

Lucy Wetmore Gray to her mother, Rebecca Hubbard Wetmore

Latitude 19° N, Longitude 74° W

Aboard Steamship *Crescent City*

March 21, 1849

Wednesday

Dear Mother,

I wish you could see how smoothly we are gliding along over the great waters – you would not be at all anxious about us. We have had a beautiful run from New York – the ocean most of the time being as smooth as the sound usually is with a good breeze --.and have suffered far less with seasickness than I anticipated, though I have not felt sufficiently well to write before today. The *Crescent City* is a noble ship, and we have every comfort it is possible to have at sea and every attention we could wish for. Yesterday for the first time since leaving New York, we saw the land – a small island near Cuba. This morning Cuba and Haiti are distinctly in view, the first west, the other east of us. Of course we are in warm latitudes; the thermometer standing at 86 this morning.

The day we left New York was dull and unpleasant, but did not much affect our spirits, crowds were on the wharf to see us off, and we were cheered again and again. As soon as we were fairly out on the ocean, which was at dusk, most of the passengers were obliged to retire to their berths, and I believe all felt something as Mr. Gray and I did – a little worse for being at sea. However, after being relieved of our dinner, we slept tolerably well. The next day, the sea, being a little smoother, we managed to dress ourselves after dinner, and go out on the deck, but did not remain long as the weather was wet and disagreeable. Sat. it was pleasant and the air delightful. We spent some time on deck and saw the sun set for the first time at sea, and a beautiful sight it was. Sunday it was the intention of the Capt. to have dinner service on board, but the sea being rougher than it had been previously, the minister (an Episcopalian who is going to San Francisco) as well as the rest of us was sick. It was the only day I did not dress. I ought not to say I was sick, but the ship was so unsteady I could not stand without feeling a

tendency to sickness. I find the best way to prevent sickness is to keep perfectly quiet. At first exertion even of talking would produce nausea. By keeping quietly in my berth I have been very comfortable most of the time since the first day. I have not sat up more than one third of the time and have done nothing else yet. One feels so good for nothing at sea, so languid that you cannot summon resolution enough to do anything. However, we shall be better after this, though some of our friends tell us we cannot expect to feel well as we do on land during the whole of the voyage. It takes a long time to become accustomed to the motion of a ship. If you attempt to walk, you stagger like a drunken man and your head is giddy constantly. At the best being at sea is not very agreeable. I can realize what they meant by the expression "all out of kilter" and you would too, if your head was constantly swimming and you had but little appetite for food. The best thing I have eaten since I have been on board is clam soup (though the tables are loaded with everything nice). You can't imagine how nice it is after one has been seasick you do not want anything sweet or sour at sea at least not till you are entirely well. The dryer the food is the better. The steward gave me some popped corn which he recommended, and I found good. We have an excellent stewardess who takes the best care of us. She will not let us eat what is hurtful. I find the apples grateful now I begin to feel better. Every ___ we have has grown damp. The cakes we brought are all moist but I think they will keep till we want them.

We have 325 passengers and there are 95 officers and men making 420 souls on board and you would be really astonished at the order and quiet which prevails among so many. The majority of them are married men I should think and nearly all of them from a good class of society I should suppose from their look and appearance. We find some pleasant acquaintances among them, and have a delightful little society among ourselves. Colonel Hughes from West River, Maryland, who is going out to make some preparations for the railroad across the isthmus. He is very much a gentleman and an agreeable man. Captain Tucker, brother of the captain of the *Orus*, who goes to the isthmus in the employ of Howland and Aspinwall, and who is a jolly good-natured gentleman, and a great favorite of Mrs. Fremont. The latter person is the only female companion I have. She is as perhaps you know the daughter of the Honorable Thomas H. Benton and is going to San Francisco with her little daughter six year old to meet her husband who you know left Missouri last August for that place. She is an exceedingly interesting woman, highly educated, and accomplished, affable in her manners, pleasant and instructive in conversation, and altogether a charming woman. I should think she was about my age, was married at 17, is rather pretty with dark hair, hazel eyes, and an agreeable countenance tho' her

features are only tolerably good. She is a superior woman and I like her very much. Of course, she has had the advantages of a superior education and some of the best society in the country, and she is what you might expect of one occupying such a position in society. She has a Mrs. Robinson [?] from Baltimore, a very clever, respectable woman, to go out with her to assist her on the way. There is also an Irish woman, making four women in all. Mrs. Fremont's brother-in-law Mr. Jacob is also on board. He goes out for his health I believe.

Chagres, Saturday morning

We arrived at Chagres 8:30 this morning having been eight days and 19 hours since leaving New York. We have had as pleasant a trip as we could have had, not a storm or an accident to prevent our onward progress. The weather has not been uncomfortably hot. We have had a cool breeze most of the time. Wednesday was our warmest day. Today it is warm, but we are comfortable on board the *C.C. [Crescent City]* which is anchored about ten miles below the town. We were in sight of the town this morning early, but came down to this quiet bay that the *Orus* which came out to meet us might come along side, there being too much swell at the town. Captain Tucker will arrange to take or send all the passengers over to Panama for a certain sum ___ we have not yet heard what. We anticipate no trouble. The captain's brother (of the *Orus*) is on board and will be of some assistance to us in crossing. He says we should all be on board the *Orus* tonight. She has just left us with one load for Chagres. The captain thought it was best for us to wait till afternoon. It takes a long time for so many passengers to get off with their baggage. We should probably go up the river tonight as far as the *Orus* will carry us and tomorrow go up the river as far as Gorgona in canoes, and stay there till Monday when we should go on to Panama. I do not like the idea of traveling on the Sabbath, but it cannot be avoided in the present case as we must leave with the rest or not join the steamer, and having once started we cannot stop short of Gorgona. We shall write to you again from Panama and send by the *Falcon* which has not yet arrived. This is sent by Mrs. Young, the stewardess ___ postage to New York. The *CC* is expected to call at New Orleans on her return and you may not receive this as soon as you expected to. I hope you have not been anxious about us.

Hoping to hear that you are all well I close.

Lucy

Notes in the margins:

Mr. Gray is well and sends love to all .

I purchased a book for Henry in New York with the money you gave me. I could not get one of Abbots works. They are not to be had. I think this will cross that out. I think this just as good if not better. It is untitled, entitled the philosophy of religion or being scenes from Scenes from sacred history and is an excellent work.

I want Cornelia to go to school this summer if possible. She and Mary must board in town during the hot weather. I have not a doubt that Henry will send enough to pay for it all. If he does not, I will. Rest assured, it shall come. I would not miss of having Cornelia go to school on any account. I hope both of the girls will have enough given to them from some of their rich relations in ___ to enable them to study music, French, Spanish, and Latin.