

SURGEON'S JOURNAL

Duke of Cornwall

Arrived Hobart 27 October 1850

General Remarks

Two hundred female adults and thirty-two children were embarked at Kingston from Grange Gorman Penitentiary all in good health, but there were several of them as was afterwards discovered who were unfit to bear the hardship of a long sea voyage, and if their passion histories had been known at the time of embarkation, others might have been selected more healthy and the infirm left behind.

About two-thirds of the convicts were between the ages of twenty and thirty and having been brought up in the country were generally of sound and healthy constitutions. Many of them had been driven to commit offences during the Famine in Ireland, who originally had very good character, when once convicted they were certain of being well fed and taken care of. The remaining third were principally from Dublin and the provincial Towns. Their constitutions were more or less injured by previous disease and intemperate and irregular habits. Being a highly susceptible race they suffered much at first from Grief and depression of Spirits on leaving their friends and Mother Country. The more delicate were sea sick and unable to use the common rations and became necessary to support them with medical comforts and wine etc.

In referring to the Nosological report it will be seen that seventy cases in all have been on Sick List but very few of these have been of a serious character, two deaths only having occurred during the voyage.

Of the Catarrhal affections nine in number, some were severe, and suffered from considerable respiratory disturbance with severe thoracic pain, followed by general disability. They were treated in the usual manner by theof laxative and Diaphonetics,

the application of Blisters and Rubefacients or the free use of di..... They all recovered and were discharged in good health at the end of the voyage.

Of the Dyspeptic complaints five cases of a character have been noticed, four of these improved much under the use of laxatives, and Bitters assisted by exercise and the sea air. The remaining patients assisted every kind of treatment and died of chronic inflammation of the mucous membrane of the stomach which was verified by post mortem examination.

Five cases of Menorrhagia recurred during the passage and of these three were cured on board and one was sent to the Colonial Hospitalconvalescent this patient having had two attacks during the time she was on board the acetate of lead and opium were at first prescribed, followed by tonic and the Mineral Acids - under these remedies the improvement was rapid and permanent. The sea air with appropriate regimen contributed much to the general amelioration of the health.

The bowel complaints are comparatively few - four of Dysenteric character and three of Diarrhoea. Two of these were second attacks which reduced the number of patients to five but dysentery is always a disease on board of ship part of this small number one died and three were sent to the Colonial Hospital, one only having been cured on board - the treatment consisted in the administration of Calomel and opium; castor oil and +-; Ipecac: Go with Barley water or and the application of Blisters and rubifacients to the abdomen - the Rhumatic complaints, four in number, were all sent to the Colonial Hospital these cases having recurred towards the end of the voyage and being Subjects are not likely to do much good under any treatments - opium, and powder were useful in relieving pain and producing but Rhumatic subjects are very ineligible for transportation and they can be of little use in the Colony.

Four casualties occurred during the passage caused by the rolling of the ship, of these two were contusions which soon set well and which easily reduced the accidents being and the system in both cases relaxed and flaccid apparently from fear -

Only one case of scurvy is reported which was well marked. No symptoms of this complaint appeared amongst any of the others. of potassium was given three times a day with generous diet - if the theory be true that there is a deficiency of that salt in the Blood the remedy is simple, cheap and convenient. It appeared to answer well in this case as the symptoms rapidly improved under its use.

Twenty hysterical cases have been, but many of the females suffered occasionally from hysterical fits who were not put on the sick lists as the paroxysms were of short duration and the general health was pretty good.

The symptoms were of the most and extraordinary character simulating all the diseases in the nosology. Several of them lost the power of speech and were unable to utter a single word for many days. In others the arms became paralysed and accompanied by the most extraordinary hallucinations.

Symptomatic distension of the abdomen was very troublesome in some of the cases swelling the patients out in a size scarcely credible unless actually seen.

It is at first difficult to account for such a great proportion of Hysterical cases but if we take into consideration the peculiar position of the female convicts, crowded together between decks on a Transport where the heat is often 82° of Fahrenheit and the atmosphere oppressive even under the best system of ventilation the nervous system no doubt becomes highly susceptible and predisposed to various kinds of; as many of the females were liable under ordinary circumstances of Hysterical affections it is very probable that the well known law of sympathy operated powerfully in exciting this remarkable complaint in variety of treatment was tried but with little apparent preparation and antispasmodic Blisters were applied to the head and epigastrium and cold douche etc used according to the nature of the symptoms - the patients need very little food during

these attacks yet notwithstanding they seldom lost flesh and were all landed in the Colony in good health.

The vessel was well lighted and very lofty between decks and the upper deck completely water tight. The Prison doors were opened about 6am and the females came from below to wash and clean themselves, the beds were rolled up every morning and stored in the hammock nettings and long boat and the Prison and mess places carefully, cleaned and ventilated and occasionally washed out and thoroughly dried with hot sand.

The swinging stores were always used when there was any appearance of dampness, the solution of Chloride of Zinc was also sprinkled about the decks, and pieces of flannel were dipped into the liquid and suspended. In the Hospital it was found most effectual in destroying bad smells and in purifying the air, and the patients in the Hospital always experienced great comfort after its use.

The mess women in the vicinity of the water closets very soon discovered its virtues and regularly applied for a small quantity to sprinkle on their mess places.

The meals were punctually and properly prepared and the provisions were of excellent quality but it seems unnecessary to send on board cocoa as an article of consumption as few of the Irish convicts have ever even seen it before and they prefer oatmeal gruel to either tea or cocoa.

Great attention was paid to cleanliness and the clothes were regularly changed according to the nature of the weather, every means were taken to keep their minds employed and they were engaged during the day in sewing, knitting and in reading and writing.

They were also encouraged to take exercise on deck and in this way their time was completely occupied and idleness, that most futile sense of and discontent in a great measure avoided.

Charles Smith, Surgeon Superintendent. Van Dieman's Land, November 8, 1850.

Recapitulation:

Number originally embarked 200

Number Deaths

Number Actually arrived

Surgeon Superintendent: Charles Smith

Master: John Whitehead.

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