

CHAPTER
9

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from* “The Opening of the
Liverpool to Manchester Railway”
by Frances Ann Kemble

The railway connecting the port of Liverpool with the city of Manchester was the first for which high-speed locomotives were designed. This excerpt, from Frances Ann Kemble’s Some Recollections of a Girlhood, is an eyewitness account of the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway on September 15, 1830. What were her impressions of this historic train ride?

We started on Wednesday last, to the number of about eight hundred people, in carriages. The most intense curiosity and excitement prevailed, and, though the weather was uncertain, enormous masses of densely packed people lined the road, shouting and waving hats and handkerchiefs as we flew by them. What with the sight and sound of these cheering multitudes and the tremendous velocity with which we were borne past them, my spirits rose to the true champagne height, and I never enjoyed anything so much as the first hour of our progress. I had been unluckily separated from my mother in the first distribution of places, but by an exchange of seats which she was enabled to make she rejoined me when I was at the height of my ecstasy, which was considerably damped by finding that she was frightened to death. . . . While I was chewing the cud of this disappointment . . . a man flew by us, calling out through a speaking-trumpet to stop the engine, for that somebody in the directors’ carriage had sustained an injury. We were all stopped accordingly, and presently a hundred voices were heard exclaiming that Mr. Huskisson was killed; the confusion that ensued is indescribable; the calling out from carriage to carriage to ascertain the truth, the contrary reports which were sent back to us, the hundred questions eagerly uttered at once, and the repeated and urgent demands for surgical assistance, created a sudden turmoil that was quite sickening. At last we distinctly ascertained that the unfortunate man’s thigh was broken. From Lady Wilton, who was in the Duke’s carriage, and within three yards of the spot where the accident happened, I had the following details, the horror of witnessing which we were spared through our situation behind the great carriage. The engine had stopped to take in a supply of water, and several of the gentlemen in the directors’ carriage had jumped out to look about

them. Lord Wilton, Count Bathyany, Count Matuscenitz, and Mr. Huskisson among the rest were standing talking in the middle of the road, when an engine on the other line, which was parading up and down merely to show its speed, was seen coming down upon them like lightning. The most active of those in peril sprang back into their seats; Lord Wilton saved his life only by rushing behind the Duke’s carriage, and Count Matuscenitz had but just leaped into it, with the engine all but touching his heels as he did so; while poor Mr. Huskisson, less active from the effects of age and ill-health, bewildered, too, by the frantic cries of ‘Stop the engine! Clear the track!’ that resounded on all sides, completely lost his head, looked helplessly to the right and left, and was instantaneously prostrated by the fatal machine, which dashed down like a thunderbolt upon him, and passed over his leg, smashing and mangling it in the most horrible way. (Lady Wilton said she distinctly heard the crushing of the bone.) So terrible was the effect of the appalling accident that, except that ghastly ‘crushing’ and poor Mrs. Huskisson’s piercing shriek, not a sound was heard or a word uttered among the immediate spectators of the catastrophe.

from Frances Ann Kemble, Some Recollections of a Girlhood (1878). Reprinted in John Carey, ed., Eyewitness to History (New York: Avon Books, 1987), 304–305.

Discussion Questions

Determining Main Ideas

1. How many people rode on the first train ride on the Liverpool-Manchester Railway?
2. What happened to William Huskisson?
3. **Making Inferences** Based on your reading of this excerpt, how do you know that the Liverpool-Manchester Railway was an important improvement in transportation during the Industrial Revolution?