

Travel Diaries of JOHANN FRIEDRICH HEINRICH WOHLER 1811-1885
Transcription of the translation which was originally written in German
Part 1 = From Germany to Bahia
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Travel Diary
From Hamburg to New Zealand
By J F H Wohlers, Missionary / Preacher
Part One – From Hamburg to Bahai [Salvador, S. America]

Preface

I regret that this travel-report m intended at the same time as a kind of diary (a copy of which I sent herewith to the Administrative Committee of the North German Mission Society) has become so very long. Some rather too extensive scribbling might profitably have been omitted during its lengthy course – though I did mean to describe to the Committee, both from the inside and the outside, our situation, surroundings and behaviour. Unpractised writer that I am, I have succeeded but poorly. In future I hope to learn better and better what is essential to report and what is better left out. I shall refrain from apology about the bad handwriting, as it will be obvious to all, without any apology from me, that in the face of all these interruptions and disturbances, and the continual unrest on board ship, to produce anything in the way of calligraphy is impossible.

Apart from seasickness, our health all-long has been good. This applies to all four of us. Even **Riemenschneider**, who suffered so badly from seasickness at the outset, had it only very slightly on the Atlantic.

Riemenschneider and I undertook the spiritual care of those aboard. But our influence on the people in this direction has not been of any great significance, though we are on the whole popular with all of them. The reason for this lies not in any spiritual influence, but in the fact that, in their precarious relationship with **Beit**, we were on their side, Her Beit, quite obviously, treats the people unjustly. He does not give them what had been promised them in Hamburg he treats them in a despotic, tyrannical manner, and by this bad treatment he drives people who are otherwise quite and inoffensive to the other extreme: they become obstreperous and begin to resist. Two young fellows, **Behrens** and **La Motte**, who could put up with **Herr Beit** and his rubbish no longer, but whose behaviour on board had hitherto been beyond reproach, despite **Beit**'s continually treating them as troublemakers – these two have, over the last few days, sneaked ashore to the port of Bahia, at some hour between the night of the 22nd and the morning of the 23rd of March, a step they most certainly would not have taken had they been properly treated. **Trost** and **Heine** too have been badly treated by Beit, and it is very much to be hoped that our Mission Society Committee will see to it that he is not allowed to get away with it. Furthermore: the whole quarrel between **Beit** and the emigrants has been reported at the Hamburg and English consulate alike; **Riemenschneider** will present a more details report on this affair; but there is not a great deal that can be done about it here. **Riemenschneider** and I as cabin passengers are not in a position to complain much; though we have had to put up with our share of unpleasantness too.

We are not at all on good terms with **Heir Beit**; on the other hand we get on very amicably indeed with **Dr Goders**, the **captain** and his wife and the mates.

Three children have died on board the ship: one of consumption, having come aboard sick; and two others died of cramps.* Otherwise we have had no deaths.

(cf. "St Pauli" papers: **O.T.R. Spanhake**, 12 months, 20th Jan 1843, of Convulsions; **P.Post**, 2 years, 5th Feb., "infantine Atrophic"; **Dorothea Muller**, 1 year, 13th Feb., convulsions. Another child died later.)

At first, especially while we were in the North Sea, we suffered a great deal from the stormy weather and the cold conditions, but later on in the Atlantic, it became much better. The wind on the whole was mostly in our favour. The temperature near the Equator rose to 20-20' Reaumur [77-88°F.] in the shade, on deck, while it was a good many degrees warmer in the interior of the ship herself. In Bahia port the temperature climbed, by contrast, as high as 24-25' R. [86-88°F.].

In the Southern sky we now saw a magnificent comet.*

(*The Brilliant Comet of 1843, mentioned in Arthur Mee's "Children's Encyclopaedia", Gp 1, Ch. 30, is "supposed to have had a trail 150million miles long" and to have been "the finest in history." I.L. Thomsen says this comet was its best in Feb/March 1843. The bright nebula would be one of the Magellanic Clouds coming into view.)

It's very brilliant tail extends over 30' and appears as thick as our mizzenmast. Every evening he sets more than an hour later, and seems to recede from us all the time. – In addition, a large nebular patch is visible, from here, as bright as the Milky War.*

In Bahia we were made extremely welcome by the German. **Riemenscheider**, who has difficulty with his writing on board, spends odd days ashore, where he is able to do his writing in peace and quiet in one of the houses. He also held a service, in German, for the Germans, in the English church.

We shall be glad when our journey is over, and we will no longer need to have anything to do with **Mr Beit**. I should also prefer our letters-of-credit made out to somebody other than **Beit**. I have now reached the stage where I do not believe a word he says, nor do I trust him an inch.

So far I have not been able to manage an official report signed by the four of us. They are getting ready to haul up the anchor, and then we shall be off again on our voyage to New Zealand. As we have been here for three weeks (from 4th-24th March), and as we had a great deal of business to attend to in town, including the complaints, **Riemenschneider** and I are somewhat out of pocket, so it will readily be permitted us to advance ourselves a trifle out of the cash-box. I cannot yet enclose an account of our expenditure, as we have not yet finished making it out.

Perhaps we might receive a letter from our Mission Society Committee as soon as we land in New Zealand.

For the worshipful Administrative Committee of the North German Mission Society

Your devoted servant

[Signed] J.H.Wohlers

Leaving Hamburg by steamer-express on 26 December 1842, I looked back and surveyed, in turn, the panorama of the Port of Hamburg with its forest of masts, and the city, and, walking up and down the harbour pier, the crowd of people, among whom my friends and acquaintances had vanished from my sight. Going by on the tender, I gazed back once more towards Altona; then I turned my glances ahead to where, alas, the moist rainy air shrouded visibility altogether on the broad estuary of the Elbe. Equally hidden lay my future, equally shrouded the new chapter of my life before me, beginning at this very moment. Gradually the towers of Hamburg, including the ruins of the two that had been burnt down*, vanished in the watery distance. (*cf. "Erinnerungen", P.50, where W. refers to the 3-day Hamburg fire which destroyed the Petri-Kirche which he with others had tried to save.) At this stage, however, the heaviness of parting had not yet found a place in my heart. Visions of a different nature still dominated my feelings. For up to now I had not only cast all care upon my God and Father, but had also left it to other people to take care of me; and so I had been able to concentrate, in peace, on my studies, unencumbered by much besides.

Now things had changed: the time had come when I would have to act on my own, independently; and with very few friends indeed (there were four of us). I must go, among people who were without exception utter strangers, across the wide sea into Terra Incognita—to the other side of the world! Now, and what's more on this very same day, I was to act as minister, and, for the first time in my life, perform a church ceremony! All this brought home to me in no uncertain terms the importance of today's step into this new phase of my life.

It was this that pushed the various aspects of parting and separation into the background. It was not so much anxiety, however, as hope which filled my heart—bold hope and trusting confidence in God, and in the fortunate outcome of our enterprise.

But the dismal rainy weather soon forced me to remain below. Had not the beautiful banks of the Elbe at Neumuhlen and the charming hills about Blankenese, with the friendly little villages in the as well as a few church steeples of the Altenland lively riverside dale – had not these beloved scenes lured me out on deck from time to time, I should scarcely have quitted my cabin.

Down below were several Hamburg citizens and others, all muffled up in greatcoats, or at least in winter clothing; they had come along out of interest, or to see their friends and acquaintances off to the ship “St Pauli”, with the intention of coming back later by the same ferry. **Herr Beit**, Chapeaurouge, **Captain Schacht** and **Dr Goders** took their seats on a platform and called up all the between-deck passengers for inspection. They had to appear one by one, or as family groups. I think it was mainly to make sure that all the people whose names were on the passenger list had turned up.

“You can see the ‘St Pauli’ already!” called a few who had been keeping watch from time to time. Soon a mutual salvo of canon shots was exchanged between the tender and the “St Pauli”, announcing our imminent approach. —There on the broad stream of the Elbe, in the cold, wet rainy air; lay the great beautiful ship, riding at anchor all alone. Her lofty, slender masts were decorated with many flags and multicoloured bunting. It was a solemn, moving sight. We passed her at a distance of a hundred yards or so, then turned, and steamed alongside.

Everyone stood on the deck of the ferry, waving hats and kerchiefs. Those on board the “St Pauli” - - the crew, and **Beit's family** - - waved too, and joined in a clamour of mutual greetings that seemed to rise above the rushing of the waves and the noise of the wind, filling the raw air.

No sooner had we arrived than we were asked by **Beit** and **Chapeaurouge** * to perform the wedding ceremonies as previously agreed. *(Beit, John Nicholas: N.Z.Co. agent, Hamburg. Chapeaurouge: in 1841 a Deutsche Colonisations Gesellschaft German Colonising Society was set up in Hamburg by representatives of leading mercantile houses, including Karl Sieveking, de Chapeaurouge & co., and J.C. Godeffroy & Son [see Ruth Allan, “Nelson” page 309]). I had already arranged with **Riemenschneider**, when we discussed it on the way out, that I would give a short preliminary address, confining the wedding service to the actual form of marriage. We did not want it to go on too long, as there were five couples. I knew he liked doing this office, so we would be able to act jointly.

As soon as we had hastily prepared ourselves for this office, and **Herr Beit** had given us in writing the names of the couples concerned, we went below to the between-deck. It could hardly have looked less like a bridal house; still less did it resemble the conventional assembly of wedding couples and guest in a church, where couples and guests alike stand in solemn array, dressed for the occasion.

The much-vaunted “tween-decks space” which we had had pointed out to us on the Sunday in Hamburg Port was not quite what we had been led to believe, in fact there was no trace of it. Along the fairway lay a tightly packed pile of sea-chests, cabin trunks, nailed-up packing cases, all packed close together in a huddle, on either side of which a little passage led past the sleeping berths; below the after-hatch a little space remained. Here the weddings were to take place. I was considerably surprised, and more too pleasantly, when I stepped down

the wet companionway, to find the otherwise roomy and beautiful 'tween-deck' so cluttered. There I took my stand, with my back against a pile of luggage, below the hatch (over which the great boat-beck protruded, like a roof running together in a point. I got the bridal couples to stand before me in a semicircle, with **Beit's family**, and the assembled guests and friends partly in shadow beyond them, and the rest of the emigrants crowded in dark passengers to right and left; from aloft, the fresh weather-beaten faces of the crew peeped down through the open hatchway like the angles in a picture.

The upheaval of parting, and the unsettled atmosphere of a newly undertaken migrant, combined with these hastily-to-be solemnised weddings, made the whole thing unreal; it was like a romantic story, quite contrary to normal German practice! Then our complete lack of familiarity with the background of the couples or anything about them - -how were we to know whether they undertook the marriage sacrament with Christian minds or even honest hearts, and after sincerely thinking it over? For all we know they might have drifted together quite casually, perhaps on someone's advice that it was more expedient to emigrate than single; there might have been previous relationships with other lovers, and with such unioris [sic] of the heart dissolved, thee might even now be sad souls left behind, grieving in the Fatherland. These and similar doubts were scarcely of a nature to inspire the newly ordained parson with joy on the occasion of his first office. I was well aware of this. Only the swaying deck I stood on could bring me peace of mind. I would just have to come to terms with necessity. These may not be German customs, I thought – well then, suppose they are English ones, or more correctly adventurous shipboard ones? Then I will act accordingly: this is the daring way the world goes on. I have been told to do this by an English agent; I have not known these couples before, and what I don't know about them I am not responsible for here. Prepared by fasting and prayer for this my first office, especially to defend my conscience against the temptation of these thoughts, I decided: this not from the heart, therefore it is only hypocritical nonsense and sin, so these doubts are invalid. Thus I undertook my obligation confidently and without any embarrassment. Next I prayed to God for His merciful help throughout our whole voyage, according to His promise in Isaiah 43.2: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee [cf. Lutheran Bible]. I said a few words then to all the emigrants at large, about our present situation, touching on the Christmas season and migration, Christmas joy, and the hardship of travel – bringing in a comparison