was entirely without foundation.

(3.) I have already, in my memorandum of the 16th March, No. 37, directed you as to the mode to be adopted in the appointment of surgeons; and when that course is pursued by you, it will scarcely be possible that the evils which have resulted from the ignorance and want of attention displayed by Dr. Leigh can be repeated.

Under the most favourable circumstances the medical inspection by the Imperial officers must necessarily be more or less cursory, and it will be requisite, therefore, that the surgeon should join the emigrants at the Plymouth dépôt several days before the date of embarkation, and closely inspect and watch them there.

The Government are anxious to avoid burdening you with details; suffice it to say that the plan pursued in the Plymouth dépôt, by the Imperial and Victorian Governments, is that which you are instructed to carry out, both at that port and the Clyde.

(4.) The stowage of the ship, the fittings, hospitals, ventilation, and examination of stores, require that you should have in your employ an efficient "ships husband," who will supervise the whole of the details connected with ship-board, from the day the ship is placed on the berth to that of her departure. By no other means can you secure the faithful carrying out of the duties devolving both on yourself and the charterers.

It is impossible that you can give personal attention to such matters, and it is only fitting that, in requiring you to bear the great responsibility and anxiety which the conduct of the large emigration now flowing to New Zealand imposes, every means should be placed at your disposal to enable you to conduct it advantageously to all concerned.

The whole of the suggestions made by the Commission are more or less important, and I shall be obliged by your giving them your best attention, with a view to practical effect, so far as circumstances will allow.

Public Works Office, Wellington, 5th June, 1872.

W. REEVES.