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 those 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 Batthyany, 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 mangleing 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.


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?
Testimony on Child Labor in Britain

During the 1800s there were few laws in Britain regulating the employment of children. Elizabeth Bentley testified before a parliamentary committee investigating conditions among child laborers in Britain’s textile industry. As you read this portion of her testimony, think about the hardships she describes.

COMMITTEE: What age are you?
BENTLEY: Twenty-three.
C: Where do you live?
B: At Leeds.
C: What time did you begin work at the factory?
B: When I was six years old.
C: At whose factory did you work?
B: Mr. Burk's.
C: What kind of mill is it?
B: Flax mill.
C: What was your business in that mill?
B: I was a little doffer.
C: What were your hours of labour in that mill?
B: From 5 in the morning till 9 at night, when they were thronged.
C: For how long a time together have you worked that excessive length of time?
B: For about a year.
C: What were the usual hours of labour when you were not so thronged?
B: From six in the morning till 7 at night.
C: What time was allowed for meals?
B: Forty minutes at noon.
C: Had you any time to get your breakfast or drinking?
B: No, we had to get it as we could.
C: Do you consider doffing a laborious employment?
B: Yes.
C: Explain what you had to do.
B: When the frames are full, they have to stop the frames, and take the flyers off, and take the full bobbins off, and carry them to the roller, and then put empty ones on, and set the frame going again.
C: Does that keep you constantly on your feet?
B: Yes, there are so many frames and they run so quick. . . .
C: Are you considerably deformed in person as a consequence of this labour?
B: Yes I am.
C: And what time did it come on?
B: I was about 13 years old when it began coming, and it has got worse since; it is five years since my mother died, and my mother was never able to get me a good pair of stays to hold me up, and when my mother died I had to do for myself, and got me a pair.
C: Were you perfectly straight and healthy before you worked at a mill?
B: Yes, I was as straight a little girl as ever went up and down town.
C: Were you straight till you were 13?
B: Yes, I was.
C: Did your deformity come upon you with much pain and weariness?
B: Yes, I cannot express the pain all the time it was coming.
C: Do you know of anybody that has been similarly injured in their health?
B: Yes, in their health, but not many deformed as I am.
C: It is very common to have weak ankles and crooked knees?
B: Yes, very common indeed.
C: This is brought on by stopping the spindle?
B: Yes.
C: Where are you now?
B: In the poorhouse.


Activity Options

1. Developing Historical Perspective Imagine that you are a child who works in a textile mill. Write a diary entry in which you describe your work life and then share it with classmates.

2. Writing for a Specific Purpose Imagine yourself as a member of the parliamentary committee investigating child labor in the textile industry. Write a list of questions that you might want to ask witnesses like Elizabeth Bentley.