

# CHARLES KINGSLEY

AT LAST: A CHRISTMAS  
IN THE WEST INDIES

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**At Last: A Christmas**  
**in the West Indies**

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*At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies:*

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**TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE**  
**HON. SIR ARTHUR GORDON,**  
**GOVERNOR OF MAURITIUS**

My Dear Sir Arthur Gordon,

To whom should I dedicate this book, but to you, to whom I owe my visit to the West Indies? I regret that I could not consult you about certain matters in Chapters XIV and XV; but you are away again over sea; and I can only send the book after you, such as it is, with the expression of my hearty belief that you will be to the people of Mauritius what you have been to the people of Trinidad.

I could say much more. But it is wisest often to be most silent on the very points on which one longs most to speak.

*Ever yours,*

*C. KINGSLEY.*

# CHAPTER I: OUTWARD BOUND

At last we, too, were crossing the Atlantic. At last the dream of forty years, please God, would be fulfilled, and I should see (and happily, not alone) the West Indies and the Spanish Main.

From childhood I had studied their Natural History, their charts, their Romances, and alas! their Tragedies; and now, at last, I was about to compare books with facts, and judge for myself of the reported wonders of the Earthly Paradise. We could scarce believe the evidence of our own senses when they told us that we were surely on board a West Indian steamer, and could by no possibility get off it again, save into the ocean, or on the farther side of the ocean; and it was not till the morning of the second day, the 3d of December, that we began to be thoroughly aware that we were on the old route of Westward-Ho, and far out in the high seas, while the Old World lay behind us like a dream.

Like dreams seemed now the last farewells over the taffrel, beneath the chill low December sun; and the shining calm of Southampton water, and the pleasant and well-beloved old shores and woods and houses sliding by; and the fisher-boats at anchor off Calshot, their brown and olive sails reflected in the dun water, with dun clouds overhead tipt with dull red from off the setting sun—a study for Vandevelde or Backhuysen in the tenderest moods. Like a dream seemed the twin lights of Hurst Castle and the Needles, glaring out of the gloom behind us, as if old England

were watching us to the last with careful eyes, and bidding us good speed upon our way. Then had come—still like a dream—a day of pouring rain, of lounging on the main-deck, watching the engines, and watching, too (for it was calm at night), the water from the sponson behind the paddle-boxes; as the live flame-beads leaped and ran amid the swirling snow, while some fifteen feet beyond the untouched oily black of the deep sea spread away into the endless dark.

It took a couple of days to arrange our little cabin Penates; to discover who was on board; and a couple of days, too, to become aware, in spite of sudden starts of anxiety, that there was no post, and could be none; that one could not be wanted, or, if one was wanted, found and caught; and it was not till the fourth morning that the glorious sense of freedom dawned on the mind, as through the cabin port the sunrise shone in, yellow and wild through flying showers, and great north-eastern waves raced past us, their heads torn off in spray, their broad backs laced with ripples, and each, as it passed, gave us a friendly onward lift away into the ‘roaring forties,’ as the sailors call the stormy seas between 50 and 40 degrees of latitude.

These ‘roaring forties’ seem all strangely devoid of animal life—at least in a December north-east gale; not a whale did we see—only a pair of porpoises; not a sea-bird, save a lonely little kittiwake or two, who swung round our stern in quest of food: but the seeming want of life was only owing to our want of eyes; each night the wake teemed more bright with flame-atomies. One

kind were little brilliant sparks, hurled helpless to and fro on the surface, probably Noctiluca; the others (what they may be we could not guess at first) showed patches of soft diffused light, paler than the sparks, yet of the same yellow-white hue, which floated quietly past, seeming a foot or two below the foam. And at the bottom, far beneath, deeper under our feet than the summit of the Peak of Teneriffe was above our heads—for we were now in more than two thousand fathoms water—what exquisite forms might there not be? myriads on myriads, generations on generations, people the eternal darkness, seen only by Him to whom the darkness is as light as day: and to be seen hereafter, a few of them—but how few—when future men of science shall do for this mid-Atlantic sea-floor what Dr. Carpenter and Dr. Wyville Thomson have done for the North Atlantic, and open one more page of that book which has, to us creatures of a day, though not to Him who wrote it as the Time-pattern of His timeless mind, neither beginning nor end.

So, for want of animal life to study, we were driven to study the human life around us, pent up there in our little iron world.

But to talk too much of fellow-passengers is (though usual enough just now) neither altogether fair nor kind. We see in travel but the outside of people, and as we know nothing of their inner history, and little, usually, of their antecedents, the pictures which we might sketch of them would be probably as untruthfully as rashly drawn. Crushed together, too, perforce, against each other, people are apt on board ship to make little

hasty confidences, to show unawares little weaknesses, which should be forgotten all round the moment they step on shore and return to something like a normal state of society. The wisest and most humane rule for a traveller toward his companion is to

‘Be to their faults a little blind;  
Be to their virtues very kind;’

and to consider all that is said and done on board, like what passes among the members of the same club, as on the whole private and confidential. So let it suffice that there were on board the good steamship *Shannon*, as was to be expected, plenty of kind, courteous, generous, intelligent people; officials, travellers—one, happy man! away to discover new birds on the yet unexplored Rio Magdalena, in New Grenada; planters, merchants, what not, all ready, when once at St. Thomas’s, to spread themselves over the islands, and the Spanish Main, and the Isthmus of Panama, and after that, some of them, down the Pacific shore to Callao and Valparaiso. The very names of their different destinations, and the imagination of the wonders they would see (though we were going to a spot as full of wonders as any), raised something like envy in our breasts, all the more because most of them persisted in tantalising us, in the hospitable fashion of all West Indians, by fruitless invitations to islands and ports, which to have seen were ‘a joy for ever.’

But almost the most interesting group of all was one

of Cornish miners, from the well-known old Redruth and Camborne county, and the old sacred hill of Carn-brea, who were going to seek their fortunes awhile in silver mines among the Andes, leaving wives and children at home, and hoping, 'if it please God, to do some good out there,' and send their earnings home. Stout, bearded, high-cheek-boned men they were, dressed in the thick coats and rough caps, and, of course, in the indispensable black cloth trousers, which make a miner's full dress; and their faces lighted up at the old pass-word of 'Down-Along'; for whosoever knows Down-Along, and the speech thereof, is at once a friend and a brother. We had many a pleasant talk with them ere we parted at St. Thomas's.

And on to St. Thomas's we were hurrying; and, thanks to the north-east wind, as straight as a bee-line. On the third day we ran two hundred and fifty-four miles; on the fourth two hundred and sixty; and on the next day, at noon, where should we be?

Nearing the Azores; and by midnight, running past them, and away on the track of Columbus, towards the Sargasso Sea.

We stayed up late on the night of December 7, in hopes of seeing, as we passed Terceira, even the loom of the land: but the moon was down; and a glimpse of the 'Pico' at dawn next morning was our only chance of seeing, at least for this voyage, those wondrous Isles of the Blest—Isles of the Blest of old; and why not still? They too are said to be earthly paradises in soil, climate, productions; and yet no English care to settle there, nor even to go thither for health, though the voyage from Lisbon is

but a short one, and our own mail steamers, were it made worth their while, could as easily touch at Terceira now as they did a few years since.

And as we looked out into the darkness, we could not but recollect, with a flush of pride, that yonder on the starboard beam lay Flores, and the scene of that great fight off the Azores, on August 30, 1591, made ever memorable by the pen of Walter Raleigh—and of late by Mr. Froude; in which the *Revenge*, with Sir Richard Grenville for her captain, endured for twelve hours, before she struck, the attack of eight great Spanish armadas, of which two (three times her own burden) sank at her side; and after all her masts were gone, and she had been three times boarded without success, defied to the last the whole fleet of fifty-one sail, which lay around her, waiting, 'like dogs around the dying forest-king,' for the Englishman to strike or sink. Yonder away it was, that, wounded again and again, and shot through body and through head, Sir Richard Grenville was taken on board the Spanish Admiral's ship to die; and gave up his gallant ghost with those once-famous words: 'Here die I, Richard Grenville, with a joyful and quiet mind; for that I have ended my life as a true soldier ought, fighting for his country, queen, religion, and honour; my soul willingly departing from this body, leaving behind the lasting fame of having behaved as every valiant soldier is in his duty bound to do.'

Yes; we were on the track of the old sea-heroes; of Drake and Hawkins, Carlile and Cavendish, Cumberland and Raleigh,

Preston and Sommers, Frobisher and Duddeley, Keymis and Whiddon, which last, in that same Flores fight, stood by Sir Richard Grenville all alone, and, in 'a small ship called the *Pilgrim*, hovered all night to see the successe: but in the morning, bearing with the *Revenge*, was hunted like a hare amongst many ravenous houndes, but escaped'<sup>1</sup>—to learn, in after years, in company with hapless Keymis, only too much about that Trinidad and Gulf of Paria whither we were bound.

Yes. There were heroes in England in those days. Are we, their descendants, degenerate from them? I, for one, believe not. But they were taught—what we take pride in refusing to be taught—namely, to obey.

The morning dawned: but Pico, some fifty miles away, was taking his morning bath among the clouds, and gave no glimpse of his eleven thousand feet crater cone, now capped, they said, with winter snow. Yet neither last night's outlook nor that morning's was without result. For as the steamer stopped last night to pack her engines, and slipped along under sail at some three knots an hour, we made out clearly that the larger diffused patches of phosphorescence were Medusæ, slowly opening and shutting, and rolling over and over now and then, giving out their light, as they rolled, seemingly from the thin limb alone, and not from the crown of their bell. And as we watched, a fellow-passenger told how, between Ceylon and Singapore, he had once witnessed that most rare and unexplained phenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> Raleigh's *Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Iles of Azores*.

of a 'milky sea,' of which Dr. Collingwood writes (without, if I remember right, having seen it himself) in his charming book, *A Naturalist's Rambles in the China Seas*. Our friend described the appearance as that of a sea of shining snow rather than of milk, heaving gently beneath a starlit but moonless sky. A bucket of water, when taken up, was filled with the same half-luminous whiteness, which stuck to its sides when the water was drained off. The captain of the Indiaman was well enough aware of the rarity of the sight to call all the passengers on deck to see what they would never see again; and on asking our captain, he assured us that he had not only never seen, but never heard of the appearance in the West Indies. One curious fact, then, was verified that night.

The next morning gave us unmistakable tokens that we were nearing the home of the summer and the sun. A north-east wind, which would in England keep the air at least at freezing in the shade, gave here a temperature just over 60°; and gave clouds, too, which made us fancy for a moment that we were looking at an April thunder sky, soft, fantastic, barred, and feathered, bright white where they ballooned out above into cumuli, rich purple in their massive shadows, and dropping from their under edges long sheets of inky rain. Thanks to the brave North-Easter, we had gained in five days thirty degrees of heat, and had slipped out of December into May. The North-Easter, too, was transforming itself more and more into the likeness of a south-west wind; say, rather, renewing its own youth, and becoming once more

what it was when it started on its long journey from the Tropics towards the Pole. As it rushes back across the ocean, thrilled and expanded by the heat, it opens its dry and thirsty lips to suck in the damp from below, till, saturated once more with steam, it will reach the tropic as a gray rain-laden sky of North-East Trade.

So we slipped on, day after day, in a delicious repose which yet was not monotonous. Those, indeed, who complain of the monotony of a voyage must have either very few resources in their own minds, or much worse company than we had on board the *Shannon*. Here, every hour brought, or might bring, to those who wished, not merely agreeable conversation about the Old World behind us, but fresh valuable information about the New World before us. One morning, for instance, I stumbled on a merchant returning to Surinam, who had fifty things to tell of his own special business—of the woods, the drugs, the barks, the vegetable oils, which he was going back to procure—a whole new world of yet unknown wealth and use. Most cheering, too, and somewhat unexpected, were the facts we heard of the improving state of our West India Colonies, in which the tide of fortune seems to have turned at last, and the gallant race of planters and merchants, in spite of obstacle on obstacle, some of them unjust and undeserved, are winning their way back (in their own opinion) to a prosperity more sound and lasting than that which collapsed so suddenly at the end of the great French war.

All spoke of the emancipation of the slaves in Cuba (an event certain to come to pass ere long) as the only condition which

they required to put them on an equal footing with any producers whatsoever in the New World.

However pleasant, though, the conversation might be, the smallest change in external circumstances, the least break in the perpetual—

‘*Quocumque adspicias, nil est nisi pontus et aer,*’

even a passing bird, if one would pass, which none would do save once or twice a stately tropic-bird, wheeling round aloft like an eagle, was hailed as an event in the day; and, on the 9th of December, the appearance of the first fragments of gulf-weed caused quite a little excitement, and set an enthusiastic pair of naturalists—a midland hunting squire, and a travelled scientific doctor who had been twelve years in the Eastern Archipelago—fishing eagerly over the bows, with an extemporised grapple of wire, for gulf-weed, a specimen of which they did not catch.

However, more and more still would come in a day or two, perhaps whole acres, even whole leagues, and then (so we hoped, but hoped in vain) we should have our feast of zoophytes, crustacea, and what not.

Meanwhile, it must be remembered that this gulf-weed has not, as some of the uninitiated fancy from its name, anything to do with the Gulf Stream, along the southern edge of which we were steaming. Thrust away to the south by that great ocean-river, it lies in a vast eddy, or central pool of the Atlantic, between the Gulf Stream and the equatorial current, unmoved save by surface-drifts of wind, as floating weeds collect and range slowly

round and round in the still corners of a tumbling-bay or salmon pool. One glance at a bit of the weed, as it floats past, showed that it is like no Fucus of our shores, or anything we ever saw before. The difference of look is undefinable in words, but clear enough. One sees in a moment that the Sargassos, of which there are several species on Tropical shores, are a genus of themselves and by themselves; and a certain awe may, if the beholder be at once scientific and poetical, come over him at the first sight of this famous and unique variety thereof, which has lost ages since the habit of growing on rock or sea-bottom, but propagates itself for ever floating; and feeds among its branches a whole family of fish, crabs, cuttlefish, zoophytes, mollusks, which, like the plant which shelters them, are found nowhere else in the world. And that awe, springing from ‘the scientific use of the imagination,’ would be increased if he recollected the theory—not altogether impossible—that this sargasso (and possibly some of the animals which cling to it) marks the site of an Atlantic continent, sunk long ages since; and that, transformed by the necessities of life from a rooting to a floating plant,

‘Still it remembers its august abodes,’

and wanders round and round as if in search of the rocks where it once grew. We looked eagerly day by day for more and more gulf-weed, hoping that

‘Slimy things would crawl with legs  
Upon that slimy sea,’

and thought of the memorable day when Columbus's ship first plunged her bows into the tangled 'ocean meadow,' and the sailors, naturally enough, were ready to mutiny, fearing hidden shoals, ignorant that they had four miles of blue water beneath their keel, and half recollecting old Greek and Phœnician legends of a weedy sea off the coast of Africa, where the vegetation stopped the ships and kept them entangled till all on board were starved.

Day after day we passed more and more of it, often in long processions, ranged in the direction of the wind; while, a few feet below the surface, here and there floated large fronds of a lettuce-like weed, seemingly an ulva, the bright green of which, as well as the rich orange hue of the sargasso, brought out by contrast the intense blue of the water.

Very remarkable, meanwhile, and unexpected, was the opacity and seeming solidity of the ocean when looked down on from the bows. Whether sapphire under the sunlight, or all but black under the clouds, or laced and streaked with beads of foam, rising out of the nether darkness, it looks as if it could resist the hand; as if one might almost walk on it; so unlike any liquid, as seen near shore or inland, is this leaping, heaving plain, reminding one, by its innumerable conchoidal curves, not of water, not even of ice, but rather of obsidian.

After all we got little of the sargasso. Only in a sailing ship, and in calms or light breezes, can its treasures be explored.

Twelve knots an hour is a pace sufficient to tear off the weed, as it is hauled alongside, all living things which are not rooted to it. We got, therefore, no Crustacea; neither did we get a single specimen of the Calamaries,<sup>2</sup> which may be described as cuttlefish carrying hooks on their arms as well as suckers, the lingering descendants of a most ancient form, which existed at least as far back as the era of the shallow oolitic seas, x or y thousand years ago. A tiny curled Spirorbis, a Lepraria, with its thousandfold cells, and a tiny polype belonging to the Campanularias, with a creeping stem, which sends up here and there a yellow-stalked bell, were all the parasites we saw. But the sargasso itself is a curious instance of the fashion in which one form so often mimics another of a quite different family. When fresh out of the water it resembles not a sea-weed so much as a sprig of some willow-leaved shrub, burdened with yellow berries, large and small; for every broken bit of it seems growing, and throwing out ever new berries and leaves—or what, for want of a better word, must be called leaves in a sea-weed. For it must be remembered that the frond of a sea-weed is not merely leaf, but root also; that it not only breathes air, but feeds on water; and that even the so-called root by which a sea-weed holds to the rock is really only an anchor, holding mechanically to the stone, but not deriving, as the root of a land-plant would, any nourishment from it. Therefore it is, that to grow while uprooted and floating, though impossible to most land plants, is easy enough to many

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<sup>2</sup> *Chiroteuthi* and *Onychoteuthi*.

sea-weeds, and especially to the sargasso.

The flying-fish now began to be a source of continual amusement as they scuttled away from under the bows of the ship, mistaking her, probably, for some huge devouring whale.

So strange are they when first seen, though long read of and long looked for, that it is difficult to recollect that they are actually fish. The first little one was mistaken for a dragon-fly, the first big one for a gray plover. The flight is almost exactly like that of a quail or partridge—flight, I must say; for, in spite of all that has been learnedly written to the contrary, it was too difficult as yet for the English sportsmen on board to believe that their motion was not a true flight, aided by the vibration of the wings, and not a mere impulse given (as in the leap of the salmon) by a rush under water. That they can change their course at will is plain to one who looks down on them from the lofty deck, and still more from the paddle-box. The length of the flight seems too great to be attributed to a few strokes of the tail; while the plain fact that they renew their flight after touching, and only touching, the surface, would seem to show that it was not due only to the original impetus, for that would be retarded, instead of being quickened, every time they touched. Such were our first impressions: and they were confirmed by what we saw on the voyage home.

The nights as yet, we will not say disappointed us,—for to see new stars, like Canopus and Fomalhaut, shining in the far south, even to see Sirius, in his ever-changing blaze of red and

blue, riding high in a December heaven, is interesting enough; but the brilliance of the stars is not, at least at this season, equal to that of a frosty sky in England. Nevertheless, to make up for the deficiency, the clouds were glorious; so glorious, that I longed again and again, as I did afterwards in the West Indies, that Mr. Ruskin were by my side, to see and to describe, as none but he can do. The evening skies are fit weeds for widowed Eos weeping over the dying Sun; thin, formless, rent—in carelessness, not in rage; and of all the hues of early autumn leaves, purple and brown, with green and primrose lakes of air between: but all hues weakened, mingled, chastened into loneliness, tenderness, regretfulness, through which still shines, in endless vistas of clear western light, the hope of the returning day. More and more faint, the pageant fades below towards the white haze of the horizon, where, in sharpest contrast, leaps and welters against it the black jagged sea; and richer and richer it glows upwards, till it cuts the azure overhead: until, only too soon

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‘The sun’s rim dips, the stars rush out,  
At one stride comes the dark,’

to be succeeded, after the long balmy night, by a sunrise which repeats the colours of the sunset, but this time gaudy, dazzling, triumphant, as befits the season of faith and hope. Such imagery, it may be said, is hackneyed now, and trite even to impertinence.

It might be so at home; but here, in presence of the magnificent pageant of tropic sunlight, it is natural, almost inevitable; and the old myth of the daily birth and death of Helios, and the bridal joys and widowed tears of Eos, re-invents itself in the human mind, as soon as it asserts its power—it may be, its sacred right—to translate nature into the language of the feelings.

And, meanwhile, may we not ask—have we not a right—founded on that common sense of the heart which often is the deepest reason—to ask, If we, gross and purblind mortals, can perceive and sympathise with so much beauty in the universe, then how much must not He perceive, with how much must not He sympathise, for whose pleasure all things are, and were created? Who that believes (and rightly) the sense of beauty to be among the noblest faculties of man, will deny that faculty to God, who conceived man and all besides?

Wednesday, the 15th, was a really tropic day; blazing heat in the forenoon, with the thermometer at 82° in the shade, and in the afternoon stifling clouds from the south-west, where a dark band of rain showed, according to the planters' dictum, showers over the islands, which we were nearing fast. At noon we were only two hundred and ten miles from Sombrero, 'the Spanish Hat,' a lonely island, which is here the first outlier of the New World. We ought to have passed it by sunrise on the 16th, and by the afternoon reached St. Thomas's, where our pleasant party would burst like a shell in all directions, and scatter its fragments about all coasts and isles—from Demerara to Panama,

from Mexico to the Bahamas. So that day was to the crew a day of hard hot work—of lifting and sorting goods on the main-deck, in readiness for the arrival at St. Thomas's, and of moving forwards two huge empty boilers which had graced our spar-deck, filled with barrels of onions and potatoes, all the way from Southampton. But in the soft hot evening hours, time was found for the usual dance on the quarter-deck, with the band under the awning, and lamps throwing fantastic shadows, and waltzing couples, and the crew clustering aft to see, while we old folks looked on, with our 'Ludite dum lubet, pueri,' till the captain bade the sergeant-at-arms leave the lights burning for an extra half hour; and 'Sir Roger de Coverley' was danced out, to the great amusement of the foreigners, at actually half-past eleven. After which unexampled dissipation, all went off to rest, promising to themselves and their partners that they would get up at sunrise to sight Sombrero.

But, as it befell, morning's waking brought only darkness, the heavy pattering of a tropic shower, and the absence of the everlasting roll of the paddle-wheels. We were crawling slowly along, in thick haze and heavy rain, having passed Sombrero unseen; and were away in a gray shoreless world of waters, looking out for Virgin Gorda; the first of those numberless isles which Columbus, so goes the tale, discovered on St. Ursula's day, and named them after the Saint and her eleven thousand mythical virgins. Unfortunately, English buccaneers have since then given to most of them less poetic names. The Dutchman's

Cap, Broken Jerusalem, The Dead Man's Chest, Rum Island, and so forth, mark a time and a race more prosaic, but still more terrible, though not one whit more wicked and brutal, than the Spanish Conquistadores, whose descendants, in the seventeenth century, they smote hip and thigh with great destruction.

The farthest of these Virgin Islands is St. Thomas's. And there ended the first and longer part of a voyage unmarred by the least discomfort, discourtesy, or dulness, and full of enjoyment, for which thanks are due alike to captain, officers, crew, and passengers, and also to our much-maligned friend the North-East wind, who caught us up in the chops of the Channel, helped us graciously on nearly to the tropic of Cancer, giving us a more prosperous passage than the oldest hands recollect at this season, and then left us for a while to the delicious calms of the edge of the tropic, to catch us up again as the North-East Trade.

Truly, this voyage had already given us much for which to thank God. If safety and returning health, in an atmosphere in which the mere act of breathing is a pleasure, be things for which to be thankful, then we had reason to say in our hearts that which is sometimes best unsaid on paper.

Our first day in a tropic harbour was spent in what might be taken at moments for a dream, did not shells and flowers remain to bear witness to its reality. It was on Friday morning, December 17th, that we first sighted the New World; a rounded hill some fifteen hundred feet high, which was the end of Virgin Gorda. That resolved itself, as we ran on, into a cluster of

long, low islands; St. John's appearing next on the horizon, then Tortola, and last of all St. Thomas's; all pink and purple in the sun, and warm-gray in the shadow, which again became, as we neared them one after the other, richest green, of scrub and down, with bright yellow and rusty rocks, plainly lava, in low cliffs along the shore. The upper outline of the hills reminded me, with its multitudinous little coves and dry gullies, of the Vivarais or Auvergne Hills; and still more of the sketches of the Chinese Tea-mountains in Fortune's book. Their water-line has been exposed, evidently for many ages, to the gnawing of the sea at the present level. Everywhere the lava cliffs are freshly broken, toppling down in dust and boulders, and leaving detached stacks and skerries, like that called the 'Indians,' from its supposed likeness to a group of red-brown savages afloat in a canoe. But, as far as I could see, there has been no upheaval since the land took its present shape. There is no trace of raised beaches, or of the terraces which would have inevitably been formed by upheaval on the soft sides of the lava hills. The numberless deep channels which part the isles and islets would rather mark depression still going on. Most beautiful meanwhile are the winding channels of blue water, like land-locked lakes, which part the Virgins from each other; and beautiful the white triangular sails of the canoe-rigged craft, which beat up and down them through strong currents and cockling seas. The clear air, the still soft outlines, the rich and yet delicate colouring, stir up a sense of purity and freshness, and peace and cheerfulness, such as

is stirred up by certain views of the Mediterranean and its shores; only broken by one ghastly sight—the lonely mast of the ill-fated *Rhone*, standing up still where she sank with all her crew, in the hurricane of 1867.

At length, in the afternoon, we neared the last point, and turning inside an isolated and crumbling hummock, the Dutchman's Cap, saw before us, at the head of a little narrow harbour, the scarlet and purple roofs of St. Thomas's, piled up among orange-trees, at the foot of a green corrie, or rather couple of corries, some eight hundred feet high. There it was, as veritable a Dutch-oven for cooking fever in, with as veritable a dripping-pan for the poison when concocted in the tideless basin below the town, as man ever invented. And we were not sorry when the superintendent, coming on board, bade us steam back again out of the port, and round a certain Water-island, at the back of which is a second and healthier harbour, the Gri-gri channel. In the port close to the town we could discern another token of the late famous hurricane, the funnels and masts of the hapless *Columbia*, which lies still on the top of the sunken floating clock, immovable, as yet, by the art of man.

But some hundred yards on our right was a low cliff, which was even more interesting to some of us than either the town or the wreck; for it was covered with the first tropic vegetation which we had ever seen. Already on a sandy beach outside, we had caught sight of unmistakable coconut trees; some of them, however, dying, dead, even snapped short off, either by the force

of the hurricane, or by the ravages of the beetle, which seems minded of late years to exterminate the coconut throughout the West Indies; belonging, we are told, to the Elaters—fire-fly, or skipjack beetles. His grub, like that of his cousin, our English wire-worm, and his nearer cousin, the great wire-worm of the sugar-cane, eats into the pith and marrow of growing shoots; and as the palm, being an endogen, increases from within by one bud, and therefore by one shoot only, when that is eaten out nothing remains for the tree but to die. And so it happens that almost every coconut grove which we have seen has a sad and shabby look as if it existed (which it really does) merely on sufferance.

But on this cliff we could see, even with the naked eye, tall Aloes, gray-blue Cerei like huge branching candelabra, and bushes the foliage of which was utterly unlike anything in Northern Europe; while above the bright deep green of a patch of Guinea-grass marked cultivation, and a few fruit trees round a cottage told, by their dark baylike foliage, of fruits whose names alone were known to us.

Round Water-island we went, into a narrow channel between steep green hills, covered to their tops, as late as 1845, with sugar-cane, but now only with scrub, among which the ruins of mills and buildings stood sad and lonely. But Nature in this land of perpetual summer hides with a kind of eagerness every scar which man in his clumsiness leaves on the earth's surface; and all, though relapsing into primeval wildness, was green, soft, luxuriant, as if the hoe had never torn the ground, contrasting

strangely with the water-scene; with the black steamers snorting in their sleep; the wrecks and condemned hulks, in process of breaking up, strewing the shores with their timbers; the boatfuls of Negroes gliding to and fro; and all the signs of our hasty, irreverent, wasteful, semi-barbarous mercantile system, which we call (for the time being only, it is to be hoped) civilisation.

The engine had hardly stopped, when we were boarded from a fleet of negro boats, and huge bunches of plantains, yams, green oranges, junks of sugar-cane, were displayed upon the deck; and more than one of the ladies went through the ceremony of initiation into West Indian ways, which consisted in sucking sugar-cane, first pared for the sake of their teeth. The Negro's stronger incisors tear it without paring. Two amusing figures, meanwhile, had taken up their station close to the companion.

Evidently privileged personages, they felt themselves on their own ground, and looked round patronisingly on the passengers, as ignorant foreigners who were too certain to be tempted by the treasures which they displayed to need any solicitations. One went by the name of Jamaica Joe, a Negro blacker than the night, in smart white coat and smart black trousers; a tall courtly gentleman, with the organ of self-interest, to judge from his physiognomy, very highly developed. But he was thrown into the shade by a stately brown lady, who was still very handsome—beautiful, if you will—and knew it, and had put on her gorgeous turban with grace, and plaited her short locks under it with care, and ignored the very existence of a mere Negro like Jamaica Joe,

as she sat by her cigars, and slow-match, and eau-de-cologne at four times the right price, and mats, necklaces, bracelets, made of mimosa-seeds, white negro hats, nests of Curaçoa baskets, and so forth. They drove a thriving trade among all newcomers: but were somewhat disgusted to find that we, though new to the West Indies, were by no means new to West Indian wares, and therefore not of the same mind as a gentleman and lady who came fresh from the town next day, with nearly a bushel of white branching madrepores, which they were going to carry as coals to Newcastle, six hundred miles down the islands. Poor Joe tried to sell us a nest of Curaçoa baskets for seven shillings; retired after a firm refusal; came up again to R—, after a couple of hours, and said, in a melancholy and reproachful voice, ‘Da— take dem for four shillings and sixpence. I give dem you.’

But now—. Would we go on shore? To the town? Not we, who came to see Nature, not towns. Some went off on honest business; some on such pleasure as can be found in baking streets, hotel bars, and billiard-rooms: but the one place on which our eyes were set was a little cove a quarter of a mile off, under the steep hill, where a white line of sand shone between blue water and green wood. A few yards broad of sand, and then impenetrable jungle, among which we could see, below, the curved yellow stems of the coconuts; and higher up the straight gray stems and broad fan-leaves of Carat palms; which I regret to say we did not reach. Oh for a boat to get into that paradise! There was three-quarters of an hour left, between dinner and

dark; and in three-quarters of an hour what might not be seen in a world where all was new? The kind chief officer, bidding us not trust negro boats on such a trip, lent us one of the ship's, with four honest fellows, thankful enough to escape from heat and smoke; and away we went with two select companions—the sportsman and our scientific friend—to land, for the first time, in the New World.

As we leaped on shore on that white sand, what feelings passed through the heart of at least one of us, who found the dream of forty years translated into fact at last, are best, perhaps, left untold here. But it must be confessed that ere we had stood for two minutes staring at the green wall opposite us, astonishment soon swallowed up, for the time, all other emotions. Astonishment, not at the vast size of anything, for the scrub was not thirty feet high; nor at the gorgeous colours, for very few plants or trees were in flower; but at the wonderful wealth of life. The massiveness, the strangeness, the variety, the very length of the young and still growing shoots was a wonder. We tried, at first in vain, to fix our eyes on some one dominant or typical form, while every form was clamouring, as it were, to be looked at, and a fresh Dryad gazed out of every bush and with wooing eyes asked to be wooed again. The first two plants, perhaps, we looked steadily at were the *Ipomœa pes capræ*, lying along the sand in straight shoots thirty feet long, and growing longer, we fancied, while we looked at it, with large bilobed green leaves at every joint, and here and there a great purple convolvulus flower; and next, what we knew

at once for the ‘shore-grape.’<sup>3</sup> We had fancied it (and correctly) to be a mere low bushy tree with roundish leaves. But what a bush! with drooping boughs, arched over and through each other, shoots already six feet long, leaves as big as the hand shining like dark velvet, a crimson mid-rib down each, and tiled over each other—‘imbricated,’ as the botanists would say, in that fashion, which gives its peculiar solidity and richness of light and shade to the foliage of an old sycamore; and among these noble shoots and noble leaves, pendent everywhere, long tapering spires of green grapes. This shore-grape, which the West Indians esteem as we might a bramble, we found to be, without exception, the most beautiful broad-leafed plant which we had ever seen. Then we admired the Frangipani,<sup>4</sup> a tall and almost leafless shrub with thick fleshy shoots, bearing, in this species, white flowers, which have the fragrance peculiar to certain white blossoms, to the jessamine, the tuberose, the orange, the Gardenia, the night-flowering Cereus; then the Cacti and Aloes; then the first coconut, with its last year’s leaves pale yellow, its new leaves deep green, and its trunk ringing, when struck, like metal; then the sensitive plants; then creeping lianes of a dozen different kinds.

Then we shrank back from our first glimpse of a little swamp of foul brown water, backed up by the sand-brush, with trees in every stage of decay, fallen and tangled into a doleful thicket, through which the spider-legged Mangroves rose on stilted roots.

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<sup>3</sup> *Cocoloba uvifera*.

<sup>4</sup> *Plumieria*.

We turned, in wholesome dread, to the white beach outside, and picked up—and, alas! wreck, everywhere wreck—shells—old friends in the cabinets at home—as earnest to ourselves that all was not a dream: delicate prickly *Pinnae*; ‘Noah’s-arcs’ in abundance; great *Strombi*, their lips and outer shell broken away, disclosing the rosy cameo within, and looking on the rough beach pitifully tender and flesh-like; lumps and fragments of coral innumerable, reminding us by their worn and rounded shapes of those which abound in so many secondary strata; and then hastened on board the boat; for the sun had already fallen, the purple night set in, and from the woods on shore a chorus of frogs had commenced chattering, quacking, squealing, whistling, not to cease till sunrise.

So ended our first trip in the New World; and we got back to the ship, but not to sleep. Already a coal-barge lay on either side of her, and over the coals we scrambled, through a scene which we would fain forget. Black women on one side were doing men’s work, with heavy coal-baskets on their heads, amid screaming, chattering, and language of which, happily, we understood little or nothing. On the other, a gang of men and boys, who, as the night fell, worked, many of them, altogether naked, their glossy bronze figures gleaming in the red lamplight, and both men and women singing over their work in wild choruses, which, when the screaming cracked voices of the women were silent, and the really rich tenors of the men had it to themselves, were not unpleasant. A lad, seeming the poet of the gang, stood on

the sponson, and in the momentary intervals of work improvised some story, while the men below took up and finished each verse with a refrain, piercing, sad, running up and down large and easy intervals. The tunes were many and seemingly familiar, all barbaric, often ending in the minor key, and reminding us much, perhaps too much, of the old Gregorian tones. The words were all but unintelligible. In one song we caught 'New York' again and again, and then 'Captain he heard it, he was troubled in him mind.'

'Ya-he-ho-o-hu'—followed the chorus.

'Captain he go to him cabin, he drink him wine and whisky—'

'Ya-he,' etc.

'You go to America? You as well go to heaven.'

'Ya-he,' etc.

These were all the scraps of negro poetry which we could overhear; while on deck the band was playing quadrilles and waltzes, setting the negro shoveller dancing in the black water at the barge-bottom, shovel in hand; and pleasant white folks danced under the awning, till the contrast between the refinement within and the brutality without became very painful. For brutality it was, not merely in the eyes of the sentimentalist, but in those of the moralist; still more in the eyes of those who try to believe that all God's human children may be some-when, somewhere, somehow, reformed into His likeness. We were shocked to hear that at another island the evils of coaling are still worse; and that the white authorities have tried in vain to keep

them down. The coaling system is, no doubt, demoralising in itself, as it enables Negroes of the lowest class to earn enough in one day to keep them in idleness, even in luxury, for a week or more, till the arrival of the next steamer. But what we saw proceeded rather from the mere excitability and coarseness of half-civilised creatures than from any deliberate depravity; and we were told that, in the island just mentioned, the Negroes, when forced to coal on Sunday, or on Christmas Day, always abstain from noise or foul language, and, if they sing, sing nothing but hymns. It is easy to sneer at such a fashion as formalism. It would be wiser to consider whether the first step in religious training must not be obedience to some such external positive law; whether the savage must not be taught that there are certain things which he ought never to do, by being taught that there is one day at least on which he shall not do them. How else is man to learn that the Laws of Right and Wrong, like the laws of the physical world, are entirely independent of him, his likes or dislikes, knowledge or ignorance of them; that by Law he is environed from his cradle to his grave, and that it is at his own peril that he disobeys the Law? A higher religion may, and ought to, follow, one in which the Law becomes a Law of Liberty, and a Gospel, because it is loved, and obeyed for its own sake; but even he who has attained to that must be reminded again and again, alas! that the Law which he loves does not depend for its sanction on his love of it, on his passing frames or feelings; but is as awfully independent of him as it is of the veriest heathen. And

that lesson the Sabbath does teach as few or no other institutions can. The man who says, and says rightly, that to the Christian all days ought to be Sabbaths, may be answered, and answered rightly, 'All the more reason for keeping one day which shall be a Sabbath, whether you are in a sabbatical mood or not. All the more reason for keeping one day holy, as a pattern of what all days should be.' So we will be glad if the Negro has got thus far, as an earnest that he may some day get farther still.

That night, however, he kept no Sabbath, and we got no sleep; and were glad enough, before sunrise, to escape once more to the cove we had visited the evening before; not that it was prettier or more curious than others, but simply because it is better, for those who wish to learn accurately, to see one thing twice than many things once. A lesson is never learnt till it is learnt over many times, and a spot is best understood by staying in it and mastering it. In natural history the old scholar's saw of 'Cave hominem unius libri' may be paraphrased by 'He is a thoroughly good naturalist who knows one parish thoroughly.'

So back to our little beach we went, and walked it all over again, finding, of course, many things which had escaped us the night before. We saw our first Melocactus, and our first night-blowing *Cereus* creeping over the rocks. We found our first tropic orchid, with white, lilac, and purple flowers on a stalk three feet high. We saw our first wild pines (*Tillandsias*, etc.) clinging parasitic on the boughs of strange trees, or nestling among the angular limb-like shoots of the columnar *Cereus*.

We learnt to distinguish the poisonous Manchineel; and were thankful, in serious earnest, that we had happily plucked none the night before, when we were snatching at every new leaf; for its milky juice, by mere dropping on the skin, burns like the poisoned tunic of Nessus, and will even, when the head is injured by it, cause blindness and death. We gathered a nosegay of the loveliest flowers, under a burning sun, within ten days of Christmas; and then wandered off the shore up a little path in the red lava, toward a farm where we expected to see fresh curiosities, and not in vain. On one side of the path a hedge of Pinguin (*Bromelia*)—the plants like huge pine-apple plants without the fruit—was but three feet high, but from its prickles utterly impenetrable to man or beast; and inside the hedge, a tree like a straggling pear, with huge green calabashes growing out of its bark—here was actually *Crescentia Cujete*—the plaything of one's childhood—alive and growing. The other side was low scrub—prickly shrubs like acacias and mimosas, covered with a creeping vine with brilliant yellow hair (we had seen it already from the ship, gilding large patches of the slopes), most like European dodder. Among it rose the tall *Calotropis procera*, with its fleshy gray stems and leaves, and its azure of lovely lilac flowers, with curious columns of stamens in each—an Asclepiad introduced from the Old World, where it ranges from tropical Africa to Afghanistan; and so on, and so on, up to a little farmyard, very like a Highland one in most things, want of neatness included, save that huge spotted Trochi were

scattered before the door, instead of buckies or periwinkles; and in the midst of the yard grew, side by side, the common accompaniment of a West India kitchen door, the magic trees, whose leaves rubbed on the toughest meat make it tender on the spot, and whose fruit makes the best of sauce or pickle to be eaten therewith—namely, a male and female Papaw (*Carica Papaya*), their stems some fifteen feet high, with a flat crown of mallow-like leaves, just beneath which, in the male, grew clusters of fragrant flowerets, in the female, clusters of unripe fruit.

On through the farmyard, picking fresh flowers at every step, and down to a shady cove (for the sun, even at eight o'clock in December, was becoming uncomfortably fierce), and again into the shore-grape wood. We had already discovered, to our pain, that almost everything in the bush had prickles, of all imaginable shapes and sizes; and now, touching a low tree, one of our party was seized as by a briar, through clothes and into skin, and, in escaping, found on the tree (*Guilandina, Bonducella*) rounded prickly pods, which, being opened, proved to contain the gray horse-nicker-beads of our childhood.

Up and down the white sand we wandered, collecting shells, as did the sailors, gladly enough, and then rowed back, over a bottom of white sand, bedded here and there with the short manati-grass (*Thalassia Testudinum*), one of the few flowering plants which, like our *Zostera*, or grass-wrack, grows at the bottom of the sea. But, wherever the bottom was stony, we could see huge prickly sea-urchins, huger brainstone corals, round and

gray, and branching corals likewise, such as, when cleaned, may be seen in any curiosity shop. These, and a flock of brown and gray pelicans sailing over our head, were fresh tokens to us of where we were.

As we were displaying our nosegay on deck, on our return, to some who had stayed stifling on board, and who were inclined (as West Indians are) at once to envy and to pooh-pooh the superfluous energy of newcomer Europeans, R— drew out a large and lovely flower, pale yellow, with a tiny green apple or two, and leaves like those of an Oleander. The brown lady, who was again at her post on deck, walked up to her in silence, uninvited, and with a commanding air waved the thing away. ‘Dat manchineel.

Dat poison. Throw dat overboard.’ R—, who knew it was not manchineel, whispered to a bystander, ‘Ce n’est pas vrai.’ But the brown lady was a linguist. ‘Ah! mais c’est vrai,’ cried she, with flashing teeth; and retired, muttering her contempt of English ignorance and impertinence.

And, as it befell, she was, if not quite right, at least not quite wrong. For when we went into the cabin, we and our unlucky yellow flower were flown at by another brown lady, in another gorgeous turban, who had become on the voyage a friend and an intimate; for she was the nurse of the baby who had been the light of the eyes of the whole quarter-deck ever since we left Southampton—God bless it, and its mother, and beautiful Mon Nid, where she dwells beneath the rock, as exquisite as one of her own humming-birds. We were so scolded about this poor

little green apple that we set to work to find out what it was, after promising at least not to eat it. And it proved to be *Thevetia nerifolia*, and a very deadly poison.

This was the first (though by no means the last) warning which we got not to meddle rashly with 'poison-bush,' lest that should befall us which befell a scientific West Indian of old. For hearing much of the edible properties of certain European toadstools, he resolved to try a few experiments in his own person on West Indian ones; during the course of which he found himself one evening, after a good toad-stool dinner, raving mad. The doctor was sent for, and brought him round, a humbled man. But a heavier humiliation awaited him, when his negro butler, who had long looked down on him for his botanical studies, entered with his morning cup of coffee. 'Now, Massa,' said he, in a tone of triumphant pity, 'I think you no go out any more cut bush and eat him.'

If we had wanted any further proof that we were in the Tropics, we might have had it in the fearful heat of the next few hours, when the *Shannon* lay with a steamer on each side, one destined for 'The Gulf,' the other for 'The Islands'; and not a breath of air was to be got till late in the afternoon, when (amid shaking of hands and waving of handkerchiefs, as hearty as if we the 'Island-bound,' and they the 'Gulf-bound,' and the officers of the *Shannon* had known each other fourteen years instead of fourteen days) we steamed out, past the Little Saba rock, which was said (but it seems incorrectly) to have burst into smoke and

flame during the earthquake, and then away to the south and east for the Islands: having had our first taste, but, thank God, not our last, of the joys of the 'Earthly Paradise.'

## CHAPTER II: DOWN THE ISLANDS

I had heard and read much, from boyhood, about these 'Lesser Antilles.' I had pictured them to myself a thousand times: but I was altogether unprepared for their beauty and grandeur. For hundreds of miles, day after day, the steamer carried us past a shifting diorama of scenery, which may be likened to Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples, repeated again and again, with every possible variation of the same type of delicate loveliness.

Under a cloudless sky, upon a sea, lively yet not unpleasantly rough, we thrashed and leaped along. Ahead of us, one after another, rose high on the southern horizon banks of gray cloud, from under each of which, as we neared it, descended the shoulder of a mighty mountain, dim and gray. Nearer still the gray changed to purple; lowlands rose out of the sea, sloping upwards with those grand and simple concave curves which betoken, almost always, volcanic land. Nearer still, the purple changed to green. Tall palm-trees and engine-houses stood out against the sky; the surf gleamed white around the base of isolated rocks. A little nearer, and we were under the lee, or western side, of the island. The sea grew smooth as glass; we entered the shade of the island-cloud, and slid along in still unfathomable blue water, close under the shore of what should have been one of the Islands of the Blest.

It was easy, in presence of such scenery, to conceive the

exaltation which possessed the souls of the first discoverers of the West Indies. What wonder if they seemed to themselves to have burst into Fairyland—to be at the gates of The Earthly Paradise? With such a climate, such a soil, such vegetation, such fruits, what luxury must not have seemed possible to the dwellers along those shores? What riches too, of gold and jewels, might not be hidden among those forest-shrouded glens and peaks? And beyond, and beyond again, ever new islands, new continents perhaps, an inexhaustible wealth of yet undiscovered worlds.

No wonder that the men rose above themselves, for good and for evil; that having, as it seemed to them, found infinitely, they hoped infinitely, and dared infinitely. They were a dumb generation and an unlettered, those old Conquistadores. They did not, as we do now, analyse and describe their own impressions: but they felt them nevertheless; and felt them, it may be, all the more intensely, because they could not utter them; and so went, half intoxicated, by day and night, with the beauty and the wonder round them, till the excitement overpowered alike their reason and their conscience; and, frenzied with superstition and greed, with contempt and hatred of the heathen Indians, and often with mere drink and sunshine, they did deeds which, like all wicked deeds, avenge themselves, and are avenging themselves, from Mexico to Chili, unto this very day.

I said that these islands resembled Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples. Like causes have produced like effects; and each island

is little but the peak of a volcano, down whose shoulders lava and ash have slidden toward the sea. Some carry several crater cones, complicating at once the structure and scenery of the island; but the majority carry but a single cone, like that little island, or rather rock, of Saba, which is the first of the Antilles under the lee of which the steamer passes. Santa Cruz, which is left to leeward, is a long, low, ragged island, of the same form as St. Thomas's and the Virgins, and belonging, I should suppose, to the same formation. But Saba rises sheer out of the sea some 1500 feet or more, without flat ground, or even harbour. From a little landing-place to leeward a stair runs up 800 feet into the bosom of the old volcano; and in that hollow live some 1200 honest Dutch, and some 800 Negroes, who were, till of late years, their slaves, at least in law. But in Saba, it is said, the whites were really the slaves, and the Negroes the masters. For they went off whither and when they liked; earned money about the islands, and brought it home; expected their masters to keep them when out of work: and not in vain. The island was, happily for it, too poor for sugar-growing and the 'Grande Culture'; the Dutch were never tempted to increase the number of their slaves; looked upon the few they had as friends and children; and when emancipation came, no change whatsoever ensued, it is said, in the semi-feudal relation between the black men and the white. So these good Dutch live peacefully aloft in their volcano, which it is to be hoped will not explode again. They grow garden crops; among which, I understand, are several products of the temperate

zone, the air being, at that height pleasantly cool. They sell their produce about the islands. They build boats up in the crater—the best boats in all the West Indies—and lower them down the cliff to the sea. They hire themselves out too, not having lost their forefathers' sea-going instincts, as sailors about all those seas, and are, like their boats, the best in those parts. They all speak English; and though they are nominally Lutherans, are glad of the services of the excellent Bishop of Antigua, who pays them periodical visits. He described them as virtuous, shrewd, simple, healthy folk, retaining, in spite of the tropic sun, the same clear white and red complexions which their ancestors brought from Holland two hundred years ago—a proof, among many, that the white man need not degenerate in these isles.

Saba has, like most of these islands, its 'Somma' like that of Vesuvius; an outer ring of lava, the product of older eruptions, surrounding a central cone, the product of some newer one. But even this latter, as far as I could judge by the glass, is very ancient.

Little more than the core of the central cone is left. The rest has been long since destroyed by rains and winds. A white cliff at the south end of the island should be examined by geologists.

It belongs probably to that formation of tertiary calcareous marl so often seen in the West Indies, especially at Barbadoes: but if so, it must, to judge from the scar which it makes seaward, have been upheaved long ago, and like the whole island—and indeed all the islands—betokens an immense antiquity.

Much more recent—in appearance at least—is the little isle

of St. Eustatius, or at least the crater-cone, with its lip broken down at one spot, which makes up five-sixths of the island. St. Eustatius may have been in eruption, though there is no record of it, during historic times, and looks more unrepentant and capable of misbehaving itself again than does any other crater-cone in the Antilles; far more so than the Souffrière in St. Vincent which exploded in 1812.

But these two are mere rocks. It is not till the traveller arrives at St. Kitts that he sees what a West Indian island is.

The 'Mother of the Antilles,' as she is called, is worthy of her name. Everywhere from the shore the land sweeps up, slowly at first, then rapidly, toward the central mass, the rugged peak whereof goes by the name of Mount Misery. Only once, and then but for a moment, did we succeed in getting a sight of the actual summit, so pertinaciously did the clouds crawl round it. 3700 feet aloft a pyramid of black lava rises above the broken walls of an older crater, and is, to judge from its knife-edge, flat top, and concave eastern side, the last remnant of an inner cone which has been washed, or more probably blasted, away. Beneath it, according to the report of an islander to Dr. Davy (and what I heard was to the same effect), is a deep hollow, longer than it is wide, without an outlet, walled in by precipices and steep declivities, from fissures in which steam and the fumes of sulphur are emitted. Sulphur in crystals abounds, encrusting the rocks and loose stones; and a stagnant pool of rain-water occupies the bottom of the Souffrière. A dangerous neighbour—but as long

as he keeps his temper, as he has done for three hundred years at least, a most beneficent one—is this great hill, which took, in Columbus's imagination, the form of the giant St. Christopher bearing on his shoulder the infant Christ, and so gave a name to the whole island.

From the lava and ash ejected from this focus, the whole soils of the island have been formed; soils of still unexhausted fertility, save when—as must needs be in a volcanic region—patches of mere rapilli and scoriæ occur. The mountain has hurled these out; and everywhere, as a glance of the eye shows, the tropic rains are carrying them yearly down to the lowland, exposing fresh surfaces to the action of the air, and, by continual denudation and degradation, remanuring the soil. Everywhere, too, are gullies sawn in the slopes, which terminate above in deep and narrow glens, giving, especially when alternated with long lava-streams, a ridge-and-furrow look to this and most other of the Antilles. Dr. Davy, with his usual acuteness of eye and soundness of judgment, attributes them rather to 'water acting on loose volcanic ashes' than to 'rents and fissures, the result of sudden and violent force.' Doubtless he is in the right. Thus, and thus only, has been formed the greater part of the most beautiful scenery in the West Indies; and I longed again and again, as I looked at it, for the company of my friend and teacher, Colonel George Greenwood, that I might show him, on island after island, such manifold corroborations of his theories in *Rain and Rivers*.

But our eyes were drawn off, at almost the second glance,

from mountain-peaks and glens to the slopes of cultivated lowland, sheeted with bright green cane, and guinea-grass, and pigeon pea; and that not for their own sakes, but for the sake of objects so utterly unlike anything which we had ever seen, that it was not easy, at first, to discover what they were. Gray pillars, which seemed taller than the tallest poplars, smooth and cylindrical as those of a Doric temple, each carrying a flat head of darkest green, were ranged along roadsides and round fields, or stood, in groups or singly, near engine-works, or towered above rich shrubberies which shrouded comfortable country-houses. It was not easy, as I have said, to believe that these strange and noble things were trees: but such they were. At last we beheld, with wonder and delight, the pride of the West Indies, the Cabbage Palms—Palmistes of the French settlers—which botanists have well named *Oreodoxa*, the 'glory of the mountains.' We saw them afterwards a hundred times in their own native forests; and when they rose through tangled masses of richest vegetation, mixed with other and smaller species of palms, their form, fantastic though it was, harmonised well with hundreds of forms equally fantastic. But here they seemed, at first sight, out of place, incongruous, and artificial, standing amid no kindred forms, and towering over a cultivation and civilisation which might have been mistaken, seen from the sea, for wealthy farms along some English shore. Gladly would we have gone on shore, were it but to have stood awhile under those Palmistes; and an invitation was not wanting to a pretty tree-shrouded house on

a low cliff a mile off, where doubtless every courtesy and many a luxury would have awaited us. But it could not be. We watched kind folk rowed to shore without us; and then turned to watch the black flotilla under our quarter.

The first thing that caught our eye on board the negro boats which were alongside was, of course, the baskets of fruits and vegetables, of which one of us at least had been hearing all his life. At St. Thomas's we had been introduced to bananas (figs, as they are miscalled in the West Indies); to the great green oranges, thick-skinned and fragrant; to those junks of sugar-cane, some two feet long, which Cuffy and Cuffy's ladies delight to gnaw, walking, sitting, and standing; increasing thereby the size of their lips, and breaking out, often enough, their upper front teeth.

We had seen, and eaten too, the sweet sop<sup>5</sup>—a passable fruit, or rather congeries of fruits, looking like a green and purple strawberry, of the bigness of an orange. It is the cousin of the prickly sour-sop;<sup>6</sup> of the really delicious, but to me unknown, Chirimoya;<sup>7</sup> and of the custard apple,<sup>8</sup> containing a pulp which (as those who remember the delectable pages of *Tom Cringle* know) bears a startling likeness to brains. Bunches of grapes, at St. Kitts, lay among these: and at St. Lucia we saw with them, for the first time, Avocado, or Alligator pears, *alias* midshipman's

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<sup>5</sup> *Anona squamosa*.

<sup>6</sup> *A. muricata*.

<sup>7</sup> *A. chierimolia*.

<sup>8</sup> *A. reticulata*.

butter; <sup>9</sup> large round brown fruits, to be eaten with pepper and salt by those who list. With these, in open baskets, lay bright scarlet capsicums, green coconuts tinged with orange, great roots of yam <sup>10</sup> and cush-cush, <sup>11</sup> with strange pulse of various kinds and hues. The contents of these vegetable baskets were often as gay-coloured as the gaudy gowns, and still gaudier turbans, of the women who offered them for sale.

Screaming and jabbering, the Negroes and Negresses thrust each other's boats about, scramble from one to the other with gestures of wrath and defiance, and seemed at every moment about to fall to fisticuffs and to upset themselves among the sharks. But they did neither. Their excitement evaporated in noise. To their 'ladies,' to do them justice, the men were always civil, while the said 'ladies' bullied them and ordered them about without mercy. The negro women are, without doubt, on a more thorough footing of equality with the men than the women of any white race. The causes, I believe, are two. In the first place there is less difference between the sexes in mere physical strength and courage; and watching the average Negresses, one can well believe the stories of those terrible Amazonian guards of the King of Dahomey, whose boast is, that they are no longer women, but men. There is no doubt that, in case of a rebellion, the black women of the West Indies would be as formidable,

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<sup>9</sup> *Persea gratissima*.

<sup>10</sup> *Dioscorea*.

<sup>11</sup> *Colocasia esculcuta*.

cutlass in hand, as the men. The other cause is the exceeding ease with which, not merely food, but gay clothes and ornaments, can be procured by light labour. The negro woman has no need to marry and make herself the slave of a man, in order to get a home and subsistence. Independent she is, for good and evil, and independent she takes care to remain; and no schemes for civilising the Negro will have any deep or permanent good effect which do not take note of, and legislate for, this singular fact.

Meanwhile, it was a comfort to one fresh from the cities of the Old World, and the short and stunted figures, the mesquin and scrofulous visages, which crowd our alleys and back wynds, to see everywhere health, strength, and goodly stature, especially among women. Nowhere in the West Indies are to be seen those haggard down-trodden mothers, grown old before their time, too common in England, and commoner still in France.

Health, 'rude' in every sense of the word, is the mark of the negro woman, and of the negro man likewise. Their faces shine with fatness; they seem to enjoy, they do enjoy, the mere act of living, like the lizard on the wall. It may be said—it must be said—that, if they be human beings (as they are), they are meant for something more than mere enjoyment of life. Well and good: but are they not meant for enjoyment likewise? Let us take the beam out of our own eye, before we take the mote out of theirs; let us, before we complain of them for being too healthy and comfortable, remember that we have at home here tens of thousands of paupers, rogues, whatnot, who are not a whit more

civilised, intellectual, virtuous, or spiritual than the Negro, and are meanwhile neither healthy nor comfortable. The Negro may have the *corpus sanum* without the *mens sana*. But what of those whose souls and bodies are alike unsound?

Away south, along the low spit at the south end of the island, where are salt-pans which, I suspect, lie in now extinguished craters; and past little Nevis, the conical ruin, as it were, of a volcanic island. It was probably joined to the low end of St. Kitts not many years ago. It is separated from it now only by a channel called the Narrows, some four to six miles across, and very shallow, there being not more than four fathoms in many places, and infested with reefs, whether of true coral or of volcanic rock I should be glad to know. A single peak, with its Souffrière, rises to some 2000 feet; right and left of it are two lower hills, fragments, apparently, of a Somma, or older and larger crater. The lava and ash slide in concave slopes of fertile soil down to the sea, forming an island some four miles by three, which was in the seventeenth century a little paradise, containing 4000 white citizens, who had dwindled down in 1805, under the baneful influences of slavery, to 1300; in 1832 (the period of emancipation) to 500; and in 1854 to only 170.<sup>12</sup> A happy place, however, it is said still to be, with a population of more than 10,000, who, as there is happily no Crown land in the island, cannot squat, and so return to their original savagery; but are well-ordered and peaceable, industrious, and well-taught, and

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Davy's *West Indies*.

need, it is said, not only no soldiers, but no police.

One spot on the little island we should have liked much to have seen: the house where Nelson, after his marriage with Mrs. Nisbet, a lady of Nevis, dwelt awhile in peace and purity.

Happier for him, perhaps, though not for England, had he never left that quiet nest.

And now, on the leeward bow, another gray mountain island rose; and on the windward another, lower and longer. The former was Montserrat, which I should have gladly visited, as I had been invited to do. For little Montserrat is just now the scene of a very hopeful and important experiment.<sup>13</sup> The Messrs. Sturge have established there a large plantation of limes, and a manufactory of lime-juice, which promises to be able to supply, in good time, vast quantities of that most useful of all sea-medicines.

Their connection with the Society of Friends, and indeed the very name of Sturge, is a guarantee that such a work will be carried on for the benefit, not merely of the capitalists, but of the coloured people who are employed. Already, I am assured, a marked improvement has taken place among them; and I, for one, heartily bid God-speed to the enterprise: to any enterprise, indeed, which tends to divert labour and capital from that exclusive sugar-growing which has been most injurious, I verily believe the bane, of the West Indies. On that subject I may have to say more in a future chapter. I ask the reader,

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<sup>13</sup> An account of the Souffrière of Montserrat is given by Dr. Nugent, *Geological Society's Transactions*, vol. i., 1811.

meanwhile, to follow, as the ship's head goes round to windward toward Antigua.

Antigua is lower, longer, and flatter than the other islands. It carries no central peak: but its wildness of ragged uplands forms, it is said, a natural fortress, which ought to be impregnable; and its loyal and industrious people boast that, were every other West Indian island lost, the English might make a stand in Antigua long enough to enable them to reconquer the whole. I should have feared, from the look of the island, that no large force could hold out long in a country so destitute of water as those volcanic hills, rusty, ragged, treeless, almost sad and desolate—if any land could be sad and desolate with such a blue sea leaping around and such a blue sky blazing above. Those who wish to know the agricultural capabilities of Antigua, and to know, too, the good sense and courage, the justice and humanity, which have enabled the Antiguans to struggle on and upward through all their difficulties, in spite of drought, hurricane, and earthquake, till permanent prosperity seems now become certain, should read Dr. Davy's excellent book, which I cannot too often recommend.

For us, we could only give a hasty look at its southern volcanic cliffs; while we regretted that we could not inspect the marine strata of the eastern parts of the island, with their calcareous marls and limestones, hardened clays and cherts, and famous silicified trees, which offer important problems to the geologist, as yet not worked out. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For what is known of these, consult Dr. Nugent's 'Memoir on the Geology of

We could well believe, as the steamer ran into English Harbour, that Antigua was still subject to earthquakes; and had been shaken, with great loss of property though not of life, in the Guadaloupe earthquake of 1843, when 5000 lives were lost in the town of Point-à-Pitre alone. The only well-marked effect which Dr. Davy could hear of, apart from damage to artificial structures, was the partial sinking of a causeway leading to Rat Island, in the harbour of St. John. No wonder: if St. John's harbour be—as from its shape on the map it probably is—simply an extinct crater, or group of craters, like English Harbour. A more picturesque or more uncanny little hole than that latter we had never yet seen: but there are many such harbours about these islands, which nature, for the time being at least, has handed over from the dominion of fire to that of water. Past low cliffs of ash and volcanic boulder, sloping westward to the sea, which is eating them fast away, the steamer runs in through a deep crack, a pistol-shot in width. On the east side a strange section of gray lava and ash is gnawn into caves. On the right, a bluff rock of black lava dips sheer into water several fathoms deep; and you anchor at once inside an irregular group of craters, having passed through a gap in one of their sides, which has probably been torn out by a lava flow. Whether the land, at the time of the flow, was higher or lower than at present, who can tell? This is certain, that the first basin is for half of its circumference circular, and walled

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Antigua,' *Transactions of Geological Society*, vol. v., 1821. See also Humboldt, *Personal Narrative*, book v. cap. 14.

with ash beds, which seem to slope outward from it. To the left it leads away into a long creek, up which, somewhat to our surprise, we saw neat government-houses and quays; and between them and us, a noble ironclad and other ships of war at anchor close against lava and ash cliffs. But right ahead, the dusty sides of the crater are covered with strange bushes, its glaring shingle spotted with bright green Manchineels; while on the cliffs around, aloes innumerable, seemingly the imported American Agave, send up their groups of huge fat pointed leaves from crannies so arid that one would fancy a moss would wither in them. A strange place it is, and strangely hot likewise; and one could not but fear a day—it is to be hoped long distant—when it will be hotter still.

Out of English Harbour, after taking on board fruit and bargaining for beads, for which Antigua is famous, we passed the lonely rock of Redonda, toward a mighty mountain which lay under a sheet of clouds of corresponding vastness. That was Guadaloupe. The dark undersides of the rolling clouds mingled with the dark peaks and ridges, till we could not see where earth ended and vapour began; and the clouds from far to the eastward up the wind massed themselves on the island, and then ceased suddenly to leeward, leaving the sky clear and the sea brilliant.

I should be glad to know the cause of this phenomenon, which we saw several times among the islands, but never in greater perfection than on nearing Nevis from the south on our return.

In that case, however, the cloud continued to leeward. It came up from the east for full ten miles, an advancing column of tall

ghostly cumuli, leaden, above a leaden sea; and slid toward the island, whose lines seemed to leap up once to meet them; fail; then, in a second leap, to plunge the crater-peak high into the mist; and then to sink down again into the western sea, so gently that the line of shore and sea was indistinguishable. But above, the cloud-procession passed on, shattered by its contact with the mountain, and transfigured as it neared the setting sun into long upward streaming lines of rack, purple and primrose against a saffron sky, while Venus lingered low between cloud and sea, a spark of fire glittering through dull red haze.

And now the steamer ran due south, across the vast basin which is ringed round by Antigua, Montserrat, and Guadaloupe, with St. Kitts and Nevis showing like tall gray ghosts to the north-west. Higher and higher ahead rose the great mountain mass of Guadaloupe, its head in its own canopy of cloud. The island falls into the sea sharply to leeward. But it stretches out to windward in a long line of flat land edged with low cliff, and studded with large farms and engine-houses. It might be a bit of the Isle of Thanet, or of the Lothians, were it not for those umbrella-like Palmistes, a hundred feet high, which stand out everywhere against the sky. At its northern end, a furious surf was beating on a sandy beach; and beyond that, dim and distant, loomed up the low flat farther island, known by the name of Grande Terre.

Guadaloupe, as some of my readers may know, consists, properly speaking, of two islands, divided by a swamp and a narrow salt-water river. The eastward half, or Grande Terre,

which is composed of marine strata, is hardly seen in the island voyage, and then only at a distance, first behind the westward Basse Terre, and then behind other little islands, the Saintes and Mariegalante. But the westward island, rising in one lofty volcanic mass which hides the eastern island from view, is perhaps, for mere grandeur, the grandest in the Archipelago.

The mountains—among which are, it is said, fourteen extinct craters—range upward higher and higher toward the southern end, with corries and glens, which must be, when seen near, hanging gardens of stupendous size. The forests seem to be as magnificent as they were in the days of Père Labat. Tiny knots on distant cliff-tops, when looked at through the glass, are found to be single trees of enormous height and breadth. Gullies hundreds of feet in depth, rushing downwards toward the sea, represent the rush of the torrents which have helped, through thousands of rainy seasons, to scoop them out and down.

But all this grandeur and richness culminates, toward the southern end, in one great crater-peak 5000 feet in height, at the foot of which lies the Port of Basse Terre, or Bourg St. François.

We never were so fortunate as to see the Souffrière entirely free from cloud. The lower, wider, and more ancient crater was generally clear: but out of the midst of it rose a second cone buried in darkness and mist. Once only we caught sight of part of its lip, and the sight was one not to be forgotten.

The sun was rising behind the hills. The purple mountain was backed by clear blue sky. High above it hung sheets of orange

cloud lighted from underneath; lower down, and close upon the hill-tops, curved sheets of bright white mist

‘Stooped from heaven, and took the shape,  
With fold on fold, of mountain and of cape.’

And under them, again, the crater seethed with gray mist, among which, at one moment, we could discern portions of its lip; not smooth, like that of Vesuvius, but broken into awful peaks and chasms hundreds of feet in height. As the sun rose, level lights of golden green streamed round the peak right and left over the downs: but only for a while. As the sky-clouds vanished in his blazing rays, earth-clouds rolled up below from the valleys behind; wreathed and weltered about the great black teeth of the crater; and then sinking among them, and below them, shrouded the whole cone in purple darkness for the day; while in the foreground blazed in the sunshine broad slopes of cane-field: below them again the town, with handsome houses and old-fashioned churches and convents, dating possibly from the seventeenth century, embowered in mangoes, tamarinds, and palmistes; and along the beach a market beneath a row of trees, with canoes drawn up to be unladen, and gay dresses of every hue. The surf whispered softly on the beach. The cheerful murmur of voices came off the shore, and above it the tinkling of some little bell, calling good folks to early mass. A cheery, brilliant picture as man could wish to see: but marred by two ugly

elements. A mile away on the low northern cliff, marked with many a cross, was the lonely cholera cemetery, a remembrance of the fearful pestilence which a few years since swept away thousands of the people: and above frowned that black giant, now asleep; but for how long?

In 1797 an eruption hurled out pumice, ashes, and sulphureous vapours. In the great crisis of 1812, indeed, the volcano was quiet, leaving the Souffrière of St. Vincent to do the work; but since then he has shown an ugly and uncertain humour. Smoke by day, and flame by night—or probably that light reflected from below which is often mistaken for flame in volcanic eruptions—have been seen again and again above the crater; and the awful earthquake of 1843 proves that his capacity for mischief is unabated. The whole island, indeed, is somewhat unsafe; for the hapless town of Point-à-Pitre, destroyed by that earthquake, stands not on the volcanic Basse Terre, but on the edge of the marine Grande Terre, near the southern mouth of the salt-water river. Heaven grant these good people of Guadeloupe a long respite; for they are said to deserve it, as far as human industry and enterprise goes. They have, as well, I understand, as the gentlemen of Martinique, discovered the worth of the ‘division of labour.’ Throughout the West Indies the planter is usually not merely a sugar-grower, but a sugar-maker also. He requires, therefore, two capitals, and two intellects likewise, one for his cane-fields, the other for his ‘ingenio,’ engine-house, or sugar-works. But he does not gain thereby two profits. Having

two things to do, neither, usually, is done well. The cane-farming is bad, the sugar-making bad; and the sugar, when made, disposed of through merchants by a cumbrous, antiquated, and expensive system. These shrewd Frenchmen, and, I am told, even small proprietors among the Negroes, not being crippled, happily for them, by those absurd sugar-duties which, till Mr. Lowe's budget, put a premium on the making of bad sugar, are confining themselves to growing the canes, and sell them raw to 'Usines Centrales,' at which they are manufactured into sugar. They thus devote their own capital and intellect to increasing the yield of their estates; while the central factories, it is said, pay dividends ranging from twenty to forty per cent. I regretted much that I was unable to visit in crop-time one of these factories, and see the working of a system which seems to contain one of the best elements of the co-operative principle.

But (and this is at present a serious inconvenience to a traveller in the Antilles) the steamer passes each island only once a fortnight; so that to land in an island is equivalent to staying there at least that time, unless one chooses to take the chances of a coasting schooner, and bad food, bugs, cockroaches, and a bunk which—but I will not describe. 'Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda' (down the companion) 'e passa.'

I must therefore content myself with describing, as honestly as I can, what little we saw from the sea, of islands at each of which we would gladly have stayed several days.

As the traveller nears each of them—Guadaloupe, Dominica,

Martinique (of which two last we had only one passing glance), St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Grenada—he will be impressed, not only by the peculiarity of their form, but by the richness of their colour.

All of them do not, like St. Kitts, Guadaloupe, and St. Vincent, slope up to one central peak. In Martinique, for instance, there are three separate peaks, or groups of peaks—the Mont Pelée, the Pitons du Carbet, and the Piton du Vauclain. But all have that peculiar jagged outline which is noticed first at the Virgin Islands.

Flat ‘vans’ or hog-backed hills, and broad sweeps of moorland, so common in Scotland, are as rare as are steep walls of cliff, so common in the Alps. Pyramid is piled on pyramid, the sides of each at a slope of about  $45^\circ$ , till the whole range is a congeries of multitudinous peaks and peaklets, round the base of which spreads out, with a sudden sweep, the smooth lowland of volcanic ash and lava. This extreme raggedness of outline is easily explained. The mountains have never been, as in Scotland, planed smooth by ice. They have been gouged out, in every direction, by the furious tropic rains and tropic rain-torrents.

Had the rocks been stratified and tolerably horizontal, these rains would have cut them out into tablelands divided by deep gullies, such as may be seen in Abyssinia, and in certain parts of the western United States. But these rocks are altogether amorphous and unstratified, and have been poured or spouted out as lumps, dykes, and sheets of lava, of every degree of

hardness; so that the rain, in degrading them, has worn them, not into tables and ranges, but into innumerable cones. And the process of degradation is still going on rapidly. Though a cliff, or sheet of bare rock, is hardly visible among the glens, yet here and there a bright brown patch tells of a recent landslide; and the masses of debris and banks of shingle, backed by a pestilential little swamp at the mouth of each torrent, show how furious must be the downpour and down-roll before the force of a sudden flood, along so headlong an incline.

But in strange contrast with the ragged outline, and with the wild devastation of the rainy season, is the richness of the verdure which clothes the islands, up to their highest peaks, in what seems a coat of green fur; but when looked at through the glasses, proves to be, in most cases, gigantic timber. Not a rock is seen. If there be a cliff here and there, it is as green as an English lawn.

Steep slopes are gray with groo-groo palms,<sup>15</sup> or yellow with unknown flowering trees. High against the sky-line, tiny knots and lumps are found to be gigantic trees. Each glen has buried its streamlet a hundred feet in vegetation, above which, here and there, the gray stem and dark crown of some palmiste towers up like the mast of some great admiral. The eye and the fancy strain vainly into the green abysses, and wander up and down over the wealth of depths and heights, compared with which European parks and woodlands are but paltry scrub and shaugh. No books are needed to tell that. The eye discovers it for itself, even before

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<sup>15</sup> *Acrocomia*.

it has learnt to judge of the great size of the vegetation, from the endless variety of form and colour. For the islands, though green intensely, are not of one, but of every conceivable green, or rather of hues ranging from pale yellow through all greens into cobalt blue; and as the wind stirs the leaves, and sweeps the lights and shadows over hill and glen, all is ever-changing, iridescent, like a peacock's neck; till the whole island, from peak to shore, seems some glorious jewel—an emerald with tints of sapphire and topaz, hanging between blue sea and white surf below, and blue sky and white cloud above.

If the reader fancies that I exaggerate, let him go and see. Let him lie for one hour off the Rosseau at Dominica. Let him sail down the leeward side of Guadaloupe, down the leeward side of what island he will, and judge for himself how poor, and yet how tawdry, my words are, compared with the luscious yet magnificent colouring of the Antilles.

The traveller, at least so I think, would remark also, with some surprise, the seeming smallness of these islands. The Basse Terre of Guadaloupe, for instance, is forty miles in length. As you lie off it, it does not look half, or even a quarter, of that length; and that, not merely because the distances north and south are foreshortened, or shut in by nearer headlands. The causes, I believe, are more subtle and more complex. First, the novel clearness of the air, which makes the traveller, fresh from misty England, fancy every object far nearer, and therefore far smaller, than it actually is. Next the simplicity of form. Each outer line

trends upward so surely toward a single focus; each whole is so sharply defined between its base-line of sea and its background of sky, that, like a statue, each island is compact and complete in itself, an isolated and self-dependent organism; and therefore, like every beautiful statue, it looks much smaller than it is. So perfect this isolation seems, that one fancies, at moments, that the island does not rise out of the sea, but floats upon it; that it is held in place, not by the roots of the mountains, and deep miles of lava-wall below, but by the cloud which has caught it by the top, and will not let it go. Let that cloud but rise, and vanish, and the whole beautiful thing will be cast adrift; ready to fetch way before the wind, and (as it will seem often enough to do when viewed through a cabin-port) to slide silently past you, while you are sliding past it.

And yet, to him who knows the past, a dark shadow hangs over all this beauty; and the air—even in clearest blaze of sunshine—is full of ghosts. I do not speak of the shadow of negro slavery, nor of the shadow which, though abolished, it has left behind, not to be cleared off for generations to come. I speak of the shadow of war, and the ghosts of gallant soldiers and sailors. Truly here

‘The spirits of our fathers  
Might start from every wave;  
For the deck it was their field of fame,  
And ocean was their grave,’

and ask us: What have you done with these islands, which we

won for you with precious blood? What could we answer? We have misused them, neglected them; till now, ashamed of the slavery of the past, and too ignorant and helpless to govern them now slavery is gone, we are half-minded to throw them away again, or to allow them to annex themselves, in sheer weariness at our imbecility, to the Americans, who, far too wise to throw them away in their turn, will accept them gladly as an instalment of that great development of their empire, when 'The stars and stripes shall float upon Cape Horn.'

But was it for this that these islands were taken and retaken, till every gully held the skeleton of an Englishman? Was it for this that these seas were reddened with blood year after year, till the sharks learnt to gather to a sea-fight, as eagle, kite, and wolf gathered of old to fights on land? Did all those gallant souls go down to Hades in vain, and leave nothing for the Englishman but the sad and proud memory of their useless valour? That at least they have left.

However we may deplore those old wars as unnecessary; however much we may hate war in itself, as perhaps the worst of all the superfluous curses with which man continues to deface himself and this fair earth of God, yet one must be less than Englishman, less, it may be, than man, if one does not feel a thrill of pride at entering waters where one says to oneself,—Here Rodney, on the glorious 12th of April 1782, broke Count de Grasse's line (teaching thereby Nelson to do the same in like case), took and destroyed seven French ships of the line and

scattered the rest, preventing the French fleet from joining the Spaniards at Hispaniola; thus saving Jamaica and the whole West Indies, and brought about by that single tremendous blow the honourable peace of 1783. On what a scene of crippled and sinking, shattered and triumphant ships, in what a sea, must the conquerors have looked round from the *Formidable's* poop, with De Grasse at luncheon with Rodney in the cabin below, and not, as he had boastfully promised, on board his own *Fills de Paris*.

Truly, though cynically, wrote Sir Gilbert Blane, 'If superior beings make a sport of the quarrels of mortals, they could not have chosen a better theatre for this magnificent exhibition, nor could they ever have better entertainment than this day afforded.'

Yon lovely roadstead of Dominica—there it was that Rodney first caught up the French on the 9th of April, three days before, and would have beaten them there and then, had not a great part of his fleet lain becalmed under these very highlands, past which we are steaming through water smooth as glass. You glance, again, running down the coast of Martinique, into a deep bay, ringed round with gay houses embowered in mango and coconut, with the Piton du Vauclain rising into the clouds behind it. That is the Cul-de-sac Royal, for years the rendezvous and stronghold of the French fleets. From it Count de Grasse sailed out on the fatal 8th of April; and there, beyond it, opens an isolated rock, of the shape, but double the size, of one of the great Pyramids, which was once the British sloop of war *Diamond Rock*.

For, in the end of 1803, Sir Samuel Hood saw that French

ships passing to Fort Royal harbour in Martinique escaped him by running through the deep channel between Pointe du Diamante and this same rock, which rises sheer out of the water 600 feet, and is about a mile round, and only accessible at a point to the leeward, and even then only when there is no surf.

He who lands, it is said, has then to creep through crannies and dangerous steeps, round to the windward side, where the eye is suddenly relieved by a sloping grove of wild fig-trees, clinging by innumerable air-roots to the cracks of the stone.

So Hood, with that inspiration of genius so common then among sailors, laid his seventy-four, the *Centaur*, close alongside the Diamond; made a hawser, with a traveller on it, fast to the ship and to the top of the rock; and in January 1804 got three long 24's and two 18's hauled up far above his masthead by sailors who, as they 'hung like clusters,' appeared 'like mice hauling a little sausage. Scarcely could we hear the Governor on the top directing them with his trumpet; the *Centaur* lying close under, like a cocoa-nut shell, to which the hawsers are affixed.'<sup>16</sup> In this strange fortress Lieutenant James Wilkie Maurice (let his name be recollected as one of England's forgotten worthies) was established, with 120 men and boys, and ammunition, provisions, and water, for four months; and the rock was borne on the books of the Admiralty as His Majesty's ship *Diamond Rock*, and swept the seas with her guns till the 1st of June 1805, when she had to surrender, for want of powder, to a French squadron of

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<sup>16</sup> *Naval Chronicles*, vol. xii. p. 206.

two 74's, a frigate, a corvette, a schooner, and eleven gunboats, after killing and wounding some seventy men on the rock alone, and destroying three gunboats, with a loss to herself of two men killed and one wounded. Remembering which story, who will blame the traveller if he takes off his hat to His Majesty's quondam corvette, as he sees for the first time its pink and yellow sides shining in the sun, above the sparkling seas over which it domineered of old? You run onwards toward St. Lucia. Across that channel Rodney's line of frigates watched for the expected reinforcement of the French fleet. The first bay in St. Lucia is Gros islet; and there is the Gros islet itself—Pigeon Rock, as the English call it—behind which Rodney's fleet lay waiting at anchor, while he himself sat on the top of the rock, day after day, spy-glass in hand, watching for the signals from his frigates that the French fleet was on the move.

And those glens and forests of St. Lucia—over them and through them Sir John Moore and Sir Ralph Abercrombie fought, week after week, month after month, not merely against French soldiers, but against worse enemies; 'Brigands,' as the poor fellows were called; Negroes liberated by the Revolution of 1792. With their heads full (and who can blame them?) of the Rights of Man, and the democratic teachings of that valiant and able friend of Robespierre, Victor Hugues, they had destroyed their masters, man, woman, and child, horribly enough, and then helped to drive out of the island the invading English, who were already half destroyed, not with fighting, but with

fever. And now 'St. Lucia the faithful,' as the Convention had named her, was swarming with fresh English; and the remaining French and the drilled Negroes made a desperate stand in the earthworks of yonder Morne Fortunée, above the harbour, and had to surrender, with 100 guns and all their stores; and then the poor black fellows, who only knew that they were free, and intended to remain free, took to the bush, and fed on the wild cush-cush roots and the plunder of the plantations, man-hunting, murdering French and English alike, and being put to death in return whenever caught. Gentle Abercrombie could not coax them into peace: stern Moore could not shoot and hang them into it; and the 'Brigand war' dragged hideously on, till Moore—who was nearly caught by them in a six-oared boat off the Pitons, and had to row for his life to St. Vincent, so saving himself for the glory of Corunna—was all but dead of fever; and Colonel James Drummond had to carry on the miserable work, till the whole 'Armée Française dans les bois' laid down their rusty muskets, on the one condition, that free they had been, and free they should remain. So they were formed into an English regiment, and sent to fight on the coast of Africa; and in more senses than one 'went to their own place.' Then St. Lucia was ours till the peace of 1802; then French again, under the good and wise Nogués; to be retaken by us in 1803 once and for all.

I tell this little story at some length, as an instance of what these islands have cost us in blood and treasure. I have heard it regretted that we restored Martinique to the French, and kept

St. Lucia instead. But in so doing, the British Government acted at least on the advice which Rodney had given as early as the year 1778. St. Lucia, he held, would render Martinique and the other islands of little use in war, owing to its windward situation and its good harbours; for from St. Lucia every other British island might receive speedy succour. He advised that the Little Carenage should be made a permanent naval station, with dockyard and fortifications, and a town built there by Government, which would, in his opinion, have become a metropolis for the other islands. And indeed, Nature had done her part to make such a project easy of accomplishment. But Rodney's advice was not taken—any more than his advice to people the island, by having a considerable quantity of land in each parish allotted to ten-acre men (*i.e.* white yeomen), under penalty of forfeiting it to the Crown should it be ever converted to any other use than provision ground (*i.e.* thrown into sugar estates). This advice shows that Rodney's genius, though, with the prejudices of his time, he supported not only slavery, but the slave-trade itself, had perceived one of the most fatal weaknesses of the slave-holding and sugar-growing system. And well it would have been for St. Lucia if his advice had been taken. But neither ten-acre men nor dockyards were ever established in St. Lucia. The mail-steamers, if they need to go into dock, have, I am ashamed to say, to go to Martinique, where the French manage matters better. The admirable Carenage harbour is empty; Castries remains a little town, small, dirty, dilapidated,

and unwholesome; and St. Lucia itself is hardly to be called a colony, but rather the nucleus of a colony, which may become hereafter, by energy and good government, a rich and thickly-peopled garden up to the very mountain-tops.

We went up 800 feet of steep hill, to pay a visit on that Morne Fortunée which Moore and Abercrombie took, with terrible loss of life, in May 1796; and wondered at the courage and the tenacity of purpose which could have contrived to invest, and much more to assault, such a stronghold, 'dragging the guns across ravines and up the acclivities of the mountains and rocks,' and then attacking the works only along one narrow neck of down, which must be fat, to this day, with English blood.

All was peaceful enough now. The forts were crumbling, the barracks empty, and the 'neat cottages, smiling flower gardens, smooth grass-plats and gravel-walks,' which were once the pride of the citadel, replaced for the most part with Guava-scrub and sensitive plants. But nothing can destroy the beauty of the panorama. To the north and east a wilderness of mountain peaks; to the west the Grand Cul-de-sac and the Carenage, mapped out in sheets of blue between high promontories; and, beyond all, the open sea. What a land: and in what a climate: and all lying well-nigh as it has been since the making of the world, waiting for man to come and take possession. But there, as elsewhere, matters are mending steadily; and in another hundred years St. Lucia may be an honour to the English race.

We were, of course, anxious to obtain at St. Lucia specimens

of that abominable reptile, the Fer-de-lance, or rat-tailed snake,<sup>17</sup> which is the pest of this island, as well as of the neighbouring island of Martinique, and, in Père Labat's time, of lesser Martinique in the Grenadines, from which, according to Davy, it seems to have disappeared. It occurs also in Guadaloupe. In great Martinique—so the French say—it is dangerous to travel through certain woodlands on account of the Fer-de-lance, who lies along a bough, and strikes, without provocation, at horse or man. I suspect this statement, however, to be an exaggeration.

I was assured that this was not the case in St. Lucia; that the snake attacks no oftener than other venomous snakes,—that is, when trodden on, or when his retreat is cut off. At all events, it seems easy enough to kill him: so easy, that I hope yet it may be possible to catch him alive, and that the Zoological Gardens may at last possess—what they have long coveted in vain—hideous attraction of a live Fer-de-lance. The specimens which we brought home are curious enough, even from this æsthetic point of view. Why are these poisonous snakes so repulsive in appearance, some of them at least, and that not in proportion to their dangerous properties? For no one who puts the mere dread out of his mind will call the Cobras ugly, even anything but beautiful; nor, again, the deadly Coral snake of Trinidad, whose beauty tempts children, and even grown people, to play with it, or make a necklace of it, sometimes to their own destruction. But who will call the Puff Adder of the Cape, or this very Fer-de-

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<sup>17</sup> *Craspedocephalus lanceolatus*.

lance, anything but ugly and horrible: not only from the brutality signified, to us at least, by the flat triangular head and the heavy jaw, but by the look of malevolence and craft signified, to us at least, by the eye and the lip? 'To us at least,' I say. For it is an open question, and will be one, as long as the nominalist and the realist schools of thought keep up their controversy—which they will do to the world's end—whether this seeming hideousness be a real fact: whether we do not attribute to the snake the same passions which we should expect to find—and to abhor—in a human countenance of somewhat the same shape, and then justify our assumption to ourselves by the creature's bites, which are actually no more the result of craft and malevolence than the bite of a frightened mouse or squirrel. I should be glad to believe that the latter theory were the true one; that nothing is created really ugly, that the Fer-de-lance looks an hideous fiend, the Ocelot a beautiful fiend, merely because the outlines of the Ocelot approach more nearly to those which we consider beautiful in a human being: but I confess myself not yet convinced. 'There is a great deal of human nature in man,' said the wise Yankee; and one's human nature, perhaps one's common-sense also, will persist in considering beauty and ugliness as absolute realities, in spite of one's efforts to be fair to the weighty arguments on the other side.

These Fer-de-lances, be that as it may, are a great pest in St. Lucia. Dr. Davy says that he 'was told by the Lieutenant-Governor that as many as thirty rat-tailed snakes were killed in

clearing a piece of land, of no great extent, near Government House.' I can well believe this, for about the same number were killed only two years ago in clearing, probably, the same piece of ground, which is infested with that creeping pest of the West Indies, the wild Guava-bush, from which guava-jelly is made. The present Lieutenant-Governor has offered a small reward for the head of every Fer-de-lance killed: and the number brought in, in the first month, was so large that I do not like to quote it merely from memory. Certainly, it was high time to make a crusade against these unwelcome denizens. Dr. Davy, judging from a Government report, says that nineteen persons were killed by them in one small parish in the year 1849; and the death, though by no means certain, is, when it befalls, a hideous death enough. If any one wishes to know what it is like, let him read the tragedy which Sir Richard Schomburgk tells—with his usual brilliance and pathos, for he is a poet as well as a man of science—in his *Travels in British Guiana*, vol. ii. p. 255—how the *Craspedocephalus*, coiled on a stone in the ford, let fourteen people walk over him without stirring, or allowing himself to be seen: and at last rose, and, missing Schomburgk himself, struck the beautiful Indian bride, the 'Liebling der ganzen Gesellschaft;' and how she died in her bridegroom's arms, with horrors which I do not record.

Strangely enough, this snake, so fatal to man, has no power against another West Indian snake, almost equally common,

namely, the Cribo.<sup>18</sup> This brave animal, closely connected with our common water-snake, is perfectly harmless, and a welcome guest in West Indian houses, because he clears them of rats. He is some six or eight feet long, black, with more or less bright yellow about the tail and under the stomach. He not only faces the Fer-de-lance, who is often as big as he, but kills and eats him. It was but last year, I think, that the population of Carenage turned out to see a fight in a tree between a Cribo and a Fer-de-lance, of about equal size, which, after a two hours' struggle, ended in the Cribo swallowing the Fer-de-lance, head foremost. But when he had got his adversary about one-third down, the Creoles—just as so many Englishmen would have done—seeing that all the sport was over, rewarded the brave Cribo by killing both, and preserving them as a curiosity in spirits. How the Fer-de-lance came into the Antilles is a puzzle. The black American scorpion—whose bite is more dreaded by the Negroes than even the snake's—may have been easily brought by ship in luggage or in cargo. But the Fer-de-lance, whose nearest home is in Guiana, is not likely to have come on board ship. It is difficult to believe that he travelled northward by land at the epoch—if such a one there ever was—when these islands were joined to South America: for if so, he would surely be found in St. Vincent, in Grenada, and most surely of all in Trinidad. So far from that being the case, he will not live, it is said, in St. Vincent. For (so goes the story) during the Carib war of 1795-96, the savages imported Fer-de-

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<sup>18</sup> *Coluber variabilis*.

lances from St. Lucia or Martinique, and turned them loose, in hopes of their destroying the white men: but they did not breed, dwindled away, and were soon extinct. It is possible that they, or their eggs, came in floating timber from the Orinoco: but if so, how is it that they have never been stranded on the east coast of Trinidad, whither timber without end drifts from that river?

In a word, I have no explanation whatsoever to give; as I am not minded to fall back on the medieval one, that the devil must have brought them thither, to plague the inhabitants for their sins.

Among all these beautiful islands, St. Lucia is, I think, the most beautiful; not indeed on account of the size or form of its central mass, which is surpassed by that of several others, but on account of those two extraordinary mountains at its south-western end, which, while all conical hills in the French islands are called Pitons, bear the name of The Pitons *par excellence*.

From most elevated points in the island their twin peaks may be seen jutting up over the other hills, like, according to irreverent English sailors, the tips of a donkey's ears. But, as the steamer runs southward along the shore, these two peaks open out, and you find yourself in deep water close to the base of two obelisks, rather than mountains, which rise sheer out of the sea, one to the height of 2710, the other to that of 2680 feet, about a mile from each other. Between them is the loveliest little bay; and behind them green wooded slopes rise toward the rearward mountain of the Souffrière. The whole glitters clear and keen in blazing sunshine: but behind, black depths of cloud and gray sheets of

rain shroud all the central highlands in mystery and sadness.

Beyond them, without a shore, spreads open sea. But the fantastic grandeur of the place cannot be described in words.

The pencil of the artist must be trusted. I can vouch that he has not in the least exaggerated the slenderness and steepness of the rock-masses. One of them, it is said, has never been climbed; unless a myth which hangs about it is true. Certain English sailors, probably of Rodney's men—and numbering, according to the pleasure of the narrator, three hundred, thirty, or three—are said to have warped themselves up it by lianes and scrub; but they found the rock-ledges garrisoned by an enemy more terrible than any French. Beneath the bites of the Fer-de-lances, and it may be beneath the blaze of the sun, man after man dropped; and lay, or rolled down the cliffs. A single survivor was seen to reach the summit, to wave the Union Jack in triumph over his head, and then to fall a corpse. So runs the tale, which, if not true, has yet its value, as a token of what, in those old days, English sailors were believed capable of daring and of doing.

At the back of these two Pitons is the Souffrière, probably the remains of the old crater, now fallen in, and only 1000 feet above the sea: a golden egg to the islanders, were it but used, in case of war, and any difficulty occurring in obtaining sulphur from Sicily, a supply of the article to almost any amount might be obtained from this and the other like Solfaterras of the British Antilles; they being, so long as the natural distillation of the substance continues active as at present, inexhaustible.

But to work them profitably will require a little more common-sense than the good folks of St. Lucia have as yet shown. In 1836 two gentlemen of Antigua,<sup>19</sup> Mr. Bennett and Mr. Wood, set up sulphur works at the Souffrière of St. Lucia, and began prosperously enough, exporting 540 tons the first year. ‘But in 1840,’ says Mr. Breen, ‘the sugar-growers took the alarm,’ fearing, it is to be presumed, that labour would be diverted from the cane-estates, ‘and at their instigation the Legislative Council imposed a tax of 16s. sterling on every ton of purified sulphur exported from the colony.’ The consequence was that ‘Messrs. Bennett and Wood, after incurring a heavy loss of time and treasure, had to break up their establishment and retire from the colony.’ One has heard of the man who killed the goose to get the golden egg. In this case the goose, to avoid the trouble of laying, seems to have killed the man.

The next link in the chain, as the steamer runs southward, is St. Vincent; a single volcano peak, like St. Kitts, or the Basse Terre of Guadaloupe. Very grand are the vast sheets, probably of lava covered with ash, which pour down from between two rounded mountains just above the town. Rich with green canes, they contrast strongly with the brown ragged cliffs right and left of them, and still more with the awful depths beyond and above, where, underneath a canopy of bright white clouds, scowls a purple darkness of cliffs and glens, among which lies, unseen, the Souffrière.

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<sup>19</sup> Breen’s *St. Lucia*, p. 295.

In vain, both going and coming, by sunlight, and again by moonlight, when the cane-fields gleamed white below and the hills were pitch-black above, did we try to catch a sight of this crater-peak. One fact alone we ascertained, that like all, as far as I have seen, of the West Indian volcanoes, it does not terminate in an ash-cone, but in ragged cliffs of blasted rock. The explosion of April 27, 1812, must have been too violent, and too short, to allow of any accumulation round the crater. And no wonder; for that single explosion relieved an interior pressure upon the crust of the earth, which had agitated sea and land from the Azores to the West Indian islands, the coasts of Venezuela, the Cordillera of New Grenada, and the valleys of the Mississippi and Ohio. For nearly two years the earthquakes had continued, when they culminated in one great tragedy, which should be read at length in the pages of Humboldt.<sup>20</sup> On March 26, 1812, when the people of Caraccas were assembled in the churches, beneath a still and blazing sky, one minute of earthquake sufficed to bury, amid the ruins of churches and houses, nearly 10,000 souls. The same earthquake wrought terrible destruction along the whole line of the northern Cordilleras, and was felt even at Santa Fé de Bogota, and Honda, 180 leagues from Caraccas.

But the end was not yet. While the wretched survivors of Caraccas were dying of fever and starvation, and wandering inland to escape from ever-renewed earthquake shocks, among villages and farms, which, ruined like their own city, could give

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<sup>20</sup> *Personal Narrative*, book v. cap. 14.

them no shelter, the almost forgotten volcano of St. Vincent was muttering in suppressed wrath. It had thrown out no lava since 1718; if, at least, the eruption spoken of by Moreau de Jonnés took place in the Souffrière. According to him, with a terrific earthquake, clouds of ashes were driven into the air with violent detonations from a mountain situated at the eastern end of the island. When the eruption had ceased, it was found that the whole mountain had disappeared. Now there is no eastern end to St. Vincent, nor any mountain on the east coast: and the Souffrière is at the northern end. It is impossible, meanwhile, that the wreck of such a mountain should not have left traces visible and notorious to this day. May not the truth be, that the Souffrière had once a lofty cone, which was blasted away in 1718, leaving the present crater-ring of cliffs and peaks; and that thus may be explained the discrepancies in the accounts of its height, which Mr. Scrope gives as 4940 feet, and Humboldt and Dr. Davy at 3000, a measurement which seems to me to be more probably correct? The mountain is said to have been slightly active in 1785. In 1812 its old crater had been for some years (and is now) a deep blue lake, with walls of rock around 800 feet in height, reminding one traveller of the Lake of Albano.<sup>21</sup> But for twelve months it had given warning, by frequent earthquake shocks, that it had its part to play in the great subterranean battle between rock and steam; and on the 27th of April 1812 the battle began.

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Davy.

A negro boy—he is said to be still alive in St. Vincent—was herding cattle on the mountain-side. A stone fell near him; and then another. He fancied that other boys were pelting him from the cliffs above, and began throwing stones in return. But the stones fell thicker: and among them one, and then another, too large to have been thrown by human hand. And the poor little fellow woke up to the fact that not a boy, but the mountain, was throwing stones at him; and that the column of black cloud which was rising from the crater above was not harmless vapour, but dust, and ash, and stone. He turned, and ran for his life, leaving the cattle to their fate, while the steam mitrailleuse of the Titans—to which all man's engines of destruction are but pop-guns—roared on for three days and nights, covering the greater part of the island in ashes, burying crops, breaking branches off the trees, and spreading ruin from which several estates never recovered; and so the 30th of April dawned in darkness which might be felt.

Meanwhile, on that same day, to change the scene of the campaign two hundred and ten leagues, 'a distance,' as Humboldt says, 'equal to that between Vesuvius and Paris,' 'the inhabitants, not only of Caraccas, but of Calabozo, situate in the midst of the Llanos, over a space of four thousand square leagues, were terrified by a subterranean noise, which resembled frequent discharges of the loudest cannon. It was accompanied by no shock: and, what is very remarkable, was as loud on the coast as at eighty leagues' distance inland; and at Caraccas, as well

as at Calabozo, preparations were made to put the place in defence against an enemy who seemed to be advancing with heavy artillery.' They might as well have copied the St. Vincent herd-boy, and thrown their stones, too, at the Titans; for the noise was, there can be no doubt, nothing else than the final explosion in St. Vincent far away. The same explosion was heard in Venezuela, the same at Martinique and Guadaloupe: but there, too, there were no earthquake shocks. The volcanoes of the two French islands lay quiet, and left their English brother to do the work. On the same day a stream of lava rushed down from the mountain, reached the sea in four hours, and then all was over.

The earthquakes which had shaken for two years a sheet of the earth's surface larger than half Europe were stilled by the eruption of this single vent.

No wonder if, with such facts on my memory since my childhood, I looked up at that Souffrière with awe, as at a giant, obedient though clumsy, beneficent though terrible, reposing aloft among the clouds when his appointed work was done.

The strangest fact about this eruption was, that the mountain did not make use of its old crater. The original vent must have become so jammed and consolidated, in the few years between 1785 and 1812, that it could not be reopened, even by a steam-force the vastness of which may be guessed at from the vastness of the area which it had shaken for two years. So when the eruption was over, it was found that the old crater-lake, incredible as it may seem, remained undisturbed, as far as has

been ascertained. But close to it, and separated only by a knife-edge of rock some 700 feet in height, and so narrow that, as I was assured by one who had seen it, it is dangerous to crawl along it, a second crater, nearly as large as the first, had been blasted out, the bottom of which, in like manner, is now filled with water. I regretted much that I could not visit it. Three points I longed to ascertain carefully—the relative heights of the water in the two craters; the height and nature of the spot where the lava stream issued; and lastly, if possible, the actual causes of the locally famous Rabacca, or ‘Dry River,’ one of the largest streams in the island, which was swallowed up during the eruption, at a short distance from its source, leaving its bed an arid gully to this day.

But it could not be, and I owe what little I know of the summit of the Souffrière principally to a most intelligent and gentleman-like young Wesleyan minister, whose name has escaped me. He described vividly as we stood together on the deck, looking up at the volcano, the awful beauty of the twin lakes, and of the clouds which, for months together, whirl in and out of the cups in fantastic shapes before the eddies of the trade-wind.

The day after the explosion, ‘Black Sunday,’ gave a proof of, though no measure of, the enormous force which had been exerted. Eighty miles to windward lies Barbadoes. All Saturday a heavy cannonading had been heard to the eastward. The English and French fleets were surely engaged. The soldiers were called out; the batteries manned: but the cannonade died away, and all went to bed in wonder. On the 1st of May the

clocks struck six: but the sun did not, as usual in the tropics, answer to the call. The darkness was still intense, and grew more intense as the morning wore on. A slow and silent rain of impalpable dust was falling over the whole island. The Negroes rushed shrieking into the streets. Surely the last day was come.

The white folk caught (and little blame to them) the panic; and some began to pray who had not prayed for years. The pious and the educated (and there were plenty of both in Barbadoes) were not proof against the infection. Old letters describe the scene in the churches that morning as hideous—prayers, sobs, and cries, in Stygian darkness, from trembling crowds. And still the darkness continued, and the dust fell.

I have a letter, written by one long since dead, who had at least powers of description of no common order, telling how, when he tried to go out of his house upon the east coast, he could not find the trees on his own lawn, save by feeling for their stems.

He stood amazed not only in utter darkness, but in utter silence. For the trade-wind had fallen dead; the everlasting roar of the surf was gone; and the only noise was the crashing of branches, snapped by the weight of the clammy dust. He went in again, and waited. About one o'clock the veil began to lift; a lurid sunlight stared in from the horizon: but all was black overhead. Gradually the dust-cloud drifted away; the island saw the sun once more; and saw itself inches deep in black, and in this case fertilising, dust. The trade-wind blew suddenly once more out of the clear east, and the surf roared again along the shore.

Meanwhile, a heavy earthquake-wave had struck part at least of the shores of Barbadoes. The gentleman on the east coast, going out, found traces of the sea, and boats and logs washed up, some 10 to 20 feet above high-tide mark: a convulsion which seems to have gone unmarked during the general dismay.

One man at least, an old friend of John Hunter, Sir Joseph Banks and others their compeers, was above the dismay, and the superstitious panic which accompanied it. Finding it still dark when he rose to dress, he opened (so the story used to run) his window; found it stick, and felt upon the sill a coat of soft powder.

‘The volcano in St. Vincent has broken out at last,’ said the wise man, ‘and this is the dust of it.’ So he quieted his household and his Negroes, lighted his candles, and went to his scientific books, in that delight, mingled with an awe not the less deep because it is rational and self-possessed, with which he, like other men of science, looked at the wonders of this wondrous world.

Those who will recollect that Barbadoes is eighty miles to windward of St. Vincent, and that a strong breeze from E.N.E. is usually blowing from the former island to the latter, will be able to imagine, not to measure, the force of an explosion which must have blown this dust several miles into the air, above the region of the trade-wind, whether into a totally calm stratum, or into that still higher one in which the heated south-west wind is hurrying continually from the tropics toward the pole. As for the cessation of the trade-wind itself during the fall of the dust, I leave the fact to be explained by more learned men: the authority

whom I have quoted leaves no doubt in my mind as to the fact.

On leaving St. Vincent, the track lies past the Grenadines. For sixty miles, long low islands of quaint forms and euphonious names—Becquia, Mustique, Canonau, Carriacou, Isle de Rhone—rise a few hundred feet out of the unfathomable sea, bare of wood, edged with cliffs and streaks of red and gray rock, resembling, says Dr. Davy, the Cyclades of the Grecian Archipelago: their number is counted at three hundred. The largest of them all is not 8000 acres in extent; the smallest about 600. A quiet prosperous race of little yeomen, beside a few planters, dwell there; the latter feeding and exporting much stock, the former much provisions, and both troubling themselves less than of yore with sugar and cotton. They build coasting vessels, and trade with them to the larger islands; and they might be, it is said, if they chose, much richer than they are,—if that be any good to them.

The steamer does not stop at any of these little sea-hermitages; so that we could only watch their shores: and they were worth watching. They had been, plainly, sea-gnawn for countless ages; and may, at some remote time, have been all joined in one long ragged chine of hills, the highest about 1000 feet. They seem to be for the most part made up of marls and limestones, with trap-dykes and other igneous matters here and there. And one could not help entertaining the fancy that they were a specimen of what the other islands were once, or at least would have been now, had not each of them had its volcanic vents, to pile up hard

lavas thousands of feet aloft, above the marine strata, and so consolidate each ragged chine of submerged mountain into one solid conical island, like St. Vincent at their northern end, and at their southern end that beautiful Grenada to which we were fast approaching, and which we reached, on our outward voyage, at nightfall; running in toward a narrow gap of moonlit cliffs, beyond which we could discern the lights of a town. We did not enter the harbour: but lay close off its gateway in safe deep water; fired our gun, and waited for the swarm of negro boats, which began to splash out to us through the darkness, the jabbering of their crews heard long before the flash of their oars was seen.

Most weird and fantastic are these nightly visits to West Indian harbours. Above, the black mountain-depths, with their canopy of cloud, bright white against the purple night, hung with keen stars. The moon, it may be on her back in the west, sinking like a golden goblet behind some rock-fort, half shrouded in black trees. Below, a line of bright mist over a swamp, with the coco-palms standing up through it, dark, and yet glistening in the moon.

A light here and there in a house: another here and there in a vessel, unseen in the dark. The echo of the gun from hill to hill.

Wild voices from shore and sea. The snorting of the steamer, the rattling of the chain through the hawse-hole; and on deck, and under the quarter, strange gleams of red light amid pitchy darkness, from engines, galley fires, lanterns; and black folk and white folk flitting restlessly across them.

The strangest show: 'like a thing in a play,' says every one

when they see it for the first time. And when at the gun-fire one tumbles out of one's berth, and up on deck, to see the new island, one has need to rub one's eyes, and pinch oneself—as I was minded to do again and again during the next few weeks—to make sure that it is not all a dream. It is always worth the trouble, meanwhile, to tumble up on deck, not merely for the show, but for the episodes of West Indian life and manners, which, quaint enough by day, are sure to be even more quaint at night, in the confusion and bustle of the darkness. One such I witnessed in that same harbour of Grenada, not easily to be forgotten.

A tall and very handsome middle-aged brown woman, in a limp print gown and a gorgeous turban, stood at the gangway in a glare of light, which made her look like some splendid witch by a Walpurgis night-fire. 'Tell your boatman to go round to the other side,' quoth the officer in charge.

'Fanqua! (François) You go round oder side of de ship!'

Fanqua, who seemed to be her son, being sleepy, tipsy, stupid, or lazy, did not stir.

'Fanqua! You hear what de officer say? You go round.'

No move.

'Fanqua! You not ashamed of yourself? You not hear de officer say he turn a steam-pipe over you?'

No move.

'Fanqua!' (authoritative).

'Fanqua!' (indignant).

'Fanqua!' (argumentative).

‘Fanqua!’ (astonished).

‘Fanqua!’ (majestic).

‘Fanqua!’ (confidentially alluring).

‘Fanqua!’ (regretful). And so on, through every conceivable tone of expression.

But Fanqua did not move; and the officer and bystanders laughed.

She summoned all her talents, and uttered one last ‘Fanqua!’ which was a triumph of art.

Shame and surprise were blended in her voice with tenderness and pity, and they again with meek despair. To have been betrayed, disgraced, and so unexpectedly, by one whom she loved, and must love still, in spite of this, his fearful fall!

It was more than heart could bear. Breathing his name but that once more, she stood a moment, like a queen of tragedy, one long arm drawing her garments round her, the other outstretched, as if to cast off—had she the heart to do it—the rebel; and then stalked away into the darkness of the paddle-boxes—for ever and a day to brood speechless over her great sorrow? Not in the least.

To begin chattering away to her acquaintances, as if no Fanqua existed in the world.

It was a piece of admirable play-acting; and was meant to be.

She had been conscious all the while that she was an object of attention—possibly of admiration—to a group of men; and she knew what was right to be done and said under the circumstances, and did it perfectly, even to the smallest change of voice. She

was doubtless quite sincere the whole time, and felt everything which her voice expressed: but she felt it, because it was proper to feel it; and deceived herself probably more than she deceived any one about her.

A curious phase of human nature is that same play-acting, effect-studying, temperament, which ends, if indulged in too much, in hopeless self-deception, and ‘the hypocrisy which,’ as Mr. Carlyle says, ‘is honestly indignant that you should think it hypocritical.’ It is common enough among Negresses, and among coloured people too: but is it so very uncommon among whites? Is it not the bane of too many Irish? of too many modern French? of certain English, for that matter, whom I have known, who probably had no drop of French or Irish blood in their veins? But it is all the more baneful the higher the organisation is; because, the more brilliant the intellect, the more noble the instincts, the more able its victim is to say—‘See: I feel what I ought, I say what I ought, I do what I ought: and what more would you have? Why do you Philistines persist in regarding me with distrust and ridicule? What is this common honesty, and what is this “single eye,” which you suspect me of not possessing?’

Very beautiful was that harbour of George Town, seen by day. In the centre an entrance some two hundred yards across: on the right, a cliff of volcanic sand, interspersed with large boulders hurled from some volcano now silent, where black women, with baskets on their heads, were filling a barge with gravel. On the left, rocks of hard lava, surmounted by a well-lined old fort,

strong enough in the days of 32-pounders. Beyond it, still on the left, the little city, scrambling up the hillside, with its red roofs and church spires, among coconut and bread-fruit trees, looking just like a German toy town. In front, at the bottom of the harbour, villa over villa, garden over garden, up to the large and handsome Government House, one of the most delectable spots of all this delectable land; and piled above it, green hill upon green hill, which, the eye soon discovers, are the Sommas of old craters, one inside the other towards the central peak of Mount Maitland, 1700 feet high. On the right bow, low sharp cliff-points of volcanic ash; and on the right again, a circular lake a quarter of a mile across and 40 feet in depth, with a coral reef, almost awash, stretching from it to the ash-cliff on the south side of the harbour mouth. A glance shows that this is none other than an old crater, like that inside English Harbour in Antigua, probably that which has hurled out the boulders and the ash; and one whose temper is still uncertain, and to be watched anxiously in earthquake times. The Etang du Vieux Bourg is its name; for, so tradition tells, in the beginning of the seventeenth century the old French town stood where the white coral-reef gleams under water; in fact, upon the northern lip of the crater. One day, however, the Enceladus below turned over in his sleep, and the whole town was swallowed up, or washed away. The sole survivor was a certain blacksmith, who thereupon was made—or as sole survivor made himself—Governor of the island of Grenada. So runs the tale; and so it seemed likely to run again,

during the late earthquake at St. Thomas's. For on the very same day, and before any earthquake-wave from St. Thomas's had reached Grenada—if any ever reached it, which I could not clearly ascertain—this Etang du Vieux Bourg boiled up suddenly, hurling masses of water into the lower part of the town, washing away a stage, and doing much damage. The people were, and with good reason, in much anxiety for some hours after: but the little fit of ill-temper went off, having vented itself, as is well known, in the sea between St. Thomas's and Santa Cruz, many miles away.

The bottom of the crater, I was assured, was not permanently altered: but the same informant—an eye-witness on whom I can fully depend—shared the popular opinion that it had opened, sucked in sea-water, and spouted it out again. If so, the good folks of George Town are quite right in holding that they had a very narrow escape of utter destruction.

An animated and picturesque spot, as the steamer runs alongside, is the wooden wharf where passengers are to land and the ship to coal. The coaling Negroes and Negresses, dressed or undressed, in their dingiest rags, contrast with the country Negresses, in gaudy prints and gaudier turbans, who carry on their heads baskets of fruit even more gaudy than their dresses.

Both country and town Negroes, meanwhile, look—as they are said to be—comfortable and prosperous; and I can well believe the story that beggars are unknown in the island. The coalers, indeed, are only too well off, for they earn enough, by one day of

violent and degrading toil, to live in reckless shiftless comfort, and, I am assured, something very like debauchery, till the next steamer comes in.

No sooner is the plank down, than a struggling line getting on board meets a struggling line getting on shore; and it is well if the passenger, on landing, is not besmirched with coal-dust, after a narrow escape of being shoved into the sea off the stage.

But, after all, civility pays in Grenada, as in the rest of the world; and the Negro, like the Frenchman, though surly and rude enough if treated with the least haughtiness, will generally, like the Frenchman, melt at once at a touch of the hat, and an appeal to 'Laissez passer Mademoiselle.' On shore we got, through be-coaled Negroes, men and women, safe and not very much be-coaled ourselves; and were driven up steep streets of black porous lava, between lava houses and walls, and past lava gardens, in which jutted up everywhere, amid the loveliest vegetation, black knots and lumps scorched by the nether fires. The situation of the house—the principal one of the island—to which we drove, is beautiful beyond description. It stands on a knoll some 300 feet in height, commanded only by a slight rise to the north; and the wind of the eastern mountains sweeps fresh and cool through a wide hall and lofty rooms. Outside, a pleasure-ground and garden, with the same flowers as we plant out in summer at home; and behind, tier on tier of green wooded hill, with cottages and farms in the hollows, might have made us fancy ourselves for a moment in some charming country-house in Wales. But opposite

the drawing-room window rose a *Candelabra Cereus*, thirty feet high. On the lawn in front great shrubs of red Frangipani carried rose-coloured flowers which filled the air with fragrance, at the end of thick and all but leafless branches. Trees hung over them with smooth greasy stems of bright copper—which has gained them the name of ‘Indian skin,’ at least in Trinidad, where we often saw them wild; another glance showed us that every tree and shrub around was different from those at home: and we recollected where we were; and recollected, too, as we looked at the wealth of flower and fruit and verdure, that it was sharp winter at home. We admired this and that: especially a most lovely *Convolvulus*—I know not whether we have it in our hothouses<sup>22</sup>—with purple maroon flowers; and an old hog-plum<sup>23</sup>—Mombin of the French—a huge tree, which was striking, not so much from its size as from its shape. Growing among blocks of lava, it had assumed the exact shape of an English oak in a poor soil and exposed situation; globular-headed, gnarled, stunted, and most unlike to its giant brethren of the primeval woods, which range upward 60 or 80 feet without a branch. We walked up to see the old fort, commanding the harbour from a height of 800 feet. We sat and rested by the roadside under a great cotton-wood tree, and looked down on gorges of richest green, on negro gardens, and groo-groo palms, and here and there a cabbage-palm, or a huge tree at whose name we could not

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<sup>22</sup> *Ipomæa Horsfallii*.

<sup>23</sup> *Spondias lutea*.

guess; then turned through an arch cut in the rock into the interior of the fort, which now holds neither guns nor soldiers, to see at our feet the triple harbour, the steep town, and a very paradise of garden and orchard; and then down again, with the regretful thought, which haunted me throughout the islands—What might the West Indies not have been by now, had it not been for slavery, rum, and sugar?

We got down to the steamer again, just in time, happily, not to see a great fight in the water between two Negroes; to watch which all the women had stopped their work, and cheered the combatants with savage shouts and laughter. At last the coaling and the cursing were over; and we steamed out again to sea.

I have antedated this little episode—delightful for more reasons than I set down here—because I do not wish to trouble my readers with two descriptions of the same island—and those mere passing glimpses.

There are two craters, I should say, in Grenada, beside the harbour. One, the Grand Etang, lies high in the central group of mountains, which rise to 3700 feet, and is itself about 1740 feet above the sea. Dr. Davy describes it as a lake of great beauty, surrounded by bamboos and tree-ferns. The other crater-lake lies on the north-east coast, and nearer to the sea-level: and I more than suspect that more would be recognised, up and down the island, by the eye of a practised geologist.

The southern end of Grenada—of whatsoever rock it may be composed—shows evidence of the same wave-destruction as do

the Grenadines. Arches and stacks, and low horizontal strata laid bare along the cliff, in some places white with guano, prove that the sea has been at work for ages, which must be many and long, considering that the surf, on that leeward side of the island, is little or none the whole year round. With these low cliffs, in strongest contrast to the stately and precipitous southern point of St. Lucia, the southern point of Grenada slides into the sea, the last of the true Antilles. For Tobago, Robinson Crusoe's island, which lies away unseen to windward, is seemingly a fragment of South America, like the island of Trinidad, to which the steamer now ran dead south for seventy miles.

It was on the shortest day of the year—St. Thomas's Day—at seven in the morning (half-past eleven of English time, just as the old women at Eversley would have been going round the parish for their 'goodying'), that we became aware of the blue mountains of North Trinidad ahead of us; to the west of them the island of the Dragon's Mouth; and westward again, a cloud among the clouds, the last spur of the Cordilleras of the Spanish Main. There was South America at last; and as a witness that this, too, was no dream, the blue water of the Windward Islands changed suddenly into foul bottle-green. The waters of the Orinoco, waters from the peaks of the Andes far away, were staining the sea around us. With thoughts full of three great names, connected, as long as civilised man shall remain, with those waters—Columbus, Raleigh, Humboldt—we steamed on, to see hills, not standing out, like those of the isles which

we had passed, in intense clearness of green and yellow, purple and blue, but all shrouded in haze, like those of the Hebrides or the West of Ireland. Onward through a narrow channel in the mountain-wall, not a rifle-shot across, which goes by the name of the Ape's Mouth, banked by high cliffs of dark Silurian rock—not bare, though, as in Britain, but furred with timber, festooned with lianes, down to the very spray of the gnawing surf. One little stack of rocks, not thirty feet high, and as many broad, stood almost in the midst of the channel, and in the very northern mouth of it, exposed to the full cut of surf and trade-wind. But the plants on it, even seen through the glasses, told us where we were. One huge low tree covered the top with shining foliage, like that of a Portugal laurel; all around it upright Cerei reared their gray candelabra, and below them, hanging down the rock to the very surf, deep green night-blowing Cereus twined and waved, looking just like a curtain of gigantic stag's-horn moss. We ran through the channel; then amid more low wooded islands, it may be for a mile, before a strong back current rushing in from the sea; and then saw before us a vast plain of muddy water. No shore was visible to the westward; to the eastward the northern hills of Trinidad, forest clad, sank to the water; to the south lay a long line of coast, generally level with the water's edge, and green with mangroves, or dotted with coco-palms.

That was the Gulf of Paria, and Trinidad beyond.

Shipping at anchor, and buildings along the flat shore, marked Port of Spain, destined hereafter to stand, not on the seaside, but,

like Lynn in Norfolk, and other fen-land towns, in the midst of some of the richest reclaimed alluvial in the world.

As the steamer stopped at last, her screw whirled up from the bottom clouds of yellow mud, the mingled deposits of the Caroni and the Orinoco. In half an hour more we were on shore, amid Negroes, Coolies, Chinese, French, Spaniards, short-legged Guaraon dogs, and black vultures.

## CHAPTER III: TRINIDAD

It may be worth while to spend a few pages in telling something of the history of this lovely island since the 31st of July 1499, when Columbus, on his third voyage, sighted the three hills in the south-eastern part. He had determined, it is said, to name the first land which he should see after the Blessed Trinity; the triple peaks seemed to him a heaven-sent confirmation of his intent, and he named the island Trinidad; but the Indians called it Iere.

He ran from Punta Galera, at the north-eastern extremity—so named from the likeness of a certain rock to a galley under sail—along the east and south of the island; turned eastward at Punta Galeota; and then northward, round Punta Icacque, through the Boca Sierpe, or serpent's mouth, into the Gulf of Paria, which he named 'Golfo de Balena,' the Gulf of the Whale, and 'Golfo Triste,' the Sad Gulf; and went out by the northern passage of the Boca Drago. The names which he gave to the island and its surroundings remain, with few alterations, to this day.

He was surprised, says Washington Irving, at the verdure and fertility of the country, having expected to find it more parched and sterile as he approached the equator; whereas he beheld groves of palm-trees, and luxuriant forests sweeping down to the seaside, with fountains and running streams beneath the shade.

The shore was low and uninhabited: but the country rose in

the interior, and was cultivated in many places, and enlivened by hamlets and scattered habitations. In a word, the softness and purity of the climate, and the verdure, freshness, and sweetness of the country, appeared to equal the delights of early spring in the beautiful province of Valencia in Spain.

He found the island peopled by a race of Indians with fairer complexions than any he had hitherto seen; 'people all of good stature, well made, and of very graceful bearing, with much and smooth hair.' They wore, the chiefs at least, tunics of coloured cotton, and on their heads beautiful worked handkerchiefs, which looked in the distance as if they were made of silk. The women, meanwhile, according to the report of Columbus's son, seem, some of them at least, to have gone utterly without clothing.

They carried square bucklers, the first Columbus had seen in the New World; and bows and arrows, with which they made feeble efforts to drive off the Spaniards who landed at Punta Arenal, near Icacque, and who, finding no streams, sank holes in the sand, and so filled their casks with fresh water, as may be done, it is said, at the same spot even now.

And there—the source of endless misery to these happy harmless creatures—a certain Cacique, so goes the tale, took off Columbus's cap of crimson velvet, and replaced it with a circle of gold which he wore.

Alas for them! That fatal present of gold brought down on them enemies far more ruthless than the Caribs of the northern islands, who had a habit of coming down in their canoes and

carrying off the gentle Arrawaks to eat them at their leisure, after the fashion which Defoe, always accurate, has immortalised in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe's island is, almost certainly, meant for Tobago; Man Friday had been stolen in Trinidad.

Columbus came no more to Trinidad. But the Spaniards had got into their wicked heads that there must be gold somewhere in the island; and they came again and again. Gold they could not get; for it does not exist in Trinidad. But slaves they could get; and the history of the Indians of Trinidad for the next century is the same as that of the rest of the West Indies: a history of mere rapine and cruelty. The Arrawaks, to do them justice, defended themselves more valiantly than the still gentler people of Hayti, Cuba, Jamaica, Porto Rico, and the Lucayas: but not so valiantly as the fierce cannibal Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, whom the Spaniards were never able to subdue.

It was in 1595, nearly a century after Columbus discovered the island, that 'Sir Robert Duddleley in the *Bear*, with Captain Munck, in the *Beare's Whelpe*, with two small pinnaces, called the *Frisking* and the *Earwig*,' ran across from Cape Blanco in Africa, straight for Trinidad, and anchored in Cedros Bay, which he calls Curiapan, inside Punta Icacque and Los Gallos—a bay which was then, as now, 'very full of pelicans.' The existence of the island was known to the English: but I am not aware that any Englishman had explored it. Two years before, an English ship, whose exploits are written in Hakluyt by one Henry May, had run in, probably to San Fernando, 'to get refreshing; but could not,

by reason the Spaniards had taken it. So that for want of victuals the company would have forsaken the ship.' How different might have been the history of Trinidad, if at that early period, while the Indians were still powerful, a little colony of English had joined them, and intermarried with them. But it was not to be.

The ship got away through the Boca Drago. The year after, seemingly, Captain Whiddon, Raleigh's faithful follower, lost eight men in the island in a Spanish ambush. But Duddeley was the first Englishman, as far as I am aware, who marched, 'for his experience and pleasure, four long marches through the island; the last fifty miles going and coming through a most monstrous thicke wood, for so is most part of the island; and lodging myself in Indian townes.' Poor Sir Robert—'larding the lean earth as he stalked along'—in ruff and trunk hose, possibly too in burning steel breastplate, most probably along the old Indian path from San Fernando past Savannah Grande, and down the Ortoire to Mayaro on the east coast. How hot he must have been. How often, we will hope, he must have bathed on the journey in those crystal brooks, beneath the balisiers and the bamboos.

He found 'a fine-shaped and a gentle people, all naked and painted red' (with roucou), 'their commanders wearing crowns of feathers,' and a country 'fertile and full of fruits, strange beasts and fowls, whereof munkeis, babions, and parats were in great abundance.' His 'munkeis' were, of course, the little Sapajous; his 'babions' no true Baboons; for America disdains that degraded and dog-like form; but the great red Howlers. He

was much delighted with the island; and ‘inskonced himself’—*i.e.* built a fort: but he found the Spanish governor, Berreo, not well pleased at his presence; ‘and no gold in the island save Marcasite’ (iron pyrites); considered that Berreo and his three hundred Spaniards were ‘both poore and strong, and so he had no reason to assault them.’ He had but fifty men himself, and, moreover, was tired of waiting in vain for Sir Walter Raleigh.

So he sailed away northward, on the 12th of March, to plunder Spanish ships, with his brains full of stories of El Dorado, and the wonders of the Orinoco—among them ‘four golden half-moons weighing a noble each, and two bracelets of silver,’ which a boat’s crew of his had picked up from the Indians on the other side of the Gulf of Paria.

He left somewhat too soon. For on the 22d of March Raleigh sailed into Cedros Bay, and then went up to La Brea and the Pitch Lake. There he noted, as Columbus had done before him, oysters growing on the mangrove roots; and noted, too, ‘that abundance of stone pitch, that all the ships of the world might be therewith laden from thence; and we made trial of it in trimming our shippes, to be most excellent good, and melteth not with the sun as the pitch of Norway.’ From thence he ran up the west coast to ‘the mountain of Annaparima’ (St. Fernando hill), and passing the mouth of the Caroni, anchored at what was then the village of Port of Spain.

There some Spaniards boarded him, to buy linen and other things, all which he ‘entertained kindly, and feasted after our

manner, by means whereof I learned as much of the estate of Guiana as I could, or as they knew, for those poore souldiers having been many years without wine, a few draughts made them merrie, in which mood they vaunted of Guiana and the riches thereof,—much which it had been better for Raleigh had he never heard.

Meanwhile the Indians came to him every night with lamentable complaints of Berreo's cruelty. 'He had divided the island and given to every soldier a part. He made the ancient Caciques that were lords of the court, to be their slaves. He kept them in chains; he dropped their naked bodies with burning bacon, and such other torments, which' (continues Raleigh) 'I found afterward to be true. For in the city' (San Josef), 'when I entered it, there were five lords, or little kings, in one chain, almost dead of famine, and wasted with torments.' Considering which; considering Berreo's treachery to Whiddon's men; and considering also that as Berreo himself, like Raleigh, was just about to cross the gulf to Guiana in search of El Dorado, and expected supplies from Spain; 'to leave a garrison in my back, interested in the same enterprise, I should have savoured very much of the asse.' So Raleigh fell upon the 'Corps du Guard' in the evening, put them to the sword, sent Captain Caulfield with sixty soldiers onward, following himself with forty more, up the Caroni river, which was then navigable by boats; and took the little town of San Josef.

It is not clear whether the Corps du Guard which he attacked

was at Port of Spain itself, or at the little mud fort at the confluence of the Caroni and San Josef rivers, which was to be seen, with some old pieces of artillery in it, in the memory of old men now living. But that he came up past that fort, through the then primeval forest, tradition reports; and tells, too, how the prickly climbing palm,<sup>24</sup> the Croc-chien, or Hook-dog, pest of the forests, got its present name upon that memorable day. For, as the Spanish soldiers ran from the English, one of them was caught in the innumerable hooks of the Croc-chien, and never looking behind him in his terror, began shouting, ‘Suelta mi, Ingles!’ (Let me go, Englishman!)—or, as others have it, ‘Valga mi, Ingles!’ (Take ransom for me, Englishman!)—which name the palm bears unto this day.

So Raleigh, having, as one historian of Trinidad says, ‘acted like a tiger, lest he should savour of the ass,’ went his way to find El Dorado, and be filled with the fruit of his own devices: and may God have mercy on him; and on all who, like him, spoil the noblest instincts, and the noblest plans, for want of the ‘single eye.’

But before he went, he ‘called all the Caciques who were enemies to the Spaniard, for there were some that Berreo had brought out of other countreys and planted there, to eat out and waste those that were natural of the place; and, by his Indian interpreter that he had brought out of England, made them understand that he was the servant of a Queene, who was

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<sup>24</sup> *Desmoncus*.

the great Cacique of the North, and a virgin, and had more Caciques under her than there were trees in that island; and that she was an enemy to the Castellani in respect of their tyranny and oppression, and that she delivered all such nations about her as were by them oppressed, and, having freed all the northern world from their servitude, had sent me to free them also, and withal to defend the country of Guiana from their invasion and conquest. I showed them her Majesty's picture' (doubtless in ruff, farthingale, and stomacher laden with jewels), 'which they so admired and honoured, as it had been easy to make them idolatrous thereof.'

And so Raleigh, with Berreo as prisoner, 'hasted away toward his proposed discovery,' leaving the poor Indians of Trinidad to be eaten up by fresh inroads of the Spaniards.

There were, in his time, he says, five nations of Indians in the island,—'Jaios,' 'Arwacas,' 'Salvayos' (Salivas?), 'Nepoios,' and round San Josef 'Carinepagotes'; and there were others, he confesses, which he does not name. Evil times were come upon them. Two years after, the Indians at Punta Galera (the north-east point of the island) told poor Keymis that they intended to escape to Tobago when they could no longer keep Trinidad, though the Caribs of Dominica were 'such evil neighbours to it' that it was quite uninhabited. Their only fear was lest the Spaniards, worse neighbours than even the Caribs, should follow them thither.

But as Raleigh and such as he went their way, Berreo and such

as he seem to have gone their way also. The 'Conquistadores,' the offscourings not only of Spain but of South Germany, and indeed of every Roman Catholic country in Europe, met the same fate as befell, if monk chroniclers are to be trusted, the great majority of the Normans who fought at Hastings. 'The bloodthirsty and deceitful men did not live out half their days.' By their own passions, and by no miraculous Nemesis, they civilised themselves off the face of the earth; and to them succeeded, as to the conquerors at Hastings, a nobler and gentler type of invaders.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, Spaniards of ancient blood and high civilisation came to Trinidad, and resettled the island: especially the family of Farfan—'Farfan de los Godos,' once famous in mediæval chivalry—if they will allow me the pleasure of for once breaking a rule of mine, and mentioning a name—who seem to have inherited for some centuries the old blessings of Psalm xxxvii.—

'Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good; dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

'The Lord knoweth the days of the godly: and their inheritance shall endure for ever.

'They shall not be confounded in perilous times; and in the days of dearth they shall have enough.'

Toward the end of the seventeenth century the Indians summoned up courage to revolt, after a foolish ineffectual fashion. According to tradition, and an old 'romance muy doloroso,' which might have been heard sung within the last

hundred years, the governor, the Cabildo, and the clergy went to witness an annual feast of the Indians at Arena, a sandy spot (as its name signifies) near the central mountain of Tamana.

In the middle of one of their warlike dances, the Indians, at a given signal, discharged a flight of arrows, which killed the governor, all the priests, and almost all the rest of the whites.

Only a Farfan escaped, not without suspicion of forewarning by the rebels. He may have been a merciful man and just; while considering the gentle nature of the Indians, it is possible that some at least of their victims deserved their fate, and that the poor savages had wrongs to avenge which had become intolerable. As for the murder of the priests, we must remember always that the Inquisition was then in strength throughout Spanish America; and could be, if it chose, aggressive and ruthless enough.

By the end of the seventeenth century there were but fifteen pueblos, or Indian towns, in the island; and the smallpox had made fearful ravages among them. Though they were not forced to work as slaves, a heavy capitation tax, amounting, over most of the island, to two dollars a head, was laid on them almost to the end of the last century. There seems to have been no reason in the nature of things why they should not have kept up their numbers; for the island was still, nineteen-twentieths of it, rich primeval forest. It may have been that they could not endure the confined life in the pueblos, or villages, to which they were restricted by law. But, from some cause or other, they died out, and that before far inferior numbers of invaders. In 1783, when

the numbers of the whites were only 126, of the free coloured 295, and of the slaves 310, the Indians numbered only 2032.

In 1798, after the great immigration from the French West Indies, there were but 1082 Indians in the island. It is true that the white population had increased meanwhile to 2151, the free coloured to 4476, and the slaves to 10,000. But there was still room in plenty for 2000 Indians. Probably many of them had been absorbed by intermarriage with the invaders. At present, there is hardly an Indian of certainly pure blood in the island, and that only in the northern mountains.

Trinidad ought to have been, at least for those who were not Indians, a happy place from the seventeenth almost to the nineteenth century, if it be true that happy is the people who have no history. Certain Dutchmen, whether men of war or pirates is not known, attacked it some time toward the end of the seventeenth century, and, trying to imitate Raleigh, were well beaten in the jungles between the Caroni and San Josef. The Indians, it is said, joined the Spaniards in the battle; and the little town of San Josef was rewarded for its valour by being raised to the rank of a city by the King of Spain.

The next important event which I find recorded is after the treaty of 27th August 1701, between 'His Most Christian' and 'His Most Catholic Majesty,' by which the Royal Company of Guinea, established in France, was allowed to supply the Spanish colonies with 4800 Negroes per annum for ten years; of whom Trinidad took some share, and used them in planting cacao. So

much the worse for it.

Next Captain Teach, better known as 'Blackboard,' made his appearance about 1716, off Port of Spain; plundered and burnt a brig laden with cacao; and when a Spanish frigate came in, and cautiously cannonaded him at a distance, sailed leisurely out of the Boca Grande. Little would any Spanish Guarda Costa trouble the soul of the valiant Captain Teach, with his six pistols slung in bandoliers down his breast, lighted matches stuck underneath the brim of his hat, and his famous black beard, the terror of all merchant captains from Trinidad to Guinea River, twisted into tails, and tied up with ribbons behind his ears. How he behaved himself for some years as a 'ferocious human pig,' like Ignatius Loyola before his conversion, with the one virtue of courage; how he would blow out the candle in the cabin, and fire at random into his crew, on the ground 'that if he did not kill one of them now and then they would forget who he was'; how he would shut down the hatches, and fill the ship with the smoke of brimstone and what not, to see how long he and his could endure a certain place, —to which they are, some of them, but too probably gone; how he has buried his money, or said that he had, 'where none but he and Satan could find it, and the longest liver should take all'; how, out of some such tradition, Edgar Poe built up the wonderful tale of the *Gold Bug*; how the planters of certain Southern States, and even the Governor of North Carolina, paid him blackmail, and received blackmail from him likewise; and lastly, how he met a man as brave as he, but with a clear conscience and a

clear sense of duty, in the person of Mr. Robert Maynard, first lieutenant of the *Pearl*, who found him after endless difficulties, and fought him hand-to-hand in Oberecock River, in Virginia, ‘the lieutenant and twelve men against Blackbeard and fourteen, till the sea was tintured with blood around the vessel’; and how Maynard sailed into Bathtown with the gory head, black beard and all, hung at his jibboom end; all this is written—in the books in which it is written; which need not be read now, however sensational, by the British public.

The next important event which I find recorded in the annals of Trinidad is, that in 1725 the cacao crop failed. Some perhaps would have attributed the phenomenon to a comet, like that Sir William Beeston who, writing in 1664, says—‘About this time appeared first the comet, which was the forerunner of the blasting of the cacao-trees, when they generally failed in Jamaica, Cuba, and Hispaniola.’ But no comet seems to have appeared in 1725 whereon to lay the blame; and therefore Father Gumilla, the Jesuit, may have been excused for saying that the failure of the trees was owing to the planters not paying their tithes; and for fortifying his statement by the fact that one planter alone, named Rabelo, who paid his tithes duly, saved his trees and his crop.

The wicked (according to Dauxion Lavaysse, a Frenchman inoculated somewhat with scientific and revolutionary notions, who wrote a very clever book, unfortunately very rare now) said that the Trinidad cacao was then, as now, very excellent; that therefore it was sold before it was gathered; and that thus the

planters were able to evade the payment of tithes. But Señor Rabelo had planted another variety, called Forestero, from the Brazils, which was at once of hardier habit, inferior quality, and slower ripening. Hence his trees withstood the blight: but, *en revanche*, hence also, merchants would not buy his crop before it was picked: thus his duty became his necessity, and he could not help paying his tithes.

Be that as it may, the good folk of Trinidad (and, to judge from their descendants, there must have been good folk among them) grew, from the failure of the cacao plantations, exceeding poor; so that in 1733 they had to call a meeting at San Josef, in order to tax the inhabitants, according to their means, toward thatching the Cabildo hall with palm-leaves. Nay, so poor did they become, that in 1740, the year after the smallpox had again devastated the island and the very monkeys had died of it,—as the hapless creatures died of cholera in hundreds a few years since, and of yellow fever the year before last, sensibly diminishing their numbers near the towns—let the conceit of human nature wince under the fact as it will, it cannot wince from under the fact,—in 1740, I say the war between Spain and England—that about Jenkins's ear—forced them to send a curious petition to his Majesty of Spain; and to ask—Would he be pleased to commiserate their situation? The failure of the cacao had reduced them to such a state of destitution that they could not go to Mass save once a year, to fulfil their 'annual precepts'; when they appeared in clothes borrowed from each

other.

Nay, it is said by those who should know best, that in those days the whole august body of the Cabildo had but one pair of small-clothes, which did duty among all the members.

Let no one be shocked. The small-clothes desiderated would have been of black satin, probably embroidered; and fit, though somewhat threadbare, for the thigh of a magistrate and gentleman of Spain. But he would not have gone on ordinary days in a sansculottic state. He would have worn that most comfortable of loose nether garments, which may be seen on sailors in prints of the great war, and which came in again a while among the cunningest Highland sportsmen, namely, slops. Let no one laugh, either, at least in contempt, as the average British Philistine will think himself bound to do, at the fact that these men had not only no balance at their bankers, but no bankers with whom to have a balance. No men are more capable of supporting poverty with content and dignity than the Spaniards of the old school. For none are more perfect gentlemen, or more free from the base modern belief that money makes the man; and I doubt not that a member of the old Cabildo of San Josef in slops was far better company than an average British Philistine in trousers.

So slumbered on, only awakening to an occasional gentle revolt against their priests, or the governor sent to them from the Spanish Court, the good Spaniards of Trinidad; till the peace of 1783 woke them up, and they found themselves suddenly in a new, and an unpleasantly lively, world.

Rodney's victories had crippled Spain utterly; and crippled, too, the French West Indian islands, though not France itself: but the shrewd eye of a M. Rome de St. Laurent had already seen in Trinidad a mine of wealth, which might set up again, not the Spanish West Indians merely, but those of the French West Indians who had exhausted, as they fancied, by bad cultivation, the soils of Guadaloupe, Martinique, and St. Lucia.

He laid before the Intendant at Caraccas, on whom Trinidad then depended, a scheme of colonisation, which was accepted, and carried out in 1783, by a man who, as far as I can discover, possessed in a pre-eminent degree that instinct of ruling justly, wisely, gently, and firmly, which is just as rare in this age as it was under the *ancien régime*. Don Josef Maria Chacon was his name, —a man, it would seem, like poor Kaiser Joseph of Austria, born before his time. Among his many honourable deeds, let this one at least be remembered; that he turned out of Trinidad, the last Inquisitor who ever entered it.

Foreigners, who must be Roman Catholics (though on this point Chacon was as liberal as public opinion allowed him to be), were invited to settle on grants of Crown land. Each white person of either sex was to have some thirty-two acres, and half that quantity for every slave that he should bring. Free people of colour were to have half the quantity; and a long list of conditions was annexed, which, considering that they were tainted with the original sin of slave-holding, seem wise and just enough. Two articles especially prevented, as far as possible,

absenteeism. Settlers who retired from the island might take away their property; but they must pay ten per cent on all which they had accumulated; and their lands reverted to the Crown.

Similarly, if the heirs of a deceased settler should not reside in the colony, fifteen per cent was to be levied on the inheritance.

Well had it been for every West Indian island, British or other, if similar laws had been in force in them for the last hundred years.

So into Trinidad poured, for good and evil, a mixed population, principally French, to the number of some 12,000; till within a year or two the island was Spanish only in name.

The old Spaniards, who held, many of them, large sheets of the forests which they had never cleared, had to give them up, with grumblings and heart-burnings, to the newcomers. The boundaries of these lands were uncertain. The island had never been surveyed: and no wonder. The survey has been only completed during the last few years; and it is a mystery, to the non-scientific eye, how it has ever got done. One can well believe the story of the northern engineer who, when brought over to plan out a railroad, shook his head at the first sight of the 'high woods.' 'At home,' quoth he, 'one works outside one's work: here one works inside it.' Considering the density of the forests, one may as easily take a general sketch of a room from underneath the carpet as of Trinidad from the ground. However, thanks to the energy of a few gentlemen, who found occasional holes in the carpet through which they could peep, the survey of Trinidad is now about complete.

But in those days ignorance of the island, as well as the battle between old and new interests, brought lawsuits, and all but civil war. Many of the French settlers were no better than they should be; many had debts in other islands; many of the Negroes had been sent thither because they were too great ruffians to be allowed at home; and, what was worse, the premium of sixteen acres of land for every slave imported called up a system of stealing slaves, and sometimes even free coloured people, from other islands, especially from Grenada, by means of 'artful Negroes and mulatto slaves,' who were sent over as crimps.

I shall not record the words in which certain old Spaniards describe the new population of Trinidad ninety years ago. They, of course, saw everything in the blackest light; and the colony has long since weeded and settled itself under a course of good government. But poor Don Josef Maria Chacon must have had a hard time of it while he tried to break into something like order such a motley crew.

He never broke them in, poor man. For just as matters were beginning to right themselves, the French Revolution broke out; and every French West Indian island burst into flame,—physical, alas! as well as moral. Then hurried into Trinidad, to make confusion worse confounded, French Royalist families, escaping from the horrors in Hayti; and brought with them, it is said, many still faithful house-slaves born on their estates. But the Republican French, being nearly ten to one, were practical masters of the island; and Don Chacon, whenever he did anything

unpopular, had to submit to ‘manifestations,’ with tricolour flag, *Marseillaise*, and *Ça Ira*, about the streets of Port of Spain; and to be privately informed by Admiral Artizabal that a guillotine was getting ready to cut off the heads of all loyal Spaniards, French, and British. This may have been an exaggeration: but wild deeds were possible enough in those wild days. Artizabal, the story goes, threatened to hang a certain ringleader (name not given) at his yard-arm. Chacon begged the man’s life, and the fellow was ‘spared to become the persecutor of his preserver, even to banishment, and death from a broken heart.’<sup>25</sup>

At last the explosion came. The English sloop *Zebra* was sent down into the Gulf of Paria to clear it of French privateers, manned by the defeated maroons and brigands of the French islands, who were paying respect to no flag, but pirating indiscriminately. Chacon confessed himself glad enough to have them exterminated. He himself could not protect his own trade.

But the neutrality of the island must be respected. Skinner, the *Zebra’s* captain, sailed away towards the Boca, and found, to his grim delight, that the privateers had mistaken him for a certain English merchantman whom they had blockaded in Port of Spain, and were giving him chase. He let them come up and try to board; and what followed may be easily guessed. In three-quarters of an hour they were all burnt, sunk, or driven on shore; the remnant of their crews escaped to Port of Spain, to join the French Republicans and vow vengeance.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Joseph, *History of Trinidad*, from which most of these facts are taken.

Then, in a hapless hour, Captain Vaughan came into Port of Spain in the *Alarm* frigate. His intention was, of course, to protect the British and Spanish. They received him with open arms. But the privateers' men attacked a boat's crew of the *Alarm*, were beaten, raised a riot, and attacked a Welsh lady's house where English officers were at a party; after which, with pistol shots and climbing over back walls, the English, by help of a few Spanish gentlemen, escaped, leaving behind them their surgeon severely wounded.

Next morning, at sunrise, almost the whole of the frigate's crew landed in Port of Spain, fully armed, with Captain Vaughan at their head; the hot Welsh blood boiling in him. He unfurled the British flag, and marched into the town to take vengeance on the mob. A Spanish officer, with two or three men, came forward. What did a British captain mean by violating the law of nations? Vaughan would chastise the rascally French who had attacked his men. Then he must either kill the Spaniard or take him prisoner: and the officer tendered his sword.

'I will not accept the arms of a brave man who is doing his duty,' quoth poor over-valiant Vaughan, and put him aside. The hot Welsh blood was nevertheless the blood of a gentleman. They struck up 'Britons, Strike Home,' and marched on. The British and Spanish came out to entreat him. If a fight began, they would be all massacred. Still he marched on. The French, with three or four thousand slaves, armed, and mounting the tricolour cockade, were awaiting them, seemingly on the Savannah north

of the town. Chacon was at his wits' end. He had but eighty soldiers, who said openly they would not fire on the English, but on the French. But the English were but 240, and the French twelve times that number. By deft cutting through cross streets Chacon got between the two bodies of madmen, and pleaded the indignity to Spain and the violation of neutral ground. The English must fight him before they fought the French. They would beat him: but as soon as the first shot was fired, the French would attack them likewise, and both parties alike would be massacred in the streets.

The hot Welsh blood cooled down before reason, and courage.

Vaughan saluted Chacon; and marched back, hooted by the Republicans, who nevertheless kept at a safe distance. The French hunted every English and Irish person out of the town, some escaping barely with their lives. Only one man, however, was killed; and he, poor faithful slave, was an English Negro.

Vaughan saw that he had done wrong; that he had possibly provoked a war; and made for his error the most terrible reparation which man can make.

His fears were not without foundation. His conduct formed the principal count in the list of petty complaints against England, on the strength of which, five months after, in October 1796, Spain declared war against England, and, in conjunction with France and Holland, determined once more to dispute the empire of the seas.

The moment was well chosen. England looked, to those who

did not know her pluck, to have sunk very low. Franco was rising fast; and Buonaparte had just begun his Italian victories. So the Spanish Court—or at least Godoy, ‘Prince of Peace’—sought to make profit out of the French Republic. About the first profit which it made was the battle of St. Vincent; about the second, the loss of Trinidad.

On February 14, while Jervis and Nelson were fighting off Cape St. Vincent, Harvey and Abercrombie came into Carriacou in the Grenadines with a gallant armada; seven ships of the line, thirteen other men-of-war, and nigh 8000 men, including 1500 German jägers, on board.

On the 16th they were struggling with currents of the Bocas, piloted by a Mandingo Negro, Alfred Sharper, who died in 1836, 105 years of age. The line-of-battle ships anchored in the magnificent land-locked harbour of Chaguaramas, just inside the Boca de Monos. The frigates and transports went up within five miles of Port of Spain.

Poor Chacon had, to oppose this great armament, 5000 Spanish troops, 300 of them just recovering from yellow fever; a few old Spanish militia, who loved the English better than the French; and what Republican volunteers he could get together.

They of course clamoured for arms, and demanded to be led against the enemy, as to this day; forgetting, as to this day, that all the fiery valour of Frenchmen is of no avail without officers, and without respect for those officers. Beside them, there lay under a little fort on Gaspar Grande island, in Chaguaramas

harbour—ah, what a Paradise to be denied by war—four Spanish line-of-battle ships and a frigate. Their admiral, Apodaca, was a foolish old devotee. Their crews numbered 1600 men, 400 of whom were in hospital with yellow fever, and many only convalescent. The terrible Victor Hugues, it is said, offered a band of Republican sympathisers from Guadaloupe: but Chacon had no mind to take that Trojan horse within his fortress. ‘We have too many lawless Republicans here already. Should the King send me aid, I will do my duty to preserve his colony for the crown: if not, it must fall into the hands of the English, whom I believe to be generous enemies, and more to be trusted than treacherous friends.’

What was to be done? Perhaps only that which was done. Apodaca set fire to his ships, either in honest despair, or by orders from the Prince of Peace. At least, he would not let them fall into English hands. At three in the morning Port of Spain woke up, all aglare with the blaze six miles away to the north-west. Negroes ran and shrieked, carrying this and that up and down upon their heads. Spaniards looked out, aghast. Frenchmen, cried, ‘Aux armes!’ and sang the *Marseillaise*. And still, over the Five Islands, rose the glare. But the night was calm; the ships burnt slowly; and the *San Damaso* was saved by English sailors. So goes the tale; which, if it be, as I believe, correct, ought to be known to those adventurous Yankees who have talked, more than once, of setting up a company to recover the Spanish ships and treasure sunk in Chaguaramas. For the

ships burned before they sunk; and Apodaca, being a prudent man, landed, or is said to have landed, all the treasure on the Spanish Main opposite.

He met Chacon in Port of Spain at daybreak. The good governor, they say, wept, but did not reproach. The admiral crossed himself; and, when Chacon said 'All is lost,' answered (or did not answer, for the story, like most good stories, is said not to be quite true), 'Not all; I saved the image of St. Jago de Compostella, my patron and my ship's.' His ship's patron, however, says M. Joseph, was St. Vincent. Why tell the rest of the story? It may well be guessed. The English landed in force. The French Republicans (how does history repeat itself!) broke open the arsenal, overpowering the Spanish guard, seized some 3000 to 5000 stand of arms, and then never used them, but retired into the woods. They had, many of them, fought like tigers in other islands; some, it may be, under Victor Hugues himself. But here they had no leaders. The Spanish, overpowered by numbers, fell back across the Dry River to the east of the town, and got on a height. The German jägers climbed the beautiful Laventille hills, and commanded the Spanish and the two paltry mud forts on the slopes: and all was over, happily with almost no loss of life.

Chacon was received by Abercrombie and Harvey with every courtesy; a capitulation was signed which secured the honours of war to the military, and law and safety to the civil inhabitants; and Chacon was sent home to Spain to be tried by a court-

martial; honourably acquitted; and then, by French Republican intrigues, calumniated, memorialised against, subscribed against, and hunted (Buonaparte having, with his usual meanness, a hand in the persecution) into exile and penury in Portugal. At last his case was heard a second time, and tardy justice done, not by popular clamour, but by fair and deliberate law. His nephew set out to bring the good man home in triumph. He found him dying in a wretched Portuguese inn. Chacon heard that his honour was cleared at last, and so gave up the ghost.

Thus ended—as Earth’s best men have too often ended—the good Don Alonzo Chacon. His only monument in the island is one, after all, ‘ære perennius;’ namely, that most beautiful flowering shrub which bears his name; *Warsewiczia*, some call it; others, *Calycophyllum*: but the botanists of the island continue loyally the name of *Chaconia* to those blazing crimson spikes which every Christmas-tide renew throughout the wild forests, of which he would have made a civilised garden, the memory of the last and best of the Spanish Governors.

So Trinidad became English; and Picton ruled it, for a while, with a rod of iron.

I shall not be foolish enough to enter here into the merits or demerits of the Picton case, which once made such a noise in England. His enemies’ side of the story will be found in M’Callum’s *Travels in Trinidad*; his friends’ side in Robinson’s *Life of Picton*, two books, each of which will seem, I think, to him who will read them alternately, rather less wise than the

other. But those who may choose to read the two books must remember that questions of this sort have not two sides merely, but more; being not superficies, but solids; and that the most important side is that on which the question stands, namely, its bottom; which is just the side which neither party liked to be turned up, because under it (at least in the West Indies) all the beetles and cockroaches, centipedes and scorpions, are nestled away out of sight: and there, as long since decayed, they, or their exuviæ and dead bodies, may remain. The good people of Trinidad have long since agreed to let bygones be bygones; and it speaks well for the common-sense and good feeling of the islanders, as well as for the mildness and justice of British rule, that in two generations such a community as that of modern Trinidad should have formed itself out of materials so discordant.

That British rule has been a solid blessing to Trinidad, all honest folk know well. Even in Picton's time, the population increased, in six years, from 17,700 to 28,400; in 1851 it was 69,600; and it is now far larger.

But Trinidad has gained, by becoming English, more than mere numbers. Had it continued Spanish, it would probably be, like Cuba, a slave-holding and slave-trading island, now wealthy, luxurious, profligate; and Port of Spain would be such another wen upon the face of God's earth as that magnificent abomination, the city of Havanna. Or, as an almost more ugly alternative, it might have played its part in that great triumph of Bliss by Act of Parliament, which set mankind to rights for ever,

when Mr. Canning did the universe the honour of ‘calling the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old.’ It might have been—probably would have been—conquered by a band of ‘sympathisers’ from the neighbouring Republic of Venezuela, and have been ‘called into existence’ by the massacre of the respectable folk, the expulsion of capital, and the establishment (with a pronunciamiento and a revolution every few years) of a Republic such as those of Spanish America, combining every vice of civilisation with every vice of savagery. From that fate, as every honest man in Trinidad knows well, England has saved the island; and therefore every honest man in Trinidad is loyal (with occasional grumblings, of course, as is the right of free-born Britons, at home and abroad) to the British flag.

## CHAPTER IV: PORT OF SPAIN

The first thing notable, on landing in Port of Spain at the low quay which has been just reclaimed from the mud of the gulf, is the multitude of people who are doing nothing. It is not that they have taken an hour's holiday to see the packet come in. You will find them, or their brown duplicates, in the same places to-morrow and next day. They stand idle in the marketplace, not because they have not been hired, but because they do not want to be hired; being able to live like the Lazzaroni of Naples, on 'Midshipman's half-pay—nothing a day, and find yourself.' You are told that there are 8000 human beings in Port of Spain alone without visible means of subsistence, and you congratulate Port of Spain on being such an Elysium that people can live there—not without eating, for every child and most women you pass are eating something or other all day long—but without working.

The fact is, that though they will eat as much and more than a European, if they can get it, they can do well without food; and feed, as do the Lazzaroni, on mere heat and light. The best substitute for a dinner is a sleep under a south wall in the blazing sun; and there are plenty of south walls in Port of Spain. In the French islands, I am told, such Lazzaroni are caught up and set to Government work, as 'strong rogues and masterless men,' after the ancient English fashion. But is such a course fair? If a poor man neither steals, begs, nor rebels (and these people do not do

the two latter), has he not as much right to be idle as a rich man?

To say that neither has a right to be idle is, of course, sheer socialism, and a heresy not to be tolerated.

Next, the stranger will remark, here as at Grenada, that every one he passes looks strong, healthy, and well-fed. One meets few or none of those figures and faces, small, scrofulous, squinny, and haggard, which disgrace the so-called civilisation of a British city. Nowhere in Port of Spain will you see such human beings as in certain streets of London, Liverpool, or Glasgow. Every one, plainly, can live and thrive if they choose; and very pleasant it is to know that.

The road leads on past the Custom-house; and past, I am sorry to say, evil smells, which are too common still in Port of Spain, though fresh water is laid on from the mountains. I have no wish to complain, especially on first landing, of these kind and hospitable citizens. But as long as Port of Spain—the suburbs especially—smells as it does after sundown every evening, so long will an occasional outbreak of cholera or yellow fever hint that there are laws of cleanliness and decency which are both able and ready to avenge themselves. You cross the pretty ‘Marine Square,’ with its fountain and flowering trees, and beyond them on the right the Roman Catholic Cathedral, a stately building, with Palmistes standing as tall sentries round; soon you go up a straight street, with a glimpse of a large English church, which must have been still more handsome than now before its tall steeple was shaken down by an earthquake. The then authorities,

I have been told, applied to the Colonial Office for money to rebuild it: but the request was refused; on the ground, it may be presumed, that whatever ills Downing Street might have inflicted on the West Indies, it had not, as yet, gone so far as to play the part of Poseidon Ennosigæus.

Next comes a glimpse, too, of large—even too large—Government buildings, brick-built, pretentious, without beauty of form. But, however ugly in itself a building may be in Trinidad, it is certain, at least after a few years, to look beautiful, because embowered among noble flowering timber trees, like those that fill ‘Brunswick Square,’ and surround the great church on its south side.

Under cool porticoes and through tall doorways are seen dark ‘stores,’ filled with all manner of good things from Britain or from the United States. These older-fashioned houses, built, I presume, on the Spanish model, are not without a certain stateliness, from the depth and breadth of their chiaroscuro.

Their doors and windows reach almost to the ceiling, and ought to be plain proofs, in the eyes of certain discoverers of the ‘giant cities of Bashan,’ that the old Spanish and French colonists were nine or ten feet high apiece. On the doorsteps sit Negresses in gaudy print dresses, with stiff turbans (which are, according to this year’s fashion, of chocolate and yellow silk plaid, painted with thick yellow paint, and cost in all some four dollars), all aiding in the general work of doing nothing: save where here and there a hugely fat Negress, possibly with her ‘head tied across’ in a

white turban (sign of mourning), sells, or tries to sell, abominable sweetmeats, strange fruits, and junks of sugar-cane, to be gnawed by the dawdlers in mid-street, while they carry on their heads everything and anything, from half a barrow-load of yams to a saucer or a beer-bottle. We never, however, saw, as Tom Cringle did, a Negro carrying a burden on his chin.

I fear that a stranger would feel a shock—and that not a slight one—at the first sight of the average negro women of Port of Spain, especially the younger. Their masculine figures, their ungainly gestures, their loud and sudden laughter, even when walking alone, and their general coarseness, shocks, and must shock. It must be remembered that this is a seaport town; and one in which the licence usual in such places on both sides of the Atlantic is aggravated by the superabundant animal vigour and the perfect independence of the younger women. It is a painful subject. I shall touch it in these pages as seldom and as lightly as I can. There is, I verily believe, a large class of Negresses in Port of Spain and in the country, both Catholic and Protestant, who try their best to be respectable, after their standard: but unfortunately, here, as elsewhere over the world, the scum rises naturally to the top, and intrudes itself on the eye. The men are civil fellows enough, if you will, as in duty bound, be civil to them. If you are not, ugly capacities will flash out fast enough, and too fast. If any one says of the Negro, as of the Russian, ‘He is but a savage polished over: you have only to scratch him, and the barbarian shows underneath:’ the only answer to be made is

—Then do not scratch him. It will be better for you, and for him.

When you have ceased looking—even staring—at the black women and their ways, you become aware of the strange variety of races which people the city. Here passes an old Coolie Hindoo, with nothing on but his lungee round his loins, and a scarf over his head; a white-bearded, delicate-featured old gentleman, with probably some caste-mark of red paint on his forehead; his thin limbs, and small hands and feet, contrasting strangely with the brawny Negroes round. There comes a bright-eyed young lady, probably his daughter-in-law, hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat, crimson cotton-velvet jacket, and green gauze veil, with her naked brown baby astride on her hip: a clever, smiling, delicate little woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes. And who are these three boys in dark blue coatees and trousers, one of whom carries, hanging at one end of a long bamboo, a couple of sweet potatoes; at the other, possibly, a pebble to balance them? As they approach, their doleful visage betrays them. Chinese they are, without a doubt: but whether old or young, men or women, you cannot tell, till the initiated point out that the women have chignons and no hats, the men hats with their pigtails coiled up under them. Beyond this distinction, I know none visible.

Certainly none in those sad visages—‘*Offas, non facies,*’ as old Ammianus Marcellinus has it.

But why do Chinese never smile? Why do they look as if some one had sat upon their noses as soon as they were born,

and they had been weeping bitterly over the calamity ever since?

They, too, must have their moments of relaxation: but when? Once, and once only, in Port of Spain, we saw a Chinese woman, nursing her baby, burst into an audible laugh: and we looked at each other, as much astonished as if our horses had begun to talk.

There again is a group of coloured men of all ranks, talking eagerly, business, or even politics; some of them as well dressed as if they were fresh from Europe; some of them, too, six feet high, and broad in proportion; as fine a race, physically, as one would wish to look upon; and with no want of shrewdness either, or determination, in their faces: a race who ought, if they will be wise and virtuous, to have before them a great future. Here come home from the convent school two coloured young ladies, probably pretty, possibly lovely, certainly gentle, modest, and well-dressed according to the fashions of Paris or New York; and here comes the unmistakable Englishman, tall, fair, close-shaven, arm-in-arm with another man, whose more delicate features, more sallow complexion, and little moustache mark him as some Frenchman or Spaniard of old family. Both are dressed as if they were going to walk up Pall Mall or the Rue de Rivoli; for 'go-to-meeting clothes' are somewhat too much *de rigueur* here; a shooting-jacket and wide-awake betrays the newly-landed Englishman. Both take off their hats with a grand air to a lady in a carriage; for they are very fine gentlemen indeed, and intend to remain such: and well that is for the civilisation of the island; for it is from such men as these, and from their families, that the good

manners for which West Indians are, or ought to be, famous, have permeated down, slowly but surely, through all classes of society save the very lowest.

The straight and level street, swarming with dogs, vultures, chickens, and goats, passes now out of the old into the newer part of the city; and the type of the houses changes at once.

Some are mere wooden sheds of one or two rooms, comfortable enough in that climate, where a sleeping-place is all that is needed—if the occupiers would but keep them clean. Other houses, wooden too, belong to well-to-do folk. Over high walls you catch sight of jalousies and verandahs, inside which must be most delightful darkness and coolness. Indeed, one cannot fancy more pleasant nests than some of the little gaily-painted wooden houses, standing on stilts to let the air under the floors, and all embowered in trees and flowers, which line the roads in the suburbs; and which are inhabited, we are told, by people engaged in business.

But what would—or at least ought to—strike the newcomer's eye with most pleasurable surprise, and make him realise into what a new world he has been suddenly translated—even more than the Negroes, and the black vultures sitting on roof-ridges, or stalking about in mid-street—are the flowers which show over the walls on each side of the street. In that little garden, not thirty feet broad, what treasures there are! A tall palm—whether Palmiste or Oil-palm—has its smooth trunk hung all over with orchids, tied on with wire. Close to it stands a purple *Dracæna*,

such as are put on English dinner-tables in pots: but this one is twenty feet high; and next to it is that strange tree the Clavija, of which the Creoles are justly fond. A single straight stem, fifteen feet high, carries huge oblong-leaves atop, and beneath them, growing out of the stem itself, delicate panicles of little white flowers, fragrant exceedingly. A double blue pea<sup>26</sup> and a purple Bignonia are scrambling over shrubs and walls. And what is this which hangs over into the road, some fifteen feet in height—long, bare, curving sticks, carrying each at its end a flat blaze of scarlet? What but the Poinsettia, paltry scions of which, like the Dracæna, adorn our hothouses and dinner-tables. The street is on fire with it all the way up, now in mid-winter; while at the street end opens out a green park, fringed with noble trees all in full leaf; underneath them more pleasant little suburban villas; and behind all, again, a background of steep wooded mountain a thousand feet in height. That is the Savannah, the public park and race-ground; such as neither London nor Paris can boast.

One may be allowed to regret that the exuberant loyalty of the citizens of Port of Spain has somewhat defaced one end at least of their Savannah; for in expectation of a visit from the Duke of Edinburgh, they erected for his reception a pile of brick, of which the best that can be said is that it holds a really large and stately ballroom, and the best that can be hoped is that the authorities will hide it as quickly as possible with a ring of Palmistes, Casuarinas, Sandboxes, and every quick-growing tree.

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<sup>26</sup> *Clitoria Ternatea*; which should be in all our hothouses.

Meanwhile, as His Royal Highness did not come the citizens wisely thought that they might as well enjoy their new building themselves. So there, on set high days, the Governor and the Lady of the Governor hold their court. There, when the squadron comes in, officers in uniform dance at desperate sailors' pace with delicate Creoles; some of them, coloured as well as white, so beautiful in face and figure that one could almost pardon the jolly tars if they enacted a second Mutiny of the *Bounty*, and refused one and all to leave the island and the fair dames thereof.

And all the while the warm night wind rushes in through the high open windows; and the fireflies flicker up and down, in and out, and you slip away on to the balcony to enjoy—for after all it is very hot—the purple star-spangled night; and see aloft the saw of the mountain ridges against the black-blue sky; and below—what a contrast!—the crowd of white eyeballs and white teeth—Negroes, Coolies, Chinese—all grinning and peeping upward against the railing, in the hope of seeing—through the walls—the ‘buccra quality’ enjoy themselves.

An even pleasanter sight we saw once in that large room, a sort of agricultural and horticultural show, which augured well for the future of the colony. The flowers were not remarkable, save for the taste shown in their arrangement, till one recollected that they were not brought from hothouses, but grown in mid-winter in the open air. The roses, of which West Indians are very fond, as they are of all ‘home,’ *i.e.* European, flowers, were not as good as those of Europe. The rose in Trinidad, though it flowers three

times a year, yet, from the great heat and moisture, runs too much to wood. But the roots, especially the different varieties of yam, were very curious; and their size proved the wonderful food-producing powers of the land when properly cultivated. The poultry, too, were worthy of an English show. Indeed, the fowl seems to take to tropical America as the horse has to Australia, as to a second native-land; and Trinidad alone might send an endless supply to the fowl-market of the Northern States, even if that should not be quite true which some one said, that you might turn an old cock loose in the bush, and he, without further help, would lay more eggs, and bring up more chickens, than you could either eat or sell.

But the most interesting element of that exhibition was the coconut fibre products of Messrs. Uhrich and Gerold, of which more in another place. In them lies a source of further wealth to the colony, which may stand her in good stead when Port of Spain becomes, as it must become, one of the great emporiums of the West.

Since our visit the great ballroom has seen—even now is seeing—strange vicissitudes. For the new Royal College, having as yet no buildings of its own, now keeps school, it is said, therein—alas for the inkstains on that beautiful floor! And by last advices, a ‘troupe of artistes’ from Martinique, there being no theatre in Port of Spain, have been doing their play-acting in it; and Terpsichore and Thalia (Melpomene, I fear, haunts not the stage of Martinique) have been hustling all the other Muses

downstairs at sunset, and joining their jinglings to the chorus of tom-toms and chac-chacs which resounds across the Savannah, at least till 10 p.m., from all the suburbs.

The road—and all the roads round Port of Spain, thanks to Sir Ralph Woodford, are as good as English roads—runs between the Savannah and the mountain spurs, and past the Botanic Gardens, which are a credit, in more senses than one, to the Governors of the island. For in them, amid trees from every quarter of the globe, and gardens kept up in the English fashion, with fountains, too, so necessary in this tropical clime, stood a large ‘Government House.’ This house was some years ago destroyed; and the then Governor took refuge in a cottage just outside the garden. A sum of money was voted to rebuild the big house: but the Governors, to their honour, have preferred living in the cottage, adding to it from time to time what was necessary for mere comfort; and have given the old gardens to the city, as a public pleasure-ground, kept up at Government expense.

This Paradise—for such it is—is somewhat too far from the city; and one passes in it few people, save an occasional brown nurse. But when Port of Spain becomes, as it surely will, a great commercial city, and the slopes of Laventille, Belmont, and St. Ann’s, just above the gardens, are studded, as they surely will be, with the villas of rich merchants, then will the generous gift of English Governors be appreciated and used; and the Botanic Gardens will become a Tropic Garden of the Tuileries, alive, at five o’clock every evening, with human flowers of every hue with

human

## CHAPTER V: A LETTER FROM A WEST INDIAN COTTAGE ORNÉE

*30th December 1869.*

My Dear—, We are actually settled in a West Indian country-house, amid a multitude of sights and sounds so utterly new and strange, that the mind is stupefied by the continual effort to take in, or (to confess the truth) to gorge without hope of digestion, food of every conceivable variety. The whole day long new objects and their new names have jostled each other in the brain, in dreams as well as in waking thoughts. Amid such a confusion, to describe this place as a whole is as yet impossible. It must suffice if you find in this letter a sketch or two—not worthy to be called a study—of particular spots which seem typical, beginning with my bathroom window, as the scene which first proved to me, at least, that we were verily in the Tropics.

You look out—would that you did look in fact!—over the low sill. The gravel outside, at least, is an old friend; it consists of broken bits of gray Silurian rock, and white quartz among it; and one touch of Siluria makes the whole world kin. But there the kindred ends. A few green weeds, looking just like English ones, peep up through the gravel. Weeds, all over the world, are mostly like each other; poor, thin, pale in leaf, small and meagre in stem and flower: meaner forms which fill up for good, and sometimes, too, for harm, the gaps left by Nature's aristocracy of grander

and, in these Tropics, more tyrannous and destroying forms. So like home weeds they look: but pick one, and you find it unlike anything at home. That one happens to be, as you may see by its little green mouse-tails, a pepper-weed,<sup>27</sup> first cousin to the great black pepper-bush in the gardens near by, with the berries of which you may burn your mouth gratis.

So it is, you would find, with every weed in the little cleared dell, some fifteen feet deep, beyond the gravel. You could not—I certainly cannot—guess at the name, seldom at the family, of a single plant. But I am going on too fast. What are those sticks of wood which keep the gravel bank up? Veritable bamboos; and a bamboo-pipe, too, is carrying the trickling cool water into the bath close by. Surely we are in the Tropics. You hear a sudden rattle, as of boards and brown paper, overhead, and find that it is the clashing of the huge leaves of a young fan palm,<sup>28</sup> growing not ten feet from the window. It has no stem as yet; and the lower leaves have to be trimmed off or they would close up the path, so that only the great forked green butts of them are left, bound to each other by natural matting: but overhead they range out nobly in leafstalks ten feet long, and fans full twelve feet broad; and this is but a baby, a three years' old thing. Surely, again, we are in the Tropics. Ten feet farther, thrust all awry by the huge palm leaves, grows a young tree, unknown to me, looking like a walnut. Next to it an orange, covered with long prickles

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<sup>27</sup> *Peperomia.*

<sup>28</sup> *Sabal.*

and small green fruit, its roots propped up by a semi-cylindrical balk of timber, furry inside, which would puzzle a Hampshire woodsman; for it is, plainly, a groo-groo or a coco-palm, split down the middle. Surely, again, we are in the Tropics. Beyond it, again, blaze great orange and yellow flowers, with long stamens, and pistil curving upwards out of them. They belong to a twining, scrambling bush, with finely-pinnated mimosa leaves. That is the 'Flower-fence,'<sup>29</sup> so often heard of in past years; and round it hurries to and fro a great orange butterfly, larger seemingly than any English kind. Next to it is a row of Hibiscus shrubs, with broad crimson flowers; then a row of young Screw-pines,<sup>30</sup> from the East Indian Islands, like spiral pine-apple plants twenty feet high standing on stilts. Yes: surely we are in the Tropics.

Over the low roof (for the cottage is all of one storey) of purple and brown and white shingles, baking in the sun, rises a tall tree, which looks (as so many do here) like a walnut, but is not one.

It is the 'Poui' of the Indians,<sup>31</sup> and will be covered shortly with brilliant saffron flowers.

I turn my chair and look into the weedy dell. The ground on the opposite slope (slopes are, you must remember, here as steep as house-roofs, the last spurs of true mountains) is covered with a grass like tall rye-grass, but growing in tufts. That is the famous

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<sup>29</sup> *Poinziana*.

<sup>30</sup> *Pandanus*.

<sup>31</sup> *Tecoma (serratifolia?)*

Guinea-grass <sup>32</sup> which, introduced from Africa, has spread over the whole West Indies. Dark lithe coolie prisoners, one a gentle young fellow, with soft beseeching eyes, and 'Felon' printed on the back of his shirt, are cutting it for the horses, under the guard of a mulatto turnkey, a tall, steadfast, dignified man; and between us and them are growing along the edge of the gutter, veritable pine-apples in the open air, and a low green tree just like an apple, which is a Guava; and a tall stick, thirty feet high, with a flat top of gigantic curly horse-chestnut leaves, which is a Trumpet-tree. <sup>33</sup> There are hundreds of them in the mountains round: but most of them dead, from the intense drought and fires of last year.

Beyond it, again, is a round-headed tree, looking like a huge Portugal laurel, covered with racemes of purple buds. That is an 'Angelim'; <sup>34</sup> when full-grown, one of the finest timbers in the world. And what are those at the top of the brow, rising out of the rich green scrub? Verily, again, we are in the Tropics. They are palms, doubtless, some thirty feet high each, with here and there a young one springing up like a gigantic crown of male-fern.

The old ones have straight gray stems, often prickly enough, and thickened in the middle; gray last year's leaves hanging down; and feathering round the top, a circular plume of pale green leaves, like those of a coconut. But these are not cocos. The last year's leaves of the coco are rich yellow, and its stem is curved. These

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<sup>32</sup> *Panicum jumentorum*.

<sup>33</sup> *Cecropia*.

<sup>34</sup> *Andira inermis*.

are groo-groos; <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Acrocomia sclerocarpa*.

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