Journal in Australia,

With the

Voyage there, and Return to England,

Embracing

A Period of Five Years

From August 21, 1852 to August 22, 1857;

By

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Advertisement

This Journal is copied as nearly verbatim from the original as grammatical errors and imperfect diction would admit. Occasionally a few additional observations, including the Preliminary, have been deemed necessary to render certain objects more intelligible to a reader, but the spirit has never once been violated. W. J. P.

Journal in Australia, &c.

Preliminary

The extraordinary news of the discovery of the gold mines of California caused a great sensation in England, but nothing in comparison of the subsequent intelligence from Australia. From Land's End to John O'Groat's, the whole country was thrown into a state of ferment, and emigration to the new regions of gold began to pour off in thousands. Every vessel that could be got ready was rapidly filled. Though suffering much from bodily infirmities, I, too, became infected with the mania. I had not been many months risen from a sick bed, where I had lain for years on the brink of the grave; but was now slowly recovering, crippled in a leg and arm, with my sight and hearing much altered for the worse. Altogether, my health was a sad wreck. Such was the condition in which I reflected over the pros and Cons of the Australian adventure, and came to the resolution of throwing my lot into it, without a mate, or even the satisfaction of knowing a single individual proceeding thither. No relation, or early friend, knew of the resolution, which was confided only to my Clayton Square

associates. But I had strong hopes in the restoration of my health, and eventually of successful employment. On these my soul was centered. Among the vessels advertised to sail for this happy land was the Great Britain, S.S.S. It was then on a voyage to New York, the first it had undertaken since the unfortunate buffeting it met in Dundrum Bay. Indeed, not a few opinionated individuals averred, some even wagered, it would never return to England again. But, return it did to find its complement of passengers fast filling up. Having visited the mode in which this celebrity was being fitted up, I engaged my passage in her the next day, July 17. My preparations were few and unimportant, and I deemed it wise to have the means of returning if an adverse fate stood in the way. The time soon slipped over. On the 18th August, the passengers luggage was got aboard amidst the greatest confusion and ill-concerted plans imaginable. The "Big Ship" was then lying in the dock, from which she moved next day into the river, and anchored in the Rayne.

Sat: Aug: 21. This day the Great Britain takes her departure from the Mersey. A small ferry-boat is advertised to carry the passengers aboard.

Taking farewell of some, and accompanied by a few others, I wended my way to the George's pier, so as to meet the ferryboat

at 12 O'clock. Many people were moving towards the river, where the crowd was great, almost choking up the approach to the pier head. The boat, itself, was so densely crowded that a spare foot could not be found. Scarcely one-half of the people were passengers, but the friends of those who were; and their presence was only to block up the way, and render it difficult and dangerous to get aboard the "Big Ship". Lame and awkward, I was nearly jostled into the river. It was advertised that none but passengers would be allowed into the ferry-boat, and the regulation ought to have been carried out. This in conjunction with the ill-directed measures adopted in putting the luggage aboard does not augur very favorably for the rules & regulations we have yet to encounter. However, none but passengers were allowed on board the Great Britain, and the care taken was such that one man, who had his luggage on board, and had paid his passage, was like to have been left behind, because he had lost his ticket. When all were on board, the poop was one dense mass of human beings. It is stated in the Mail of this morning that there are upwards of 630 passengers; and I believe, including the hands, there are nearly 800 in all.

The departure of the biggest ship in antient or modern times proved an object of interest throughout the length and breadth of the land, such as was never accorded on a similar

occasion. Cheap trains were run into Liverpool expressly to enable thousands to participate in the advent. The crowds which lined the river wall was truly astonishing, while many little steamers, in gaudy colors, and with crowded decks, kept dashing about - every feature, in short, wearing as bright an aspect as the departing emigrant could wish.

Exactly, at 2, we got under motion, and immediately after the first Cannon thundered forth, with a deafening noise; which was repeated at every little interval, and occasionally responded to by some of the numerous vessels lying in the river. On board some half dozen boys, from the Kirkdale Industrial school, with their musical instruments were brought into play with good effect. As we moved forth the scene was of a most exciting nature. A more beautiful day never lighted up the Mersey; and besides the numerous vessels flying crowded past, the Shores, both on the Cheshire and Liverpool sides, were crowded where-ever a place of observation presented itself. On the Liverpool side not a single foot seemed unoccupied along the whole length of the docks; but at the Landing stage the mass of human beings was truly dense. The booming Cannon, - the Martial strains, - the beautiful day; - the great number of vessels, - and the long line of crowded Shores, formed the most interesting scene I ever wit-

nessed on the Mersey, or any other port. It was, no doubt, also interesting to those who saw us move past. The vessel, - the number of passengers, - the length of the voyage, - and the country bound to were all extraordinary. From every vessel, and at little intervals all along the shore, deafening shouts of acclamation rent the air, and were responded to by those on board the Great Britain. Slowly as we moved, every point was gradually reached and gradually left behind, till we escaped from the river. Most of the little steamers accompanied us out to sea, and dropped off one by one with three hearty cheers as they took farewell.

The departing scenery was too interesting to me to spend a single thought on what was transpiring on board. Finding the poop very much deserted, I at once guessed what was up, and made my way to the cabin where the passengers were eagerly devouring their dinner. So great was the pressure that it was utterly impossible to get near. I stared, but it was useless, and had to bide my time with a few other simpletons, who came in for the Jack-alls share - a small piece of the last parings of a joint of beef, three pieces of biscuit, each about the size of a crown piece, and a small slice of pudding. The meal was not only scanty, but detestable. In fact, I was so much disgusted that I did not know I eat the detestable repast with my hat on, till I had finished.

Our whole arrangements seem abominable. The cabins are not near ample enough to accommodate so many passengers; and neither are there sufficient stewarts or waiters to attend to the cabins. Without any notice, too, the dinner itself seems to have been placed on the table on the principle of "first come - first served".

This detestable ceremony being over, I resolved to keep a look out for the next meeting, and succeeded in securing a seat at one of the tables; but nearly every one seemed to be equally awake. Long before the hour, the apartments were crowded to suffocation, and all not accommodated either. Anxious, however, as I had been, I was not a whit more successful than at dinner, while I was equally disgusted. Cups and saucers, a basin of sugar, a plate of butter, and a tray with biscuit, were placed upon each table, but no tea, for which every one waited till patience could stand it no longer. First one gent began, and then another followed his example to pick up a bit of biscuit, cover it with butter, and crunch it between his teeth. Very soon the biscuit was reduced to a small compass, and by the time the tea arrived the biscuit-tray at our table was all but emptied. One individual then coolly took it up and divided what was left between himself and two friends. A single piece never fell to my share. I managed, however to get a cup of tea, and just as I finished it another tray with biscuit

was set down, out of which I was fortunate to secure a few little pieces. Unlike the Chapinon, I was more thirsty than hungry, and not over solicitous about buttered biscuits; but willing to try another drop of what they called tea, handed my cup for this purpose. "No more", was the simple answer. Such indeed has been the treatment received in the commencement of a voyage, for which we have paid thirty guineas. But it is satisfactory to find that the whole proceedings were loudly condemned; and that a demand was made for better order, which it is sincerely to be hoped will follow.

The remainder of the evening I spent on deck, which was tolerably well patronized – the evening being clear and calm with the moon in her first quarter. Various lights twinkled on the coast of Wales. Two young men, passengers, apparently professionals, each with a cornopean, and playing alternately, attracted some attention; but I was not much interested, as indeed I never am with brass instruments.

Sun: 22 I went tolerably early to bed last night, and lay moderately comfortable, but could not sleep for long, owing to the commotion and merriment of passengers all around me. A company of Scotchmen were particularly vociferous in their mirth, and why I could not conceive, as their observations were inopportune, without point, and childish at the best. When the lights were put out

this jarring of sounds ceased; but then an infant, in a neighboring berth, set up such a provoking mewling that I wished it had been at Bath.

During the whole night the vessel moved as steady as a rock: it was scarcely possible to perceive it was in motion, or otherwise than at anchor in the river. However blameable the agents may be, the vessel itself is not so, and has commenced the voyage most auspiciously. I sincerely trust we shall have a continuance of the same favorable circumstances.

I rose early and was among the first that showed face on deck, which was in a moist state, and where I walked some time barefoot, in expectation that it may be of service. It continues clear and calm. A number of vessels enliven the prospect. One of these we approached and saluted with some cheering. The coast of Ireland is also in sight, but very dim and distant.

Yesterday, the passengers appeared to me, for the most part gentlemen – i.e. men of independent means, or such as did not earn their bread by the sweat of the brow. To-day they are greatly transformed, and many of them, in the forward cabins at least, seem hard working, countryfied people. All in all, they form a curious company to look at. Some are Mustachiod and

bearded foreigners from different nations, mixed with Yankees, English, Scotch, Irish, and Welsh. Among them are two English-speaking blacks of the woolly-headed variety. Two men are very big-veritable sons of Titan, and several are as remarkably diminutive. In short, there is every material for a counterpart to Hogarth's celebrated group. All seem to have mates, or acquaintances, more or less; and generally are quite cheerful.

A most beautiful day with a gentle breeze athwart our course; about 10 A.M. however, the swell was sufficient to produce sickness, which in the afterpart of the day somewhat increased. The "Big Ship" then rocked considerably.

In the afternoon a ship appeared far ahead, and at 6 was passed 2 miles to leward. The sight of a ship at sea is always welcome; more so, if it is near. In the wide circle of water which continually surrounds the view there is nothing to mark our progress, and however quick we move we seem to be eternally fixed in the centre. Of course, the approach of a vessel, or any other object, at once shows we are making real progress, which of itself is a pleasurable sensation.

In the forward part of the poop, a compass has already become the centre of considerable attraction, and among others a few individuals who know as much about a compass as a compass