

Lucy Wetmore Gray

To her sister
Gorgona [Panama,

March 28, 1849

Dear Sister,

We have proceeded thus far on our journey, and by the advice of our kind friends here have stopped to rest today. We are at the engineering depot house, which is made of a slight frame of beams and poles, and covered with bamboo slats about as strong as _____. The inside of the house is divided into several apartments by slight frames of wood, covered with cotton sheeting which serves as a screen. Mrs. Fremont, Lily, and myself with Mrs. F's servant occupy the best room, which is furnished with three small cot beds, looking glass, and two chairs with washstand which we consider quite luxurious being all together the best house in the place. We have been so fortunate as to meet with those who have proven themselves friends. Never have I been treated with more hospitality and kindness. I've already told you that Col. Hughes came out with us. He is one of the surveying party for Mr. Aspinwall. He has been very attentive to us, but it is through the kind attention of General Norris that we have had such a pleasant trip thus far on our way across the Isthmus. Had we not met with friends we should have found it unpleasant as far as accommodations are concerned, the huts of the natives being nothing more than bamboo houses covered with reeds without floors or furniture. We left Chagres Sunday morning and arrived at the place at this place last evening, having been three days coming up the river, which is very low and the *Orus* could come only 16 miles with us. The balance of the way about 25 miles we came in a small boat which we found much more comfortable than the canoes, they being small and most of them without cover. I sent you two letters by the *CC*, the last one written on board the *Orus* just before we left. As soon as Captain S had left us we were off. It was laughable to see the natives when the steamer started. (The captain had hired them to go up and take his passengers to Gorgona, and, of course, took them in tow.) They kept up such a jabbering you would've thought yourself among a parcel of ducks. The steamer would go so fast that the canoes would sometimes upset, and then such a chattering as there would be was quite amusing to us. Captain Tucker who came out with us has been an invaluable companion.

Indeed, I scarcely know what we would have done without him. He made all our arrangements for us and has been a great service to us. He waits here for Mrs. Fremont, who will be detained a few days by the illness of her brother-in-law Mr. Jacob, who has had his stroke of the sun. The Chagres River is beautiful in the extreme. The brilliant green of its banks overhung with beautiful flowers of every color, make it a most enchanting stream. We enjoyed our sail up as far as the *Orus* carried us very much. We stayed on board of her all night as Gen. Norris said it was the most comfortable place we could have, and he said Capt. Tucker was under his orders and he had told him he must keep the boat there for us till morning. Next morning bright and early we were off in our little boat manned by fine men. We had a nice little party. Mrs. Fremont, Lily, and servant, Capt. Tucker, the Reverend Mr. ____ (an Episcopal clergyman) and Dr. D ____ from Colchester, Connecticut. We could not have desired a pleasanter party. Dr. D is acquainted with Mr. Edward Stearns. Col. Hughes, and Gen. Norris went in a canoe by our side. It was warm, but we had an awning over our heads and having a breeze we were tolerably comfortable. We called it our pleasure excursion. We stopped to dine at an empty house, (We carried our own provisions.) went 12 miles that day, and stopped at the camp of the engineering and surveying party to spend the night by the invitation of Gen. N. Mr. Jacob, having a tent with him, the gentlemen soon pitched it getting some blankets and a bed which they brought from the *Orus* they arranged to pass the night. We ladies had a good tent belonging to the party with cot bedsteads and sheet spread over them. We were furnished with pillows and blankets and slept soundly. Next morning (Tuesday) we started off again and arrived at Gorgona at half past six last evening pretty well fatigued and dirty enough. The river is so low that we came very slowly. The boatmen had to pull the boat along over a great many places, and it was with much difficulty that they got it there at all. It was so much larger than the canoes. We had to get out and walk five times which we found warm and fatiguing. The longest distance was about half a mile. We were bitten by some insect (not mosquitoes) in the ____ not very badly though. I have not seen more than two mosquitoes since I have been here and no alligators, though I am told that there are some in the river. The natives are truthful, honest, and kind-hearted, though they do not like to labor and will not work any more than they choose. In going up the river you must let them do as they please as they will be obstinate and you can do nothing with them. Several of our party speak Spanish as I scarcely know how we should have gotten along if it had not been for this. I do not think it is advisable for any lady to cross, unless she has someone with her who is accustomed to traveling in this country. Jan., Feb., and March are the only months suitable for strangers to come here, the two latter months are the best. Tell Charles if he comes

to bring a blanket and provisions enough to last him four days. It will take him that long to cross, and perhaps five. There are so many delays where there are so many going that one needs patience. Tell him also that he must bring an umbrella by all means. If he can get a canoe with a cover, he can lay down and take his ease. The expense of crossing will be between 30 and 40 dollars. He must on no account come without a ticket on the other side as there are now 12 or 14 hundred persons at Panama and on the way there waiting to go up and the *Galveston* has just arrived with 300 passengers who are coming up the river. Father must wait till the new road is completed before he comes. They are surveying the route now, whether it will be a rail road or plank road is not yet determined. They will complete it from Panama [City] to this place first and the snags are to be cleared from the river and a smaller steamboat sent out so that they will be able to come up the river much farther. When that is done, there will be but little difficulty. One must be careful not to expose themselves to the heat of the sun or damp of the evening. The nights are cool and damp notwithstanding the extreme heat during the day. I have not suffered any more than I have at home in our warmest weather, but it will be hotter surely when the sun is vertical. It rains constantly in June and July.

A young girl told Mrs. F, she liked our dress very well, but it was too dark and covered us too much. They wear a chemise and skirt flounced. The chemise not like ours but with large sleeves ruffled and a broad ruffle falling from the neck. Some of their needlework is quite pretty.

Most of the houses here are miserable dirty places. They all look alike. The roofs covered with palm leaves and look much like haystacks. I will tell you about the trees and fruits some other time.

Love to all friends Aunt Becca particularly. We have got along finely thus far and we expect a pleasant trip across the mountains. We take the lower route.

We are both well and what do you think we had for dinner. Baked pork and beans, pickled nam. corn beef and dried apple pies. All this on the isthmus. What do you think of that?