

SCENE ON BOARD THE TASMANIA CONVICT SHIP.

(From a Dublin Paper, September 1.)

As it was expected that the above vessel would sail on Saturday from Kingstown Harbour, a number of persons proceeded to the pier to witness the impressive and melancholy sight. The day was beautiful, the sky was serene, the sea unruffled and smooth as a mirror—all nature was hushed in a hallowed repose, and everything indicated peacefulness and happiness; but when the eye turned to the gloomy form of the convict ship as it lay upon those calm blue waters, a floating dungeon, the prison-home of the felon exile, a sadness came o'er the mind from the reflection that however bright and lovely, and joyous all things around it seemed to be, within its dark and tomblike bosom were enclosed many suffering spirits, whose crimes had expatriated them from their native land, and to whom the beauties of "the firmament above and the earth beneath" were but as "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." At three o'clock, through the kindness of the commander, William Black, Esq., and Surgeon Jason Lardner, a few visitors were allowed onboard. The convicts, altogether consisting of females, amounting in number to 137 women and 37 children, were at this time arranged at the mess table, and had just eaten plain substantial dinner. The visitors descended one of the two ladders which lead to "the prison," as the place in which the convicts eat their meals, and sleep is called and entered by stooping, through a grated door-way, very much resembling that of an ordinary cell. This prison is situated under decks, and the mess-tables, which are constructed at each side, extend about two thirds of the ship's length. Each table is sufficiently large to accommodate eight persons with ease; and at night can be converted into a bedstead, or receptacle for a mattress; it is railed or boarded-in like a sheep-pen, and separated from similar tables which at either side adjoin it. To reach these tables or leave them it is therefore necessary to climb over the wooden railings. At the time to which we allude all the convicts were penned-in; some were occupied sewing, some winding thread or cotton into balls; some reading prayers from small time and thumb-worn

books; some endeavouring "to make out" the last letter from home, while others were lulling their sickly-looking infants to slumber, or sitting silently and motionless in a state of morbid, moping melancholy. The hour for recreation upon deck having arrived, the convicts prepared to proceed there, and a few had done so when the shrieks of women were heard "above," together with the rapid steps of a female, who was apparently running about the deck, chasing and beating every person whom she met. Then resounded from all quarters exclamations such as "The madwoman has broken loose"—"She is coming down stairs"—"Shut the door." Some of the women ran and hid under the tables or in the little hospital, which adjoins the prison; and others, more courageous, hastened upon deck to see who it was that was disturbing the vessel. It was soon ascertained that a woman named Mary Kelly, who was mad or feigned madness, was pursuing all who were within her reach. She had, it appeared, exhibited symptoms of violent insanity, or assumed them, from the time that she was brought on board, in consequence of which it was considered necessary by those who had the care of her to take means to prevent the possibility of her injuring anyone. Her hands were accordingly fastened behind her back, her feet were tied together by leathern rings, and she was kept down in a recumbent position by a fellow prisoner who was selected to guard her. The surgeon was unwilling to take her on board as he was afraid she would disturb the peace and order of the vessel, and he objected to leaving the harbour and sailing until he heard further upon the subject from the executive. A communication was therefore made to the Castle, and intimation received there from, that on Monday (this day,) medical investigation to test the state of the convict's mind, would take place. On the receipt of this reply, the surgeon gave directions to liberate the prisoner. Her fetters were then removed, and when she found herself free, she, as has been already stated, rushed furiously upon all whom she met, tearing the clothes, caps and hair of the women, striking the commander, surgeon, and sailors, and creating the consternation and dismay which has been but faintly described. The Rev. Bernard Kirby, chaplain of the

Grangegorman depot for female convicts, who paid a visit to the vessel to give his parting and prayerful admonitions to the unfortunate prisoners to conduct themselves peaceably during the voyage, and respectfully for the remainder of their lives, was in the cabin of the commander at this period, and went forward to restrain the infuriated woman. He spoke to her, reasoned with her, and succeeded in bringing her mind to a condition of temporary composure. He then collected the Roman Catholics (upwards of 100 in numbers) into group at each side of the vessel, and prevailed upon Mary Kelly to kneel near him. The scene at this period was very imposing. Here were a number of human beings, varying from ten years old to seventy—the black glossy curls of girlhood, contrasting with the hoary locks of wintry age; the bright beaming eye and rosy cheek of dawning womanhood, with the sunken tearful eye and withered cheek of "three score years and ten"—all kneeling to supplicate mercy from an offended God for crimes different in complexion and kind, ascending in the scale of criminality from the felony of a riband to the murder of a husband or a child; and in duration of punishment from seven and ten years, to perpetual transportation. Side by side knelt the miserable creature who poisoned her husband in Kilkenny and she who drowned her infant in Wicklow when driven from the door of her seducer; and near them sported, in happy innocence, unconscious of their degradation unobservant of the misery around them, happy and playful as if they were gathering flowers in the fields, two little girls, the children of the convict mothers. The Rev. Mr. Kirby having gone through a portion of the evening service, usual upon such an occasion, Mary Kelly, being under the impression that an old woman behind her, who was saying her prayers in a very loud tone, had approached too near her, turned round, and with a heavy blow laid the poor penitent prostrate upon the deck. A panic spread through the crowd, several rose from their kneeling positions, and ran towards the forepart of the vessel; in their flight two women fell over wet coil of ropes, which in no small degree disturbed the solemnity of the scene; but the service, notwithstanding this ludicrous episode, was continued to the close. The influence which

religion had over the mind of Mary Kelly was but transient, for she broke out again in a manner equally violent as before, and it became a second time necessary to handcuff her. The authorities of the vessel stated that they never had a better-conducted class of convicts entrusted to their care, or persons more disposed to submit to discipline and observe the regulations, which they had made. The vessel will, it is thought, sail on Monday evening for Van Diemen's Land, where it will in all probability arrive about the month of January next. A plentiful supply of provisions has been laid in, comprising pigs, sheep, and all descriptions of fowl; and this fine vessel, one of the largest, most cleanly, and most expeditious in the service of the government, intended for the transmission of convicts, has been fitted up in every way that could ensure the comfort of those whom it is destined to convey to exile. The convicts will be usefully employed during the voyage in making shirts, stockings, and other articles of clothing. They retire to rest and rise, eat their meals and amuse themselves upon deck at certain hours, the rules in these respects being very rigid. The children who accompany their mothers are left with them till they are two years old; they are then taken from them and educated at the expense of government. The Rev. B. Kirby returned to "Olivemount" at six o'clock. The Rev. Gentleman ran some risk in visiting the vessel, for he had only a day or two recovered from a dangerous fever, in which his life was despaired of by his physicians, and which originated in exposure to cold and over exertion in his untiring labour to support the interests of the benevolent institution which he has founded. The assiduity and the anxiety evinced by Mrs. Rawlins, the matron of the Grangegorman prison, in preparing each convict for the voyage, and seeing that everything was provided for her which necessity required, are beyond all praise. A number of attendants have been appointed from amongst the convicts themselves, the most active and intelligent being selected to wait upon the rest during their meals; and to prevent confusion, all the articles belonging to each convict have been numbered, the number which they bear corresponding with that affixed to a plate worn by

her. In conclusion, it may be said that a scene such as is here feebly depicted reads a wholesome and solemn moral lesson: it was one which deeply interested all the visitors, who were indebted to the courtesy of the commander and surgeon for an opportunity of witnessing it.

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