

## LETTER IV.

THE PASSAGE FROM SOUTHAMPTON TO ST. THOMAS  
CONTINUED.

*On board the Forth, off Santo Domingo,  
Thursday, January 4, 1849.*

A LARGE outward-bound steam packet, full of passengers, forms, as my statistics have shown, a complete epitome of cosmopolitan life. You have a sprinkling of various nations, of every class in society, of every diversity of talent, education, and acquirement; finally, of almost every language spoken in Europe.

Our manner of life on board is this:—At half-past eight, A.M., a bell is rung to warn sluggards that the breakfast hour is at hand. At nine, the breakfast bell itself is rung, when, (now the weather is good), almost all muster, and a truly substantial meal is discussed. Then at noon comes luncheon; and at four, P.M., an ample dinner is served. At half-past six we have

tea, which concludes the somewhat cumbersome eating and drinking operations of the day.

Among the various pursuits, busy and idle, with which our passengers anxiously seek a riddance of their time, a curious game, called "sea billiards," has been very attractive for our "fast" young men, and even for some of the more staid among us. A figure is chalked out on the deck, thus:—

10 off		
5	9	6
4	1	7
8	2	3
10 off		

and two pair of round flat pieces of wood, about four inches in diameter, and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch in thickness, are hurled smoothly, on the flat side, along the deck by the players, stationed about twenty paces from the board, or "square;" and he who, in his throws, first scores 100, by his success in placing his *missile* in the respective divisions, according to the written number, wins the game. The implement, however, must not be on a line, and if it



lands in the "10 off," that number is deducted from the score; while the antagonists may knock each other out, as is done at bowls, when they can. Thus, my disc, for instance, lies in division 1, my opponent may chance to knock me into division 9, and he remain in 1, by which, of course, I gain 8.

Another less quiet game, called "monkey," well known at sea, was played, till the hard knocks received put an end to it. The "monkey" gets a rope, which is fastened to a spar some feet above him, round his waist, and then leaning forward on his chest, and giving his body an impetus by two or three paces on the deck (all he can do), he swings in the air, without being able to steady his course. Around him, on the deck, are his assailants, armed with knotted silk handkerchiefs, striking at him; and he, with a similar weapon, endeavours to hit some one, who thereupon becomes the "monkey." The difficulty is to guide the swing, so as not to strike against surrounding objects. An intrepid "monkey" is, moreover, exposed to severe blows or contusions, and the game altogether is a very rude species of gymnastics.

Music and dancing, when the weather has permitted, have formed leading amusements on board

the Avon. The Terpsichoreans were first set in motion by the violin of the versatile and good-natured Captain D—; while Cavaignac has gathered large audiences round him, to listen to his Italian *arias* and French *chansons*, both which he sings magnificently.

The least agreeable part of the day, I presume, for the ladies is after tea, when whist sets in, and they are consequently left much to themselves.

To return to my narrative. Our unexpectedly devious course, as stated at the conclusion of my second letter, led us to the island of Madeira. On the 16th of December, we were two hundred and fifty miles from it. On Sunday, the 17th, a beautiful day, we all assembled at prayers, that is, all our Protestant passengers and ship's company, with some lookers-on of the Catholics. Captain Hast read the service well, and our purser (Mr. C—) made an excellent clerk. Mr. L— our doctor, laid aside, for the nonce, his joyous laugh, and, with grave look and sonorous voice, accompanied Mr. C— in the responses.

On Monday, the 18th, after a fine run of the two previous days, we came to anchor in Funchal Bay, close in-shore, about half-past ten, A.M.,



obtaining, as we approached it, a close view of the charming and picturesque island. It may be enough to say, that those on board, who now saw Madeira for the first time, found no adequate terms to express their delight with so novel, so attractive a scene, as that upon which they gazed, while they stood on the deck of our fine steamer.

Many were our plans as to how we were to spend our day on shore; but, like many other well-imagined schemes "of mice and men," ours were destined never to be realised. The health-boat came off.

"How d'ye do, captain?" said the officer of the boat.

"Quite well, I thank you."

"How long are you from Southampton?"

"Sixteen days."

"Any case of cholera on board?"

"Not one."

"Any case of sickness?"

"Not a single case."

"Any one confined to bed?"

"No one."

"Have you a clean bill of health?"

"Yes."

"O then," said the sapient health-officer, unconscious of his amusing *non sequitur*,—"O THEN, you are in quarantine!"

And in quarantine we remained, spell-bound to the Avon. The sickly-looking Funchalians would not be infected with our fresh, rosy, breezy health, which had increased upon us every day as we braved the Bay of Biscay, and encountered the gales of the broad Atlantic.

I was especially annoyed myself, not to be allowed to land. I was in sight of the island, after a lapse of thirty-five years between my first and my present visit. I had a vivid recollection of all its beauties; and I was pluming myself on my abilities as a cicerone for H— on the occasion. But O these stupid and absurd quarantine laws! How incomprehensible it is, that benighted rulers of civilised nations still bow their heads to this most senseless relic of our barbarous times!

We took in coals, and a complete supply of fresh provisions and live stock. We made telescopic observations of the villa-dotted hill—I might say, mountain in front—sighing in vain for a walk among orange-groves and vineyards.

At one P.M. on Tuesday, the 19th, we weighed



anchor, and majestically swept out of the bay, and along the sea-board of the beautiful, but inhospitable, isle.

From this time we had fine weather up to Christmas-day; but that no pleasurable festival for us, brought rain in torrents; hatches fastened down, and skylights closed. Towards evening the weather cleared up; the wind was still fair; and on the 26th we were scudding away, "all right," once more.

Our route was now completely changed. Instead of Bermuda and Nassau to Havana, it was to that port by Madeira, St. Thomas's, Porto Rico, and Jamaica. The alteration was agreeable, from the greater range of intermediate islands which we were thus to visit. I had heard much of the pretty islands of St. Thomas and Porto Rico; and, of course, I was also anxious to see poor old Jamaica, which, by all accounts *here*, is now really on its last legs.

On Friday, the 29th, enjoying the same splendid weather, which, with only slight interruptions, we had brought with us from Madeira, we found we were within three days' sail of St. Thomas; so we set about carrying into effect two projects,

which had occupied our thoughts during the two previous days. One, originating with H—, was, to give a miscellaneous concert; the other was, to present Captain Hast with a letter of thanks and a small present, as a testimony of the esteem of his passengers.

On Friday, then, there issued from H—'s cabin the following announcement:—

"It is respectfully announced, that a grand instrumental and vocal concert will be given in the Royal Avon Saloon, on Saturday, the 30th of December, which will be supported by the following

" EMINENT ARTISTES.

"Instrumental—Sig. D—, the celebrated flautist.

„ Sig. H—, on the Boehm flute.

„ Mr. L—, Mus. Doc., on the violin.

"Vocal—Mons. D—, the unrivalled French baritone.

„ Herr D—, the great German tenor.

„ Mr. R—, the renowned Scotch singer.

"Engagements are pending with other *artistes* of great merit. Full particulars will be duly announced, and programmes issued on the morning of the performance."



These were accordingly drawn up, and, after many alterations and improvements, finally adopted; making them a veritable facsimile of the innumerable programmes of concerts, which, in "Parts I. and II.," one sees every "season" in the music shops and newspapers of London.

The mornings of Friday and Saturday were given to rehearsals. We named a "Committee of Taste" to fit up the "Saloon," and to provide refreshments. We determined that the whole expense should be borne by the *English* gentlemen passengers only; and all being thus disposed, the audience was called to the concert at seven o'clock precisely.

The saloon was so well arranged, that all the listeners were comfortably seated in front of the performers: the orchestra was in the centre, and all heard equally well. Our audience was composed of about seventy persons. As to the concert itself, I can safely avow that it went off with an *eclat*, never exceeded in the Hanover Square Rooms. The flute performances were exquisite. "Cavaignac" sang in fine voice. Our duets, trios, and choruses, all went famously; and Captains H— and D—'s comic songs, were decided

hits, and irresistibly encored. Nothing went wrong; and Herr L—'s leger-de-main, as well as some volunteered by Sir R—, created great merriment as well as surprise, so well were they done. Captain Hast assured every one that nothing at all like the Avon concert had ever been got up in any one of the Royal Mail steamers; while the delighted steward affirmed that he had seen nothing of the kind in twenty years of the Foreign Packet Service. The concert closed with "God save the Queen," in solo parts and full chorus.

Our next demonstration was the presentation of a letter of thanks to Captain Hast, with a little purse containing twenty-five guineas. On Saturday, a meeting was held to arrange preliminaries; the letter to Captain H— was agreed upon, as well as the inscription for the proposed small piece of plate, to be purchased; and Miss F— and H— volunteered to work the purse, to be ready on Monday: a very pretty purse it was, although, some alleged, not quite heavy enough.

The passengers proceeded to assemble in the saloon, and Captain F— taking the head seat, Captain Hast was introduced by Sir R. S—. Our chairman spoke with tact, and Captain Hast made a feeling and appropriate reply.



Before winding up the first part of our voyage, I will give you some extracts of H—'s diary, from Madeira, as illustrative, a little farther, of "life on board a West India steamer."

"18th December, 1848.—We sent off from Madeira, this morning, a good many letters, which occupied us till a late hour last night. I propose, now and then, to take up the "journal" style, and, from time to time, to send you what I have ready. It is not so easy to write now as it was last night; for we are no longer at anchor, but again tossing about, though now in a somewhat more *piano* manner.

"The weather has been so fine to-day, that I have enjoyed it throughout on deck. The sad ceremony of consigning our poor cow, (which died from injuries received during the storm,) to a watery grave, was performed this morning. Its place was supplied, at Madeira, by two native cows, which were amongst the numerous purchases our captain was obliged to make. As no one was allowed to land at Madeira, every thing wanted was brought off in shore-boats; and it was amusing enough to see the variety of articles presented to our view. Caged Canary birds,

feather-flowers, straw hats and bonnets, queer shoes, and fruits of every kind, were among the purchases made by the passengers.

"Friday, 22nd.—To-day I have been reading Andersen's 'Two Baronesses.' The days are getting so much longer, that we were in time, after dinner, to see the sun set, which was beautiful. After admiring it, I sat down beside the dear deaf doctor, and spoke to him through his trumpet. While thus engaged, a proposal to dance was made; and soon there was quite a large party assembled, 'on polking thoughts intent.' Captain D— was found to be a willing performer on the violin; and to the 'Annen Polka,' played by him on a fiddle of doubtful reputation, the ball was opened. We kept it up with considerable spirit, 'totally regardless' of occasional bumps or slides; till, at last, after a vigorous *deux-temps*, we were obliged to rest, and recover ourselves by promenading. In this way I had got almost to the other extremity of the vessel, with my partner, when we heard the sounds as of a vocal performance. 'Rushing madly' back, we found 'Cavaignac' singing, to a delighted audience, the baritone air from 'Nino.' He has decidedly



a fine voice, and sings remarkably well for an amateur. He has been a great deal in Italy, is a member of the Philharmonic Society of Bordeaux (whence he comes), and is '*passionné pour la musique.*' Next we got our *German* to sing a romance, a pretty little thing about *Lebewohl*, which he gave very nicely. The evening closed with tea, talk, and cards, and other amusements, diversified by two songs from '*Cavaignac*,' very well given.

"Christmas Day.—Yesterday we had prayers. In the afternoon it got windy, and rained a great deal: a dreadful night, the rolling again as bad as ever; passengers sick, etc. etc. This morning the heat was oppressive, every one shut up on account of the rain and the sea, both very heavy. We were all, if not in an unchristian, at least in an unchristmas-like mood, and made the usual congratulations with woe-begone looks, fearing, as we did, a return of our first gale, and a repetition of former miseries. We had, in the meantime, a regular Christmas dinner, of which several of our friends were unable to partake, having retired to their berths, there to be merry after a fashion!

"We thought of you all, as no doubt you did of

us, imagining us very near Havana. I hope next Christmas will find us in dear old England again, or if not so, at any rate not upon the high seas.

"After dinner, there was a joke got up about a *sham* misletoe, in the shape of an old cabbage, which was hung from the balcony over the saloon, and of course caused a good deal of merriment. No dancing *this* evening; every one inclined to be slow.

"Tuesday, 26th.—High wind, but in our favor, so we don't mind it much; otherwise a fine day. One of the middies, Mr. M—, has presented me with a little water-colour sketch of the '*Avon*' in the gale, which Mr. C— said would keep me in mind of some very miserable days; but, I added, of some very pleasant ones also.

"Thursday, 28th.—Yesterday was a beautiful day again. I sat all the morning with Miss F— under the awning. We read a little, and talked a great deal. We had much amusement with Herr D— (the phrenologist), as the fat Spanish lady got him to examine her bumps and explain them to her. In the evening, we had our dance again, but found it rather warm, as we had now entered the tropics.



“Saturday, 30th.—Yesterday and to-day we were very busy preparing for a concert, which took place this evening. I send you a programme. It was on a very grand scale, I assure you. The best thing of all was Captain D—’s song of ‘The Ladies’ Man,’ which was excellent. He is a very gentlemanly man, full of quiet fun, which constantly finds vent for itself, under the gravest aspect. He is very musical; and the flute duets which he and Mr. H— played, were well executed. Then the captain’s song, ‘The Hurricane,’ was very good; and our famous French baritone came out in grand style. Between the parts, there were some amusing *tricks*, executed by Herr L— and Sir R. S—, so that altogether it was good fun, and every one seemed to enjoy the evening.

“Beside the musical rehearsals, arrangements were made to-day for presenting the captain with a letter of thanks, and a purse, to which all the passengers subscribed. Miss F— and I, according to our offer, have been very busy *knitting the purse*.

“Monday, January 1st.—A happy new year to you all! Yesterday and to-day have been disagreeable; rain and great heat. Miss F— and I

were busy all the forenoon at our purse, which we finished in good time; and at three, Captain F— presented it, and its contents, to Captain Hast. This evening we had the most glorious sunset I ever saw, assuredly something worth seeing. All were collected on deck, and declared they had never witnessed a finer sight. When it had quite faded away, the dancing began, and the evening passed as usual. We had seen land in the afternoon, and therefore all the conversation was of St. Thomas, and the parting there with some of our fellow passengers.

“Tuesday.—This morning I got up at six o’clock to see the entrance to St. Thomas, which is remarkably pretty. The town, also, looks well from the sea. The little bay is formed by a semicircle of hills, and the town is built on three of them, while on two other eminences are the ruins of a castle, and of adjacent buildings, once the stronghold of Buccaneers. At St. Thomas we were ordered to leave the Avon, and to proceed in the Forth, to our different destinations. You cannot think how sorry we were to hear this,—to leave the poor old ‘Avon,’ shattered as she was, to go to a new ship, and to part from all our



friends, particularly from our especial favourite Captain Hast, who had been so kind, to go among strangers! There was much grumbling on the occasion; and then we were obliged to set about packing, moving the luggage, etc.; in fact, it was a scene of confusion once more.

"However, we hurried through the needful operations, being *determined* to go on shore; and accordingly, at twelve, we got boats, and with Mr. and Mrs. S—, the two Misses F—, Mr. M—, and Mr. L—, we set off on our expedition. I was very much astonished to find the town poor-looking, dirty, and unpaved. There was a number of 'blackies' going about in holiday costume (for they were keeping up the new year festivities), selling all sorts of things, and making an immense hubbub!

"We went to the ice-house, where we enjoyed ourselves much. We took a walk through the town, making a few purchases; returned to the ice-house; and fancying it was then time to return to our floating prison, we got into boats, and rowed towards it. We met, however, coming off, other parties, who informed us we should not sail till four, P.M., and that a gun fired would warn us on

board. Availing ourselves of this reprieve, we returned. We went to the hotel—one of the best, they say, in the West Indies—and they showed us into a fine ball-room (opening upon a large corridor), where we had our dinner, which we much enjoyed. Discovering an old piano, I played a polka, and while Lieutenant M— and Miss F— were whirling round to it, a case of Cinderella ensued. The gun was fired—a rush and scuffle for bonnets, etc., took place, and *bon grè, mal grè*, off we went, once more. We found all on board was bustle; we took a hasty leave of our friends of the Avon, regretting no loss so much as that of her very kind and most gentlemanly commander.

"We got under weigh at half-past four, a beautiful afternoon, and calm sea, receiving a loud cheer from the Avon, heartily re-echoed from the Forth. In the evening, we had our dance as usual; and a discovery was made that we had a *professional* fiddler on board, who, though small, does very well; and Captain D— is superseded. The evenings are now something quite lovely—moonlight, and such a sky!



We expect to reach Jamaica on Saturday, when we shall lose nearly all our most agreeable fellow-passengers, and then Dulness will have her reign. Meantime, the captain here, and all the officers, are most civil and obliging. The doctor is an amusing and gentleman-like person."

## LETTER V.

THE PASSAGE FROM ST. THOMAS'S TO VERA CRUZ.

*On board the "Forth," 350 miles from  
Havana, 9th January, 1851.*

THE first day of the year set in with rain; and every place on board being then shut up, the smell was close and disagreeable: the heat was suffocating. But the weather cleared up as the day advanced; and in the evening we had one of those glorious sunsets which at once astonish and delight the first visitors of a tropical clime. No pencil which ever obeyed the sublime inspirations of the highest genius, could transfer to canvass the splendour and gorgeous colours of a tropical sunset, such as that which we witnessed on the first evening of the year; so I must leave to your own imagination the grandeur and beauty of the bright, but evanescent, scene, which is better than dimming and obscuring all its glories in a vain