

LETTER III.

THE PASSAGE FROM SOUTHAMPTON TO ST. THOMAS'S.

*On board the "Avon,"**At Sea, 17th December, 1848.*

BEFORE the dawn of day, all the objects and forms which surround us, blend into masses, in which one form is not to be distinguished from another. But as the light imperceptibly diffuses itself abroad, the figures gradually emerge from their chaotic jumble: every minute, some new feature is displayed; till at length, all is distinct to the view, and each separate object stands revealed to us, the unit of a whole — one component part of the general outline.

Of a similar kind is the process which takes place when you are brought into contact, suddenly and simultaneously, with a great variety of new faces and characters displayed to you for the first time. So it happened to us when we went on board the Avon. Between passengers and ship's

company, about a hundred and sixty sets of features to examine; men and women, of all nations, among the former; and among the latter, captain, officers, doctor, purser, engineers, stewards, cooks, baker, butcher, sailors, stokers and cabin boys! The first day all was a confused *melée* of human beings — scarcely one to be distinguished from another. As the dawn of observation and inspection broke, some distinct features began to be dimly visible. Day by day they assumed more individuality; and now we can see them with all the clearness of a broad, daylight view. The progressive acquaintance, which in such cases we open up with our fellow-beings, curiously illustrates the unceasing systematic inquisitiveness of our nature.

I wish to give you some definite view of life on board a transatlantic passage in a steam packet; because it is a life, or little interlude of life, every day becoming more general. I therefore propose to be somewhat minute, as well as analytical, in my observations on our passage from Southampton to Vera Cruz.

We have, one by one, then, and from time to time, come into contact with our fellow-travellers, and with the more prominent of those permanently

attached to the vessel; and they may be roughly recapitulated, thus:—

- 1st. The Captain, and his first, down to his fifth officer.
2. The Admiralty Agent (always a Lieut. R.N.), in charge of the mails.
3. The doctor and purser.
4. The chief engineer, and his subordinates.
5. The lady passengers.
6. The gentlemen passengers.
7. The chief steward, and stewardess.
8. The children, and family servants.

The gentlemen passengers, again, may be classified in a variety of ways. About 25 of them are English; 12 to 15 Spanish and Spanish American; 6 French, and 6 or 7 German and Continental.

Then there are the following families:—

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| 1. Capt.F.—, wife, 5 daughters, 3 sons, 2 servants | 12 |
| 2. Mr. S., wife, 1 child, 1 servant - - - | 4 |
| 3. Mr. L., wife, 2 children - - - | 4 |
| 4. Mons. D., wife and child - - - | 3 |
| 5. Señor Z—, young wife, and Duenna - - | 3 |
| 6. Mr. R. and daughter - - - | 2 |
| 7. Señora B—, a lone Spanish lady, said to be
married - - - | 1 |

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In all 29,

Then we have on board, 1 Colonial Governor, 1 Chargé d'Affaires, 1 Consul-General, 1 Consul, 3 Captains, 4 Doctors (M.D.), and 3 Lieutenants.

Among our passengers we have certain characters more or less prominent, in some shape or other, viz. :—

1. The Commander of the Avon.
2. A Governor of one of H. M's Islands.
3. A German savant, knighted by H. M., and proceeding as British Consul to one of the Republics formed from an ex-colony.
4. A Lieutenant, R.N., in charge of the mails.
5. A Creole Chargé d'Affaires from his Republic to the Court of St. James's, returning, on leave, to his native country.

All these are on actual service.

And, among our general passengers, we have many pleasant individuals, as—

1. An agreeable and gifted Scotch physician, returning to Havana.
2. An opulent merchant, and proprietor of Jamaica.
3. A Captain in the 42nd Regiment.
4. A London fashionable.
5. A Lieutenant, R.N., going to join his ship on the West India Station.
6. A Lieutenant in a W. I. Regiment, going to re-join.

7. The doctor of a Royal Hospital, in one of our colonies.
8. A colonial barrister.
9. A rich French merchant of Mexico, originally of the army of the Empire.
10. A great traveller, though young, and scion of one of our leading Liverpool families.
11. A young German merchant and phrenologist, bound for Mexico.
12. An English merchant of Honduras.
13. } Two young Scotch gentlemen, commencing
14. } their career—one in Mexico, the other in the West Indies.
15. A lively and agreeable young French *Republican*, and some others.

Again, we have oddities, as—

1. The lone Spanish lady—fat, fair, and forty.
2. An old blind Dutch settler, bound for, and so going by the *sobriquet* of “Surinam.”
3. An eccentric Swede, fond of the guitar.
4. A city trader, bound for Bermuda, and called “Cheapside.”
5. A shaggy-bearded Frenchman, and
6. A Swiss Botanist, both constantly engaged in gauging the temperature of the sea.

Thus you may perceive that, if variety be charming, there is every chance of our being charmed; and I owe it to my fellow passengers

to say, that, each in particular, seems resolved to contribute, as far as possible, to the harmony and good feeling which pervades the whole ship.

I have here given you such general statistics as might be elaborated by a Registrar-General; but the following extracts will introduce you more specifically and more genially into “Life in a West India Steamer”—H—*loquitur*.

“Once more I can sit still on my chair; and the best use I can make of this novelty, which we enjoyed yesterday for the first time since we got out of Southampton-Water, is to write letters.

“Can it be possible that it is only a fortnight since I saw you? With you, no doubt, it has passed like any other; or perhaps you even say, ‘What a short fortnight it seems since they went away!’ But what with the monotony of misery of the first week, and what with the variety of people with whom I have already become acquainted on board, these two weeks seem to me to be the longest I ever spent in my life.

“I did not make my appearance till the Thursday after we came on board. The only ladies as yet in the saloon were Mrs. and Miss F—; and with the latter, who is young and amiable, as well as

very pretty, I have become quite intimate. I like her father also, Captain F—, who, although he mixes little in our very mixed company, is pleasant with us; and, in fact, the family is a great acquisition to me. They have been much abroad; and having, not long ago, made a three months' passage, they are all (to their own great comfort), good sailors.

"We have another pleasant fellow-passenger in Sir R— S—, who is a German, with a very *klüg* expression in his eyes; and they tell me he is scientific in his pursuits. He goes out as a British Consul to a little republic in one of the West India islands; and, under reminiscences of Germany, we have become the best of friends. On learning I was disappointed that the packet boasted not of a library, he lent me two or three interesting volumes, a treat where such were so scarce.

"I cannot say very much about our fellow passengers, as I am just *beginning* to become acquainted with them. Of the ship's officials, I only know the captain and the doctor: the first is a quiet, gentlemanly man, of pleasing aspect and manners. The weather, however, has hardly

permitted my seeing him, except at dinner. The doctor is very much inclined to be sociable, and is a good deal with us. He keeps us all merry when he makes his appearance, looking much more the sailor than the doctor; and he certainly is an acquisition, from his good humour, and his evident desire to do all he can to keep up our spirits. One of the most amusing persons in our village of Avon is old Mr. S—, the Admiralty Agent. He, too, often keeps us in merriment, by his own peculiar eccentricities and amusing ways. He is quite a gentleman of the old school; and all the young men delight in getting him to tell some of his naval adventures, which he does with great animation, though, sailor-like, somewhat inattentive to the little niceties of language in expressing his feelings. Withal, he is a warm-hearted, well-informed, clever man, with a great deal of fun and amusing talk. Captain F— is a remarkably pleasant person, and we like him much. Then there are Mr. S. and his lady. He is an opulent Jamaica planter; and she is young, pleasing, and frank in her manners. She was very ill for a length of time; but since she has made her appearance, I have been very much with her. They have got a little

girl, about two years old, who is very engaging and the pet of the ship. Mr. S—'s cabin, and my own adjoining, open into a sort of passage or gallery, which surrounds the great sky-light, and it is the most cheerful part of the vessel; for *from* it you can look down on the saloon, and *in* it hangs the barometer; so that we have the benefit of hearing all the conversation going on about the weather, as well as the good mornings, and tender inquiries as to how one's friends have slept. Then, during the day, we get chairs, and sit in the gallery, holding a sort of drawing-room. The only other English lady we have, is a Mrs. L—, who has a husband in delicate health, two small children, and nurse; so that she has enough to do, poor soul.

"Then there are the noisy young men; and first comes Mr. M—, a lieutenant in the navy, with a good expression of countenance, merry, and amusing. I have only spoken once to him; but I dare say we shall soon get to know more of each other. Then there are two young Scotchmen, Mr. C—, and Mr. H—, who, though quiet, fraternise with this set. Another, Mr. G—, called the "good-natured dandy." He goes about with

a glass hanging from one of those round glazed sailor's hats, and sticking in his eye. When any vessel was to be seen, he would go on deck with an opera-glass! which always created a laugh: but he is the very essence of good-nature, takes nothing amiss, and joins in the fun. Then we have a quieter sort of these younger men: Mr. L—, a tremendous chess-player, beating every person here, quiet and gentlemanly, whose society I like much. For some years he has been, and still continues, travelling for pleasure; and he has been in all sorts of places, principally in India and China. Captain D—, of the 42nd, I have not yet spoken to. Next we have Lieutenant C—, who does not play cards; and so generally comes to talk with us "lone women" in the evenings. There is a fat Spanish woman who sleeps next door to him, and whom he abominates; whence she is called Mrs. C—. I know little, as yet, of our middle-aged and elderly passengers, saving old Dr. F—, who, though very deaf, is most agreeable and entertaining, and with whom I have got up an intimacy. He is returning to his family at Havana.

Having gone pretty well through our list of

English passengers, I will not detain you much with our foreigners. With some exceptions, I do not think much of them. There is one Spanish couple, recently married, going to the Havana; and another, with a baby, returning to Mexico. We have a good many other Spaniards, of whom I know nothing, although the father, of course, congregates with them. Among the Frenchmen, the principal character is a young man, good-looking, with a beard *à la Cavaignac*, whence his *sobriquet* is that general's name, and he is known by no other. For ten days he never came out of his cabin; but, though complaining of being ill, always ate a good dinner, handed in to him from the table by a *compatriote*. Speaking, however, very loud at last, and merrily, the captain told him he must *come out* to dinner, which thenceforward he did. Of Germans, after Sir R—, we have a Ham-burgher, Mr. D—, very amusing. His mania for phrenology gave him at first no peace, till he explained to each and every one their bumps, which created a great deal of merriment; both because some looked so frightened and *convicted* by several of his discoveries, and because he gave them in such quaint, though very good, English.

Then there is Herr L—, of whom I know little, although we found he had a letter of introduction for us. With the remainder of the passengers I am unacquainted; but I think I have given you a pretty good list of the inhabitants of the floating community in the "Avon."

18th.—The poor Bermuda people are, as the "fast" men here say, "regularly sold," as we shall not see that island. We are now at anchor in Funchal-Bay; and, alas! nothing more shall we see of the island than we do at this present: for we are placed in quarantine, on account of the cholera, which, they say, is raging dreadfully in England, although I am sure I saw nothing of it. So here we shall be all day *looking* at this old-fashioned town of Funchal from the vessel; but that is all. I suppose our present letters will arrive in a pretty *pickle*, for they insist on putting every thing into vinegar.

All this morning it has rained; but now the weather is fair and lovely, although *excessively warm!* The sight from the deck, however, is very fine. All the houses look so white, and the steep, abrupt ascent from the sea-side renders the scene very picturesque. Such beautiful hills! and so

lovely a sky!—a day such as we seldom have in England in the middle of July. Yesterday was also very fine. We had prayers in the morning, and then we remained for hours on deck. In the evening it was still delicious and warm, with beautiful star-light.

This morning the heavy rain prevented us from going on deck to see the approach of the Avon to the roadstead of Madeira; and all the best windows aft being taken, Mr. and Mrs. S—, our young German friend Sir R—, and I, led by the doctor, went to the fore part of the vessel, near to the butcher's shop. There we not only had a famous place on the second deck to see the approach, but the doctor afterwards, offering to be showman, took us all over the hitherto unseen *ateliers*, holes, and corners, and unimagined places of the steamer, keeping us in a roar of laughter with his merry explanations of the whole.

I hope our stormy weather is now at an end. When we came on board, I asked my father the use of the dead lights; and he said—“O, they are horrible things, put down in stormy weather to prevent the water coming in; but I hope we shall not often see them.” Yet, till Saturday,

they were never unshipped; and, thanks to the thirteen days' gale, we have earned the pleasant notoriety of having made the longest passage to Madeira of any of these steamers up to the present time. Still, considering the disadvantages we have had to contend with, we have, on the whole, done very well, and the passengers are unanimous in their praises of Captain Hast. We now expect a continuance of the beautiful weather we at present enjoy—weather which renders it difficult for me to believe that, perhaps at this moment, you sit shivering by the fire.