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“ONE GENERATION PASSETH AWAY . . .”

BY G. K. M.

TURNING out a drawer, the other day, I came across a letter written in 1830 by my grandmother, Mary Molesworth, describing her voyage to India at the age of nineteen. She was travelling with her sister Gertrude, married to Francis Lascelles, of the Madras Civil Service. Many of that girl's grandchildren are alive and well today, and I was impelled to reflect on the changes that have come about with the passing of only one generation.

I found refreshment in the simple dignity of the letter, in the leisurely tempo of life in those days, the absence of hurry, and the faith that generation placed in God to see them through their difficulties; and it seemed to me that others, besides Mary's descendants, might find refreshment too.

What a different voyage the two young Princesses have just made to Cape Town! We may hope that the Royal Party escaped “the sting of the mosquito and the parching thirst of the land wind.” We can be sure that the Captain of H.M.S. *Vanguard* refrained from throwing two full bottles of wine at a young officer's head and nearly killing him on account of a slight disagreement at the cuddy table!

August 1830.

MY DEAR PAPA,

I feel assured you will read with pleasure a narrative of our voyage to India, which I have endeavoured to draw up; and knowing you and Mama, with the dear little family circle, will be interested to hear all the particulars, I have given you a

detailed account of our singular career these last twelve months since we left the shores of “dear old England.” I intended to have sent it sooner, but various circumstances occurred which prevented its being despatched. I have, at last, however, found a good opportunity in Captain Thrist, of *The Alfred*, who resides at Chudleigh, and he has been kind enough to promise me to have it forwarded from thence to Exeter. *The Alfred* sails on the 15th. I am therefore unable to send you some sketches which I took from Dassen Island, and which I hoped to have finished, but I enclose you parts of two rough sketches taken on the spot.

On the 14th October (1829) we sailed from Portsmouth, but did not succeed in clearing the Channel before the 31st: soon after which we ran against a large vessel in a fog; it was a complete wreck; all hands seemed to have perished.

Our voyage was as monotonous as most others until the 7th November, when we arrived at Madeira, where we were obliged to remain one month, occasioned by our ship having been blown out to sea in a storm. Most of the passengers were fortunately on shore. During this storm we witnessed two ships dashed to pieces, and only three hands saved. So completely dashed to pieces were they against the rocks that many persons who came down to render assistance could perceive no remnants of them, except what was floating in small fragments on the sea, or had been thrown on the beach below. The people on the

island were standing within fifty yards of one of those ships when she struck on the rocks; it was blowing a gale, and except in the case of our own shipwreck I never witnessed such a scene. We could distinctly see the distracted countenances of the poor sufferers as they clung to the rigging, their faces turned to the rocks on which their ship was dashing, every wave covered the greatest part of the ship, striking from the deck the sailors on board, each wave leaving still fewer, until the strength of the strongest gave way to the force of the water, and the ship was soon after dashed to pieces. Here and there we could perceive a poor fellow struggling with the waves to reach a floating spar or cask, but the water breaking over him hid him from our sight and launched him into eternity.

We were sufficiently near to throw a rope over the bowsprit, which was the means of saving three sailors.

The Island of Madeira was in a wretched state. Popery in full vigour, and the Government most arbitrary. An attempt was made while we were there to poison the troops by putting poison into their bread. It was fortunately discovered before many suffered, but it tended much to irritate the already insolent soldiery. The baker was accused and tried by the Inquisition, but nothing was extorted from the poor sufferer.

The climate of Madeira, however, is delightful. The myrtle, the geranium, the rose, and the violet grow in all the prodigality of primitive nature on the borders of the narrow horse paths (you can hardly call them roads), being narrow paved passes through the vineyards and the mountains.

The hospitality of the English merchants at Madeira is princely. We were most kindly received at the

house of Mr Gordon, where we remained for three weeks.

The town of Funchal stretches along the margin of the bay for more than a mile. It strikes an English eye as being the centre of filth, although it is by no means so dirty as the Portuguese like. The English residents are so influential there, that they have been able to exercise a tyranny of cleanliness which the natives sullenly endure at the hazard of catching cold.

We visited every part of the Island on horseback, the only mode of conveyance made use of except a very disagreeable kind of palenkeen, the hills being too steep to admit of wheel carriages.

When you intend to make an excursion at Madeira you send a servant to the corner of the street to summon the muleteers, at which down come scampering the crowd of boys, mules, horses, and ponies, and a regular fight commences. Often when you are getting up on one horse, the bridles of two or three others are put into your hand. At last when you are seated, the *vara* in hand, and all ready, the muleteer catches hold of the tail by the left hand and begins to goad the flanks of the animal with a small pike in the right, shouting "cava, cava, cavache, caval," and away they go at full speed up the pebble-paved streets.

The greatest sight on the Island, perhaps one of the greatest in the world, is the awful *Corral*. We visited this place, and I will endeavour to give you a description of it, although a pen of more descriptive powers than mine is needed to give you any idea of the scenery. We had to ride sixteen miles into the interior of the Island. The road was a steep ascent almost the whole way; at first winding under tracteries of vines and among

