

CHAPTER XXIV.

Arrival at Jamaica—Departure for Europe—Lucayos or Bahama Islands—
Falmouth—Arrival in France.

I EMBARKED on board an English schooner for Jamaica. I had no less reason to complain of the mariners of the Caribbean Seas than of those of the great Ocean. The most sordid parsimony, during a voyage of twelve days, reduced me to such a state of weakness, that a three weeks' residence at Jamaica was hardly sufficient to recruit me. The English, so attentive in procuring for themselves even the superfluities of life, must have robust constitutions to be enabled at the same time, to undergo the greatest privations. In fact, aboard these little merchant vessels they live very badly, and in case of illness, will only take violent medicines without the least discernment.

The very day of our departure from Chagres, we met an English frigate; she was on her way to Carthage, whence she was going to Santa-Marta; this was what our captain called the round (*la tournée*) of the English ships of war. He was performing his own, that of collecting the specie of the American merchants, which,

upon an allowance of two and a half per cent he carried to Jamaica.

We were in sight of Carthagena on the 2nd of December, we then crossed, at a great distance from land, the currents of the Magdalena; whilst we were beating to windward in the gulf of Darien, the winds blew from the north-east, and the currents had run from the south-west. We had no sooner doubled the Papa, than the latter were, on the contrary, north-west, and the former south-west. On the 4th of December we perceived Jamaica. The sea ran high, and water spouts rose on all sides; but as there was but little wind, we could not enter the roads till the next day; after having beat off for some time, we arrived at an anchorage at noon. Immediately went on shore.

Jamaica is traversed from one end to the other by a very high chain of mountains. Although a most delicious coolness reigns upon their summits, the inhabitants are but few. The creole throughout the Antilles fears to remove from the sea coasts; he is continually longing to see European vessels, and the thirst for gain as well as fear, rivets him to the unhealthy borders of the sea.

Land breezes blow during a part of the day and throughout the night, a luxury dangerous to Europeans, for by suppressing perspiration, they cause fever; they also hinder vessels from entering

the port before ten o'clock in the morning, the time when the sea breezes commence.

In addition to a great number of villages, there are many small towns in Jamaica, amongst which Spanish Town, and King's Town, hold the first rank. The one is both the capital and the seat of government; the other the chief commercial town. The latter frequented by all foreigners is full of bustle, while the other is very dull.

At the entrance of the port of King's Town is the borough of Port Royal; near this is the anchorage for ships of war, which generally muster from twenty to twenty-five. Independently of this maritime force, a very strong castle and several batteries line the shore through which is the approach to the port for merchant vessels.

The stranger who arrives from the Spanish colonies is astonished upon seeing the activity, and the great number of vessels which fill the harbour. Near the wharfs have been built immense warehouses lined with iron, the receptacles for merchandize. This place, which brings to recollection the London docks, is one of the most interesting to be seen. Whilst in one part of the yard are found huge blocks of mahogany, campeachy log wood, deals, and spars from Canada, Virginia staves, iron, lead, and copper, in another are small barrels filled with the precious metals of Mexico and Colombia.

A bustle no less interesting is to be observed in the town. Here, is a warehouse filled with the rich stuffs of India, and Manchester; there, another crowded with mirrors, glass, and goods of every description. One street is appropriated to the sellers of salt provisions; the sale of these is very great, as they form the only article of food with the inhabitants of the interior.

The streets are so crowded with passengers, coaches, elegant chaises, landaus, &c. crossing each other in every direction, that I was never more at a loss in some of our largest European cities. The plan of King's Town is very well conceived; built upon the gentle declivity of the mountains, all the streets extend towards the sea in right lines. This arrangement, however, so agreeable to the eye, often renders them in winter almost uninhabitable, for the mountain torrents then rush down and cause dreadful devastation. The houses are of wood; at the same time they are so clean, so convenient, so beautifully constructed, that they appear delightful. In the streets where business is carried on, they have generally a low gallery, where people walk sheltered from the heat of the sun. The barracks, and the theatre, are built upon the same plan as the houses of individuals. There is one English church, one catholic, two Scotch, three methodists' chapels, and three synagogues. These

buildings, constructed upon the same model, are only distinguished from the other houses by their size. The number of slaves in comparison with that of whites is prodigious; they amount to two hundred thousand, while the whites do not exceed twelve thousand. Among these are four thousand Frenchmen from Saint-Domingo, the only remains of twenty-two thousand who were compelled to quit Cuba in 1808.

Notwithstanding the militias and a garrison of three thousand men, the black population cause considerable alarm; alarm-signals are continually being fired, and the soldiery are almost always under arms; it might be supposed they feared the invasion of some foreign enemy, that, however, which they dread is a domestic one. The system of the English, notwithstanding, is very judicious; they acknowledge no difference but that of a freeman or a slave. According to their laws, no owner can beat his slave; should the latter have been guilty of any crime, he must be taken before a magistrate, who orders him to receive thirty-nine lashes; this is the maximum of punishment; it can only be inflicted once a week. Notwithstanding, however, this species of justice, notwithstanding the esteem which the English have gained among the blacks, the never failing execution of their laws and the terror of their power, every one is uneasy;

upon the least disturbance they run to arms, and on holidays a garrison is placed for several days in each habitation.

Jamaica, as every one knows, is very productive in sugar and coffee. Although these articles should first proceed to England, the smugglers carry great quantities to the United States. Jamaica is not only the entrepot of the American continent, from Mexico as far as Peru, but is also that of Cuba and the United States, the ships of these countries alone are permitted to enter the English colony. Although vessels sail daily for Chagres, Rio-Hacha, and Carthagena, the prosperity of Jamaica is less owing to its commercial relations with foreign countries than to the exchange of its produce against the manufactures of the mother country, as this has the privilege of clothing and feeding the two or three hundred thousand individuals who people the colony, the relations between it and the latter are incessant and of great importance.

Upon seeing the towns, establishments, houses, and customs of the people of the continent, every thing appears so fixed, that the lapse of ages only can bring about any change. This is not the case in the Antilles, nor, consequently with Jamaica. In his dwelling, and in his domestic life, the inhabitant of this archipelago always preserves the character of the wandering colonist. He seldom marries, and is always

ready to quit his temporary home ; nothing attaches him to the soil ; for his provisions, his ships, and oftentimes his house, come from the continent. His character, made up of all possible contrasts, a singular mixture of the serious and calculating avidity of the English, the careless and factious levity of the French, the speculative and avaricious spirit of the Jews, the cool firmness of the Danes and Swedes, the negroe's indifference, and the mulattoe's pride, resembles neither the wandering inclinations of the people of the Llanos, nor the mild character of the inhabitants of the Andes, nor the mercantile spirit of the north Americans, but partakes, in some degree of all : for the inhabitant of the Antilles, to whatever cast he belongs, does not like to remain in one place ; he has not sufficient room ; he goes from isle to isle ; he is greedy after gain, a passion which always induces him to turn corsair or soldier, and makes him feared upon the continent, whose armies, when deprived of their most powerful allies, the men of colour would, with difficulty, resist the warlike inhabitants of the Antilles.

The more I approached the end of my voyage, the greater was my anxiety to accomplish it ; the celebration of Christmas rendered opportunities very rare, so much so, that only one vessel, the packet *Flecping*, was to set off in the month of December ; I engaged for my

passage. We set sail on the 25th of December; two days afterwards we were between Cuba and St. Domingo. Our voyage continuing prosperous, on the 1st of January we perceived Crooked Island, one of the Bahamas. We there anchored, it being here that the English packets deliver their dispatches for the governor of this archipelago.

The aspect of Crooked Island is very dreary; like that of all the Bahamas, the ground is very low; towards the centre of the isle, it is composed of sand and stones, amid which grow a few shrubs, while the shores, formed of madrepores and corals, afford a retreat for an infinite number of turtles. The incomes of the inhabitants, in almost every part of the archipelago, are derived from the sale of salt and cotton, which is collected by black slaves. The approach to these isles is very dangerous, and numbers of vessels are lost amid the reefs of rocks surrounding them: whoever has passed them, cannot but admire the courage and ability of Columbus, which enabled him to escape the dangers he had to encounter every moment in a sea beset with rocks, and at that time unknown. We only passed the night at Crooked Island, and the next morning again set sail. Our passage was an excellent one, and we came in sight of Lizard Point on the 28th of January, 1824, without the least accident, and even without the fear of one. The

next day we sailed for Falmouth, where we anchored at sun-rise. The delightful view presented by the country surrounding the bay redoubled my joy at again seeing Europe.

I remained a few days at Falmouth, and then set off for London; I arrived there on the 6th of February, but quitted it three days after, being unwilling to interpose any delay to the pleasure I promised myself in returning to France. I only stopped one night at Calais, and on the 13th of February reached Paris.