

ROB RAT
A STORY OF BARGE LIFE
BY MARK GUY PEARSE

Here are cabins, in which whole families are born and brought up, with 150 cubic feet for the whole : that is in a space not big enough to hold a comfortable bed. In the town, the police are “down upon” a case of overcrowding ; but into a place like this are huddled a man, his wife, and six or seven children.

Listen to this as to the cabins :”Some of them are models of neatness, and a man or two youths might pass a few nights in such very comfortably. Others are the most filthy holes imaginable. What with bugs and other vermin creeping up the sides, stinking mud finding its way through the old leaky joints at the end to the bottom of the cabin, and being heated by a hot stove, stenches arise therefrom enough to make a dog sick. In the boat cabins – *hell holes* as some of the women call them – cohabitation takes place. Father, mother, sister, brother sleep in the same bed and at the same time. In these places girls of seventeen give birth to children, the fathers of which are members of their own family”.

Is it any wonder that the boats should go to and fro, carrying not only human beings of all ages, and cargoes of filth and manure and the refuse of our large towns, but carrying also small pox and deadly fevers? Is it any wonder that living, cooking, eating, sleeping together in such a place, we should find two thirds of those who live as man and wife are unmarried? That ninety percent are drunkards? Can we wonder at such a picture as this?