

Aboard the *Adriatic*, Bound for Alexandria

Letters to the Editor from Dr. F.T. Rogers, 1922

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On January 7, 1922, **DR. FREDERICK T. ROGERS**, 63, associate editor of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* (RIMJ), an ophthalmologist and otolaryngologist from Westerly, boarded the steamship RMS *Adriatic* in New York City on a six-week Mediterranean voyage.

The following day the *New York Times* reported:

ADRIATIC OFF WITH NOTABLES TO EGYPT

Thousands Crowd Liner to Bid Adieu
to Friends Sailing to Mediterranean Ports.

H.G. WELLS IS ON BOARD

Departs for Spain to Write a Book
– He Praises Disarmament Conference.



Figure 1. Dr. Frederick T. Rogers
[PHOTO: RHODE ISLAND MEDICAL SOCIETY, PAST PRESIDENTS]

Figure 2. Vintage post-card shows the *Adriatic*, one of the largest commercial and passenger ships of the White Star Line. Launched in 1906, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, it sailed the North Atlantic and Mediterranean.

[SOURCE: COMMONS. WIKIMEDIA.ORG]

The article began: “Spick and span with paint and varnish from truck to keel which glistened in the bright morning sun, the White Star liner *Adriatic* steamed away at noon yesterday for Egypt and principal Mediterranean ports...”

Dr. Rogers, a longtime practitioner in Westerly, (**Figure 1**), wrote letters to RIMJ about the voyage, which appeared in the spring issues. On January 22, he noted the presence of H.G. Wells.



Figure 3. Author H.G. Wells on board the *Adriatic*.

[PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS]

“On the *Adriatic* (**Figure 2**) there are types of all sorts. There is the woman (usually who knows the celebrities of art and literature) who bores us with her imaginary reminiscences. One on board said while she was in Washington as the guest of Secretary Hughes she had the entrée of the Conference and had so many interesting talks with Mr. Wells, the famous author. Mr. H.G. Wells (**Figure 3**) happens to be on board and failed to recognize his quondam friend.”

Wells was on his way to Gibraltar, and when asked by the *Times* reporter about the Disarmament Conference he had attended in Washington, D.C., he replied: “America has

come to the front and taken a great interest in European affairs for the first time in her history and I trust that she will continue to do so and never return to her shell.”

Also among the 609 first-class passengers were composer Irving Berlin, *New York Times*’ publisher Adolph S. Ochs, and European and Asian delegates to the Disarmament Conference.

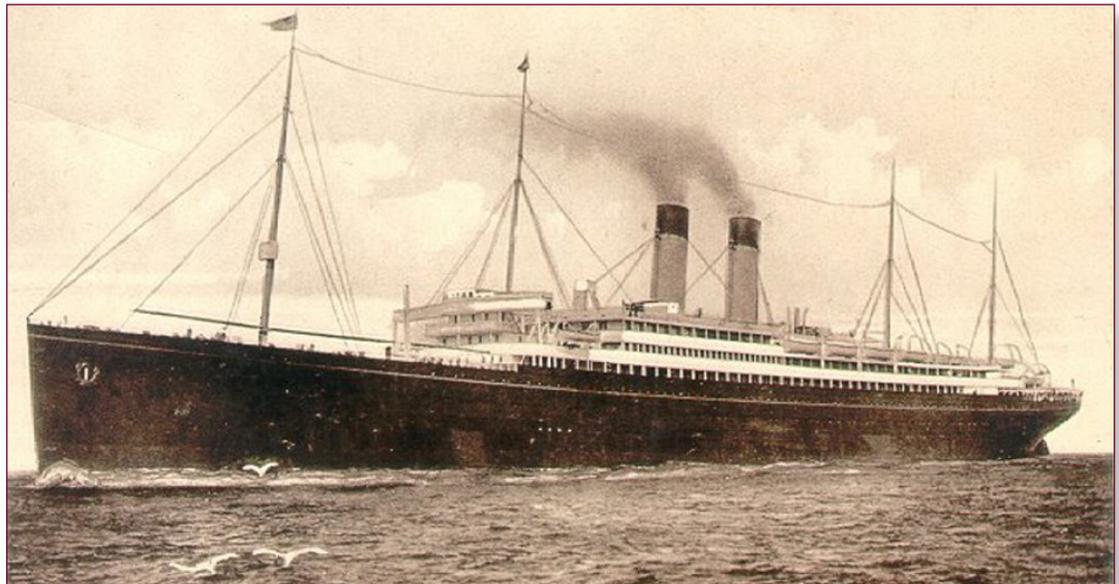




Figure 4. The *Adriatic's* reading and writing room.

[SOURCE: COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG]

"We have passed the Messina Straits and are in the Adriatic bound for Athens. In two days we should be at Alexandria. This letter is but an attempt to keep my word to Dr. Brown that I would send a letter to the Journal. Pardon the effort; when I get back from Assuam I hope I shall have more interesting material.

"Of course, there are possibilities; there are already rumors on board that Cairo is under martial law, an epidemic of flu is raging at Alexandria and one of the Nile boats has been sunk by the rebels. However, we shall see what we shall see."

Adriatic Amenities, Services

The RMS *Adriatic (II)* was billed as one of the largest and most luxurious cruise ships of the era with the latest technology. According to a White Line brochure: "This steamer is fitted with Marconi's system of wireless telegraphy and also submarine signaling apparatus." The ship's four masts supported the telegraphy cables.

The ship featured a glass-roofed dining room, reading and writing room (**Figure 4**), smoking room, a covered promenade, Turkish bath and indoor pool.

Dr. Rogers writes of spending many hours in the ship's library with its thousands of volumes on history and antiquity. No doubt he ran into H.G. Wells there, who published "A Short History of the World" in 1922.

However, the "trip on the *Adriatic* was not an entire success," he wrote, and enumerated some of the woes he encountered, such as "white fleas" in his cabin. And then there was the ship's arrival in Naples:

"We were lined up at the gangway when an officer appeared and stopped us, and there we stood at first patiently, and then expectantly and finally wrathfully for hours...six hundred of us packed in so we could scarcely move, with women fainting, children crying and men swearing..."

"See Naples and die," someone once said, and I don't wonder at it.

On the bumpy road

Dr. Rogers' travel observations were interspersed with Ocean State innuendos. Once in Italy, he described the road driving to Pompeii:

"Multiply the famous East Greenwich detours of some years ago by the number of rough cobbles on lower Weybosset Street and it will approximate the number of bumps we bumped."

Back on board and headed for Greece, he referred to unstable conditions rumored to be occurring in Egypt.

In Egypt

He did not report any unrest in his travelogue, and reverted to medical observations and amusing asides. On February 7, Dr. Rogers described walking the streets of Cairo and a donkey ride in the desert:

"Trachoma in its varying stages is so common. One meets scores of blind and sees hundreds of children with swollen, purulent lids..."

"The antiquities offered for sale had the flavor of Attleboro, so I bought none..."

"Donkey ride in the desert to see the ruins of the old city of Memphis, of Sakkara and the tomb of Ti. Some five thousand years have elapsed since there was any life in the city or the tombs. We had four donkeys, named Black Diamond, Whiskey, Telephone and Maria...it was an enjoyable five miles into the desert, nothing but sand, not a vestige of green, passing on the way a camp of Bedouins, with their picturesque gaily colored tents..." (**Figure 5**)

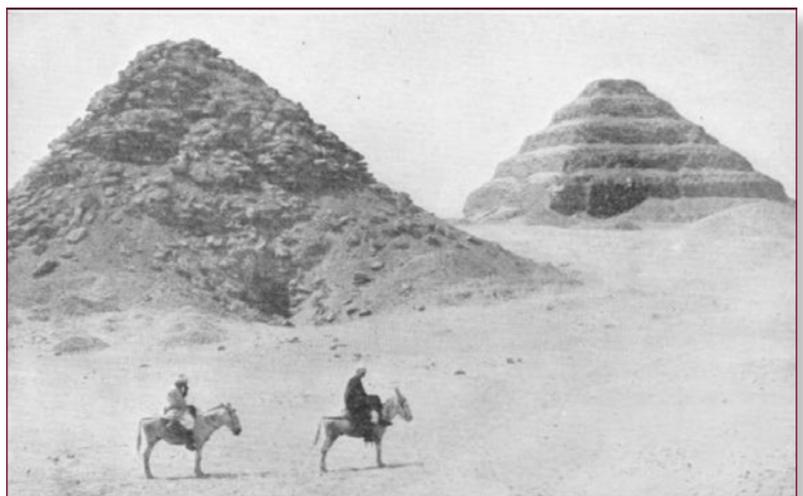


Figure 5. A photo of the Sakkara pyramids which appeared in H.G. Wells' "A Short History of the World," published in 1922.

[SOURCE: PROJECT GUTENBERG]

The Nile

Dr. Rogers was most impressed by the Nile and its vessels.

“Of more interest to me are the boats. Photographs only can adequately describe them, the feluccas, with their peculiar lateen sails, their curious up-turned bows, wide gunwales on which they stand to pole the boat upstream, slowly drifting on the placid waters of the Nile, the green of the fertile planes, the yellowish brown of the surrounding mountains and above all the wonderful blue of the sky, at sunset changing to the hues of the rainbow form a picture of the Nile never to be forgotten...the wondrous, the glorious Nile.” (Figure 6)

The *Adriatic* returned to New York on February 13th and remained in operation for 12 more years, until the Cunard Line and White Star Line merged in 1934. The following year, the ship was broken up for scrap in Japan.

Dr. Rogers, a graduate of Union College, and the New York Medical College (1882), passed away in 1932. He left behind a trove of written material, including a history of the medical community in Washington County, and numerous letters to the editor on his travels around the globe. He is buried among the notables in Swan Point Cemetery. ❖

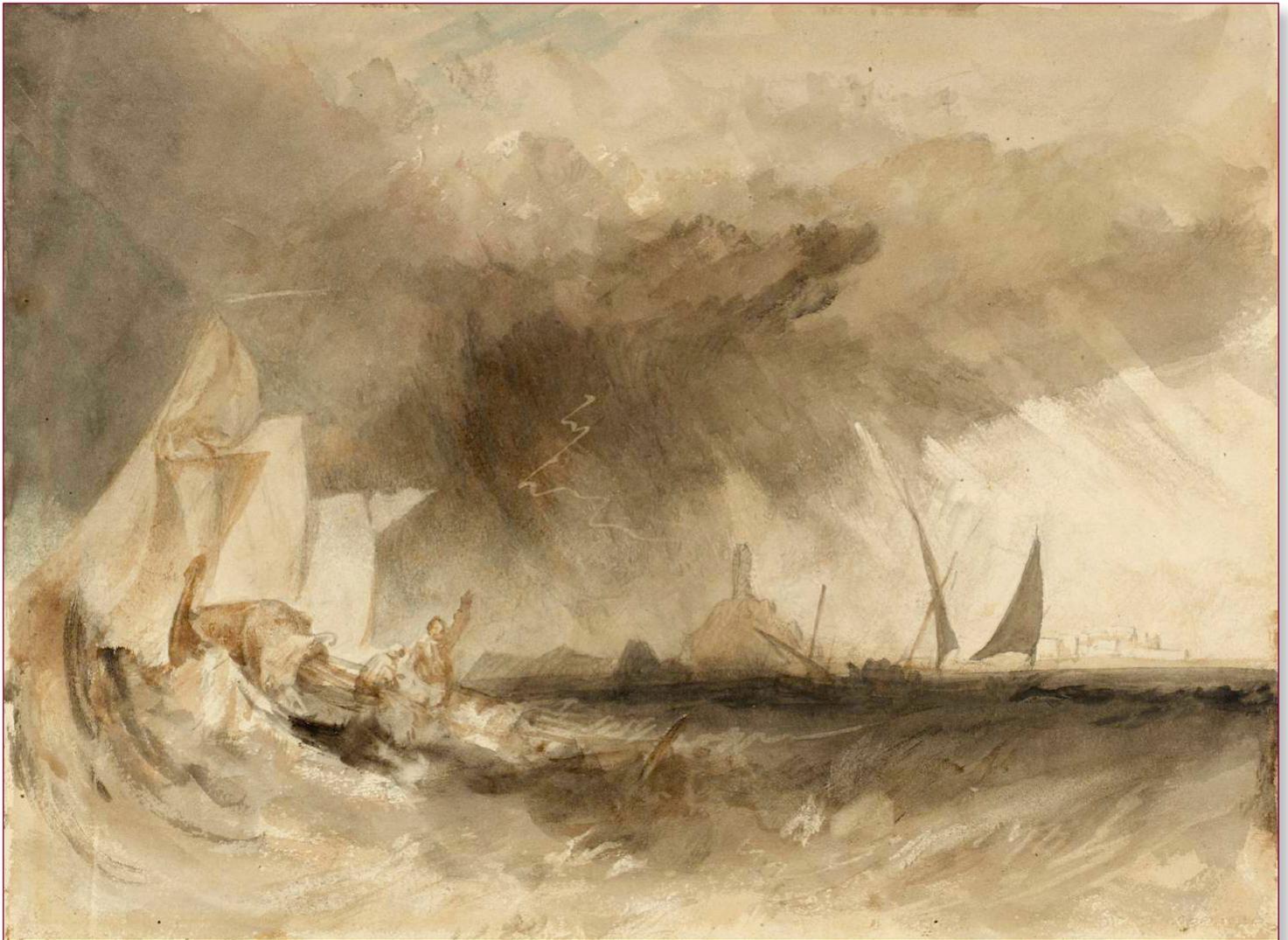


Figure 6. The Felucca by Joseph Turner.

[SOURCE: MATTHEW IMMS, 'THE FELUCCA C.1824 BY JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER', CATALOGUE ENTRY, MAY 2006, IN DAVID BLAYNEY BROWN (ED.), J.M.W. TURNER: SKETCHBOOKS, DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLOURS, TATE RESEARCH PUBLICATION, DECEMBER 2012, [HTTPS://WWW.TATE.ORG.UK/ART/RESEARCH-PUBLICATIONS/JMW-TURNER/JOSEPH-MALLORD-WILLIAM-TURNER-THE-FELUCCA-R1131781](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-the-felucca-r1131781), ACCESSED 18 JANUARY 2020.]