

refer you upon this point to former correspondence, and especially to my predecessor's letters No. 224, of 22nd October, 1873, respecting the ship "The Douglas;" No. 29, of the 7th May, 1874, respecting the "Woodlark;" and No. 180, of 29th June, 1874, respecting the "La Hogue." Although it does not appear that special instructions were given you in the matter, I regret no steps appear to have been taken to prevent their recurrence. I desire now that you will instruct your Despatching Officer not to embark the emigrants until the cargo of the ships is on board and the fittings completed.

I have, &c.,

The Agent-General for New Zealand, London.

H. A. ATKINSON.

Enclosure in No. 85.

REPORT of ROYAL COMMISSION on Ship "Berar."

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

Wellington, 8th March, 1875.

We, the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the origin, existence, and treatment of any infectious or other disease on board the ship "Berar" during her voyage from London to Port Nicholson, having proceeded to make the inquiry entrusted to us, and having taken evidence, have the honor to report that we have elicited the following facts:—

1. Scarlet fever was taken on board the ship by Alice Sophia C——, a girl three years old, daughter of William and Mary Ann C——, emigrants; but whether contracted by her in the depôt at Blackwall, or at the village from which she and her parents came, there was no evidence to show.

2. At the time of passing the Inspecting Officer, the disease was in a state of incubation in this child, and had not sufficiently shown itself to enable a medical man, upon a cursory inspection, such as that described as having taken place on board the ship, to decide upon the nature of the disease.

3. Before embarkation there was no medical inspection whatever of the emigrants.

4. The surgeon-superintendent of the ship, although young and without experience, showed great perseverance and patience under most trying circumstances.

5. The ship was not in a fit state to receive the emigrants when they were embarked. It came out in the course of the evidence that the emigrants were embarked while the ship was still taking in cargo, with the hatches open, and the married people's compartment exposed to the weather, which was wet, thus making the deck and bunks damp and dirty, and in a condition to develop any latent disease. There was cargo still lying about the 'tween-decks, waiting to be stowed below, after the emigrants were on board, thus crowding them up and rendering it impossible for them to make any preliminary arrangements for their comfort during the voyage. Carpenters were also at work in the 'tween-decks, and the fittings were not completed until after the ship's arrival at Gravesend, being two days after the emigrants embarked.

6. The water supply fell off at times in quality, through the inefficiency of the condensing apparatus. It was only by persevering efforts and constant repairs that the necessity for calling in at some port on the voyage for a fresh supply of water was obviated. The evidence shows that, although the condenser itself was a new one, the boiler was second-hand, worn, and patched, and evidently unfit for the purpose to which it was applied.

We are of opinion:—

(I.) That the Inspecting Medical Officer should visit a depôt containing emigrants at least once a day. Thus, having several opportunities of seeing the emigrants before embarkation, he would be in a position to weed out any suspicious cases, probably before the period when danger of infection had arrived. The system of cursory inspection after embarkation is totally insufficient and useless, as the time occupied by such inspection renders it impossible for it to be a searching one. In the present case, the C—— family had been in the depôt for seven days prior to embarkation, and no medical man saw the child which took the sickness on board, although premonitory symptoms of illness had evidently shown themselves. If a daily visiting of the depôt by the Inspecting Medical Officer had taken place, this child would not have been embarked, and probably such disastrous consequences would not have resulted.

(II.) Previous medical service on board an emigrant ship should, in our opinion, be a *sine quâ non* to employment as surgeon-superintendent of a ship conveying emigrants to this colony. We venture to suggest that a probationary voyage might be taken in the capacity of assistant-surgeon by young men desirous of undertaking the duties of surgeon-superintendent. The advantage of the assistance which would thus be rendered to the surgeon-superintendent in case of sickness on board, and of the presence of a substitute ready to take his place in case he should become incapacitated during the voyage, is obvious. The additional expense, which need not be great, would be more than compensated for by the existence of a staff of experienced officers, ready to take charge of the emigrant ships.

(III.) The persons responsible for the state of the ship on its leaving the dock should be called rigidly to account for their *laches* in this respect.

(IV.) A trial of at least twenty-four hours' full working should be the test required by the Inspector of every condensing apparatus placed on board an emigrant ship.

We forward for the information of your Excellency the following documents:—Commission, copy of evidence taken.*

(Signed)

ALEXANDER JOHNSTON, M.D.,

Chairman, on behalf of the Commissioners.

Governor the Most Hon. the Marquis of Normanby.

* The evidence is presented in manuscript.