

Enclosure 2 in No. 34.

EXTRACT from the SURGEON'S JOURNAL.

Ship "Piako."

NOVEMBER 11th. — After breakfast, went on deck as usual till 10 a.m., when I went to single women's compartment, then to the dispensary, and attended all who came there, and afterwards went to those who were not able to come, &c.; then, as usual, to single men's compartment, then to my cabin to write medical-comfort list for the day; having done that, I put down the temperatures in my table, and while doing so heard the fire-alarm sounding, but went on writing till I had finished, thinking it was only a practice without notice, to test the men in their efficiency; came up on deck and found it was real, and smoke was coming from the fore end of the galley. I saw the single men, some with blankets in hand, standing in a row on the port-side of the quarter-deck, others, about twelve in number, on the lee (starboard) side of the poop, talking to the single women. I was told that the captain was down the fore hatch in the 'tween decks or "hole." I sent all the single women to the after end of lee side of poop at once, asking them all to keep cool, keep their places where they were, and on no account to interfere with any of the men. I then sent one of the single women's constables to keep the girls from coming forward. Then the captain came aft and told me the fire was in the hold, and flames in the 'tween decks. My time was then (soon after 11 a.m., I should say,) fully occupied in trying to pacify the single women, and, together with the constable, keep them in their places. I then sent for the married women and children, and had them up on the poop with the single women, keeping them all as quiet as possible by trying to make them see the folly of interfering with their male relatives, who were working at the pumps, fastening down the hatches and covering them with wet blankets, plugging up cowl-heads and other ventilators, &c., with wet blankets, &c., helping the crew, and working the ship, clearing the boats, and breaking up wood for the steam fire-engine, and generally making themselves useful for the safety of all on board, under the directions of the captain and officers.

About this time I saw the captain standing on the taffrail, on the port-side of the poop, and heard him asking a man whom he had sent aloft if there was a sail in sight; the man said "Yes," and pointed out where—namely, on our port bow. I then heard the captain give orders to the man at the wheel to change the course, so as to steer for the ship in sight. By this time the port and starboard lifeboats were almost in the water, and soon after I told off about seven or eight mothers, with their children, to each lifeboat. I heard the captain give orders that four seamen and one officer should go in each boat. There was some delay in getting them in, owing to the swell at the time. I saw water put into each boat, and some biscuits into one or two. The sail was soon made out to be a homeward-bound English barque. Our ensign was hoisted at the main with the Union down, and rockets were let off at frequent intervals, and the flags N M (I am on fire) I saw hoisted at the usual place on the spanker gaff. The ship was stopped, or nearly so, some time before that, and before the boats went off. The other boats were lowered as quickly as possible, and all the women and children, except four or five single women, went off in the first five boats. These remaining single women went off in the last boat—viz., the forward boat on the port side; with these last, the boatswain, sailmaker, emigrants' cook, two of the crew, and as many single and married men as were consistent with safety; I went myself. The barque, which proved to be the "Loch Doon," Captain Conning, from San Francisco to Liverpool, had by this time passed us on our port side, and was about half a mile astern of our ship. We reached her without accident, and went on board without delay. I saw the captain at once, ascertained, as far as possible, what provisions and accommodation there were on board, and went back for anything which I thought would be of use. I then came off, having sent five sheep, and as much water, preserved meats, and soup, also as many blankets as I could get, some wine and brandy, and some of my own personal effects, together with the ship's medicine chest, on board the "Loch Doon."

The captain of the "Piako" told me he intended to run for Pernambuco, and stay by the ship as long as possible, using every possible and available means to get the fire under. When I was last on board, the fire had made considerable way, and it was utterly impossible to go down even the after-hatch to the single women's compartment; smoke was even coming into the saloon through the lazarette. When I got on board the "Loch Doon" again I made arrangements at once with the captain for the suitable disposition of the people. The single women I had confined to the poop-deck, as in the "Piako," the married people on deck amidsthips under the skids and boats, and the single men forward. I then spoke to each set separately, telling them that they must have the same discipline here as on the "Piako," the single women to be under the matron, as usual, and the married and single men to be overlooked as usual by their respective constables. I then counted out the blankets, which were nearly all double ones, and divided them, making about thirty-nine single blankets, which I gave first of all one each to those women who were weak and ailing, and then to those who had infants and young children, after which I distributed the remainder equally to the single women. I then got some condensed milk from the captain, sent for the hospital assistant, and had it mixed with water and distributed to the infants and children. After that I had all the passengers arranged in their messes, and, having told off two men previously to get up biscuits, served them out from the poop to the captains of the messes, in the proportion of two biscuits for each person, then about a pint of water for each person was served out in the ship's fire-buckets, the emigrants using such vessels for drinking as they had brought with them or could find, such as cups, tins, empty meat-tins, pannikins, &c. A small tub of butter, too, was sent round among the women, but as the supply on this ship is small, the men did not get any.

The next thing was sleeping accommodation. To meet this, the captain kindly placed at my disposal the after-hold, in which is stored wheat in bags, and in which there is an interval of about 4 feet 6 inches or 5 feet between the wheat and the main deck, with an area of some 20 square feet, or perhaps more, available for lying down; the saloon, capable of holding ten or eleven people on the deck, seats, and table; the fore hatch, in which is wheat again; the lower fore-castle, and the top-gallant fore-castle.