

A TOTTINGTONIAN IN MEXICO

FROM BURY TIMES 20th MAY 1899

Mr. Arthur Greenhalgh, formerly residing at Sunny Bower, Tottington, and sometime employed as an under manager at Brookhouse Mill Tottington who went out to Mexico in January to enter upon an engagement as assistant to his uncle, Mr. Arthur Ecroyd, in the management of a cotton spinning and weaving mill at Bella Vista, near Tepic, Mexico, has written to his friends at Tottington, giving them some of his experiences. Writing from Kingston Jamaica, February 19" he says:- "Since leaving Colon we have had bad weather and I have been sick. Landed at Port Royal, 9am. Sunday. It is a fine port built on a coral reef for protection of Kingston, which is about 7 miles further inland. Here we passed an English flagship and man of war. A doctor came on board to examine us. The view from a distance is very pretty. The hills just behind the town rise to a height of 2000ft. I walked through the town to a place called Myrtle Grove where there is a splendid hotel, equal to any in England. All English travellers stay here. The park two miles away is lit up with electricity. There are a good many churches and chapels and the people profess to be very religious. The Salvation Army is very strong here. I listened to some niggers. They were singing 'Shall we meet beyond the river` and then a negro woman offered a prayer that would have done credit to some of our ministers at home.

We got into Colon about 8 o'clock on Thursday, and were unloading by 8.30. I had a strange feeling on arriving at Colon. The houses are wooden and the place is a very dirty one. At the end of the houses there are all kinds of filth and refuse and it is very unhealthy. I had a drive down Palm Grove - a place covered with palm trees and very cool - and went past the house of M. Lesseps, the chief promoter of the Panama Canal scheme. At the entrance of the canal I saw hundreds of railway wagons and scores of engines rotting away. Some of these have never been used and have lain here since the canal was given up. The railways go along the main streets.

We got lost a day in our reckoning last week and instead of having pancakes on the Tuesday we had them on the Wednesday!

In a diary commencing January 26th he writes:

1st day: "On leaving the tender I found we had 15 passengers and about 4000 tons of cargo. There are 6 gentlemen, the rest are ladies and children. I shall never forget the sensation on leaving and seeing the distance between myself and friends increase."

2nd day: "We saw the last of land for 12 days. I had some fun this afternoon. We had been talking of flying fish and seeing something jump out of the water, I called out 'Flying fish'. The flying fish was a porpoise. During the afternoon I saw 12 of them."

4th day (January 29th): "My first thoughts this morning are that it is Sunday, and I am thinking of Tottington and all its memories. I seem to see all the people in their places at chapel. No unnecessary work is done today."

6th day: "Very heavy sea this morning and the wind is blowing a gale. We have had to run 100 miles out of our course. The captain dare not run with the storm alongside, so had to head it."

7th day: "The gale is still blowing and there is rain, hail and fog. The waves are 40ft high. I shall never forget this. We have to wedge ourselves in our bunks to prevent us being thrown out and the luggage is rattling about. The storm carried away the steps leading to the captain's bridge. We passed the Azores this afternoon but it being hazy we could not see much. During the night the waves kept sweeping over the deck."

9th day: "Gale as usual. We have only made 120 miles since Tuesday, instead of 500. We are just running fast enough to keep control of the boat. I am perfectly jaded with the weather. If we go on deck we have to stick for fear of being blown over. We passed within a mile of a steamer that was being badly tossed. They had up a signal saying that the vessel was not under command, but they did not want assistance. They were drifting before the storm."

11th day: "Gale still on. Again I remember it is Sunday. It is rather finer and we have gone full speed - the first time since Monday. The captain says he has been on this route 12 years and has never known such a rough passage as this and I hope I shall never have another. I keep thinking of Tottington and picture to myself what is passing with you."

15th day: "Sea quite calm, beautiful day. We made our best run today since leaving Liverpool 1380 miles. I have been helping the sailors to haul the sails, and it feels quite a treat to be allowed to do a little work. I am quite tired of living in idleness. The sea is like a sheet of glass; not a ripple."

16th day: "Have made 304 miles today. The flying fish have begun to appear in shoals, they look almost like swallows as they skim above the waves".

18th day (February 12th) : "Our third Sunday on the water. We sighted land at 12.30, it was the West Indies. We passed through the group named Virgin Isles, and we were in sight of one named Santa Cruz. To the north of this is one called Haiti. In this place the natives worship a god called Omar, and it is a common thing for mothers to eat their babies as a sacrifice to this god. In this nineteenth century the Church has still a great work to do. This morning there was a fire and boat drill by the sailors. We had an imaginary fire and the men had to get the fire pumps going. It was fine fun; the men kept getting in the way of the water and so got drenched. Sunday is the day above all others when I seem to be always thinking of home and seeing in my mind the happy times I have had."

19th day: "We should have been at Colon today but owing to the storm it will be Thursday before we land. We shall stay at Colon 24 hours, so we can go on shore and have a look round."

21st day: "Everything is hurry today so that all will be ready for morning. Passengers are all getting their letters ready to send off immediately the boat reaches land. We saw a lot of dolphins today."