

"Barbarous Inhumanity—Great Distress Among the Immigrants—A Whole Family Frozen to Death" from *The Irish American*, 1852.

Correspondence of the NY Daily Times
Holydaysburgh¹, Monday,
January 19, 1852—PM

The scenes I have witnessed to-day, and recitals I have heard of facts said to be of frequent occurrence in this section of the country, impel the conviction of our foreign Emigrant Societies have an important field before them not yet occupied by many of their agents. The route to the West by the way of Pittsburgh is taken by large numbers of immigrants, who, of course, know nothing of the country through which they are to pass or the incidents of delay and discomforts necessary to be provided against. At this season of the year the trains frequently are stayed by the snow banks which block up the way, as at present. I am informed, however that the Railroad Companies continue to undertake the transportation of all the immigrants who offer, although perfectly aware that their progress must necessarily be arrested in the mountains, and the poor creatures exposed in consequence to great suffering and distress. The cars appropriated to immigrants are too frequently dilapidated and uncomfortable, admitting the chilling blasts through a hundred crevices, and sometimes even without fire in the bitterest weather.- Last night about a hundred of these poor creatures arrived here, from Philadelphia, and the snow-drift stopped them, of course. A warehouse of the company- a barn-like building through which the wind whistles almost without impediment- was the only shelter which could be provided them. Within the house a little room- perhaps 10 by 15 feet- is partitioned off, and provided with a stove, where over ninety human beings, some of these females with nursing children, spent the night, after the fatigues of 250 miles railroad travel. The size of the room allotted them, of course, precluded the possibility of space sufficient either to sit or lay down. —Add to this, they were without food, and had been for twenty four hours, and you have a knowledge of their situation. In the morning their condition became known to some benevolent residents in the neighborhood, who furnished them with food, and provided temporarily for their wants. At an early hour I noticed one woman, with her babe nestling in her bosom to avoid the piercing blast, wading through the deep snow-drift, in search of some hospitable shelter, where sustenance and relief might be procured for her famishing child. Several others similarly situated, found relief in the dwellings of the sympathizing villagers.

Another party of immigrants, who arrived here on Monday morning, were left in the cars, where they still remain, for want of better shelter. The error is in permitting these immigrants to come beyond Harrisburg, when the

roads are known to be impassable in the mountains. An honest, reliable agent, located at Harrisburg, would be able to render great service.

Sometimes, the consequences of this inhumanity are more fatal than the party now here have experienced. You are aware that a portion of this route is over a stage road. It is only a fortnight since an entire family—a man, his wife and two children—froze to death on the road, in one of the shelterless wagons provided for the poor immigrants.—This is one only of the heart-rending incidents of immigrants travel across the mountains in the winter season.

Remarks

This is the best commentary we can offer on the wholesale praise of the “respectable commissioners” of Emigration, published, a few days ago, in the journal to which the correspondence is addressed. We ask the editor of *The Times*, with all possible respect for his love of humanity and truth, whether the brutality of the Railroad Companies, above mentioned, does not come within the scope of the Commissioners’ duties with a view to its correction, exposure, and punishment? And whether emigrants should not be advised of and protected from such abominations? We ask, further, whether, if a Commissioner were chosen at the ballot-box and paid for his services, he could avoid taking cognizance of such facts and acting for the benefit of the mal-treated and kidnapped. Perhaps our contemporary would reply to those interrogatories suggested by the communication we publish from his own paper.

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