

## **Diary of Thomas Arthur Acton (1863 – 1942) and Family on voyage to Cape Town en route to New Zealand.**



**SS British King. Leased to the New Zealand Shipping line for 2 years from 1883 - 1885**

### **Day 1: Saturday March 15<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Left Plymouth at 11am on tender for the SS British King, which started on her voyage at 3pm with splendid weather and in about six hours we entered the Bay of Biscay and I tell you a landsman's first experience of this is anything but agreeable. For a better idea of this you may picture about 60 to 70 human beings cooped up in about twice as many sq. feet whilst Neptune is having a game of pitch and toss with one's stomach.

**Day 2: Sunday March 16<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

About the same as last night except that this morning we saw porpoises leaping out of the water and in the afternoon we past a Troop Ship in full sail with troops returning from the Mediterranean, one of the grandest sights I have ever seen.

**Day 3: Monday March 17<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

The best of us began to pull round a little and are having what is called a “first rate passage” and in the evening we are expecting to get out of the Bay of Biscay, for at present we are spanking along, almost under full sail at the rate of 12 to 13 miles an hour. We can see the North Coast of Spain first looming in view which is a grand sight rarely seen by a landsman.

**Day 4: Tuesday March 18<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

A glorious day gliding along the Spanish Main and everything going along smoothly, making a run of 290 miles which speaks very well.

**Day 5: Wednesday March 19<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

No change from yesterday. Going along in good style, making about the same distance.

**Day 6: Thursday March 20<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Another glorious day, temperature something like what we have in England about June, with refreshing breezes. Had a good spell this am, of an hour and a half with brush and Holy stone cleaning out our cabins, which we take it in turns to do. Shortly afterwards the Captain and Doctor makes a visit of inspection which is almost a necessary proceeding or else among the various nationalities which make up our party, they would not be so particular as one would wish, as they consist of English, Scots, Irish, German, French, Danes and Italians, so you may take it for granted that we have not to be fastidious in the eating but I will just give you a list of our weekly diet. Thick porridge, coffee bread and butter for breakfast, sometimes salted or preserved meat. Dinner – potatoes and stewed rice (with fresh meat on Sunday for a change) pickles etc. Tea – tea, bread and butter and if you have not had enough you must make up with sea biscuits, which are not very palatable.

Also, whilst going through the Tropics we have fresh lime juice given twice a week. Besides these we have flour, suet and raisins given so that we can make cakes and puddings. To return to the events of the day we are just getting in sight of land which proves to be the Canary Islands and about 5pm we dropped anchor in the Bay of Tenerife, and were immediately boarded by natives selling fruit, oranges and cigars. Here we took in coal as we lay in the bay, it was a splendid sight before us, the island with lofty hills in front and the town of Tenerife nestling at the foot.

**Day 7: Friday March 21<sup>st</sup> 1884.**

5am. The sun first rising on the bay looks splendid so does the town with its flat roofed square houses without windows, and the mist first rising off the mountains are altogether worth seeing. At 8:30 am, finished getting coal in, weighed anchor and started off with a sea as calm as a mill pond and not a breath of wind. In about 4 hrs. we were out of sight of land once more.

**Day 8: Saturday March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1884.**

All passengers have to muster on the deck.

**Day 9: Sunday March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1884.**

The day beginning to be oppressively hot. The sailors are spreading awnings over the decks. The Captain goes on a round of inspection, to see how all are going on and to see if any complaints are to be with anything. Afterwards he conducts Divine worship according to the Church of England. In the evening the passengers have service among themselves, same as the Wesleyans. Weather is now very hot and we are glad when the sun goes down, for until that it is almost unbearable.

**Day 10: Monday March 24<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Washing day on board ship looks for the time being, something like an animated clothes line. About 7pm we met the Cape mail boats, each vessel exchanged signal which was a splendid sight in the growing darkness.

**Day 11: Tuesday March 25<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Splendid weather in the morning and evening. Through the day the sun is so hot that we can do nothing but lie down on our backs in the shade wishing for the sun to go down, the thermometer stands at 90 deg. F in the shade so that you may imagine how the butter and cheese are.

**Day 12: Wednesday March 26<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Under the heat of the tropical sun almost without power to move oneself about, gasping for evening. But after today we expect it to be rather better as tonight, we cross the line (Equator).

**Day 13: Thursday March 27<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Decided change in the weather and while we are busy getting our luggage, a very heavy shower of rain comes on and the sea is changed from being like a mill pond to large rolling waves, tossing us about like shuttlecocks.

**Day 14: Friday March 28<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

The weather is more reasonable, but still we have very oppressive heat through the daytime. Flying fish are coming on board in great numbers.

**Day 15: Saturday March 29<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Dead calm set in and if our vessel was a sailing vessel, we should be being like a log on the water.

**Day 16: Sunday March 30<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Still very calm weather. Muster and divine service. Repetition of last Sunday, also boat and fire drill which all male passengers have to take part in.

**Day 17: Monday March 31<sup>st</sup> 1884.**

Change in the weather, wind and sea very high, knocking us about awfully.

**Day 18: Tuesday April 1<sup>st</sup> 1884.**

Both wind and sea very much against us. We are making very poor progress and to show you the difference it makes we have only made 261 miles since yesterday.



**Day 19: Wednesday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1884.**

Father, Mother and Lillie down with diarrhoea, as indeed most of the married people and children are. We believe it has been brought on by the bad state of the water we have to drink.

**Day 20: Thursday April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1884.**

Still much sickness amongst married people. Wind and sea very much against us, but weather has cooled considerably.

**Day 21: Friday April 4<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

An accident occurred to the engines which occasioned a delay of about 2hrs. Wind and sea against us.

**Day 22: Saturday April 5<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Progressing very slowly, knocking us about frequently, however much cooler.

**Day 23: Sunday April 6<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

Rough morning. Just managed to get a glimpse of the South African coast. Muster, service and boat drill. Same as last Sunday. In the afternoon the sea showed unmistakable signs that we were not far from land. Flying fish, porpoises, seagulls, albatross and penguins seen in great numbers. We are anxiously looking forward to being in Cape Town in the morning where we should have arrived about last Friday or Saturday if everything had been alright.

**Day 24: Monday April 7<sup>th</sup> 1884.**

5am. Cape Town in sight. Expect to go onshore about 12 noon.

