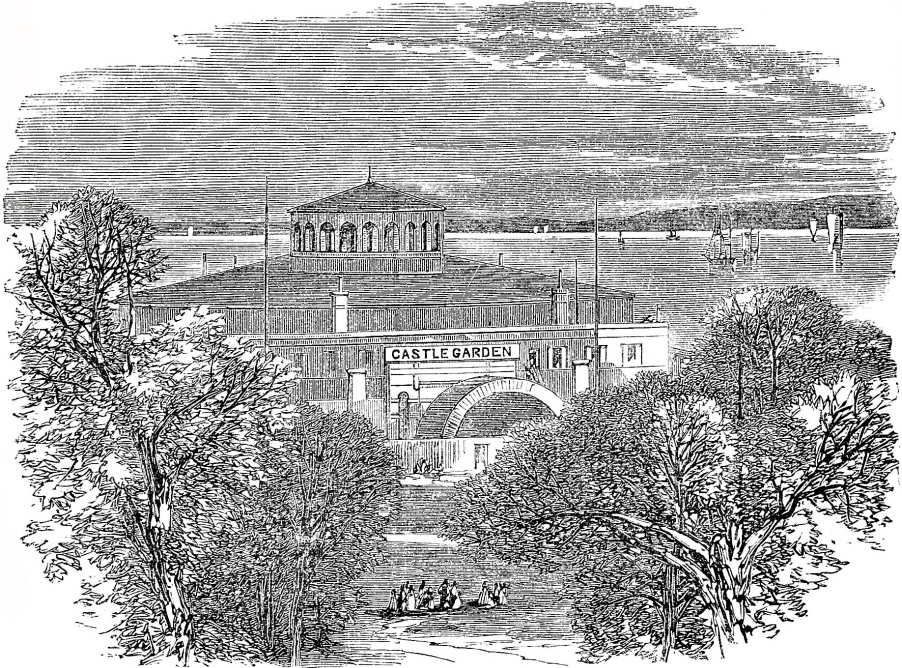


## Emigrants in America.

BY ROBERT TOMES.



WHEN New York, not many years ago, was "a handy little town," as Irving used to say, "when, if your friends did not live opposite, they were sure to live round the corner," the Battery was a smiling expanse of verdure, shaded by groves of willow, hickory, and sycamore. Though the space was small, there was room and verge enough for the whole population of the then little town to congregate and breathe at ease, the southern wind, as it came, bearing the fresh but soft and soothing influence of tropical seas. Fanned by the gentle breeze, lulled by the whispering ripple of the waves, and looking through an atmosphere of hazy indistinctness upon the calm bay, with its anchored fleet of great ships and skimming small craft, verdant isles and forest shores, a past generation here enjoyed a dreamy repose of which its wide-awake, restless, and over-busy successors can hardly form a conception.

The willows, sycamores, and hickories are fast disappearing, and

the green grass has been long since trod by careless and busy feet into bald spots of clay and gravel. The defiant fortress, first changed into a resort of pleasure, known as the Castle Garden, and which echoed not many years since with the melodious voice of Jenny Lind, has been finally turned, by a still happier transformation, into a great hall of reception for newly-arrived emigrants. Here the first welcome is given to the thronging Germans, Irish, English, and other people of all nations whom Europe is emptying into the broad embrace of America.

During the last twenty years nearly four millions of emigrants, about the number of the combined populations of London and New York, made their first landing on American ground at this place known as the Castle Garden. Of these persons one million, four hundred and eighty-five thousand, and one hundred (1,485,100) were from Ireland, one million, three hundred and seventeen thousand, and sixty-nine (1,317,069), from Germany; 435,171, from England; 86,890, from Scotland; 68,390, from France, and the rest from all the other parts of the globe. China, during these twenty years, sent three hundred and thirty-three of its natives, Greece eighty-seven, Turkey eighty-two, Arabia eight, and Japan seven.

The largest number of arrivals during one year was 319,223, in 1854, and the smallest 65,539, in 1861. The emigrants from Ireland formerly greatly preponderated, but now the Germans surpass them in numbers. Of the 233,418 emigrants who arrived during the whole of 1866, 106,716 were from Germany, 68,147 only from Ireland, 36,186 from England, and 22,469 from other countries.

The first aspect of Castle Garden is certainly not very cheering, presenting, as it does, with its shabby wooden structures, a dismal contrast to the bright and beautiful bay of New York. The old stone fortress, once so picturesque an object, still exists, but its walls are now hidden from external view by projecting roofs and contiguous buildings of shingle and pine board, either painted or white-washed.

The scene is a busy one, both inside and out. Crowds are constantly coming and going. The people are generally young and vigorous-looking, but here and there is an occasional decrepit old man or woman, or some more youthful person sapped by disease, showing that the emigrant in coming to a new world, with all its bright hopes, has not entirely thrown off the trials and responsibilities of the old. There is a wonderful silence in all that great crowd and an expression of startled wonder upon each face, as if all were subdued and even alarmed by the great event of recommencing life in an untried land.

The emigrant may at first turn his eyes, filling with tears, away from the shabby-looking Castle Garden and seemingly inhospitable structure, and look over the smiling bay longingly towards the ocean he has just crossed, which separates him from the land of his birth. He, however, soon ceasing to indulge in sentimental and useless regrets, and seeking for practical comfort, finds all that he can reasonably ask for in that ugly but kindly building.

Nothing can be better adapted for the purpose designed than the New York State Commission of Emigration. The legislature of New York, in consequence of the impositions to which emigrants from Europe to the United States were exposed in the course of their long voyage by sea and by land, passed an Act for the appointment of Commissioners, to watch over and protect their interests. Six of these Commissioners are appointed by the Governor, with the consent of the Senate. The Mayor of New York, the Mayor of Brooklyn, and the Presidents of the German and Irish Emigrant Societies are *ex-officio* members, and make up the full number of ten, who compose the board. The services of these gentlemen are gratuitous, and they have been always selected with an exclusive regard to the public welfare, and without any consideration of pecuniary or political advantage.

Before the organization of this Commission in 1847, about twenty years ago, the emigrant was at the mercy of a band of plunderers, who, scattered along the whole of his lengthened route, so robbed and maltreated him that he was not only deprived of all his money and health, but often of life. These highwaymen, disguised as shipping merchants, boarding-house keepers, ticket-agents, and canal-boat captains, but familiarly known as "baggage-smashers," "runners," and "scalpers," had in the course of time enriched themselves with the spoils of the emigrant, and by means of their wealth acquired a corrupt but vigorous political influence. They resisted with all their might the appointment of Commissioners, and were only beaten at last after a long struggle. "The warfare, however, did not end here," says one\* who took a foremost and honourable part in it, "the ticket-agents transferred themselves to Europe, commencing and successfully carrying on their depredations on the other side of the Atlantic. Thousands of emigrants arrived with their rail-road tickets purchased abroad, for which they had paid not only double and treble the regular fare, but upon their arrival here [New York] they found themselves with bogus tickets and bogus drafts. Innocent and unprotected girls came con-

\* The Hon. Thurlow Weed, of New York.

signed to houses of prostitution." These practices became unendurable, and the Commissioners decided promptly to send to Europe an agent who succeeded in obtaining the co-operation of its various governments, and thus breaking up the foreign ticket agencies.

Ever since, the long passage of the emigrant from his old home to his new destination, guarded by a beneficent care, has been of comparative safety, comfort, and enjoyment. He no sooner arrives in American waters than he is brought under the protecting influence of the Commissioners at New York. Their agents, always on the alert, board each vessel as it comes up the bay, and take immediate charge of the poor emigrant passengers, with whom no one else is allowed to have any intercourse lest their ignorance and inexperience should be preyed upon by the designing.

As soon as the vessel has anchored and complied with the requirements of the law, in regard to quarantine and the customs, great barges, towed by little steamers, are sent to bring off the emigrants and their luggage. These, on being landed at Castle Garden, are immediately disposed of. Each article of luggage is "checked," that is, a leaden check or token with a number is attached to it and a similar one given to the owner, to be returned by him on reclaiming his property.

The emigrant himself, after his luggage has been thus checked and stowed away in the great "baggage room," is ushered into an immense circular reception hall, which is the eviscerated interior of the old fort, the embrasures of whose walls, being but partly closed, are still apparent. In this large apartment there is always an immense throng of newly-arrived men, women, and children of all nations, many of whom find an immediate welcome from friends and relations who are here in attendance. Here parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, lovers and sweethearts, who had parted in other worlds with hardly a hope of seeing each other again, meet once more. The imagination can picture such touching scenes as here daily arise.

In the centre of the great hall there is a circular enclosed space, occupied by three or four brokers, who, licensed by the commissioners, are ready to exchange all foreign into United States money; projecting from this central enclosure, there is a pulpit, ever and anon occupied by an energetic speaker, who is listened to with eager attention. His words have a greater effect than ever had the eloquence of a Chatham or a Webster. He is announcing to his breathless audience the names and addresses of inquiring friends and relatives in America.

Along the walls of the same circular hall are stretched long refresh-

ment bars, where coffee, tea, fresh milk, bread, pies, and cake, are for sale. The quality of the articles and their prices are regulated by the Commissioners, and the poorest emigrant need hardly deprive himself of a satisfying morsel or a refreshing drink, when a good large loaf of bread can be bought for ten cents, and a cup of excellent coffee or fresh milk for five cents in paper money. From the posts everywhere hang directions, in all languages, for the guidance of the emigrant; there are also baths and wash-rooms in convenient proximity.

If the emigrant is sought after and found by his friends, he leaves with them whatever may be his destination; if not, and he has the means and desire to go immediately to some place in the interior, he finds at the receiving depot, where he at first disembarked, railway agents ready to sell him tickets, and take him and his luggage at once to the proper station. If the emigrant desires to remain awhile in New York, he finds boarding-house keepers, licensed by the Commissioners and wearing their badge, awaiting him, and he is advised to beware of all others. If the new comer seeks immediate occupation, he will find it by applying at the "Labour Exchange," where the demand for work is almost always beyond the supply. If he wishes to communicate with his distant friends, and is unable to write himself, he has only to enter the letter-room, where there are writers prepared to do it for him. If the emigrant, though passing muster at the quarantine, has some disease requiring medical or surgical treatment, he is sent at once to the Commissioners' hospital on Ward's Island, a structure which Florence Nightingale pronounced to be "an admirable building, and much better than any civil hospital of the size in this country" (England), and added, "It is a noble thing to do, to build such a building not for your poor, but for ours."

If the friends of the expected or arrived emigrant want information of him, he will get it in what is called the "Information Office," where a register is kept of the names and addresses of the inquirers for and inquired after.

These various departments supply some curious and interesting statistics. While a few years ago most of the emigrants came to the United States in sailing vessels, much the larger number now arrive in steamers. During the last year, 1866, the latter brought 156,931 steerage passengers, and the former only 74,898. The more rapid transit by steam produces a very sensible effect upon the mortality. There were only 816 deaths out of the large number of those arriving in steamers, and 851 of the comparatively small number who

came in sailing vessels. The number of steamers arriving in the year 1866 was 401, and that of other craft 349. There were 668 vessels in all sailing from eighteen different ports. The average number of passengers in each was 345.

Of the whole number of emigrants who arrived in 1866, 97,607 reported their destination to be the State of New York; 32,751 Pennsylvania and New Jersey; 18,743 New England; 5,333 the various Southern States; 71,485 the Western States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and California; and 2932 Kansas, Nebraska, and Canada.

During the year 1866 there were 2754 letters written for newly-arrived passengers, and 1551 answers were received with remittances, amounting to 24,383 dollars; 57,350 dollars were sent by friends and relations in the United States in advance, to await the arrival of expected emigrants, and be placed at their disposal; 50,751 dollars in addition were obtained from the German and Irish emigrant societies and other sources, to be appropriated to the same purpose.

10,771 persons, of whom much the larger proportion were females, were provided during the year 1866 with labour at the Castle Garden, or by the agents of the Commissioners at Albany, Rochester, Buffalo, and elsewhere in the interior.

In the same year 249 persons were sent back to Europe at their own request, and 272 were forwarded into the interior, at the expense of the Commission; 8783 patients were admitted into the hospital at Ward's Island; 109 lunatics into the insane asylum; and 179 into the small-pox hospital.

The chief source of the large sums expended annually by the Commissioners of Emigration, is what is called the commutation-tax. This amounted in 1866 to 471,008 dollars. The consignee of each vessel is obliged by law to pay 2 dollars 50 cents (formerly less) per head for all passengers brought to New York, in lieu of executing a bond as security against their becoming a burthen to the State, during the five years subsequent to their arrival. This applies only to the able-bodied; for the sick and disabled, a special bond is exacted.

Though the larger proportion of emigrants hasten away immediately on their arrival, to the interior, a great number remain permanently in New York. It is thus that this city has such an immense foreign population, which is now computed to amount to 600,000 inhabitants, or 200,000 more than the native born.\* The Germans count above

\* The whole population of the city of New York is about 1,000,000.

300,000, and the Irish nearly the same number. New York is thus, in fact, the third largest German city in the world, ranking next to Berlin and Vienna, and the next largest Irish after Dublin.

This large foreign element, of course, reveals itself by its characteristic indications. There are, indeed, whole quarters of the city of New York, and of its suburban towns, Brooklyn, Jersey City, and Hoboken, almost exclusively inhabited by Germans. Here, with their breweries and beer-houses, their gardens and dancing-saloons, their peculiar churches and synagogues, their SAUER KRAUT and sausage-shops, their theatres, music and gymnastic societies, they remain in as full enjoyment of their Teutonic tastes as if they had never left their Fatherland. They have as well German newspapers and German schools, and German aldermen, German tax-receivers, and, in fact, German representatives in every department of public life.

The Irish, who bating the brogue, speak the same language as the native Americans, are of course more easily identified with them, but even they, to some extent, retain certain national peculiarities. These are chiefly manifested by the free use of whiskey and the shillalegh, and by the Hibernian readiness for a fight or a row. The Irish too have their newspapers, and their political and other representatives.

The foreign population holding the balance of power in the city of New York, is much petted by the political demagogue. The Irish and Germans become as rapidly as possible citizens of the United States; but in the State of New York\* they cannot vote until five years after they have declared their intention to become citizens, though in the meantime they can hold real property and enjoy the other privileges of citizenship. As most of these foreigners have not been properly educated, either morally or intellectually for the exercise of the right of suffrage, they become the leading instruments of the unscrupulous demagogue. Thus political intriguers have obtained the control of the municipal government of New York, and made it one of the most corrupt ever known. They take care not to lose hold of the foreigner, for upon him depends their political existence. He is accordingly flattered by petty officers, or bribed by profitable jobs and liberal grants to the institutions of the religious sect to which he may belong, which is generally the Roman Catholic,† and his vote thus secured.

\* In other States the requirements are much less. In most of the Western States the alien can become a citizen immediately.

† Of 150,000 dollars granted in one year, 2,500 dollars only were given to Protestants.

The hereditary puritanism of the American, though he generally agrees tolerably well with his Teutonic or Celtic neighbour, has brought him into collision lately with his German fellow-citizens. A law was passed by the State of New York prohibiting the sale of beer, wines, and liquors of all kinds on the Sunday. This, the German who loves his *lager* beer, and does not like to go to church, feels to be a great hardship, and he is determined to do all in his power to get rid of the obnoxious law. The Germans have, it is understood, resolved to withhold all political support from those who refuse to strive to obtain its repeal.

De Tocqueville remarked that while the native Americans formed the aristocracy of the United States, the foreigners were the *prolétaires*. It is so; the labouring portion of the community is almost exclusively composed of German and Irish. They are the servants and journey-men. It is seldom that an American of mature age is ever seen in any capacity below that of a master workman.

It must not be supposed, however, that foreigners do not thrive in the United States. On the contrary, they are among the most successful and wealthy of its citizens. John Jacob Aster, who, at the time of his death, was by far the richest person on the American continent, was born in Germany, and did not leave his native Hesse-Cassel until he was a full-grown man. Taking London on his way, where he had a brother, a not very prosperous manufacturer of musical instruments, he obtained from him, as a present, an old piano. On arriving at New York this worn out and asthmatic instrument was his sole dependence, but it became the foundation of his huge fortune. He died leaving some ten millions of dollars; his eldest son is supposed to possess nearly treble that amount, and pays tax upon an income of about a million.\*

Stewart, too, the great dry-goods merchant, or haberdasher, who shows a ledger with one year's profit of four millions of dollars, and who pays an annual income-tax amounting to four hundred thousand dollars, arrived in New York a poor Irish emigrant less than forty years ago. He is now sixty years old.

Each Irish emigrant cannot expect to become a millionaire, or rather billionaire like Stewart, but he may be sure of getting everywhere in the United States a hearty meal of something more substantial than potatoes, and what seemed so greatly to surprise Dickens, a whole coat to his back.

\* Another foreigner, Gerard, was long at the head of the rich men of the United States.