

SEAS IN HISTORY
Series editor: Geoffrey Scammell

The Atlantic

Forthcoming titles

THE MEDITERRANEAN

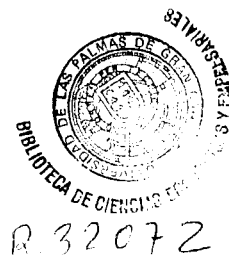
THE PACIFIC

THE BALTIC AND NORTH SEA

THE INDIAN OCEAN

Paul Butel

Translated by Iain Hamilton Grant



London and New York

Chapter 7

The Atlantic in the nineteenth century

Tradition and change

An age-old but always changing transatlantic trade

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, trade in the Atlantic underwent no major change. In fact, global commerce covered this maritime space as it had any other, with characteristics similar to those it had in the previous century: the goods were the same, the movements of trade were identical, and the sailing ships that kept them thus were fundamentally no different. What had changed was the volume of the quantities transported, as the case of cotton from America for supplying Lancashire's textile industries shows, as well as North America's increasing importance due to its trading links.¹

By contrast, the second half of the nineteenth century, with the development of a traffic in heavy raw materials, especially foodstuffs from the temperate climates such as cereals (wheat, maize), meats, butter and cheese, fresh fruit and preserves, exported to Europe in growing quantities from North America, Argentina and Uruguay as well as from Australia and New Zealand, marked a genuine change in large-scale overseas trade. The Atlantic, particularly the North Atlantic, became the privileged area for inter-continental trade, since a global market for these goods sprang up. The cereal market was the most important. In addition, an increasing amount of raw materials was transported: metals and non-ferrous minerals, nitrates, petrol, rubber, oil-producing plants and coal, since boiler coal from Wales was exported to coal depots in Africa or America, where steamships were re-fuelled. Larger and larger quantities of new manufactured goods, such as the materials for the railway networks that enabled products from the western United States or Canada to be sent to port, also began to appear in cargoes. These same railways enabled ever greater numbers of immigrants to be transported across the ocean to the 'frontiers' of these new countries.

Thus a change occurred in men's relation to the seas, where, after the end of the 1840s and during the 1850s, they were often chased from their native lands by hunger and political persecution, drawn by the appeal for a workforce in the

industrial towns of the eastern United States, as well as by the receding frontiers of North and South America. The ships that transported them increasingly belonged in the service of the regular transatlantic shipping lines that had appeared since the 1820s, but improved enormously during the steam age. Their departures were set for precise dates and they were the property of limited companies, sailing firms in bitter competition over the most profitable human freight to transport from Europe to America, as well as wheat and other products on their return. Fierce competition caused freight and transport costs more generally to fall. It saw German and, to a lesser extent, French companies successfully challenge the British and the Americans over the Atlantic traffic.

There were also changes in the recruitment of sailors and their relation to captains and shipowners. Previously, the particular characteristic of sailing ships, in almost every European and American port, was the connection between captain and crew lasting only for the duration of a voyage. After that, the whole complement was dismissed with the exception of the captain. In Bordeaux in the eighteenth century, this same practice of temporary associations could be seen in making preparations for the Antilles, and extremely diverse crews frequently changed.² A ship's boy on the *Highlander* in 1857, Herman Melville managed to escape his miserable comrades on the ship's arrival in New York. His comrades, sharing a 'cordial antipathy' towards a captain despised for his severity, were able to calm themselves sufficiently to say a collective farewell 'to an old lord and master' they did not revere. Like 'rootless seaweed', the sailors went this way and that.³

Despite being a simple anecdote, such behaviour reveals a general rule that contracts of labour between sailors and shipowners' firms were only to become permanent with the introduction of steam and shipping lines. Creating large companies, their directors maintained a permanent workforce that henceforth sailed under a flag noted for its consistency – and its ambitions.

At the same time, the new Atlantic era saw the reinforcement of the predominance that had, it is true, been acquired from the beginning of the century, by ports that dared to challenge the hegemony of the largest – London. Still unrivalled at the end of the eighteenth century, London saw Liverpool challenge its role and successfully compete for its traffic, even clearly outdoing it in the North Atlantic. This was also the era of the spectacular growth, on the other side of the Atlantic, of a port like New York, whose activity complemented Liverpool's remarkably well. In Europe, Hamburg, to a certain extent dependent on London for capital at least, also developed more and more while the great centres of the previous century such as Bordeaux, Cadiz and even Amsterdam, declined.

English advantages and American successes at the beginning of the nineteenth century

British commercial supremacy in 1815

At the close of the wars of the Revolution and the Empire, Great Britain's naval and commercial supremacy seemed beyond question: in 1814, the United Kingdom possessed more than 21,000 merchant ships having a capacity of 2,400,000 tx.⁴ As regards ocean-going ships alone, in 1816, the ports of London and Liverpool possessed 6,198 and 2,946 ships respectively, with a capacity of 1,250,000 and 640,000 tx.⁵ However, well beforehand, from the American War of Independence to the French Revolution, the sudden boom in British trade raised England to a new rank: in 1785, the British fleet comprised almost 12,000 ocean-going ships with a capacity of 1,200,000 tx, that is, considerably more than double the French merchant fleet, which then comprised more than 5,000 ocean-going ships with a capacity of 729,000 tx.⁶ Naval war under the Revolution and the Empire created a period of 'splendour' for British foreign trade, although it was uneven, since its growth slowed after 1802.⁷ Moreover, Great Britain owed this growth more to the spectacular improvement in its exports of cotton fabric than to the mastery of colonial traffic made possible by the war. In fact, it left the neutral countries, especially America, with a reasonably firm hold on this traffic. While it certainly became the world's entrepôt for all exotic products, thanks to its naval power, Great Britain nevertheless came up against the far from insignificant effects of the Continental blockade that closed Europe's markets, and had then to face up to a conflict with the United States. To offset this situation, Britain had to turn towards the new Atlantic markets in an Iberian America that was seeking its own independence. In fact, although speculative sales could be made there, they were far from offering the desired Eldorado.

After withdrawing from Europe's markets, the British had found their best clients in the United States which, in 1806–1807, took 27 to 28 per cent of their manufactured goods and was to hold a privileged position after the peace.⁸ The Americans, however, had also become Great Britain's rivals.

The advantages of America's neutrality

Remaining outside the naval war even in 1812, and with the war with Great Britain lasting no more than 30 months, the United States profited from France's maritime decline. Their neutrality ensured them an exceptional advantage throughout the several years of conflict. In the days following the American War of Independence, in 1784, America's trade with Europe employed almost 1,220 ships with a capacity of 200,000 tx.⁹ In the Caribbean, United States ships

profited considerably from the European powers having abandoned their commercial monopoly, creating free ports, beginning in the days following the Seven Years' War, and accelerating on the eve of the French Revolution.¹⁰ In 1789, the slave trade was opening up to foreigners in the Spanish colonies; in 1794, by the Jay Treaty between the United States and England, the West Indies' ports were open to American ships. It was above all, however, during the maritime war of the revolution, after 1793, that American neutrality became valuable, enabling it to enlarge its trade considerably: the French and Dutch Antilles had no choice but to turn to neutral ships, and the Americans were more numerous, for delivering manufactured goods and provisions and carrying colonial goods. There was a huge expansion of American trade in the Antilles and the Spanish mainland colonies (Central and South America). These markets absorbed almost a third of all American exports from 1792 to 1812, that is \$383.8 million out of \$1,234 million. Even in the English Antilles, whose ports received food-stuffs and wood imported by Yankee ships, the Americans took the advantage: in 1803–1805, these colonies received two-thirds of their imports of provisions, and almost the entirety of their wood, from the United States.¹¹

By the Council Order of 6 November 1793, London ordered the navy to capture all neutral ships trading with the French colonies; however, two months later the English gave in to the protests of the neutral countries and only prohibited direct trade between France and her colonies. This tolerant attitude was maintained until the blockade was more stringently enforced in November 1807. Colonial cargoes travelled through United States' ports and ships experienced a fictive interruption in their voyages since, without charging, American customs delivered certificates of payment of duties for captains to show in case of British arrest. In 1807, 40 per cent of the Antillean trade was in American hands, and the French islands provided their privileged market. From 1793 to 1797 they took from 39 to 44 per cent of American exports to the Antilles and Spanish America.¹² The annual value of United States' sales in the French colonies thus reached almost \$8 million.

Meanwhile, Spanish America also turned out to be a highly attractive market: in 1799, the United States made sales of \$9 million there, because its colonies had been freely opened to American ships and products. Although this decision was then rescinded, the complicity of the colonial authorities kept trade at more than \$8 million in 1800 and 1801. Throughout the decade of the 1800s, this market took at least 40 per cent of America's exports in the Caribbean. In 1807, Spanish America received more than \$12 million-worth from the United States. The British did not hide their annoyance at seeing American trade reducing the capacities of a market that had turned into one of the most attractive by Napoleonic Europe's being closed to their products.

It was with Cuba that the volume in American trade developed most. From

1792 to 1817, the colony's population doubled due to the arrival of new slaves for a sugar economy in the midst of expansion. The example of Philadelphia best brings out America's interest in Cuba: in its port, the majority of the ships that came from Spanish America from 1798 to 1809 departed from Cuba, as shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 America's trade with Cuba, 1798–1809

Arrivals in Philadelphia	1798	1801	1807	1809
From Cuba	58	98	138	91
From Spanish America	75	137	200	184

At the time of the colonial revolt, the Americans hurried several of their ships to Rio de la Plata (42 in 1806), to Montevideo and Buenos Aires (30 in 1810), and to Mexico, where Vera Cruz received 47 Yankee ships in 1806.

Meanwhile, owing to the wars, American progress in the Caribbean and Spanish America served the interests of the colonial cities. Neutrality provoked an expansion in the transit trade that practically ceased at the end of 1807 with the American embargo, and in its entirety with the peace in 1815. This 'ephemeral' trade had seen its value increase very quickly, rising from \$1.8 million in 1792 to \$47 million in 1801 and \$60 million in 1807, that is, 32 times higher than in 1792. On the other hand, when the Americans exported more and more cotton to the British Isles, they developed a trade destined to grow further after the peace: on the eve of the blockade, they were far and away Great Britain's principal providers, their cotton covering slightly less than half her needs, 27,038,000 pounds out of a total of almost 60,000,000 pounds per year.¹³

British ambitions and initial disappointments

While in Europe the Napoleonic blockade was reducing English sales, and while, after 1808, the United States also closed its ports, the markets in America's foreign colonies – Portuguese and Spanish – seemed to be capable of supplying the outlets the British needed. The combatants respected American neutrality less and less, and numerous incidents pitted the Americans against the British, not the least of which was the capture of American sailors or deserters from the navy on board American merchant ships by the English. President Jefferson decided on an Embargo on 22 December, 1807, refusing to trade with Napoleon as well as Great Britain.

Since 1806, there had been massive expeditions to Buenos Aires, by the English who took advantage of the colony's rebellion against Spain. English exports of manufactured articles at this time reflected a sophisticated speculative ability on the market of Rio de la Plata, with those made to foreign colonies rising

from £162,000 sterling in 1805 to £318,000 sterling in 1806.¹⁴ Two years later, Brazil saw an improvement in English sales that was just as unexpected: England sent almost 10 per cent of its national product there, with foreign American colonies then receiving £3,416,000-worth of manufactured articles.¹⁵

However, disappointments were not long off: sales were to a large extent at a loss, since they had sent far higher quantities of products than these markets had the capacity to absorb. Several adventurers were left with packages of poor-quality goods bought at rock bottom prices; firms thought that they would be able to get rid of unsold stocks of articles made more for the North American market than for Brazil: ice skates or warming pans were ill-suited to the tropical climate. Already at the beginning of 1809, two-thirds of the cargoes received in Rio de Janeiro remained unsold. The trader Antoine Gibs decided that to send goods to Brazil was 'to throw money out the window'.¹⁶

Exchanges were often made with cotton, which was much in demand since the Americans had suspended their shipments; however, stocks piled up, and, due to the industrial crisis of 1810 in England, sales were difficult. At the beginning of 1812, London and Liverpool held stocks of 110,000 bales of Brazilian cotton in the former port, and 300,000 bales of American cotton in the latter, brought back by expeditions in 1811.¹⁷ The value of English exports to the United States rose in 1812 to more than £4 million pounds sterling, and was improving again in Europe.

The disappointments the English suffered in Brazil and Rio de la Plata did not prevent Great Britain, after the peace, from hoping to achieve success through large commercial and political projects in a Spanish America that had attained independence, thus finally being able to find some stability. Exporters thought that in Latin America they could find an alternative to the traditional colonial system within an 'informal' empire that was easy to build up due to the total elimination of French naval power. In so doing, however, England was heading for confrontation with the Americans.

Anglo-American rivalry in Latin America

After 1815, Castlereagh and Canning in England believed that the liberalization of trade with new partners, in particular the Latin Americans, would further British influence beyond solely commercial effects. The City of London could develop large investments there, British advisers would be consulted on constitutions to establish new states. In so doing, they hoped to find agreement with Great Britain's major competitor in these markets, the United States. Turning away from crossing the Atlantic towards Europe, since the transit trade that had been the principal cause of the Yankee boom during the Napoleonic wars had come to an end, the Americans were tempted to turn again to the Latin American continent.

In the face of the success of independence movements in the Spanish colonies at the beginning of the 1820s, Canning proposed to the American government that they sign an agreement by virtue of which London and Washington would guarantee the independence of the new states against all military intervention from Spain, France or the Holy Alliance acting together. Welcoming an American diplomat to Liverpool, the English Minister had this to say:

a common language, a common spirit of commercial enterprise and a common respect for properly governed liberties should force our two countries into an understanding. Old quarrels forgotten, mother and daughter will join together to face the world.¹⁸

These propositions received a very cool response since they arose while London was conducting gunboat diplomacy, the already declared law of the Pax Britannica in Caribbean waters. British merchants suffered there from the anarchic situation created by rebellion. For the French Minister Villèle in December 1822, when London launched an expedition against Cuba, the 'island traders' were playing a new role when they profited from a police action that was supposed to reach the pirates in their lairs.

Facing squarely up to this, the United States found confrontation difficult due to the crushing superiority of the British navy. However, the privileged character of US relations with the rest of the American continent had already been recognized for almost a generation. At the beginning of the American War of Independence, on Saint Eustacius, the great Caribbean entrepôt, the Dutch governor had honoured the star-spangled banner of the American brig the *Andrew Doria* with a cannon salute.¹⁹ In 1781, Vergennes feared that the Americans were forming a naval power capable of becoming master over the whole immense continent. However, although the American frigates had inflicted important losses on the Royal Navy at the time of the war in 1812, it was not for all that a matter of challenging English sea power.

Meanwhile, the Americans worked to realize their ambitions. In 1819, they purchased eastern Florida from Spain for \$5 million after having cleared it of bases for pirates such as the Frenchman Jean Lafitte, as well as the anti-Spanish rebels. In the same year, President Monroe sent a squadron to Buenos Aires in pursuit of the pirates who were attacking American ships on the Rio de la Plata. In Venezuela, the same expedition forced Bolivar to abandon his pirate operations against the Americans. The instability of the Spanish colonies favoured the explosion of piracy in the Caribbean where trade needed to be protected, since the Yankee traders occupied strong positions there. This was particularly the case in Cuba where, in 1820, American exports accounted for more than two-thirds of all the United States' exports to Spanish America. A law was voted in by Congress

to protect trade, and three years later the American squadron in the Antilles comprised two frigates, a corvette, a sloop and two schooners charged with protecting American interests from West Africa to the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, however, Monroe supported the rebels against Spain, and the American navy was not allowed to assist Spanish officials in Cuba and Puerto Rico, where the pirates had their bases.

When, at the end of 1822, Canning proposed to the United States that they be the 'second light' enforcing English initiatives for stabilizing the Caribbean, President Monroe's response, on 2 December 1823, was that the American continent should avoid all future colonization. America should not get involved in European affairs. The American government alone took on the commitment to protect the continent of the two Americas against all European intervention. The Monroe doctrine became: 'the Rock on which American politics remained standing for more than a century'.²⁰

In the immediate term, the Americans pursued their mission to protect trade: 16 ships carrying more than 1,500 men and 133 cannon cruised off Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Cuba in February 1823. Numerous pirates were destroyed but yellow fever struck down the American forces and calm was not to return until several years later, once Madrid had recognized the independence of the republics in 1827.

When London wanted to enforce the decision, taken in 1807, to abolish to slave trade, the United States had no intention of recognizing Great Britain's right to police the seas, either in the waters off the American mainland, or on the other side of the Atlantic. American slave-traders were one element of this trade, and England wanted to persuade or force the other maritime powers to negotiate treaties allowing them to seek out and arrest slave-traders sailing under a European flag. Cruising off Africa or the Antilles, American ships might arrest ships of their own, but they did not act against other flags, and their actions turned out to be somewhat limited: there was rarely ever more than one ship stationed off the West African coast, although numerous slave-traders flew the star-spangled banner.

An impossible Eluorado

Confronted with the very firm intentions of the Monroe declaration, Canning wanted to react: on 3 February 1825, the Speech from the Throne announced that His Majesty George IV, who until then was opposed, in the name of the principle of monarchy, to recognizing the independence of the Spanish colonies, took measures to confirm, by treaties already existing, commercial arrangements between his country and the American nations that appeared to have consummated their separation from Spain. 'Spanish America is free and, if we manage our affairs well, it will be English', the minister announced on 17 December 1824.

The hopes that England placed in the markets of Latin America, stabilized at last by independence, were to be quickly disappointed. The violent crisis of 1825 revealed the absurdity of hopes founded a short while before on the future of the American republics. In September 1825, in the face of the market's expansion, the Lancashire cotton trade collapsed and panic broke out on the London Stock Exchange at the end of the year. Foolhardy commitments made in Latin America would appear to be one of the major causes of the crisis through which England was passing. The surplus in manufacturing production had been dumped there without taking sufficient account of the market's real capacity, and banks had agreed to make heavy loans to the new governments: in 1822 and 1824, Barings lent more than £3 million sterling to Colombia and Argentina; in 1825, Barclays had lent Mexico more than £3 million; in Brazil, Rothschild lent £2 million in 1825. Firms had been established for mining the mineral wealth of Peru and Mexico, with some 29 companies from February 1824 to September 1825.

But the new states were not credit-worthy, the mining companies were not viable, and exports could not find buyers. Traders were fortunate when they were paid in silver, which the capital holders had simultaneously exported there, for some of the products sent across the Atlantic. The independence of these countries had limited economic and social effects, and they neither enhanced the market's needs, nor provoked a redistribution of wealth, nor improved inland transport.

It nevertheless remains the case that once the crisis was passed, British predominance was long lasting in all these countries, with the exception of Cuba and Mexico, where the Americans occupied strong positions. In Salvador de Bahia and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, English traders, still few in number in 1815, occupied an important position 10 years later. In 1828, a boom again began to take shape in English exports, and British goods were sold more cheaply in Rio than in the City of London: 'handkerchiefs, cotton fabrics in all colours, silks, hats, shoes and stockings; all these articles hung from shop fronts, covered doors and windows with their finery'.

The British kept the lion's share in the Brazilian trade where, in the middle of the century, they provided half of the country's imports, and their sales improved noticeably,²¹ occupying first place in the provision of manufactured articles. It is still true that, with the exception of the cotton fabrics, these were reserved for the leisured classes: table linen, porcelain, glassware and silverware crossed the Atlantic and took their place in every wealthy house in Rio, Salvador and Recife, the three large ports that absorbed the majority of the imports. In the rest of the country, a very low purchasing power and poor transport explained why these articles were stationary products. The same observation could be made of the whole of Latin America.

Brazil in particular, having made a considerable contribution under Napoleon

to supplying England with cotton, withdrew its sales while the United States controlled the British market. Brazilian sugar and coffee were also barred from England, at least until the middle of the century, when the produce of the English colonies enjoyed imperial favour that for coffee did not end until 1851, and for sugar until 1854. It was no longer possible to sell these goods to France for the same reason. Countries without colonies, such as Germany, Austria and the United States – although the latter favoured Cuba – were certainly able to absorb some proportion of this produce, and the Hanseatic towns therefore developed an Atlantic trade with Brazil: the number of ships arriving in Hamburg from Brazil climbed from four in 1815 to 137 in 1824.²²

An old colonial structure persisted between England and Brazil: the former sold a relatively large amount and bought little, so that the latter's trade deficit was considerable and had to be regulated in a multilateral system of payments, due to the surplus in its trade with North America and the countries without colonies. This was indeed the 'informal' empire on the subject of which the Brazilian minister in London showed so much bitterness in 1854: 'Trade between the two countries is conducted with English capital, on English ships, by English companies. The profits...interest on the capital, insurance payments, commissions and dividends, all goes into English pockets.'²³

Despite an initial infatuation, relations remained strained, and Brazil – like Argentina with its skins – still had something to offer the market, while the other Latin American republics had nothing, with exports of guano from Peru only beginning in 1840, and Bolivia and Colombia exporting only gold and silver. There were serious handicaps: the extremely high costs of transport in the age of the sail, even along the Atlantic coasts, and all the more prohibitive for reaching the Pacific coasts by navigation around Cape Horn; costs and total credits were both increasingly burdensome, requiring more than substantial profits. Meanwhile, cargoes fell after the end of the 1820s, while traffic remained just as irregular. A single cargo could fill a port's shops for months or even years, and it was crucial to calculate precisely the date of arriving at the stopover, or ships would run the risk of being left with unsold goods. Contrary winds from Europe to America could make a ship wait in Liverpool's docks for weeks or even months: a cargo of winter textiles that was supposed to reach the market in autumn might be unloaded in Valparaiso in Chile in the southern spring, when the wintry weather had disappeared.²⁴

The same handicaps on sailing were also found in the North Atlantic on the route from Europe to the United States, although here market relations were quite different, due both to the European demand for American products and the spectacular growth of consumption on the other side of the Atlantic.

New York and Liverpool, the new Atlantic of the liners

In the eighteenth century, the principal entrepôt ports on the European Atlantic front, from Cadiz to Hamburg, knew huge prosperity. London already dominated British trade by a long shot, and it retained first position in 1800, when it took in two-thirds of Great Britain's foreign trade. On the other side of the Atlantic, despite the sudden explosion in the population of the United States and the Antillean boom, there had been no comparable growth of the ports. In 1815, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, the French and Spanish ports still felt the consequences of long naval conflict very keenly. In Spain, neither Cadiz nor Barcelona could regain the wealth of the previous century, and in France, neither could Nantes, La Rochelle or Bordeaux. When peace returned, there was certainly a desire to return to the golden age of the past, but the plantations of the largest Antillean island, Santo Domingo, the flower of French Atlantic wealth, had been partially destroyed by the slave revolt of 1791 and the maritime war had unsettled its markets. There were efforts on behalf of French Atlantic trade even in the midst of the conflict, and even more under the Restoration, to reconstitute a commercial empire that was still held in living memory. Huge fortunes were made, particularly in farming the new sugar islands like Cuba, or in the traffic from India. However, they were never comparable to those created in the new trading giants of the nineteenth century, Liverpool in the British Isles, and New York in North America, which were indisputably the dominant poles of exchange. We could add, of course, Le Havre in France, or Hamburg in Germany; and London remained a large metropolis, especially in financial terms as well as in its trade in Asia and the Antilles. As regards relations with the United States and the other Atlantic countries, however, Liverpool took on a far greater importance and New York was to dominate trade in America.

The age of King Cotton

Before the wars of the Revolution and the Empire, the signs of a spectacular boom in Liverpool were already emerging. In 1791, one commercial directory saluted its port's success in trade and business in the islands: 'The merchants here trade throughout the entire world except Turkey and the East Indies, but the most profitable trade is that of Guinea and the Antilles that has enabled many to build large fortunes.'²⁵

After the end of the eighteenth century, however, striking improvements in the Lancashire cotton industry turned out to be an incomparable contribution to the boom of the Mersey port. Following the peace of 1815, Liverpool was able to play a full role as an intermediary between the adjoining area, with industrial

Lancashire in full growth, and the other side of the Atlantic, for the supply of cotton and for the available outlets.

In the United States, at first in South Carolina and Georgia, then in Alabama and Louisiana, the use of machines for cleaning cotton fibres allowed production to be handled much more quickly: in a single day, one man could clean 300 lbs as opposed to 10 lbs when the work was done by hand, particularly when Whitney's machine, invented in 1794 but only generally available around 1820, was used. On this date, cotton was grown in an area 1,000 km across and 1,620 km long. Liverpool became the primary port for importing it into Great Britain: in 1833, 840,953 bales of cotton were unloaded there as against 40,350 in London and 48,913 in Glasgow, and Liverpool thus covered more than 90 per cent of the needs of British industry.²⁶ Its port kept this role until the American Civil War, while the United States remained the primary provider. On the eve of the war, Great Britain used some 2 million bales of cotton every year, of which Liverpool imported from 80–90 per cent. To deal with these imports, its port possessed more and more ships: in 1816, there were 2,946, with a total tonnage of 640,000 tx. London had 6,198 ships with a tonnage of 1,250,000 tx. However, in the middle of the century, Liverpool's tonnage exceeded 3,600,000 tx over 9,338 ships, while London then reached only 3,290,000 tx over 16,437 ships.²⁷

In the 1840s, at the same time as the cotton trade was developing and, in exchange, exporting manufactured goods to the United States, a new element intervened that strongly favoured the traffic between Liverpool and New York. This was the massive immigration of Europeans, with waves of immigrants pouring in to the United States as Europe began to 'burst in large numbers into America'.²⁸ The Irish famines, the economic difficulties on mainland Europe and revolutions were many of the causes of the more and more numerous crossings. This ever growing flow, transformed into a tidal wave at the end of the century, enabled the United States to receive 10 million immigrants from 1880 to 1914, when Slavs and Italians from central and eastern Europe followed immigrants of Nordic origin, Irish Catholics, Germans and Scandinavians.

The crossroads of New York

For receiving immigrants as well as manufactured goods, New York was particularly well placed for its exceptional vocation as a crossroads. Its port opened onto the greatest variety of horizons: the Great Lakes to the west, more easily accessible after 1825 following the digging of the Erie canal; to the south by inshore navigation (although this was not without its dangers) towards the ports of the Carolinas and Georgia, and further on, Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, towards the Alabama port of Mobile, and New Orleans, the port of Mississippi and Louisiana. From New York, one could also head further south towards the Caribbean, where

Cuba turned out to be an excellent market. To the north-west, the utterly safe shelter of the waters of the Sound, beyond Long Island, opened onto some 200 kilometres of inshore sailing in the direction of New England.

As well as men, New York received manufactured goods and equipment, especially materials for the railroad that was indispensable to pushing back the frontier, and distributed them inland. However, its port also played a very significant part in the wealth created by the export of American cotton. A *cotton triangle*, established over the voyage across the North Atlantic between the American Atlantic façade and Liverpool, gave New York an essential role.²⁹ In fact, ships entering New York were often headed for ports further south in order to take on cotton and carry it back directly to Europe. For this reason, departures from New York for the European continent were lower in number than arrivals. However, there existed a very important inshore navigation traffic from New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah and Charleston headed for New York, taking cotton there to be exported from the Hudson port and to bring back the foodstuffs, such as wheat and flour, that the South needed. In fact, a monoculture reigned in the cotton fields, and foodstuffs had to come from the north or the north-west. Initially transported by way of the fluvial axis of the Mississippi, flour and meats from Cincinnati and other markets in Ohio and the west were, after the 1830s, rerouted through New York via the Erie Canal to be shipped as before in their totality to New Orleans.³⁰ This trade was conducted in exchange for the import of European manufactured goods, which New York stringently controlled. The sale of these products in the western and southern United States was conducted through the intermediary of large commercial firms, whose head offices were in New York, supported by the banks and the shipowners of that city, and that sent their agents to buy cotton and finance the loans that enabled plantation owners to purchase the foodstuffs and textiles they required. The key to New York's success lay in the exceptional ability that the city's trade had to supply the credit needs of the South. As previously in the Antilles, the plantation owner was likely to commit himself to at least a year's credit, corresponding to the maximum value of future crops, with a view to being able to buy more land and slaves.³¹ New York was better placed than anywhere else to make increasingly large profits from this situation.

Under the commercial dominance of New York, the South received far less from Europe than it sent by the direct maritime route. In 1822, exports from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana rose to almost \$21 million, whereas their imports were no higher than \$7 million.³² One of the principal activities in the New York market, at the beginning of the summer, was the arrival of traders from the South to replenish their stock for the coming season. They did not hesitate to spend several weeks in a city that was already highly attractive, with lively theatres and clubs, and often returned in the same ship that carried the goods they bought.

Profiles of the ports of New York and Liverpool

Drawing in the best part of the boom in the transatlantic traffic in the first half of the nineteenth century, these two ports experienced continued growth. In Liverpool, from 1816–1818 to 1843–1845, measured by tonnage, arrivals and departures were more than tripled; average annual arrivals rose from 390,073 tonnes to 1,214,794 tonnes, and annual average departures from 317,476 tonnes to 1,300,632 tonnes. In New York, from 1821–1823 to 1843–1845, growth was less powerful: average annual departures rose from 195,600 tonnes to 488,600 tonnes, and arrivals from 212,000 tonnes to 555,000 tonnes. After 1845, the boom accelerated in the two ports. In Liverpool in 1850, departures exceeded 1,483,000 tonnes, and in New York, during the years 1851–1853 and 1858–1860, saw arrivals rise to an annual average of 1,634,000 and 1,852,000 tonnes, and departures to 1,297,600 and 1,538,000 tonnes. On the eve of the War of Secession, the port of New York had tripled its traffic since the 1840s and multiplied it by seven to eight times since the beginning of the 1820s.³³

This statistical measure of the boom leaves the particular characteristics of the two ports somewhat obscure, and it is essential to illuminate these since they represented the foundation of their Atlantic dynamism.

In relation to the European ports, New York enjoyed the enormous advantage of not experiencing, as London, Liverpool and Le Havre did, enormous tidal swells. There was no point therefore in fitting out expensive floating docks; they could content themselves with building wharves perpendicular to the banks of the East River and the Hudson so as to enable ships to come alongside at any state of the tide. The coast itself, however, comprised long cordons of sand scattered throughout the Hudson estuary, and did not provide very favourable access. Towards the north, Long Island's coast extended over almost 160 kilometres, while the sandy coastline of New Jersey was spread over 150 kilometres. Via Long Island, ships could take the maritime route for Europe by ascending towards the Gulf Stream in the direction of Newfoundland, where, in winter, fogs and icebergs represented a real danger. Via New Jersey, there was the southern route through the Caribbean.

Some 25 kilometres from Manhattan, Sandy Hook formed the edge of the port. Sandbanks stretched between Sandy Hook and Long Island, and ships had to navigate the pass at Gedney Channel with the aid of pilots, in order to leave or enter the bay of New York. This was split, by the 'straits' of the narrows between Brooklyn and Staten Island, into two parts, the Lower Bay and the Upper Bay. From the latter, vessels passed Governor's Island in order to gain access, via Manhattan, to the Hudson or the North River and the East River. Long lines of boats, quays and docks lay stretched out there, creating the feverish life of the port.

After the 1830s, steam tugs helped ships as they left, and a pilot would climb

aboard before departure. In the Upper Bay, several ships lay at anchor, before passing the green coasts of Staten Island to gain access to the entrance to the sea from New York harbour, in the narrows. Here, they had the impression that the port was closing in on itself, already constituting its limit, beyond which, in the Lower Bay, the immensity of the ocean unfolded. Nevertheless, they still had to clear the straits in order to reach the Atlantic, and sails were unfurled and filled upon reaching the Lower Bay, allowing the tug's pilot to return. Right up until the beginning of the 1880s, sea-going sailing ships and steamers could enter and leave from Sandy Hook without waiting for high tide, the 7.30 metres of low tide sufficing for a sailing ship of 2,500 tx or a 5,000 tx steamer. By contrast, in 1885–1890, the departure of the new, much larger, much lower-lying steamers, laden with cotton, cereal and meats, had to await high tide to move into a depth of 8.5 metres.

Space soon turned out to be limited and expensive, bribes had to be paid for wharves, for making use of the services of the tugs that depended on the port's masters, because thousands of sailing ships, and then steamships, were crowded into the Bay. In 1824, James Fenimore Cooper provided a realistic picture of this – a port of intense activity with still rudimentary installations:

The time has not yet come for the construction of massive, permanent quays in New York Port. Wood is still too cheap and labour too expensive for so large a capital investment. All these wharves are still very simple, a frame of posts covered in stones and recovered in a hard-packed surface. The front of the port takes up some seven miles...only the Battery, the Post office, is protected from the Bay's waves by a stone pier...New York's wharves form a succession of little docks, sometimes quite large, for sheltering thirty to forty sails, sometimes much smaller.³⁴

Remaining provisional, the wharves were only built for 30 years and gave the impression of incompleteness and disorder. Waste from cargoes of molasses, oil, tea and cotton were strewn over the quays of some 60 wharves in the East River and the 50 in the Hudson around 1840. But the activity did not stop there: in a single day in spring 1836, up to 921 ships could be counted in the East River and 320 in the Hudson. Three-masted square riggers, brigs, schooners and cutters came in great numbers to New York's port because its costs were the lowest on the entire American Atlantic coast, and loading and unloading were very quickly done: in 1852, two and a half days were enough to unload one of the 1,700 bales of cotton from a packet out of New Orleans, on a wharf in the Hudson. Moreover, this cost less than \$5, whereas in Baltimore it would have cost \$50, and \$68 in Boston, Charleston and Mobile.³⁵

At Liverpool, the Mersey estuary provided a clear route for navigating, at least at the entrance to the port, since on leaving, contrary westerly winds frequently delayed departures or required much tacking before being able to reach the open sea.

To land here after a crossing lasting, on average, 30 days from New York for traditional sailing ships, or less than 20 days for ships following the transatlantic lines, it was necessary to round Holyhead and Anglesea in Wales, after having passed Ireland. Often the westerly breeze that until that point blew regularly, had just dropped, and ships had to start to tack. It was only when a strong following wind filled the sails that they started to get under way again, arriving in the Irish Sea to pick up one of the pilots cruising there on light sloops, looking for ships heading for Liverpool. The ships had to moor at the mouth of the Mersey and wait for the flood tide to carry them, with a favourable wind, into the great arms of the estuary's waters. After a few kilometres, the river narrowed and they could anchor off the city. The most important thing, however, was still to be accomplished: to reach the dock where they would find a mooring quay. It was necessary to leave anchorage, then under pilot's orders, manoeuvred by a tug, bumping against other ships, the ship would thread its way into a lock before the tide carried it back. Having managed this, the ship found its mooring at a quay in one of the docks that were built in Liverpool since the eighteenth century, and that subsequently multiplied.

It took a patient and long-term effort, leaving nothing to chance, to make Liverpool ready to exploit Atlantic traffic by building installations to ameliorate the natural inconveniences of an estuary open to the tides. In 1710, the first closed dock for accommodating ships was built, and at the end of the century Liverpool already possessed a complete system of docks, while London was still vacillating over building its own. By 1771, George's Dock had been built for receiving ships from the Antillean and American trade, fitted out with 17 warehouses. The King's and Queen's Docks were opened in 1788 and 1789. Herman Melville could compare Liverpool's docks with the Egyptian pyramids or to genuine Chinese walls, when celebrating their monumental scale. With the peace of 1815, the available area amounted to 7 hectares. In 1821, the Prince's Dock, the largest yet constructed, added 4.5 hectares to this, its two locks 15 metres in size, and cost £650,000 sterling, whereas the docks of the eighteenth century cost no more than £150,000. Brunswick Dock was added to these in 1832, and in 1834–1836, Waterloo, Trafalgar and Victoria Docks. By 1836, the available area was close to 37 hectares. Almost 30 years later, when the steam age was at its height, it exceeded 100 hectares.

Liverpool's docks were closed off from the city by railings, ensuring security for the merchants that New York's quays could not provide. Men were often searched on leaving, as there were so many thefts perpetrated on board the

docked ships. Metal sheds stretched along the quays for protecting unloaded cargoes.

This remarkable effort of fitting out, completed around the middle of the nineteenth century by extending the docks over to Birkenhead, on the other bank of the Mersey, benefitted from the first railways being set up, after the 1830s, linking Liverpool to the rest of Lancashire and the Midlands. In 1837, the Great Junction Railway joined Liverpool to Manchester and Birmingham. Around 1850, via the London and North Western Railway, the transportation of goods had already risen and the predominance of the link with Manchester was quite clear: with almost 125,000 tonnes a year of goods sent from Liverpool to Manchester, 52 per cent of the traffic went on iron wheels, and two-thirds of this was the cotton imported by Liverpool. The remainder was sent to Birmingham (25,000 tonnes), the Black Country (35,000 tonnes), Sheffield (29,000 tonnes) and London (27,000 tonnes).³⁶

A port providing an essential service to its surrounding industries – textiles and metallurgy – Liverpool also profited, around this time, from the extension of railway lines in the north of England. Immigrants coming from northern Europe and disembarking in Hull then reached the Atlantic coast by train.

All this explains why Liverpool had managed to dominate so many of the Atlantic routes in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1850, the United States came at the head of the list of purchasers of manufactured goods, taking 852,500 tonnes out of a total of 1,483,000 tonnes exported by Liverpool, that is, almost 58 per cent, followed by Canada with 187,500 tonnes, Brazil and Argentina with 76,100 tonnes, and the Antilles with 71,000 tonnes. In total, the New World received more than 80 per cent of Liverpool's exports.³⁷ In 1857, Liverpool occupied first place amongst Great Britain's exporters, with more than 45 per cent of this trade, ahead of London's 23 per cent and Hull's 13 per cent.

However, there were also unfavourable aspects. Inclined to demand total freedom for its exports to Europe, the United States intended, from the 1820s, to protect its young, north-eastern industries. There was a gradual increase in import duties for European products: with the tariff of 1828 they reached a rate of 35 per cent on English woollen textiles, and in 1832, on the same product, the rate was 50 per cent. In 1842, certain goods were taxed as high as 100 per cent *ad valorem*. The South, which needed machines and manufactured goods that were sold less expensively in England than in the United States, reacted against these taxes that favoured the north's industries, and this was an important aspect of the differences that contributed to creating the tension between north and south leading to the crisis of the War of Secession.

These policies could cause immense harm to firms of traders. Thus, in 1828, the ship *Franklin*, leaving Liverpool on 18 May, did not reach New York until 6 July, after a crossing of 49 days. It bore a total tax burden of \$70,000 on its

cargo of fine textiles and cheap cotton fabrics. Another ship, the *Silas Richard*, more fortunate, left Liverpool six days later and reached New York on 29 May, some hours before the application of new taxes. Its crossing time of only 42 days allowed it to avoid the tariff. The *Franklin's* cargo had to be re-exported to another market.

Moreover, Liverpool could not struggle against competition from Le Havre for the finest goods. These articles, the most recent of fashions coming from Le Havre and Paris, already created a vogue for luxury goods, the finest gauzes, birds of paradise, pearl necklaces, 'Hernani' scarves, fine boots, handkerchiefs 'à la paysanne', and small bottles of perfume. The majority were re-exported from New York through the ports of the South. The regular shuttles of the new transatlantic lines enabled stocks to be replenished rapidly.

The Mersey port was also endowed with a powerful commercial network for selling in the United States. In the first half of the nineteenth century, one of the most characteristic cases was that of the Quaker firm Cropper, Benson and Company, agents in Liverpool for another Quaker, Jeremiah Thompson, who emigrated from Yorkshire to America in the eighteenth century and in 1818 founded the first regular sailing line from New York to Liverpool, the Black Ball Line. The importance of Cropper, Benson and Company's role is shown in the part played by the speculation on cotton that preceded the crash of 1825. It had regular shipments at its disposal, made by the packets of the Black Ball Line. An orgy of speculation developed at the end of 1824 when it was announced that Liverpool's stock was one-third lower than normal stock. Prices soared. Cropper, Benson and Company, and a few other traders, stocked up to the maximum. In New York, they only learnt of the situation some weeks later, and Jeremiah Thompson dispatched a messenger to New Orleans to give his agents the order to buy as much cotton as possible. There was a race to buy in Liverpool, New York and New Orleans. In Liverpool, the crash began in April 1825, when a Scotsman threw a small quantity of low-priced cotton onto the market as enormous quantities of Brazilian cotton were arriving. Manchester cut back stringently on its purchases and prices collapsed in Liverpool while remaining high in New York as the speculators carried on putting in their orders in the South. On the arrival of the Black Baller, the *Florida*, in New York in May, announcing the collapse in prices in Liverpool, there was a rapid collapse. New Orleans still did not know this, and Thompson's agent, ascending the Mississippi, bought even more at the highest prices. By mid-summer, all the ports in the South were aware of the crisis and its trail of bankruptcies. The crisis was very serious for Liverpool, since British credit underwrote these exchanges: Jeremiah Thompson's numerous bills were drawn on Cropper, Benson and Company, and were very expensively discounted in New York.

The capital of these Liverpool firms remained quite low, so that Cropper,

Benson and Company had £60,000 sterling available to them, and Browns £125,000. Highly dynamic, however, these traders tried to take advantage of the manufacturers of Manchester and Yorkshire in controlling foreign commercial networks.³⁸ In the second half of the nineteenth century these trading firms carried themselves to the forefront of Liverpool's shipowners. This was the case with the Harrison brothers, who created the Charente Steamship Company, and Alfred Holt, with the Ocean Steam Ship Company. Just as Cropper, Benson and Company had done, the Harrisons had an excellent agent in America at their disposal, one Alfred Le Blanc, who had representatives in the cotton belt and the cereal states, the products of which were now the object of highly important exports. These traders made purchases by taking advantage of profitable freight agreements signed with the railway lines that transported wheat and cotton to New Orleans to send them on to Liverpool. The Harrisons, like Liverpool's other large firms, such as the Rathbones, managed to diversify their traffic. The Harrisons' American agent, Le Blanc, thus switched to Mexican fruit while American cotton was depressed. Following their associations in the Antilles, the Harrisons also worked on Brazilian cotton.

Due to the seasonal aspect of these trades, it was best to organize the turnaround of their ships to get the best ships in the most appropriate areas to secure profitable freight levels to compensate for the general tendency of freights to fall. Those who could call on the Forsytes of Liverpool, the Rathbones, the Holts or the Harrisons, whose role was cultural as well as commercial, could struggle against increasing foreign competition, in particular from the Germans of the Hamburg Amerika Line, by making an effort to concentrate their exports of coal, salt and manufactured goods from Manchester, in exchange for imports of American wheat and cotton, Brazilian cotton, African palm oil and Chinese tea, to Liverpool's advantage. For this, they made use of 'on the spot' agents able to prepare the best loads for their sailing and steamer fleets, taking advantage of the new rapidity in the transmission of market news due to the installation of undersea telegraph cables.

The Atlantic of the liners

Liverpool and New York profited more than any other ports from the establishment of the liners, packet sailing boats that could complete the fastest crossings of the Atlantic, offering traders a punctual service. Freights of high value, couriers and cabin passengers were the first clients of the new shipping lines that reduced the uncertainties of business.

For over 30 years before the middle of the century, before the steam age took shape, great sailing ships were used. Their departures on fixed dates along the Gulf of Mexico line from New York to Vera Cruz and then to New Orleans, and on

the North Atlantic line from New York to Liverpool, constituted a major innovation. In 1818, the Black Ball Line opened, the first regular line between New York and Liverpool. Up until then, charterers had to depend on shipowners sending their ships out, the 'occasionals', when they considered them sufficiently full, after longer or shorter delays. They did not disappear altogether, but continued to be attached to Liverpool or New York, leaving on dates they set in accordance with when they expected their freight, and sailing when it suited them, provided that their destination was always either Liverpool or New York. The same services existed, although more sparsely, between other European ports such as Le Havre, Hamburg or London and the Atlantic coast of the United States, in the same ports in which the liners were about to appear.

Regular liner services for courier traffic first sprang up in the American North Atlantic, from Newfoundland to Halifax and Boston. It was again for the courier traffic that liners began their crossings between Europe and America. The crews on these ships had a very tough job because of the amount of sails they carried in order to make as quick a crossing as possible and to maintain their reputation for speed. Favoured by westerly winds, they could complete their Atlantic run from New York to Liverpool in less than 18 days, whereas other ships needed 30 days. From Europe to America, contrary winds delayed them and they required at least five weeks, or up to eight in winter. A few years of running before the wind were enough to damage them, and they were then sold to traders in Nantucket or New Bedford who repaired them and fitted them out for whaling.

The ocean-going ships provided their passengers with great comfort, with salon cabins in mahogany and maple, furnished with rosewood tables with fine silverware, an enormous quarter-deck where the gentry – their clientele consisted of rich businessmen and wealthy English aristocrats – took the air. The fare on board was sophisticated, and passengers drank champagne, fine wines and prize cognacs. When the first liners appeared, shipowners, in advertising their voyages, emphasized the quality of their construction, the speed and the regularity of the crossings, as well as the comforts of these ships, 'built entirely in New York from the best materials, covered in copper, with extraordinary sail-makers, thoroughly experienced commanders, offering regularity underway and prompt delivery of goods'.³⁹

When the first departures of the Black Ball Line took place – the *Courier* from Liverpool and the *James Monroe* from New York – the quality of their ships justified the publicity. On 5 January 1818, an inquisitive and sceptical crowd gathered at the foot of New York's Wall Street to see if the departure lived up to the publicity that had already been created. With her seven cabin passengers, a valuable cargo, albeit low in volume, and above all, her postbag, brought on board from a nearby coffee house at the last minute, the *James Monroe* left her moorings at the appointed time and sailed down the port in a snowstorm. She had to go through

the seas off Newfoundland, where fog had turned its shores treacherous and, to make sure of her position, the ship often had to make use of a sounding line. Despite these obstacles, the crossing took only 25 days. Leaving Liverpool on 4 January, the *Courier* took 49 days to reach New York.

In 1822, the Red Star Line was the second line to be opened from New York to Liverpool, with the departure, again in January, of the *Meteor*. The Black Ball Line then worked with four ships and responded by doubling the number of its vessels. A third line, the Blue Swallowtail, was created in September of the same year. At the end of 1822, there were four departures a month from New York, and just as many from Liverpool, and they were already enormously successful. In 1819, the New York firm Leroy, Bayard and Company opened a line to Le Havre. At the end of the 1820s, the number of liners from New York was nine times higher than it was in the first year, since there were 36 of them, and in 1845 they passed the 50 mark. Similar attempts were made in Boston and Philadelphia, although they were in no way comparable. The *Amazon*, the largest ship in service in the middle of the century, was almost 71 metres long and 19 metres wide with a tonnage of 1,771 tonnes, whereas, in 1816, the *Amity*, the first liner from Newfoundland, was 35 metres long, less than 10 metres wide, and had a tonnage of less than 400 tonnes. Their dimensions grew towards the end of the 1820s, and the *Charles Carroll* from Le Havre, which carried Charles X into exile in England in 1830, was 40 metres long and had a tonnage of 411 tonnes.

The steam age

On 22 April 1838, 20 years after the departure of the first liner of the Black Ball Line, New York welcomed the first two steamships on a regular line to have crossed the Atlantic from Europe to America:

News of the *Sirius*' arrival spread through the city like a powder trail and the river was completely filled with boats carrying onlookers. A universal joy reigned, every face beaming with happiness... While all this was unfolding, suddenly a large cloud of black smoke streaming into the sky came into view over Governor's Island. It all happened very quickly and in three hours the cause of the phenomenon became clear: it was the steamship the *Great Western*, whose immense bulk was propelled at high speed across the bay. It passed quickly by and, next to the *Sirius*, graciously exchanged salutes with her before coming to anchor in the East River. If public opinion was excited at the arrival of the *Sirius*, it became intoxicated with joy at the sight of the superb *Great Western*.⁴⁰

The *Sirius* had left Cork on 4 April, and the *Great Western* left Bristol on 8 April,

that is, a 19-day crossing for the former, at 6.7 knots, and 14 and a half days for the latter, at 8.7 knots. Each ship used steam continuously, burning 400 tonnes of coal. With its shorter crossing, the *Great Western* had enough to burn, but the *Sirius* had to burn some of its wooden superstructure.

The steam age had, in fact, begun earlier, with a crossing in May 1819 from Savannah to Liverpool in 27 days on a steam sailing ship using steam over 80 hours in alternating 10-hour days. On the Irish coast, sighting the funnel spitting out its smoke, a cutter from the Irish customs thought that the ship was on fire and raced to her aid. However, for many years steam was only used in coastal voyages around the American Atlantic. The successful crossing of April 1838 unleashed a 'rush for steam' in New York throughout the rest of the year. In July and November, Liverpool dispatched four more. After 1840, steamships could make six voyages per year, twice more than sailing ships, and two steamers provided the same monthly service as four packet sailing ships of the traditional line.

The entry into service of Cunard's vessels, first on the line from Liverpool to Boston via Halifax in 1839, and then from Liverpool to New York in 1847, marked a new stage. Originating from Halifax in Nova Scotia, where his Quaker father from Philadelphia had taken refuge after the American War of Independence, Samuel Cunard took an initial interest in the postal service from Halifax to Liverpool by traditional liner. When London considered subsidizing the postal service in 1838, Cunard managed to obtain the subsidy for a thrice-monthly Liverpool to Boston line by steamships. He hired excellent crews, placed them under an iron discipline, safety being the primary objective, in order to beat fogs, icebergs and storms. In 1847, his son Edward set up in New York, where he obtained a postal grant twice as large as the preceding one. Samuel Cunard then doubled his fleet, using his eight ships every fortnight from Boston to Halifax to Liverpool and from New York to Liverpool.

'Drive the Cunarders off the ocean!' – crushing the Cunards was the dream of many an American, the most aggressive of which were the ships of the Collins Line. Collins was a shipowner who, over a period of 20 years, had sent packet sailing ships to Vera Cruz and New Orleans. In November 1847 he obtained a large subsidy from the American Mail while starting to build four fast ships that could beat the Cunarders. The United States Mail Steamship Company could offer the best crews and most comfort for passengers. Its first steamer, the *Atlantic*, began its crossings from New York to Liverpool in 1848 and in 1850, three more ships, the *Pacific*, the *Arctic* and the *Baltic*, with a tonnage of some 2,800 tonnes, that is, 100 tonnes more than the average Cunard ship, of 35 metres in length, were put into service. Speed was to be the new company's major advantage. However, despite the immense resources the Americans put into it, Cunard maintained its top ranking for the postal service and in 1851 its ships transported three

times more courier traffic than Collins. For passenger transport, however, the Americans' speed and comfort pleased many: in the first 11 months of 1852, Collins transported 4,306 passengers, and Cunard 2,969.⁴¹

Daringly taking great risks to increase his ships' speed, and enduring very high operating costs, Collins was to suffer a serious set-back when, on 27 September 1854, his ship the *Arctic* collided with the *Vesta*, a small French steamer, in thick fog off the Newfoundland coast; the ship sank, and there were more than 300 deaths. Less than two years later, crossing from Liverpool to New York, the *Pacific*, having struck an iceberg in fog, sank with all hands and cargo. The tragic disappearance of this steamer, prefiguring that of the *Titanic*, the giant of the White Star Line, in April 1912 in these same coastal waters off Newfoundland, dealt Collins an extremely heavy blow. His largest ship, the *Adriatic*, 116 metres in length with a tonnage of 4,114 tonnes, costing \$1.2 million, that is, 6.6 million gold francs, completed only two voyages and had to be sold in 1858.⁴²

The loss of two of the best ships in his fleet hit the American shipowner hard, whose new ship, the *Adriatic*, under construction after the wreck of the *Arctic*, was not yet ready. He had to use old ships and was unable to keep up the twice-monthly crossing on the basis of which he had secured a grant from Congress. To pay his creditors, the *Atlantic* and the *Baltic* were sold, just like the *Adriatic*. Enabling the entire company to maintain challenging speeds turned out to be very costly: the engines were extremely heavily used and had to undergo major repairs between voyages. Cunard's gains between 1850 and 1855 were more than 50 per cent of the Americans' (£1,202,885 sterling as against £801,420).⁴³

Cunard's prestige came out of this battle of the North Atlantic greatly strengthened. Charles McIver, an associate of Samuel Cunard's, was fond of emphasizing how his company's success was based on disciplined crews and regular services, announcing to his captains that 'we are counting on you to maintain loyalty amongst everyone connected with your ship, officers and crewmen, through the firmest discipline and efficiency'.

Approaching the coast always turned out to be a delicate operation, and particular care had to be taken in navigating, and it was always necessary to use sounding lines to confirm the ship's position, even if this meant reducing speed. Similarly, captains had to concentrate on avoiding what was the most feared of hazards, the numerous icebergs in winter and spring along the coasts of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

The duration of crossings was notably reduced due to the struggle between Collins and Cunard. In 1848, Cunard's *Europa*, averaging 12 knots, made the crossing from New York to Liverpool in 11 days and three hours; three years later, Collins' *Baltic* proved faster, reducing the journey time to less than 10 days at an average speed of 13 knots over the same route.

Around 1880, when steam finally took over from the sail in rapid transatlantic

crossings, Cunard's progress was again confirmed. Whereas in 1840 the company had four ships displacing 8,200 tonnes, 40 years later his fleet possessed 28 ships, displacing almost 137,000 tonnes, Cunard, however, was far from monopolizing the transportation of emigrants, the steerage-class passengers who proved to be the most profitable; its share of the passenger trade in the North Atlantic was no more than 15 per cent in 1880, and the ships assigned to this trade were of only average tonnage, less than 3,000 tonnes, fitted with low-output engines. The crisis of 1873 had proven the status of the company, which had had to face increasing competition. Efforts were made to increase the capacity of its liners: the *Bothnia* and the *Scythia*, entering service at the end of the 1870s, could each transport 300 cabin-class passengers and 1,200 steerage, displacing more than 4,000 tonnes.

In fact, competitors multiplied, initially in Great Britain, where three rival companies sprang up from 1850–1860: the Inman Line, the White Star Line and the Guyon Line. Although the last of these disappeared after a few years, the other two led a bitter struggle for the conquest of the North Atlantic. William Inman, the creator of the Inman Line, began with the London to Philadelphia line in 1849, where he undertook to make a fortune from his fleet by increasing his share in the transportation of emigrants, which was then in full swing. Understanding the financial interest they represented, he gave them better transport conditions, offering berths and light meals, while his competitors held onto traditional transports, cramming their passengers in without hygiene or comfort.⁴⁴ His profits enabled him to offer a weekly service on the New York line, opened in 1857, and in 1869, to bring in liners capable of worrying Cunard: the *City of Brussels* and the *City of Berlin*, followed later by the *City of Rome* and the *City of Paris*, steam sailing ships with iron propellers and hulls. Cunard's most serious rival, however, was Thomas Ismay, owner of sailing ships; he founded the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company by taking over the White Star Line that had undergone expansion around 1851, during the time of the gold rush in Australia. His first transatlantic vessel, built in the Belfast dockyards, was the *Oceanic*, for the Liverpool to New York route completed in May 1871. He made rapid progress, and the following year Ismay had six ships at his disposal in the North Atlantic. The White Star Line – the shipowner had adopted the name of the company he took over – stood out by virtue of its comfort, a highly valued innovation: cabins were fitted with running water, heated by steam; the great hall, magnificently decorated, occupied the entire width of the ship, opening onto the seaport and starboard.

The ships of the White Star Line set about challenging their rivals in high speed runs. In fact, after 1869, Cunard no longer figured among the medal winners in the Atlantic, preferring security to speed, to which policy it adhered until the beginning of the 1880s. Around 1880, speeds reached 15 knots; then, at the beginning of the 1890s, they reached 20 knots. The White Star Line then brought

new ships into service, the *Teutonic* and the *Majestic*. The Inman Line responded with a new series of the *Cities*, built in Glasgow, and Cunard was obliged to follow in the dash for speed with its two new ships, the *Luciana* and the *Campania*, also built on the Clyde. At 189 metres long, sailing at 21–23 knots, displacing 13,000 tonnes, and carrying 2,000 passengers, these transatlantic vessels gave Cunard back its predominant position. In 1880, the company was restructured with this in mind, increasing its capital, and by 1885 it had already taken the record, the Blue Ribbon, for the crossing, with the *Etruria*, in six days and two hours, four days' less than in the middle of the century. The *Etruria* was the last steamer to be fitted with auxiliary sails.

At the same date, the efforts made by Cunard and other British companies to maintain their control over North Atlantic crossings met with increasingly severe competition from shipowners on the German side of the Rhine. Two companies from Hamburg and Bremen appeared on the North Atlantic in the middle of the century and took on an important position in the link between Europe and America. Until the end of the 1840s, the sailing ships of the Hamburg Amerika Line sailed for New York; after 1865, this company turned to steamers, and was imitated by its Bremen rival, the North German Lloyd, in 1858. From the 1860s their ships occupied an important role in the transatlantic transport of North European immigrants to North America, as well as Latin America. It was at the end of the century, however, that, under the impetus of Albert Ballin, with the Kaiser's support, the Hamburg Amerika Line turned out to be increasingly threatening to the British. 'Our future is at sea', Emperor Wilhelm II could declare in 1896, and Ballin enlarged this ambition still further, setting vast horizons for his company: 'the world is my kingdom'. It was the Bremen company, however, that in 1898 was the first to assert the new German ambitions. The *Kaiser Wilhelm der Gross*, with a tonnage of more than 14,000 tonnes, capable of transporting 1,725 passengers, and with a crew of 480 men, offered baroque splendour in its cabins as well as speed. In 1898 it took the record for the crossing between Bremen and New York, calling at Southampton and Cherbourg in less than nine days. In 1900, the Hamburg firm launched the *Deutschland*, but Albert Ballin then abandoned the dash for pure speed that put management at risk, preferring to give his liners the advantage of the most splendid comfort. At the same time, he was willing to side with the Americans when Pierpont Morgan, the steel magnate, wanted to lead the struggle against Cunard to reconquer these maritime routes.

For a long time during the age of the liner, the French rather paled. At the beginning of the opening of the transatlantic route the French – who had showed great reticence regarding railways – were even more reticent about the use of steam in maritime transport. At the opening of the initial debate in 1840 in the Chamber of Deputies, where the creation of three steamship lines, Marseilles to the Antilles to Mexico via Bordeaux, Saint Nazaire to Rio de Janeiro, and Le Havre

to New York, was being discussed, Lamartine stated: 'Fire is a thousand times more expensive than wind, the wind that God gives freely to every sail.'⁴⁵ Despite the irritation of traders in Le Havre and other ports, they had to wait for almost seven years to see the state support the creation of the *Compagnie Générale des Paquebots Transatlantiques*.

In 1847, the *Union* was the first steamer with a paddle wheel to leave Cherbourg for New York. The administration and operation of the line, however, were very poorly handled. Only the first voyage was completed in a satisfactory manner. Boat after boat ran out of coal, and the crossing had to be finished by sail, and even the sail liners of New York harbour outran them. In New York, not understanding English, the helmsmen did not follow the pilots' orders, giving rise to clumsy accidents and numerous jokes on this topic that injured French self-esteem.

It was the creation of the *Compagnie Générale Maritime* on 25 February 1855, by the Pereire brothers, that marked France's real entry into the transatlantic routes. The Pereire brothers bought up ocean-going sail ships for the first commercial service to the Antilles and California, and on 20 October 1860 the *Compagnie Générale Maritime* became the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* for postal transport. Three ships were under construction in Greenock in Scotland: the *Washington*, the *La Fayette* and the *Europe*. The *Washington* made the first departure, giving the opportunity for a sumptuous feast in Le Havre on 15 June 1864. At 105 metres long, with paddle wheels and sails, the packet boat was luxurious and richly decorated, with salons, a library, a smoking room, and 10 bathrooms, while the cabins were fitted with toilets and dressing rooms for the ladies. On its rear mast the white flag with a red globe of the *Transatlantique* flew for the first time.⁴⁶ In the same year it reached a new stage with the foundation of the Penhoët shipyard in Saint Nazaire which was destined to experience a great boom, with five ships built there and three others ordered from British yards. The return of peace in the United States after the American Civil War created a favourable opportunity, and in 1867, 9,100 passengers were transported to New York while the *Compagnie* benefitted from a postal subsidy.

Meanwhile, the *Transatlantique* was to go through a difficult period when competition was fierce: in 1872, there were up to 39 departures a month for the United States, that is, 468 a year, in place of the 100 in 1861; from Le Havre alone there were 130 departures a year for New York, 104 of which were foreign.⁴⁷ The German companies, having no postal service to ensure, took the majority of the market. The split between the Pereire brothers in 1868 was an initial blow for the French company, after the collapse of *Crédit Mobilier* the year before. This was followed by three catastrophes: on 21 November 1873, the *Ville du Havre*, rammed by an English three-master with 226 lost; the *Europe*, abandoned at sea on 10 April 1874 with 18 feet of water in the engine room and the holds; and

finally, on 15 April 1874, the *America*, deserted by its crew 80 miles west of Ushant, after transferring passengers to other ships, was towed into Plymouth by the English. This last incident unleashed furious criticism of the sailors, whom the public suspected of giving in to panic and abandoning the passengers.

In the same year, however, Isaac Pereire's return led to a new boom, and the number of passengers doubled and freight tonnage tripled by 1880. Isaac Pereire immediately strengthened the other maritime routes operated by his ships, in particular that to Central America, where the Le Havre to Bordeaux to Colón and Marseilles to Colón met with great success. The Marseilles line was opened by Ferdinand de Lesseps, who was making ready for the opening of the Panama Canal on 7 August 1886, serving Genoa, Naples, Cadiz, Madeira, Tenerife, Martinique, Venezuela and Colombia. On the North Atlantic four new liners, the *Bretagne*, the *Champagne*, the *Bourgogne* and the *Gascogne*, laid down a challenge to other companies. The *Bretagne*, with a speed of close to 20 knots, managed to better Cunard's *Etruria* to take the record for the crossing in 1888. A dazzling liveliness on board and a lavish table made the French line renowned. They were, strictly speaking, the preserve of a wealthy clientele, 5,528 first-class passengers transported by the four liners in 1888, whereas, in the same year, there were 1,881 second-class passengers and 23,124 third-class, or steerage, passengers. On the other hand, a section of the steerage where the immigrants' quarters were located could be dismantled and filled with goods.⁴⁸

Despite the launching of a new packet boat, the *Touraine*, in 1890, with a steel hull and two propellers, capable of reaching more than 21 knots, the *Transatlantique* was again to go through an eclipse relative to the successes of the German giants and Cunard's fastest ships at the end of the 1890s and the very beginning of the twentieth century. Four other liners put into service from 1890 to 1914, the *Lorraine*, the *Savoie*, the *Provence* and the *France*, did not look for spectacular success in a dash for speed which, moreover, was considered passé, while people were looking for comfort and luxury through increased tonnages. The *France*, which made her maiden voyage to New York on 20 April 1912, was not concerned to take the Blue Ribbon from Cunard's *Mauritania*, which had stolen it from the *Deutschland* and was to keep it for 20 years. For a crossing of six days from Europe to America, at a speed of 23 knots, the use of turbines enabled more space to be made in the steerage decks, and led to more passengers being carried. With 27,300 tonnes displacement, the *France* could carry almost 1,900 passengers in comfortable or even luxurious conditions, so that the American press could define it as 'a floating Paris'.

The Americans who, after the Civil War and Collins' failure had left the initiative in the North Atlantic first to the British, and then to the Germans, began to take it back again in the 1880s. They got their opportunity when the Inman Line was experiencing difficulties in 1881, and American capital took over the British

company, bearing the name of the Inman and International Line. It became the American Line in 1893, and was sufficiently powerful to incite Cunard and the White Star to join together to negotiate with the Americans, resulting in their choosing Antwerp, rather than a British port, as their European terminal, with Southampton becoming their English port of call.

It was with the intervention of Morgan, the fabulously rich American banker and industrialist, that the British were led to fear the worst. For \$25 million, Morgan made himself master of the White Star Line in 1902 and managed to unleash a price war in the North Atlantic for transporting immigrants. At stake was the transportation of new waves of European migration – Latins and Slavs – to the United States and the rest of the Americas. Since the 1880s there had been price wars pitting the White Star Line against Cunard, then English companies against German ones, but Morgan's offensive aimed to sharply reduce, if not to eliminate, the share of his only two competitors, the French Transatlantique and Cunard. In fact, he had allied his group, International Mercantile Marine, with German companies, this alliance aiming to eliminate Cunard from transporting emigrants from Mediterranean Europe. At the beginning of 1904, Morgan lowered his prices for steerage passengers to only £2 sterling for the crossing from London to New York. Cunard, which then charged prices ranging from £2.10s to £3, had to revise its fares downwards, but Morgan went further in order to beat these prices, reducing his fare to 30 shillings.⁴⁹ At these levels, losses were inevitable. To avoid a price collapse that would hurt everyone, especially the German lines that were still supporting Morgan, a conference was held in Frankfurt in August 1904 that brought Cunard and the continental European companies together again. As Cunard was trying at that very moment to take its share of the transportation of Hungarian and Austrian emigrants boarding in Fiume for the United States, an emigration that had until then been dominated by the German lines, a compromise could be reached. Cunard undertook to put a sharp limit on its presence in Fiume, the English having to make no more than 26 annual departures, that is 5.2 per cent of the trade taken on by the continental European companies. In exchange, the price war came to an end.

After further episodes, with Cunard continuing to challenge the Germans in Fiume, strengthened by their technical superiority – the company held the speed record for crossing the North Atlantic – its prestige was strengthened in January 1908 when, at the London conference, Cunard accepted an agreement with its rivals. The English company could cover 13.7 per cent of the traffic between Europe and America and was free to transport Hungarian passengers from Fiume.⁵⁰ Despite the opposition of a hostile American government, in the name of the anti-trust legislation against all price agreements between companies, this agreement would govern transport on the North Atlantic right up until the First

World War, each company agreeing to respect fixed quotas for transporting emigrants to North America.

Tensions arising between the transatlantic companies and governed by agreements like the London accord, looked more like truces than final rulings: in 1906, an English commission declared that 'in the ocean-going business, there is no middle ground between war and peace'. There were also more profound phenomena marking new life on the Atlantic. First among these was the preponderance of the regular lines, originally created for postal services, such as the English firm Cunard or the French Transatlantique, over the 'tramps' – the charter ships not tied to a regular line, that sailed whenever their holds were full. These tramps, of which there were several in New York for trade with the Caribbean and Central America, maintained a sailing tradition born of the seventeenth century. They continued to cross the seas, but their share was reduced: in 1914, it stood at less than half the world's traffic.⁵¹

The tendency of falling freights that became manifest during the first third of the nineteenth century, was also strengthened and proved to be compatible with the consistent operation of the lines. The maritime conferences that established a minimum discipline and 'fair play' between the operators attempted to find solutions, without genuine success, for what was a real collapse of the price of transport that favoured the giants and concentrated resources. Thus, in 1913, the Hamburg Amerika Line had 48 liners as opposed to only six in 1886; it gathered available traffic in European ports; its liners and its cargoes leaving from the North Sea and the Baltic took it largely from the national shippings.

These commercial rivalries led to severe confrontations in which nations' grievances came out more and more. Imposing their laws on the Atlantic for almost a century, the British did not take well to the claims of Wilhelm II to develop his naval forces so as to be better able to put the ambitions of his merchant fleet into practice. They were entering a new age of the Atlantic, the twentieth century. The 1914 war brought to an end a long period during which the Atlantic had known the Pax Britannica. This Atlantic had built its wealth on industrial growth first in Great Britain and then on the Continent, as well as an ever healthy exploitation of the wealth of the New World. The appeal of a still-virgin continent in which to prosper, and the hope of finding a freedom in America that old Europe often denied, encouraged Europeans to cross the Atlantic in an unprecedented flow of immigration.

Europe crosses the ocean: immigrants in the New World

From 1840 to 1914, almost 35 million Europeans left the Old Continent to fill

the rest of the world. The New World attracted them in the greatest numbers: the United States alone, between 1840 and 1890, welcomed some 15 million immigrants, whereas, in the 40 years between independence and 1840, there had been no more than a million. This unprecedented flood of migration accelerated again at the end of the nineteenth century: from 1890 to the First World War, more than 14 million Europeans landed in the United States. The peak of the wave of immigration was reached in the 1900s, with more than six million immigrants.⁵² From 1815 to 1914, Canada saw the arrival of more than 4 million immigrants, coming principally from Great Britain, more than 2.5 million of which settled after 1880.⁵³ It is true that in Canada, 'a reservoir with two taps', many were only passing through to go on to the United States.

Immigration in Latin America, derisory before 1850 and still low as late as 1870, suddenly exploded,⁵⁴ because, in the less than half century from 1871 to 1914, 9–10 million entrants were counted. In Brazil alone, from 1891 to 1900, there were more than a million immigrants. Exercising a relatively stronger influence than in the United States, due to the low population of the states in Latin America to begin with, immigration contributed strongly to a rise in the number of inhabitants. Thus, Brazil and Argentina rose from 3.2 million inhabitants in 1800 to 26.6 million in the former in 1914, and from 400,000 to 7.6 million in the latter. As in the United States, the pull exerted by development on pioneering fronts, such as coffee in the Brazilian state of São Paulo, cereal crops and cattle-farming in the Argentine Pampa, made immigration all the more important. In Europe, however, demographic pressure and changes in the economy also played an essential role.

Old and new immigration to the United States

In the United States the immigrants' origins were of two clearly opposed kinds: the old and the new, the first dominating entrances up until 1890, while the second was growing stronger right up until 1914. During the 1880s, 'old immigration' still accounted for almost two-thirds of the arrivals, but amounted to less than 40 per cent of them at the end of the 1890s.⁵⁵ Western and northern Europe provided the majority of the immigrants, with a predominantly British contribution in the beginning, after which a larger and larger place was taken by Germans and Scandinavians. In the 'new immigration', Austro-Hungarian elements, Italians and Slavs largely took over, coming from southern and eastern Europe.

Set apart by their origins, these two currents also differed in the types of reception offered to immigrants, as well as in their reactions. Regarding the former, the immigrants were welcomed with the greatest favour. Vast spaces to clear, fertile land, a variety of natural resources and the lack of a workforce were

among the factors that attracted new immigrants. In the land that received them, they themselves felt satisfied at discovering a freedom that until then they had not known. Economic, social and political crises struck north-western and central Europe between 1845 and 1853, and the same conditions were reproduced again and again thereafter, prompting a large number of Europeans to leave the land of their birth. Having generally suffered in Europe, the immigrant 'shook off and repudiated his past, leaving for a new life in a new environment on another continent'.⁵⁶ With a certain pride, he acquired a new dignity and Siegfried cites the case of the Welshman, Stanley, who came to settle in Louisiana, where he was adopted by a New Orleans trader:

A few weeks after my arrival in New Orleans, I had become utterly different in character and in mind. My new feeling of dignity made me stand up straight to my full height, and plunged me into a kind of ecstasy. Here, poverty and inexperience were nothing diminishing, they were not exposed to the scorn of the wealthy or the mature. It would take me centuries to extinguish the affection I feel for the town where it was revealed to me that a child may become a man.

Doubtless very fortunate, Stanley was not however the only one to be happily absorbed into the American 'melting-pot'. Numerous British artisans and their families, coming from the valleys of the Mersey, the Clyde or the Tyne, also managed to find a new pride on American soil. The exemplary success of Andrew Carnegie, the magnate of the iron and steel industry, is testimony to this. His father, a master-weaver from Scotland, felt the destructive impact of the industrial revolution.⁵⁷ Rendered redundant by mechanized industry, on 17 May 1848 he and his family boarded for Pittsburgh to meet his parents, who had already settled there. Although the elder Carnegie could not turn to another kind of work, Andrew Carnegie, aged 13 at the time of his crossing, erstwhile bobbin winder in a cotton factory at \$4.80 cents a month, learnt to adapt, and managed to become a telegraph operator. At 18 years of age, he entered the Pennsylvania railroad, which paid \$35 a month, and at age 24 became one of its directors.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the conditions of welcome had changed a great deal: there was a reduction in social mobility, the price of land had grown increasingly higher, and the immigrant was no longer welcomed as a pioneer coming to clear new spaces: the final frontier had disappeared. Increasingly important after 1880, the Latin and Slav presence also represented another social stratum, quite different from that of the British, German and Scandinavian agriculturists and artisans. Chased away by overpopulation and lured by the bait of better salaries, shamelessly recruited and lulled with illusions by the agents of maritime transport companies competing with each other for passengers, the

new arrivals were crushed into the poorer districts of the large towns on the east of the United States, grouped by nationality, which made it very difficult, if not impossible, for them to assimilate. The problem of the American soul being endangered by the admission of foreigners was exacerbated.

Of course, similar fears had come up since the beginning. Before 1840, in his newspaper, Philip Hone had exclaimed:

All of Europe is crossing the ocean....All those who cannot live at home. What are we to do with them? They raise our imports, eat our bread, fill our streets and not one of their twenty year olds is able to fend for himself.⁵⁸

However, on reaching economic maturity at the end of the century, America became more conscious of its national identity. Inhabitants and new arrivals alike shared this sentiment, believing that Europe was increasingly using America as a dumping ground for its poor, its homeless and its criminals. The future of the Union would be threatened if immigration were not controlled. The Atlantic had to become an unbreachable barrier once again. The politics of immigration quotas, decided in 1924, was already in outline before the First World War, and fairly early on voices were raised in Congress for putting these measures into effect. Since 1882, when the first federal law on immigration was passed, a tax as well as penalty measures against criminals were established; then there was a law against undesirables – anarchists, prostitutes and polygamists – but there was as yet no funding debate in Congress. The only one, at the highest point in the wave of immigration, was concerned with the registration of migrants, since one-third of the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe did not know how to read. As late as 1917, the White House opposed a resolution in Congress imposing a reading test. Given tangible form by the Statue of Liberty lighting the world, erected by Bartholdi at the entrance to the port of New York in 1886, the American tradition turned the country into a land of refuge for the oppressed of the Old World.

Why emigrate?

Conditions reigning on the Continent and those existing on the other side of the Atlantic held sway over leaving Europe: Europeans were subject to a 'push' effect inciting them to leave their country and a 'pull' effect that drew them to America. Demographic pressure certainly represented the strongest element driving towards emigration, and Ireland presents an illustrative case.

From 1781 to 1841, its population rose from four million to more than eight million, an extraordinary excess of births over deaths, during a period of relative

prosperity that lay at the root of this exceptional boom. However, after very poor potato harvests, the basic diet of her inhabitants, Ireland experienced a terrible famine from 1845 to 1848. The number of emigrants leapt from 20,000 in 1843 to 220,000 in 1851. It reached 105,000 in 1847, and in total, in the nine years from 1847 to 1855, 1,187,000 Irish crossed the Atlantic, whereas, in the previous 60 years from 1781 to 1841, 1,750,000 had reached Great Britain and North America. At this point, there were less than 20,000 a year, but this number rose to slightly less than 130,000 a year during the 'hungry years'.

Driven out also by the Malthusian effects of the famine that afflicted their native land after the first demographic boom had also taken place there, the Germans of Saxony and the Rheinland were forced by poverty to cross the ocean: from 1847 to 1855 there were 919,000 of them, slightly more than 100,000 a year; in New York the number of arrivals from Germany exceeded even those from Ireland, and from 1853 to 1854, 176,000 Germans landed there. Added to the demographic pressure in both countries was the effect of changes in agriculture that produced an overabundant workforce: concentrated properties drove small farmers out.

In America, the attraction was essentially caused on the one hand by new transport facilities that enabled immigrants to reach the lands in the west; and on the other, by highly specific factors, such as the discovery of gold in California. Until the decade from 1830, once they got clear of the Appalachians, immigrants found themselves in the west. Digging on the Ohio canal from Albany to Buffalo came to an end after 1825, and considerably enlarged New York's hinterlands, but had progressive effects: the tonnage of goods transported rose from less than 40,000 tonnes in the 1830s to almost 262,000 tonnes in 1853.⁵⁹ The extension of the railroad was another factor that played a fundamental role. Effected during the 1830s, it came to an end in 1835, and the line from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh aspired to challenge the main line of the Erie canal, and by 1840 the American network was the largest in the world. However, rail did not reach its height until later, and we can recall the stages in its growth by the number of miles constructed from 1831 to 1890, as shown in Table 7.2.

At the same time as these transport facilities, created by the progress of the railroad (the completion of the first transcontinental service in 1869 should also be highlighted) came into being, technological changes that enabled industries to create positions for the immigrants also occurred. The case of Boston is especially illuminating here. Isaac Merritt's sewing machine, modernized by Singer in 1851,

Table 7.2 Growth of the railroad, 1831–1890

1831–1840	1841–50	1851–60	1861–70	1871–80	1881–90
2,795	6,203	21,605	22,096	40,345	73,929
miles	miles	miles	miles	miles	miles

revolutionized the manufacture of textiles, and labour costs fell dramatically. This mechanical manufacture could absorb the flood of the unskilled Irish workforce, men, women and children, and Boston managed to become the fourth largest industrial town in the United States at the beginning of the 1860s.⁶¹ The industries in the east then absorbed an increasing number of immigrants, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1911–1912, east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio and the Potomac, 60 per cent of salaried workers were originally foreign.⁶²

It is true that the dynamic that enabled the European workforce to be absorbed into a developing economy was created by numerous exports of capital, mostly British. In Great Britain, a rich land-owning class, lightly taxed, sought to place their capital overseas. By 1851, \$225 million had been invested in state federal funds, towns and above all, the railroad.

The discovery of gold in California represents a particular case in point. In 1849, many ships crossing the Atlantic were filled with speculators, their imaginations ablaze with visions of the unbelievable wealth waiting for them in Sacramento. On 24 January 1848, in the valley of the American River, James Marshall, overseeing the construction of a sawmill for John Sutter, discovered gold by the banks of a stream. Less than six weeks later, the gold fever had spread and Marshall's workers abandoned him. On 15 June, San Francisco was a ghost town, deserted by its inhabitants who had left for the Sierra where prospectors rushed in search of nuggets or alluvial river beds. The Atlantic coast learnt of this only later, on 19 August, and had to await confirmation, which was provided, in his message of 5 December, by President Polk in order that the real rush to Eldorado could begin, with more than 80,000 migrants in 1849, 25,000 of whom came via Panama or Cape Horn, the rest across the Union's interior, over poor tracks across deserts and mountains. Production in the United States was to rise from less than two tons of gold in 1847 to 127 in 1852.

In Latin America, too, similar factors can be found to explain immigration. As in the United States, the effect of Europe's population boom played its part in driving up departures. The attraction of the pioneer frontiers in Latin America also made itself clearly felt: these were the coffee boom in Brazil, from the 1870s to the 1890s, and the cereal boom in Argentina in the same period. To reach virgin lands for clearing, as for transporting this new produce, the railroad was also an essential resource. The example of the Brazilian state of So Paulo makes this quite clear: at the request of the Paulists, a line was built from the port of Santos in 1867 towards the 'frontier', reaching Campinas in 1872. At the end of the century, several Italian immigrants managed to take advantage of these transport facilities, and in 1910 one-third of the state's population was originally from Italy. The same phenomenon took place in Argentina, where in 1895 the Italians

constituted one-third of the population. The railroad companies turned themselves into immigration companies, bringing new colonists into the state's interior.

A form of seasonal immigration developed in Latin America and was also present in North America, although in a less obvious manner. Departures of these *golondrinas* or 'swallows' from Italy to Argentina belonged to this kind of immigration. Seasonal work such as harvests demanded an exceptional reinforcement of the labour force from countries that were still very sparsely populated, and lay at the root of these voyages of 'birds of passage'. Thus, after the harvest in their own country, peasants left Italy to reach Cordoba and Santa Fe in northern Argentina, where they harvested wheat; similarly, for the maize harvest they moved again from December to April–May to reach more southern regions, the hinterland of Buenos Aires. At the end of May, they travelled back to Piedmont to sow seed in spring. This voyage represented a crossing of the Atlantic in two senses.

This practice can also be found, in the United States this time, by the masons of Venice arriving in March and leaving again in October. For seasonal labour, however, the United States appealed more to the Mexican workforce, and the Mexican harvesters thus left for the wheat fields of Montana and California.⁶³

For immigration to North America, departures could be facilitated in Europe by apprenticeships in professions prized on the other side of the Atlantic. Thus, the Jewish tailor from Dublin or Poland, or the cigar maker from the same country, learnt their profession in the East End of London. A first emigration paved the way for another. In the same way, the Italians left to dig the Suez Canal before coming to work on the Panama Canal.

Crossing the Atlantic

It is indubitably the case that the multiplication of regular liners capable of crossing the ocean at sufficient speed, if not sufficiently comfortably for the emigrants, was one of the essential ingredients in the esteem accorded to the American continent. It was also accompanied, however, by a palpable fall in the price of a passage that allowed the largest number of people to become expatriates. The *Sunday Times* showed this in 1852, while the liners were already cutting across the Atlantic and enabling their owners to profit from a first boom in emigration: 'During the coming season, great crossings of the Continent from Liverpool into New York are expected. They are caused by the low cost of passage in Liverpool.'⁶⁴

Prices for steerage passengers, the immigrants, were already considerably lower. In 1825, a passage for America from Liverpool cost £20 sterling; in 1863, the steamships asked only £4.15s per emigrant, and sailing ships even less, £3 each. The £3 level had already been reached by the middle of the century.

Without cheap transport, itself facilitated by bitter competition between companies, the massive Irish and German emigration of the years 1847–1855 would not have developed as it did.

The crossing became inexpensive but it was also extremely frightening. Even at the end of the century, a director of Cunard might still tell an unhappy steerage passenger that the transatlantic voyage was a gruelling test to undergo. Nevertheless, conditions were considerably improved by then.

The embarkation ports

In the British Isles, the majority of the emigrants left from Liverpool, but also from Bristol, London and Glasgow, then Southampton on the south coast of England, a convenient port for foreign companies. The Irish ports of Londonderry, Belfast and Cork, used at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had been abandoned since the 1830s in favour of Liverpool, where Irish departures were concentrated, particularly for New York. In 1859, the Inman Line and Cunard opened the port of Queenstown where a certain number of Irish could take their places on ships coming from Liverpool.

The predominance of the latter port was increasingly clear: between 1860 and 1914, 4,750,000 passengers boarded there out of a total of 5,550,000 leaving Great Britain. British departures were concentrated in the Mersey port, as indeed were continental departures, since it received Germans and Scandinavians from Hull by train: thus, in 1887, out of a total number of 482,829 emigrants leaving Europe for the United States, Liverpool managed to send off 199,441 passengers, of which 68,819 were continental Europeans, 62,252 were British, and 68,370 were Irish, that is, almost 42 per cent of all departures. Liverpool, in that year, had boarded some 66 per cent of British emigrants, the total number of whom had risen to 93,375.

In France, Le Havre was the principal emigration port, eclipsing its rivals in Marseilles, Bordeaux and Nantes. It too profited from the concentration of passengers facilitated by railway traffic. From Basle and Strasbourg, Le Havre received southern Germans and Rheinlanders; from Modano they received Italians, although they were also received from Marseilles, arriving in this port by the Transatlantique's and the Fraissinet Company's liners, and then transported by train to Le Havre. This traffic in transalpine emigrants built up at the end of the nineteenth century, during the Mediterranean's migration boom: from 1894 to 1907 more than 3.5 million Italians left their peninsula for the New World, more than 2.5 million of whom left from 1900 to 1907.⁶⁵ The railways of the west, the east and the PLM agreed to significant price reductions, comparable to those taken by the transatlantic lines of Hamburg and Bremen for carrying emigrants to their ports. Le Havre's boarding capacity can partially be seen in the traffic of the

Compagnie Transatlantique in the port, but Cunard, the other British companies and the German lines also put in to this Norman port. In 1883 and 1884, years of declining traffic due to the economic crisis in the United States and the cholera epidemics rampant throughout France, the Compagnie Transatlantique made 33,000 and 46,000 places available for emigrants. In 1908, at the peak of the wave of emigration, the Transatlantique embarked some 60,000 emigrants in Le Havre, and equally as many in the following years until 1913, half of whom were Italians.⁶⁶

Marseilles was France's second port for embarking emigrants, after Le Havre. Its uniqueness lay in being, more than any other port, tied up with Italian emigration: on departure from Marseilles, ships made calls in Genoa and Naples, or sometimes they waited in Marseilles for the arrival of ships hailing from those ports. In 1874, capacity was of the order of 10,000 emigrants a year, and a Marseilles emigration agency was founded in 1870 for undertaking the recruitment of passengers. Three companies were engaged in the traffic, favouring their links with South America – Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. The Messageries Maritimes had gained the postal concession for South America in 1857, the Société Générale des Transports Maritimes and the Compagnie Fabre risked opening their first line to New York in 1881, after difficult beginnings, given the keen competition on this maritime route, and managed to maintain it by using cargo/passenger ships which, on their return, brought back cargoes of grain. It then added a second line to New Orleans. However, in 1900, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fabre used the Italian port of Naples for a line to New York, with a service every three weeks. At the same time, it sent out a monthly ship via Genoa to Montevideo and Buenos Aires.⁶⁷

In Bordeaux, which had been the major port for French departures for the Antilles in the eighteenth century, emigration also developed after the Second Empire. With more than 378,000 emigrants in the half-century from 1865 to 1920, Bordeaux ranked after Le Havre and Marseilles. The port dispatched passengers to South rather than North America: 46,000 departures to the United States, and 268,000 to South America, of which 200,000 went to Argentina alone.⁶⁸ This last country was in fact the favoured destination of Spanish (114,000) and Italian (46,560) emigrants, joined by 123,000 French emigrants. The strongest wave of emigration was attained in 1887–1890, with 75,634 departures, one-fifth of the total. In 1888, Argentina granted free passage and began the sale of prepaid tickets. The South of France railways also lowered their prices during these years. The companies, with the Messageries Maritimes in the first rank, having six ships to South America available to them in 1886, found a precious return cargo in the meats, leathers and cereals of the countries of La Plata. On board the ships there was the ethnic mix characteristic of the 'new immigration': Greeks in the 1880s, Turks and Syrians during the spectacular flood

of the 1900s (5,247 in the three years from 1904 to 1906; 6,100 from 1908 to 1914).

Meanwhile, traffic slowed after the boom at the end of the 1880s, since Italian and German companies, departing from Genoa and putting in to Barcelona, became increasingly competitive in the transportation of Italians and Spaniards. After 1885, Genoa and Naples were the two ports for transalpine emigration, the Italians aiming to challenge the transport of their migrants by foreign companies. In Istria, Fiume took on great importance at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Austro-Hungarian departures began to increase; Cunard then endeavoured to take the majority share of this traffic, to the detriment of the continental companies. Around 1900, the Italian companies La Navigazione Generale Italiana, Italia, Veloce and Lloyd Italiana managed to handle slightly less than half of the emigrant departures. The former, which defeated its rivals, had 103 ships with a tonnage of 140,413 tonnes at its disposal in June 1908.⁶⁹

The Italians successfully took part in the emigration boom of the 1890s and 1900s: 3,515,191 departures from their ports from 1894 to 1907, that is, more than 251,000 per year. The peak was reached in 1900 to 1907, with 2,575,776 departures.⁷⁰ Brazil alone received some 693,000 Italian immigrants from 1887 to 1902; Argentina was another frequent destination, but the United States also held a strong position when their eastern towns were crammed with strong Italian communities who could propagate the cult of American soil in their homeland. The practice of prepaid tickets to Brazil or Argentina, even of free passage and, in certain years, passage paid for by their governments, facilitated these departures. Companies were able to renew their fleets in the 1900s, ordering the construction of new liners in Italian or British shipyards. Two among them were, however, supported by German capital, the Veloce and the Italia. The latter was even directly dependent on the Hamburg Amerika Line. Their new ships, such as the *Italia*, the *Verona*, the *Taormina* and the *Ancona*, launched in 1908, were capable of transporting some 2,400 passengers in relatively comfortable conditions. For its lines to Santos and Buenos Aires, and even more for New York, Genoa was the principal boarding port, with companies using Marseilles and Barcelona as ports of call.

Since the middle of the century, Hamburg and Bremen had begun to challenge Liverpool's handling of Germans and even Scandinavians, but after the 1880s the most successful of these companies, the Hamburg Amerika Line, and Norddeutscher Lloyd, were certain to carry second-generation emigrants from their own national ports, and the Mediterranean ports in particular. Present in Genoa, Naples, Barcelona, La Coruña, Bilbao and Vigo as well as a French port like Le Havre, the German liners also had an excellent commercial network in the New World. Thus, for the United States alone, the Hamburg Amerika Line was able to set up a network of 3,200 agents, present in various states, qualified to sell

prepaid tickets bought in advance by an emigrant's fellow countrymen who were already settled there. They were also able to negotiate the best price agreements with German and French railways for carrying their passengers.

Together with Antwerp, from where the Red Star Lines' liners sailed, Hamburg and Bremen were the North Sea ports from which emigrants left. The two German companies competed with each other to offer their cabin passengers the greatest comfort, or even luxury, but were also able to improve considerably, better than Cunard had, the conditions of passage for the emigrants, who still brought in the highest receipts. German success sprang from the comparatively large number of the steerage passengers transported in 1891 across the North Atlantic to America by the Hamburg Amerika Line, the Norddeutscher Lloyd, the White Star Line and Cunard, as shown in Table 7.3.⁷¹

The massive influx of Slav and Austrian emigrants into German ports filled their ships in a way their rivals did not manage.

Table 7.3 Share of steerage passengers to America, 1891

Line	Passengers	% of total
Hamburg Amerika	75,835	17.9
Norddeutscher Lloyd	68,239	15.3
White Star	35,502	7.9
Cunard	27,341	6.1

Suffering in the Atlantic

The regular voyages of the liners, from the packet sailing ships of 1820 to 1840 right up to the first steamers in the middle of the century, due to their punctuality and their relative speed, were able to ensure emigrants acceptable conditions of passage, quite different from those experienced on board the 'occasionals' on the longest and most uncertain crossing. In fact, it would take until the end of the century to see even the larger companies, who nevertheless made their clearest profits from the steerage passengers, the emigrants, concern themselves with noticeably improving their lot. As competition became stronger, prices fell, and voyages were made, if not in comfort, then at least with the necessary security and a certain well-being. Meanwhile, Cunard remained famous over many years for the austerity and the discomfort of its berths and the frugality of the fare, whereas Collins, then Inman and Guyon had quite quickly been able to provide some degree of comfort.

Of course, the worst experiences were had when emigration had just begun. Adverts in the press certainly tried to reassure: in May 1818, the *Liverpool Mercury*

announced in the most glowing terms the departure of the *Timoleon* for New Bedford, 'well suited for steerage passengers, being tall, with a large capacity between its decks, its cabin lodgings are excellent'.⁷² In reality, the available space was amongst the smallest, and stayed that way for a long time on most ships. In the ships, most often with two decks, the emigrants were housed between the upper and lower decks, the hold beneath the upper deck was usually reserved for heavy freight, although sometimes exploiting this space would also serve to house the emigrants. There was generally less than 1.82 metres between the decks, although a tall man could stand upright. Around 1880, one of the directors of the Société Générale de Transports Maritimes in Marseilles finally grasped the reality and became concerned that emigrants were being crammed in, in order to ensure large freights for the company. He was not afraid to ask the authorities for permission to install three rows of berths in the 'false decks' on his ships, instead of the regulation two, for his third-class passengers. 'The false decks, measuring 2.4 m in height, would give every emigrant sufficient space, better even than is necessary, and we could increase the number of emigrants per ship by half.'⁷³ This was also a concern for the Compagnie Fabre – also from Marseilles – ships had to be filled to their maximum capacity:

regarding the eight supplementary berths, it is easier to move the floating bulkheads slightly, and build them....It is also quite easy to suspend hammocks...a simple wooden bar wedged between the beams would suffice to hold the head of a hammock and another would hold the feet.

Although the ruling obsession amongst the shipowners was to make their ships as profitable as possible by cramming the steerage passengers in, this did not however prevent a preoccupation with maintaining moral standards in the course of the journey. The Marseilles Chamber of Commerce recognized that segregating the sexes on the emigrant ships dampened sexual desire, and was therefore of the mind that 'the complete separation of women and girls travelling alone is to be made obligatory'. Morals certainly did not always concern the companies: in Bordeaux in 1888, the port's commissioner was obliged to proceed with arrests on the steamships of the Messageries Maritimes, on the grounds of engaging in the white slave trade. Unscrupulous minds understood how to exploit the situation of a mass of people setting off alone on a distant and decisive voyage.⁷⁴

The discomfort arose not only from the narrowness of the space offered the emigrant for resting, but also the sense of confinement created by weak light. Light only came in through a few hatchways and only a few hanging lamps gave a dull light, since there were rarely any portholes, certainly on the ships that predated the companies' liners, where efforts were made to make the steerage

lighter. Melville has shown how, on his first voyage by sailing ship, in 1837 (an occasional), the conditions created by the crush of luggage and people turned the steerage into a kind of overpopulated prison. The crew of the *Highlander* had completely cleared the steerage, the cargo being stowed in the holds, in order to receive the 500 passengers whose luggage cluttered the decks. However, for a crossing that might last as long as five, or indeed six, weeks, water reserves had to be taken on:

a greater tonnage on deck, rows of large tiercerons were stowed in the middle of the ship, in the steerage, running its entire length and dividing it into two long galleries, themselves cut into four compartments by lines of tiercerons crammed into the vessel's sides, three times one on top of the other. These compartments were soon closed with the help of rough planks, and more than anything else they resembled kennels; so much so that they were dark and stifling, since the only light that entered came from hatchways fore and aft.⁷⁵

During storms, the steerage hatchways had to be closed and the passengers remained locked up, finding themselves in a fetid lair in which fevers and epidemics developed. Lines of rough berths, cutting into each other, left barely enough room to move between them.

It was not until after the first boom in Irish and German emigration that measures were taken in England and the United States, in 1854 and 1855, to reduce the number of migrants admitted on board a ship. The English law especially set a minimum quantity of provisions that each emigrant boarding in Liverpool had to bring. The packet boats transported a real farmyard for the well-nourished cabin passengers, waited on by obsequious black stewards: fowl, pigs, and a cow, milked daily. The often scrawny emigrants in the steerage, however, had of course no right to any of this. Their passage ticket enabled them only to obtain bread, salt meat and, in the best conditions, a sea biscuit, an imperishable foodstuff that could be kept from one year until the end of another, and that required no cooking. The emigrants' 'kitchen' was, in fact, often reduced to a single flame, hidden in one of the hatchways in the centre of the deck, which was far too narrow for such numbers. Passengers had to establish a rota for lighting their fire, despite the ship's pitching. Each disputed his turn, so that there were difficulties in cooking the basic food of the Irish emigrants, a broth of barley flour in water. In bad weather, the fireplaces were too risky to be used, and since they were not allowed to light fires on deck, they had to eat an uncooked diet or suffer from hunger.

When contrary westerly winds delayed the vessel beyond the habitual five to six weeks, personal provisions became exhausted. Water could also be a problem: the ration for each adult's drinking, washing and other uses was four litres a day.

Before the law of 1855 was passed, a parliamentary White Paper in London revealed these conditions. Its author had made the crossing incognito in the steerage of the *Washington*, one of the liners that ran to New York. The 900 steerage passengers were assembled on the first day to receive their water ration, being insulted by sailors and some even being dealt blows, and only 30 got their water; provisions were not distributed for two days. Famished, the passengers sent a letter to the captain, but its bearer was beaten at the foot of the main mast. Finally, the following day, half of the expected provisions were distributed.⁷⁶

As well as experiencing hunger, the passengers often had to face worse: shipwreck. In winter and spring, on approaching the Irish coasts and the waters off New York on the coasts of Long Island or New Jersey, the Newfoundland fogs prevented the helmsmen from seeing icebergs in time. In the midst of the Atlantic, when the sea's fury was unleashed, without a ship within reach to lend help, even sailing ships at full sail could not avoid sinking. Finally, on one occasion the fourth watch on the prow at night, half asleep, did not see a nearby ship approaching at full speed, and there was a collision that stove in the ship's side and sent it straight to the bottom.

When a boatload of emigrants sank, the crew were sometimes sufficiently humane to bring help to the unfortunate people in the grip of panic. Equally often, however, the brutality of men and the sea came out. Thus, the ship the *William Brown*, carrying emigrants for Philadelphia, five weeks out from Liverpool, struck an iceberg one night and began to sink.⁷⁷ Thirty-two sailors and passengers got away in a rowing boat with a boatswain, but the latter thought the little boat was too heavily laden and decided he had to throw several emigrants overboard like cheap merchandise. The federal tribunal that tried him for this crime in Philadelphia heard an Irishman, a certain Frank Carr, testify to a tragic death:

I was not going to leave that little boat, I had worked bravely the whole time, until morning, I will work and do what is necessary to get the water out of the boat. Here are the five sovereigns in exchange for my life until dawn. When it comes, if the Lord does not help us, we will hold on to the end, and if my turn comes, I will go as a man...don't push me overboard until I have said a few words to Mrs Edgar...Mrs Edgar, can't you do anything for me?

The Irishman continued his deposition: 'She made no response that I could hear, and then they threw her into the sea.'

It is not until the famous wreck of the *Titanic*, on the night of 14–15 April 1912, also after striking an iceberg, that scenes of panic would be seen, showing contradictory evidence of generous help and hard-heartedness. In order to be able to extinguish a blaze that had broken out in the ship's holds by reaching New

York as early as possible, the packet boat increased its speed and the officer of the fourth watch was unable to avoid the iceberg in time. Only 703 people managed to take refuge in the lifeboats and more than 1,500 victims were dragged down with the ship over the 3,000 metres to the sea-bed. The steerage passengers were the majority of the victims, and it does indeed seem that some were refused help, and bars were even placed over the hatchways opening onto the steerage in order to enable the evacuation of the cabin passengers first.

It is certain that the emigrants paid the heaviest price, because, crammed in as they were, the panic that broke out was almost always fatal. This was the case in 1854 on the Inman Line's *City of Glasgow* which lost 460 people when wrecked, principally emigrants. Again, the *Powhatan*, in the same year, coming from Le Havre, was driven against the Jersey shoreline, so close that the screams of the passengers, some 200 German emigrants, could be heard as they were thrown into the sea. On the other hand, safety measures were sometimes adequate. Thus, the Black Ball Line's *Montezuma*, which was also driven aground on Long Island with its 500 emigrants, managed to save the passengers, thanks to the help that rushed from New York.

America welcomes the immigrants

Could the battalions of immigrants discovering New York once their ship had got past the Narrows and sailed along the shores of Staten Island hope to find there the warm welcome promised them by the agencies that had recruited them, as well as the means for settling quickly into the New World?

Above the coast of Staten Island flew the yellow flag of quarantine: as well as the poverty of the majority of the immigrants, the fear of epidemics reigned amongst New Yorkers and had inspired the construction of lazarets where the passengers stayed before being given permission to enter the port. The immigrants' agents sometimes managed to find ways of avoiding quarantine by letting them off in New Jersey. Perhaps a certain number of captains also did this, as Melville's captain did when, on coming in to port, he threw all the mattresses, blankets, pillows and straw mattresses overboard, and fumigated his ship, and having thus ended up with a healthy looking ship after this enormous cleaning operation, the passengers could avoid several weeks' detention in quarantine. Nevertheless, the *Highlander* had to throw 25 of its passengers overboard since they died of contagious diseases, with an epidemic being declared on board.

The boom given to immigration by the Irish famine required the establishment of more cumbersome quarantine services: the maritime hospital on Staten Island was exclusively reserved for contagious diseases, while the infirm, or non-contagious patients who needed care, were sent to Hellgate on Ward's Island.

However, once the barrier of quarantine had been cleared, the immigrants

found themselves confronted with the scourge of their disembarkation port on one of the wharves on the East River or the Hudson, where numerous 'runners', agents for guest houses who attempted to take advantage of them, stolen luggage, excessive travel costs and accumulated debts often found the immigrant totally stripped. Philanthropic associations such as the Hibernian Providence Society for the Irish, sought to secure a means for the new arrivals to leave New York as quickly as possible to look for work inland in the Union. After 1855, on the Battery, Castle Garden Fort was devoted to receiving immigrants, and a depot was erected there where they could be kept apart from the runners and their plundering. Here they were offered normal travel prices, and their luggage was guarded. In 1892, the reception was transferred to Ellis Island.

Conditions were changing during this period, however, and the total disarray of the Irish and indeed the German immigrant in the 1840s made way for something else. In fact, the ethnic communities of New York and the other large American towns were growing increasingly stronger, and were able to coordinate the welcome of the new arrivals. Kinsfolk and friends bought prepaid tickets for Sardinians, Piedmonters, Lithuanians, Bosnians, Magyars, Syrians and Slovaks. The immigrant's disorientation in the new world he was crossing, where he did not understand the language, remained real, but the more striking reality was a migration for which kinship or friendship bonds had prepared the way. At the end of the nineteenth century, more than 70 per cent of new arrivals on Ellis Island were to rejoin their kinsfolk or friends. We can employ the concept of a 'migration chain' for this.⁷⁸

For voyages, the sailing companies had sold tickets covering the entire journey: from Finland, for example, immigrants would go to England, from England to an American port, and from there to their final destination. The Finnish who chose to go over to Minnesota, a favoured region among the immigrants from this country, could count on well-ordered time and space.

The voyage had also been prepared by letters from immigrants who had already settled and who made the migration chain effective through the detailed and generally optimistic information they provided. The classic example of a letter would contain information about America in general, about the American diet and the high salaries, while at the same time managing to complain of low employment and the hardships of life in the pioneer camps:

Dear Brother, allow me to invite you to come to live and die here. Dear Brother, leave the country of our fathers and come here... I promise to help you to build your farm... Buy a railroad ticket for a town called Minneapolis, and I will come to meet you.⁷⁹

The immigrant already settled in Minnesota was anxious to give every guarantee for the success of the voyage, about which another immigrant, from Ohio, is much more precise: 'If you are coming, send me a letter. And when you are in New York, telegraph me from there. I will come and meet you at the depot although you won't get lost.'

There was an enormous trust in the bonds of kinship or friendship amongst the immigrants who settled next to those who had paid for their voyage with prepaid tickets, and this must have contributed to making a success of the largest wave of immigration at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The success of their elders served as an example to the young and gave them the necessary hope at a time of inevitable uprooting on departing their native land.

With this exceptional migration movement from the Old Continent to the New World, the Atlantic gave Europe and America the best grounds for believing in a better future. In fact, the disruptions imposed by the war and the crises prior to it were to change the life of the ocean profoundly.