West India scenery: with illustrations of Negro character, the process of making sugar, &c. from sketches taken during a voyage to, and residence of seven years in, the island of Trinidad / by R. Bridgens.
WEST INDIA SCENERY.

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS OF NEGRO CHARACTER,

THE PROCESS OF MAKING SUGAR, &c.

From Sketches

TAKEN DURING A VOYAGE TO, AND A RESIDENCE OF SEVEN YEARS IN.

The Island of Trinidad.

By R. BRIDGENS,

AUTHOR OF “THE ANTIQUITIES OF SEFTON CHURCH,” &c.

London:

PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETOR, BY ROBERT JENNINGS & CO.

92, CHEAPSIDE.

1836.
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PLATES.

No. 1. Title Plate, a wreath composed of Sugar Cane, Plantain Tree, 

No. 2. Flying Fish.  No. 15. Sunday Morning in the Country.  


14. Field Negro.  No. 27. Fruit of the Banana and Plantain.
FLYING FISH.

This little creature, whose size is about that of a herring, is on many accounts one of the most interesting of the Fenny tribe. Our sympathies are more excited in its favour than for any of its more useful and less persecuted brethren. It possesses, unfortunately for itself, the privilege of being the favourite food of one of the most voracious tyrants of the sea—the Dolphin. As its inferiority in size to its pursuer would render any attempt at resistance hopeless its only prospect of escape is in flight. Besides the power of swimming away, common to other fishes, it is furnished with two pairs of wings, of which those in front are, taken together, longer than its whole body, and are moved by a set of muscles of uncommon strength, and with these it is enabled to leave its natural element to wing its way to a very considerable distance through the air, out of the reach of its pursuing foe. The length of the flight varies from a mere skip out of the water to about a furlong, which is performed in somewhat less than half a minute. A notion prevails abroad, says Capt. Hall, but I know not how just it may be, that they can fly no longer than while their fins, or wings, remain wet. Generally speaking, they fly to a considerable distance in the wind’s eye, that is exactly to the point from which the wind blows, and then gradually turn off to leeward. That they sometimes rise as high as twenty feet above the surface is certain, from their being found in certain parts of a ship which are full as much as that out of the sea. Humboldt good naturedly suggests, that their flight may be mere gambols; but Capt. Hall was witness of a chance in which he saw them fall from exhaustion into the very jaws of their pursuer.
CROSSING THE TROPIC.

Though our plate presents a scene which happened on board a merchant vessel, where from want of space and performace the piece cannot be cast with becoming dignity, yet as it is that part of the ceremony which is pretty much alike in all cases, we shall avail ourselves of Mr. Coleridge’s humorous description * of the mode of doing those things on board a King’s ship. “About six in the evening of the 17th of January, a sail was discovered to windward on the larboard bow. Shortly afterwards, the man on the fore-top-gallant-yard saw that she was making towards us on the other tack. There seemed to be something mysterious in the appearance of this sail and the course she was keeping; unless she came from Sierra Leone, no one could imagine what she was. The captain eyed her with his glass; she was under courses and topsails, with her jibs flying, and a broad pendant at the mast-head. Yet she made no signal, and was nearing us fast. It was eight o’clock, and a hoarse piratical voice hailed us, and demanded who we were; the captain answered with his hat off, for it seems he had been on the station before, and recognized the awful sound, and having told our name and other log-book particulars, concluded by requesting His Majesty to come on board. Neptune, for it now appeared to be indeed no other than this awful personage, replied that he could not leave his car that night, but he would visit us the next morning. He said: the couches Tritonian sounded again, the god rushed by in a flaming chariot, like unto a tar barrel, which the sailor heaves upon the forecastle, what time he tar the newly twisted yarn; and from yards and masts, main-top, top-gallant and royal, down came an avalanche of water, which laid some dozen of unwary mariners sprawling in an inundation of Neptunian ichor.

“At nine the next morning, the king came in through one of the broad ports. He was seated on what men would have supposed to be a gun-carriage, and drawn by four marine monsters. Amphitrite was by his side, and their only child, the heir of the sea, was in her arms. The king was crowned with Atlantic water-flowers, and he bore in his hand the trident. He was preceded by six Tritons, whom I had so often wished to see and hear after reading Wordsworth’s sonnet,

* The world is too much with us,

and Mercury came with wings, caduceus and a scroll under his arm. A white bear, who seemed to have come from Regent’s Inlet on an iceberg, which melted in latitude 50° and left him to shift for himself, acted as body-guard,

* Six Months in the West Indies, p. 43.
CROSSING THE TROPIC.

and another troop of Tritons closed the cavalcade. We all took off our hats; civil things passed between Neptune and the captain; the man complained that the trades were kept too far to the south now, and the god declared that as he travelled by steam himself, he was wholly unaware of the fact, but that he would order them up forthwith; and then he ordered all his children, who had not entered his kingdom's capital province before, to listen to his public crier, and willingly do accordingly. While I was giving the hearse cake to eat, Mercury read an oration, some parts of which were hermetically sealed from my comprehension; however, he urged us to admire Amphitritity, a woman, as he assured us, as remarkable for the amiableness for her disposition, as, we saw, she was for the elegance of her person. He finished by repeating to us youngsters those three invaluable maxims, which will carry a man safe through the world.

"1. Never hear anything to windward, except hot water and sashes."

"2. Never drink small beer when you can get strong, unless you like small beer better."

"3. Never kiss the maid when you may kiss the mistress, unless, as aforesaid, you happen to like kissing the maid better."

"The pageant passed off; but two water bailiffs came and tapped me on the shoulder, with a 'You're wanted.' It made me think of my debts. They wished to blindfold me, but I was determined to be shaved, like Ney, with my eyes wide open. As I walked slowly to the forecastle, I was considerably washed by a dozen buckets of water sent down upon me from the main-top and yard; then I mounted the ladder, at the top stood the doctor on one side and the barber on the other; the medical man felt my pulse, said it fluttered a little, and gave me a saline draught from an eau-de-Cologne bottle, and gently pushed me into a deep purse bag half full of water. Thrice I essayed to get out; thrice the sly dog tripped me up, and bear, ungrateful bear, who was rolling about at the bottom, caught me in an amorous hug, and dashed with me his turfy palms. At last I doubled him up with a smashing hit in the wind, stood upon him and clambered out, knocked down the shower, and ran through a Niagara of water to my cabin."

"After this, Ducking began in all its forms, under every possible modification of splashing and immersion. There was the Duck courteneus, the Duck oblique, the Duck direct, the Duck upright, the Duck downright, the bucket Duck, the tub Duck, the shower Duck, and the Duck and the Drake."

'There was water, water everywhere,
   And not a drop to drink.'

A fine water-piece."
PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD.*

On entering the Gulf, the mind is imbued with intense emotions, on beholding one of the most magnificent panoramas nature ever formed. To the east, the waves of the mighty Orinoco dispute for mastery with the contending billows of the ocean, and the lofty mountains of Cumaná rise with stupendous majesty. To the west, appear the mountains, hills, valleys, and plains of Trinidad.†

Port of Spain, though from the lowness of its situation, it does not form a very prominent feature in the view, has attractions of its own, which after a voyage of four thousand miles, prove quite irresistible. The houses, built of stone and white washed, produce a gay effect, beautifully contrasting with the bright green of the densely wooded hills, which form the back ground of the scene.

Mixed with the merchant vessels from many a far distant land, are seen the heavy country boat labouring through the water to some estate situated at a distance from the capital, or light Indian canoe skimming away to the secluded home of the poor Indian.

The ceremony of a visit from the health officers being over, and having obtained pratique, we will land. The moment we set foot on the King's Wharf, every object strikes us by its novelty, and the contrast it presents to the manners of "the home we've left behind us." We have to make our way through crowds of that race whose miseries we have heard so much of but whose smiling faces present no appearance of mental or bodily suffering.

A street in a line with the pier leads into King Street, which has a very fine appearance, as it is planted on each side with double rows of palms, cedars, mahogany trees, &c. intermingled in the most pleasing variety. It has at its eastern extremity the Catholic Cathedral, seen in the plate to the right of the spectator. Proceeding on, we enter Brunswick Square, which, from its

* There is an error in the lettering of the plate, which it is hoped will be parsed.
† Martin's History of the British Colonies, Vol. ii.
PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD.

extent and the charming effect produced by the magnificent specimens of tropical vegetation united to adorn it, is without its equal in the colonies. On its southern side is situated the Protestant Church,* which appears in the left of the present view. Most of the houses consist but of one story, but some have a second. The streets are straight, and are crossed by others at right angles: they are well paved, with footways at the side. A stranger must be surprised to see a town without a chimney, the fires employed in cooking (for which purpose only fires are ever lighted) being in detached buildings to the rear of the street elevation.

The fire in 1890, destroyed the greater part of the town. Before that event, the houses were built generally of wood, but the authorities took advantage of that calamity to publish a code of regulations, to which the town owes its improved appearance.

* The spire is shown as it is proposed to be when finished, though a deficiency of funds has hitherto prevented its completion.
PLANTING THE SUGAR CANE.

The land being cleared, the field is formed into beds, and, as it is termed, round ridged: it is then lined off with a chain for the cane holes, which are dug with the hoe, and at from four to five feet distance, according to the quality of the soil. The plants consist of the upper joints of the cane, which are set apart for that purpose at a previous crop. Two or three of these joints are fixed in each hole in an inclined position. In about six weeks after they require weeding: this is performed by the weaker part of the gaug, and is repeated two or three times, at intervals of six weeks or two months. After this they are two or three times cleared of their dry or dead leaves, and, in about ten or twelve months from being planted, they are cut for making sugar.
CUTTING CANES.

Weeding the young canes succeeds planting: it is begun when the cane is about twenty inches in height. It is performed by the weaker part of the gang. Stripping canes is the next operation. Every joint of the cane throws out two very long leaves with serrated edges: they soon droop, wither, and become as dry as straw. They are then stripped off the cane to expose it to the full effects of the sun’s rays. These dried leaves are laid along the ground to check evaporation, that all the moisture possible may be retained for the nourishment of the plant.

Cutting canes in general commences in January: it is performed in this manner:—The Negro seizes the cane by the top, cuts off the upper joints to plant for the next crop; he then cuts down the remaining stem close to the ground. When a sufficient number are cut, another Negro carries them to the cart, which is always in waiting to convey them to the mill.

To the left of the view are seen specimens of the wild plantain.
BOILING HOUSE.

The juice of the cane is conveyed in pipes from the mill to the boiling house, where it is converted into sugar. Here it is passed through a succession of coppers gradually increasing in heat, till the aqueous portion is sufficiently evaporated to admit of its crystallization. At each copper a Negro is placed to take off the scum as it rises, and when the temperature of that vessel has had its full effect, to remove it with a ladle into the next. At the fourth copper is stationed the most experienced person, whose superior knowledge has raised him to the dignity of head boiler man. When he perceives by the absence of scum, and the disposition of the liquor to crystallize as it drops from his ladle, that the boiling has been carried sufficiently far, the fire is removed, and the contents of the boiler conducted by a spout to the coolers. Here it remains about six hours, when it becomes solid, and is then dug out and carried in pails to the curing house, where it is thrown into hogsheds which are to convey it to Europe. Previous to being shipped, however, it is kept in the curing house six or eight weeks, to permit the molasses to drain off.
CARTING SUGAR.

The conveyance of the Sugar from the various estates to Port of Spain for shipment is attended with considerable difficulty, and often with much risk. The general want of bridges, (which would require to be built on a scale the Colony cannot afford,) and the rapid rise of the rivers after rain rendering the fords impassable, are the causes of what must otherwise appear so extraordinary to those who have spent their lives in England.

The river of St. Anne’s (the bridge over which is seen in the drawing) rose suddenly in June 1831, upwards of twenty feet, carrying away the few bridges, and causing much devastation in its turbulent course. The mansion in the background is the residence of a Gentleman well known in the colony for his classic taste and enlightened appreciation of every thing connected with the arts and literature. The beauty of the scenery from the belvedere on the top of the house, extending over the town, the shipping, the gulf, and bounded only by the blue mountains of Carana, cannot be paralleled in the colonies.
THE FIELD NEGRO

Is represented with the implements employed in the cultivation of the Sugar Cane. The hoe* is used to prepare the holes for the cane cuttings, and afterwards to remove the weeds which might injure the growth of the young plants.

The cutlass and crook assist him in removing the dead leaves from the stem, that it may more equally receive the benefit of the sun’s rays. He carries a sort of sandal, such as are used by the Frati of Italy, which he wears in the woods, or when employed in newly cultivated land, to protect his feet from thorns. On his arm is a too-toe in a coarse netting of lien, termed by the Negroes tie-tie.

* The spade is only used by the Negro in digging trenches.
SUNDAY IN TOWN.

In a former sketch, we have shown the attempt of the field negro to honour the Sabbath, by indulging his own taste for finery. This disposition is no less remarkable in the more civilized tradesman of the town, or even in the freed negro. As in Europe, this is more conspicuous in the female sex. Here indeed, dress not having yet become a science, the most laughable inconsistencies are often observable. The gayest colours, and ornaments of some value, are sometimes seen on females without shoe or stocking. At another, the foot is thrust into a pink or blue shoe, the heel of which is turned down, as it is often impossible at the colonial depots of fashion to fit all the customers to a nicety. It is gratifying, however, amidst these awkward attempts at imitating the externals of good society, to observe the politeness and self-denying anxiety to please others, by the sacrifice of personal gratification, that forms the best criterion of European high breeding.

In the back ground appear the towers of the Catholic Cathedral at the Port of Spain.
STOCKS FOR HANDS AND FEET.

This is a common punishment for the smaller delinquencies, which are not judged deserving of the lash. They are used also as a safe mode of detention for greater culprits previous to their trial. Before the late regulations, the construction was such as to admit of their being made exceedingly painful to the unfortunate culprit. By raising the hands to an inconvenient height, and drawing back and separating the feet, the body was thrown forward in an inclined position, while it was deprived of the support it might have derived from the arms. To prevent these abuses, in 1832, models were formed by order of the local Government on a more merciful plan, and strict regulations drawn up for the use of them. We will quote a few passages, to shew the contrast of the present to the former system.

"Stocks for the hands to be used only during the day; provided that for each offence the period of confinement shall not exceed six hours.

"Stocks for hands and feet to be used only during the day; provided that for each offence the period of confinement shall not exceed three hours.

"And provided also that no person or persons shall have, use, or employ stocks, for the confinement of any male or female slave, other than such as shall be made of the size and dimensions of said model."
Stocks for hands and feet, with leg and hand stocks (from the approved models).
NEGRO HEADS.

We have here given representations of two of the various modes of tattooing in use among the native tribes of the west coast of Africa. The operation is performed in infancy. The desired figure having been pricked on the skin with a sharp instrument, a dyeing liquid is rubbed into the wound. The impression is indelible, and expands with the growth of the features. The male head in the centre row is marked with parallel lines of small protuberances. These are the distinctive badge of the Mocha tribe, who are reproached with the horrid crime of cannibalism. Some are willing to suppose the charge may have arisen from their disfiguring practice of filing the teeth to a point, which they consider a great beauty.

In the accompanying female head, we have attempted to show the manner of putting on the handkerchief, the usual head dress of the Negroes.

* The tia collar is a punishment for shamelessness in females. The mark is used as a punishment and prevention of the practice of diri-casting, a disease peculiar to the Negro, and for which no satisfactory name has hitherto been assigned.

† The different tribes have each their peculiar pattern, which serves to identify the subjects of the different petty chiefs.
NEGRO HEADS,
with punishments for intoxication and Durt-eating.
NEGRO SUPERSTITION.

This is a kind of ordeal in use among the Negroes, for extorting a confession of guilt from persons suspected of theft or other crime. The officiating person is generally some Negro, whose success on previous occasions have procured him the superstitious veneration of his tribe. The ceremony is conducted with much solemnity. The injured party communicates his suspicions to the Dudie (as the reputed sorcerer is called), who appoints a time for the trial. A refusal of the suspected person to accept the challenge is considered an admission of guilt. If he abide the trial, it is conducted as follows: the Dudie twists a hand out of the branches of a common shrub, at intervals sprinkling salt on it, and accompanying the operation with some rude form of incantation in his own language. Thus formed, it is passed round the neck of the supposed culprit, who is then called upon to clear himself by oath of the imputed crime. The Negroes are led to believe that if they prejudice themselves on this occasion, the hand would remain immovably twisted round the neck, and, by gradually tightening itself, ring from the party an acknowledgment of his guilt. This effect is produced by a dexterous turn of the hand by the operator, when from circumstances he has reason to suspect that the accusation is true. The numerous confessions obtained by the mere anticipation of what is so much dreaded, added to those extorted by this last stroke of art, confer on the Dudie all the dignity of magic powers.

The sketch here given was taken from a scene which passed under the eye of the Author.
DANCING.

It may almost be said that Negro recreation is comprised in the word dancing. Parties to enjoy this favourite amusement are, on the larger estates, and on grand occasions, got up in a style which would surprise those who have heard of nothing but the extreme wretchedness of the Negro's lot. At such times, each displays his best attire. The ladies generally prefer white muslin, with sometimes a petticoat of gay colours, and on the head a Madras handkerchief put on with considerable taste. The men appear in white jackets and trousers; but on common occasions, the appearance of the company is such as is given in the sketch here presented to the reader.

It should be observed that the music is, with few exceptions, the same at all times. A drum, made of a barrel, covered at one end with a piece of dried goat's skin, and a course instrument (termed a slak-slak) formed of a hollow calabash, in which some shot or stones are enclosed; these, when the former is beaten violently and the latter shaken uninterruptingly, produce a din highly gratifying to the negro ear, but which it is almost impossible for the more delicate organ of a white man to bear. This is generally accompanied by the voices of several of the party, whose vocal efforts are, if possible, more overpowering than the noise of the instruments. Some of the attitudes most frequently introduced have been given in a former plate.
THE GROO GROO TREE

Is remarkable for the formation of its trunk, which is of a greater diameter at the top than at the bottom. It is covered with a dense tough coating of woody fibre, which is embraced at intervals by strongly marked rings of thorns or spikes of a bluish colour, varying from one to four inches in length. The more central parts are much softer, consisting almost entirely of cellular substance. Imbedded in the latter are found, when the tree is in a healthy state, numerous worms, about an inch in diameter and two in length. They are called by the negroes, the groo groo worm, and are sold in the market as a great delicacy. They are generally broiled and sent to table several of them attached to a skewer. It is very difficult for a white person to conquer his disgust at such a dish, but when he brings himself to do so, he finds that they derive from the juices of the tree they are found in, an aromatic flavour, (if the expression is admissible) which is far from being so disagreeable, as he had anticipated.

To the left is seen a Planter's house, which will give some idea of the domestic architecture of the colonies. The basement is sometimes of stone or brick, but generally the whole edifice is formed of wood. The house is often surrounded with an open gallery, but if this be not the case, care is taken to provide a thorough draft in all directions, without which the heat would be insufferable. The apartments inside are without ceilings, and as the internal structure of the roof appears, the whole very much resembles an English barn. Adjoining, are seen two small buildings which contain the kitchen, &c.; further to the right, may be perceived the bell used to summon the negroes to labour. In the extreme height is situated the boiling house, where all the operations of the manufacture of sugar are carried on.

The interior of the latter has been given in a former plate.
PLANTAIN TREE.

The Plantain is one of the most interesting productions of a tropical climate. The stem is about six inches in diameter, tapering slightly towards the summit. The leaves are in a cluster at the top; they are very large, being about six feet long and two feet broad; the midrib is strong, but the rest of the leaf is tender and apt to be torn by the wind. The spike of flowers rises from the centre of the leaves to the height of about four feet. At first they are enclosed in a sheath, but, as they come to maturity, it drops off. The fruit, which is seen in small clusters round the spike, resembles the cucumber in form; in colour, it is at first green, but as it ripens turns to a pale yellow. It is filled with a substance like the potato; its produce is enormous. Humboldt calculates that thirty-three pounds of wheat and ninety-nine of potatoes require the same space that would yield four thousand pounds of Plantain fruit. Its ratio of productiveness compared with that of wheat is, therefore, as 133.1; and with that of potatoes 44.1; yet weight for weight it will not bear a comparison in nutritive power with either.

The bunch of Plantains represented in the following plate weighed 63 lbs.
FRUIT OF THE PLANTAIN AND BANANA.

The Plantain and Banana have so many points of resemblance, that they are usually treated as slightly differing species of the same genus. This plate shows in what the difference consists. The fruit of the plantain is about two inches in diameter, eleven inches long, and bent a little on one side. In ripening, it changes from a bright green to a pale yellow; when opened, it is found to consist of a substance like a raw potato. Among the negroes it supplies the place of bread and potatoes, being boiled and eaten with salt, or dried and pounded and made into a pudding called tum-tum.

The fruit of the banana is not so long, and rounder than that of the plantain. It is eaten raw, or fried with sugar as a sort of fritter; cut in slices, also, it is a good dried fruit. There is a striking difference in the colours of the two trees, as of their respective fruits. While the plantain changes its green to a russet brown in the bark and edges of the leaves, the banana, which is originally, both stem and fruit, of a russet brown, which it retains, assumes in the latter, a tint similar to that of the ripened fruit of the plantain.
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