

Chapter 15

Voyaging Home, Difficult and Amusing Passengers, Arrival at Liverpool (1836)

Martineau's second Atlantic crossing lasted just short of four weeks, but during the first two-and-a-half of those she claimed to have suffered the worst seasickness of her life. Small-minded acts by other female passengers before their departure worsened matters. She had picked a cabin on the starboard side of the ladies' cabin away from the steward's noisy domain, following the "exhortation . . . from an experienced sailor." Obliging, the captain pinned slips of paper with the names of Martineau and Tuckerman to the curtains of their berths. Then the day before they sailed "an old Dutch lady," a Mrs. Van Polanen, prevailed upon another lady, "Miss Preoost's aunt," to remove a ticket from one of the berths Martineau had chosen and to substitute one for *herself* claiming Tuckerman's reservation was provisional. Martineau ended by sharing a cabin with a young orphan woman working her way across the Atlantic as assistant to the steward. Next a "certain square box" of Martineau's holding "some papers of value" the captain had conscientiously kept out of the hold was put under the table in the gentlemen's cabin. Within a day or two, Mrs. Van Polanen's "quick eye" spotted Martineau's box, and she ordered the steward to bring up her *two* trunks from the hold to be placed inconveniently in the ladies' cabin. Otherwise, Martineau lived out of a "carpet-bag and bandbox," bringing into the cabin only her journal and "a few good books" with her name written in them.

By 3 August, "fortified by chicken broth, red with cayenne pepper," Martineau felt well enough to begin her sea journal. The first afternoon before being safely over the bar, the pilot of the steam "tug" had called out "'Haul away, boys, and no humbugging!'" Soon afterwards Eliza Farrar turned pale, Sarah Tuckerman left the dinner table and Martineau found her Boston newspapers "strangely uninteresting." At night a woman (Miss Preoost?) moaned noisily, and in the morning, Martineau was the only female on deck. Congratulating her, the captain bragged of their progress in the rough seas -- sending her back to the ladies' cabin to lie on the sofa. "I wish you had seen the august captain approach, pepper-box in hand, and followed by a cup of hot chicken broth," she recorded in her journal meant for the Wares. "I felt seasoned enough for half a century, and took to 'Life of Mackintosh,' of which I read half a volume before laying the book down."¹ In late afternoon Martineau toiled up on deck to watch the sun set. Remembering that nothing was "more dispiriting to the captain than the absence of passengers from the table," she "plunged down into the cabin to tea."

Of other homely incidents, Martineau felt jealous of Sarah's spotting their first Portuguese man-of-war (the "beautiful little mariners of the deep" that had intrigued her on her first crossing). Four days out, on a "heavenly day: the perfection of sailing," the captain gave orders to "'square the yards'" that allowed the ship to cut "steadily through the waves all day." Six Portuguese men-of-war now appeared "wetting their lilac sails in the purple sea." On deck, Professor Farrar presided over the opening of the ship's mailbag again leading to "shouts of merriment" at the outlandish addresses on envelopes from Irish emigrants. Mrs. Van Polanen then came up "in a passion of tears" because her cat had disappeared. At dinner she fussed when Farrar gave her a turkey wing with bone. That evening, when the cat reappeared in her cabin, she became hysterical. The captain, all the while, tried to please difficult female

passengers, and Martineau tried to go up on deck every day -- as well as to divert Farrar in the evenings with whist. Lieutenant Wilkes became her favorite, spouting scientific lore, showing Martineau the ship's progress on the chart and one day informing her they were 400 miles from New York.

On 5 August the weather was "damp, stifling, with much rain, and [the ship] rolling;" Sarah continued "gentle and merry," and the captain patient under Mrs. Van Polanen's insults. Eliza Farrar now let Martineau read proofs of her new book, while Lieutenant Wilkes entertained them with his experiences. When the party compared dressing cases, *his* proved to be "nothing else than a stocking!" At last a Scottish gentleman (a contributor to *Hood's Magazine and Comic Annual* and an acquaintance of "divers literary folk in London") ventured on deck and promised to take on Mrs. Van Polanen from whom he hoped to get "fine new material" for his pen.

On 11 August, after days of rain and worsening tempers, the captain sent around glasses of champagne to cheer the passengers' spirits. Mrs. Van Polanen declaring the ship was not moving at all, "over went her rocking chair," spilling her into another passenger's lap. Martineau, meanwhile, thought Southey's *Life of William Cowper* "as interesting as possible, but most dismal."² At night a storm drew Wilkes on deck and in his sea-coat with "rain streaming from his hat and chin," he came down to the cabin to praise the ship.

On 12 August, another miserable day, the captain tried to amuse the passengers by putting on "a lady's long deck bonnet." Then he "looked to the making of the pea-soup" and mended Eliza's Farrar's door lock. After his "forty-eight hours of toil," he told Martineau about his wife and children and a brother who had died, querying "the degree of faith" one could have in a future life. Martineau was "heartily sorry when the tea-bell rang."

On 15 August, a fair wind cheered the passengers, and the captain showed Martineau a tiny book of poems in manuscript by a young "artist and poet" who had been ill in his stateroom the whole time. At night the captain helped her on deck to admire the "star-lit sky." A brief lecture by Farrar on "the improvements in astronomy and navigation" led her to marvel at the future of science. The following day the captain unpacked "a hundred towels" so passengers could take sponge baths with sea water, after asking the steward could to "draw up a bucket or two . . . every morning."

Unluckily, there had not been enough time at New York to mend the vessel's leaky copper bottom, and a leaking cargo of turpentine in the hold began to produce nauseating odors. Wilkes assured Martineau, however, that they had passed the worst of the crossing.

As she "scribbled" almost every day in her journal, Martineau pondered. In her letter to the Wares (beginning 17 August) she apologized for recording "sadly ill-natured . . . Stuff," mostly about Mrs. Van Polanen. Ware's "situation & prospects" concerned her more, and she advised him to "write, write, write [and] travel." She and Eliza Farrar were swept away by his three last "Palmyra letters." Could he arrange to cut future ones out of the *Knickerbocker Magazine* to send to James at Liverpool, via Captain Bursley? Regrettably, Eliza Farrar had now revealed her "worldliness, & . . . (quaker) coarseness," the last chapters of her new book being "horrid." *Ware*, she advised playfully, must always write the "plain truth" to Martineau in the manner of "Gracchus's advice to Lucius about how to meet Zenobia." The end-folds of Martineau's letter in cribbed writing then held shocking gossip about Mrs. Van Polanen:

The capⁿ believes she never was married to M^r V.P; & says you may satisfy yourselves of

this, if you wish, by asking M^r *Theodore Meyer*.

Even worse, she had been detected in helping "some Southern gentⁿ" trying to seduce the orphan girl with whom Martineau was sharing a stateroom. If Ware wanted to know more, he must ask the captain, for *she* could not write about it.

Now Captain Bursley had more problems. Passengers complained when it was too rough to have the cow milked, and stewards left the ice-house door open, possibly spoiling "some of his best joints of beef." On 17 August, however, when the *Orpheus* overtook the *St. Vincent* of Bristol, "thirty-three days from Jamaica," the ladies on the other ship aroused Martineau's pity. Offered limes, Captain Bursley did not want to send the boat and slow his speed. Perhaps suitably, in the afternoon Martineau read *Much Ado about Nothing*.

On the night of 21 August, the captain came down to invite Martineau and Sarah to enjoy the spectacle of the ship flying "at the rate of twelve knots" with the stars shining and the spray dazzling as if on a "white marble floor." In the ladies' cabin, however, an Irish widow who had "kept her temper in check" now began to scold her two daughters. That morning she had thrown a bread-basket at Margaret, the Scottish stewardess carrying breakfast to her. When Captain Bursley heard, he murmured "O ho!" strode into the ladies' cabin and shut both doors after him. The rest of that day the Irishwoman remained in a passion.

Wilkes had agreed to express the customary thanks to the captain on their behalf of the passengers, though a disgruntled third of the passengers ill-humoredly refused to support him - - *their* empty and inane conversations having disgusted Martineau. On 22 August a sounding showed a depth of sixty fathoms, and Martineau saw "Irish earth." As usual, the rowdy men on board began playing cards immediately after breakfast. At five in the evening a "brief, faint line of coast" was seen through the fog. Next day, 23 August, they saw Ringan Head (on the west coast of Ireland) and "three other points of high land." That evening a favorable breeze carried them twelve miles "off the Point of Kinsale." To general relief, the Irish widow was "busy in the cabin among her bandboxes all day, quilling and trimming." The captain told Martineau boyishly that he liked to think of "so many lives saved -- so many feelings made comfortable." Farrar was not well, however, so Martineau's party continued to play cards for his sake. On 24 August, Eliza Farrar began collecting tips for Margaret, who had attended the female passengers "night and day," kept their staterooms and waited at meals. Earning only what was given her, she supported her aged parents. Most ladies gave a sovereign, but the Irish woman went into hysterics when asked, and the Dutch woman "not only refused to give anything, [but] sent the plate down the whole length of the table." Her final offense at the end of the voyage was ordering the steward to throw overboard Sarah's geranium, "brought from Dr. Channing's garden in Rhode Island, and kept alive . . . with great care."

On the 25th, between Cork and Milford Haven, a gale and the rolling of the ship kept Martineau from her journal. Passengers were sick and food and drink spilled over on the table - - though anyone willing to be "half-frozen on deck" might see "large flocks of Neptune's sheep" (billows of foam) under the clear sky. By noon they had seen the Dungarvon Mountains and the bay of Tramore on the Irish coast. White towers, the lighthouse, a steamboat and seven sails confirmed that they were "in the midst of society once more." When the ship tacked Martineau saw through a spyglass the windows of houses in Tramore. As they passed the *Georgia* bound for New York, Martineau hoped her American friends might hear of the *Orpheus*'s safe arrival. That evening the captain expected to be off Holyhead at "half-past ten

o'clock," while the night promised to be "the quietest" since they had left New York. In her bunk, however, Martineau was wakened by "a prodigious tramping upon deck" and thought the crew were shifting the sails. Next day, she learned that the captain had been locking up an unruly member of the crew in the icehouse!

On the morning of 26 August, the ladies' cabin was "in great confusion," so Sarah sat in Martineau's cabin to chat. Church steeples of Liverpool had come into view before breakfast, then the "floating lights and the castle at the mouth of the Mersey" and finally the houses and gardens of New Brighton. Post-office and custom house boats were coming to meet them. About eleven, they "hove alongside the pier," where workmen with hands in their pockets had gathered (Sarah wondered if all Englishmen "carried their hands there"). Within ten minutes Martineau could see James among the breathless gentlemen "running down the parade." From a friend, he had learned that the *Orpheus* was seen from the top of the Exchange "coming up the river."

"O we are so happy!" Martineau added in a postscript to Wares next day. She had shouted to James "My mother?" and he returned with Elizabeth. Within twenty minutes she was "the first person to go ashore" and found all the family in "perfect health & joy & prosperity." Just now Russell (James's little boy) was beside her writing to Charley Follen "to thank him for his maple sugar basket," while Isabella was a "refined little beauty." Martineau hoped the Wares' little Willie might "be just like our Herbert at a year old." James's house was filled with flowers from the country, his tables and bookshelves covered with beautiful gifts showered on him by his congregation. His church was filled, his salary increased, and his book had reached "a 2^d edition." To her surprise, except for the children, she had trouble *hearing* her family.³

Martineau's shipmates on the *Orpheus* were not forgotten: she promptly recommended "M^r Wilkes of New York, of the United States Navy," to Henry at Norwich, asking him to help Wilkes "to see any thing he may have time for in our city." To Ware she boasted of "overtures ab^t my expected books," but if she were to "accept all the invitations" she received, she might be a year in getting home. Meanwhile she and Ellen and her mother, who looked "younger" and was "placid & happy," were to visit the Rankins and Greenhows at Newcastle and Robert and Jane and their children in Birmingham.⁴

1 See "A Month at Sea" and HM to William Ware, 17 August 1836, *CL* 1: 306-309; *Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh*, ed. R. J. Mackintosh (London: Moxon, 1835; Mackintosh's daughter Fanny Wedgwood became Martineau's staunch friend [see chap. 8]).

2 Robert Southey, *The Life of William Cowper* (London: Baldwin & Craddock, 1835).

3 HM to William Ware, 17 and 27 August 1836, *CL* 1: 306-309; for Eliza Farrar's memoirs, see chap. 50; Farrar's next book, *The Young Lady's Friend. By a Lady* (Boston: American Stationers' Company, 1836), was a popular guide to female conduct, "Travelling" and "Mental Culture" comprising the last two chapters; Martineau failed to mention that Farrar reported Martineau's giving a lecture on Kant during the voyage; perhaps harsher or louder American voices better compensated for Martineau's deafness.

4 HM to Henry Martineau, 26 August 1836, *CL* 1: 309-10.