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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.

62, Cheapside.

1836.
PREFACE.

The privations of a first voyage to a landsman are innumerable, and most trying to his patience. His established notions of comfort are outraged in the most ruthless manner. On exchanging his happy home for the imprisonment of a merchant vessel, he must submit to the usual ordeal of sickness, during which he is confined to his berth, a name which dignifies the dingy hole, six feet by three, that contains his bed, and such portion of his luggage as his necessities oblige him to keep about him. When recovered (as many unfortunately a very protracted process) and become sufficiently a sailor to use his legs, there are but a few square yards in which, with some ingenuity, he can exercise them. Not to weary with detail, we shall give the remainder of the bill of fare in the words of a recent lively writer. "Think of undergoing eternal canned butter, hard biscuits, tainted water, and milkless tea and coffee; and for ever to hear no sounds but the rattling of the sails and the straining of the ropes; and to see near us only the disconsolate hens thrusting their scraggy necks out of the coops, and the consumptive-looking pigs and sheep in the long boat, while all around is sea and sky interminable."**

A first voyage, however, as it exposes us to many unlooked for elegancies, so it produces much to excite the attention and reward the observation of a cultivated mind. The cheering song of the crew, by which they regulate their well combined efforts, often pleasingly varied with allusions to the approaching voyage, or the personal feelings of the individual;—the motion of the vessel on the dark blue surface of the sea, as she dashes from her course the followings which seem one after the other, but ineffectually, endeavouring to oppose her passage—at night, the beautiful phosphorescent appearances which the water assumes when thrown into violent agitation, as if it were the work of some benevolent being to light and guide her on her solitary way—in the day, the ever-varying schools of fish playing round and following the vessel—the Porpoise

* Four Years’ in Southern Africa, by Cooper Rose, Royal Eng., p. 390.
i

PREFACE

Disporting with a grace peculiar to himself—the Flying-fish rising from the surface (perhaps passing over the vessel, sometimes falling exhausted on the deck), pursued by its indefatigable enemy, the Dolphin, who, in his turn, may be closely pressed by the "Tiger of the Seas," the Shark—the heavy, sleepy movements of the Turtle—the graceful motions of the Nautilus, his sail extended to the breeze, his ears apparently in readiness, sometimes approaching near enough to display a beautiful pale red, like the bloom of the Crocus, but on the least alarm of danger drawing in his sail, and sinking to the unfathomed depths of ocean—the mighty proportions of the gigantic Whale—all these form but a small part of the interesting objects which, especially in a voyage to the Tropics, meet the eye of the attentive observer. One of the most striking in the estimation of an admirer of nature will certainly be a rising or setting of the Sun. As soon as he appears, the mists of night are dispersed; the clouds which resist his power are converted into gold by the magic of his rays, and the interest of the scene enhanced by the solitude of the situation from which it is beheld. At his setting he has charms of a milder, yet not less impressive character. The clouds assume the most delicate tints, infinitely varied and imperceptibly modified, as the glorious luminary descends. When he reaches the horizon, he seems to pause, as it were, to take a last look at the world of his care—then sinks, not, as Poets once thought, to rest in the bosom of the deep, but to display to another world the power and goodness of his Creator.

Should a storm arise (which few escape on so long a voyage), a scene presents itself which cannot be described, but which never can be forgotten by those who have seen it. After being tossed about for many days in a sea, which, without exaggeration, "rises mountains high," yet (though it is impossible to convince a novice of it) often unaccompanied with danger, every sail taken in, the waves frequently washing overboard the unfortunate sailor whose duties kept him on deck. In a few hours the scene may entirely change, the good ship crowded with sail in a tranquil sea, walks the waters with such gentle motion, as to permit an Artist to note down, while fresh in memory, the details of the awful scene, of which he has so lately been a terrified spectator.
THE DOLPHIN.

This plate is given with a hope of furnishing a more correct idea of his form and of the brilliant hues he is so celebrated for than is common in popular works, and on account of the friendship he was once supposed to entertain for the human race, and the prejudice in his favor which that supposition produced. Goldsmith,* in his delightful work on Natural History, thus alludes to the latter circumstance: "What could have induced the ancients to a predilection in favor of this animal, it is not easy to account for. Historians and philosophers have contended, who should invent the greatest number of fables concerning him. He was celebrated in the earliest times for his fondness for the human race, and was distinguished by the epithets boy-loving and philanthropist. Scarcely an accident could happen at sea, but the Dolphin offered himself to convey the unfortunate to shore. The musician fell into the sea by pirates, the boy taking an airing into the midst of the sea, and returning again in safety, were obliged to the Dolphin for its services. Yet the figure of this animal is far from prejudicing us in their interests. Their extreme capriciousness tends still less to endear them to us. I know nothing that can reconcile them to man and excite his prejudices, except that when taken they sometimes utter a plaintive moan, with which they continue to express their pain till they expire. This, at first, might have excited human pity, and that might have produced affection."

In describing his form, the same Author remarks: "The Dolphin is scarcely ever exhibited by the ancients in a straight shape, but curved vertically, as he sometimes appears when exerting his force in leaping above the surface of the water." He might have added, that modern sculptors still adhere to this faulty representation, when they employ the figure of the Dolphin as an ornament.

We shall conclude with a few remarks on his ever-changing hues, which, perhaps from their very mutability, have seldom been correctly described. The colours he seems to possess are, in the body a bright resplendent gold.

THE DOLPHIN.

and, in the fins, a deep full blue, of the most beautiful description. The brilliant light of a tropical sun passing through his transparent blue fins, and reflected from the dazzling gold of his sides, sometimes conveys to the eye of the spectator a delicate green. This circumstance is noticed in the Journal of the amiable but unfortunate Lewis. Speaking of the Dolphin, he observes: "While covered by the waves he was entirely green, and, as the waters gave him a case of transparent crystal, he really looked like one solid piece of transparent emerald.

"And as he darts, the waters blue
Are streaked with gleams of sunny hue,
Green, orange, purple, gold."**

This variety of tints is to be attributed to the combination of his real colors with that of the element he inhabits, and to the different refrangibility of the rays of light. His colors have been said to increase in beauty as the fish dies.

"Like good men who, expiring, shine
The power that calls them, all confine
Your brightest hour your last."†

But the writer of these notes, after carefully watching the death of several, observed on every occasion a diminution of brilliancy, though a bloom appears like that which is often visible on the skin of the dying snake. It may be well to remark, that whatever difference is perceived in our plate from the form usually given to the Dolphin, the present drawing was made from one of a very large size, caught on the voyage.

It will be observed that the Dolphin, like all the Cetacean, is destitute of scales.

* Journal of a West India Proprietor, by M. G. Lewis, p. 28. † Ibid. p. 43.
ST. ANNE'S, FROM THE EAST.

This estate is situated about half a mile from Port of Spain, the capital of the colony, at the foot of the picturesque chain of hills which run along the Northern side of the Island. Being the official residence of the Governor, it possesses on that account a claim to notice, which it does not merit from any superiority in the style of architecture of its buildings. The grounds are beautifully wooded, and the garden contains fine specimens of the choicest plants brought from the most distant parts of the world. The collection has been formed under the direction of the late Sir Ralph Woodford, and their culture is superintended by Mr. Lockhart.

A few notices may enable the reader to understand better the objects in view. On the left is seen a colonnade, or portico, which leads to the principal entrance. This affords a agreeble shade during the heat of the day, and commands a view of the Circular, which is the favourite drive of the inhabitants of Trinidad. The more lofty part of the house in the background is occupied as bed-rooms. The advanced portion in the centre are the public reception rooms of the Governor. In the drawing-room are the portraits of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, General Picton, Colonel Young, General Halsey, and Sir Ralph Woodford, the two latter by Sir Thomas Lawrence. A portion of the low continuation towards the right, open at the sides to admit a free circulation of air, is a dining-room, or hall, which is agreeably refreshed by the constantly falling water of a handsome fountain in the angle formed here with the body of the house. Conveniently adjoining, a more lofty building contains the kitchen, servants' hall, etc., a covered gallery lends thence to a Chinese bath on the extreme right of the spectator. Nearly the whole of these buildings are constructed of wood, which, from its lightness and tenacity, is found to resist better than stone the frequent violent earthquakes to which most of the Islands are subject. This advantage however is nearly counterbalanced by the facility with which the walls and roof absorb and transmit the intolerable heat of a West Indian sun, for ever precluding the delightful coolness enjoyed in the more solid structures of other climates.
CARTING CANES.

From the field the canes are immediately carried in carts drawn by mules or oxen to the mill. Here the saccharine juice is pressed out by a very simple contrivance, which will be better understood by the wood-cut given below. Three horizontal, or more frequently vertical rollers, are made to revolve at a moderate rate by machinery, of which the prime mover is two, and, sometimes three pairs of mules attached to the mill-sweep (long wooden arms as represented in the plate). A Negress, called the "feeder," stationed at a convenient place, introduces the fresh canes between the two first rollers, by which they are drawn up, and being retained in contact with the centre roller by a groove (as seen in the cut), descend between that and the third, when they are removed by a person appointed for that purpose. The exhausted canes, under the name of "Bagass," are laid up in a separate building, till by the evaporation of the moisture they have become excellent fuel for the furnace of the boiling-house.

The vicinity of a mill in crop time, is generally a very gay scene. The Negroses comfort themselves in the increased labor which is requisite to prevent fermentation in the newly cut cane, by a boisterous mirth that knows no relaxation. Some gifted individual extemporizes a line or two, when he is joined by the whole gang, with a power of songs that would cause the despair of a chorus at a minor theatre.

This sketch is taken from the estate of St. Clair Farm, in the occupation of Robert Gray, Esq.
THE PITCH LAKE.

We shall take the liberty of borrowing our description of this interesting natural phenomenon from a paper communicated by Sir J. E. Alexander to Mr. Martin, and inserted by him in his valuable History of the British Colonies.

"At the small hamlet of La Braye, on the South-western side of the Island, a considerable extent of coast is covered with pitch, which runs a long way out to sea, and forms a bank under water. The pitch lake is situated on the side of a hill, eighty feet above the level of the sea, from which it is distant three quarters of a mile; a gradual ascent leads to it, which is covered with pitch in a hard state, and trees and vegetation flourish upon it. The road leading to the lake runs through a wood, and, on emerging from it, the spectator stands on the borders of what at the first glance appears to be a lake, containing many wooded islets, but which, on a second examination, proves to be a sheet of asphaltum, intersected throughout by crevices three or four feet deep, and full of water. The pitch at the sides of the lake is perfectly hard and cold, but as one walks towards the middle with the shoes off in order to wade through the water, the heat gradually increases, the pitch becomes softer and softer, until at last it is seen boiling up in a liquid state, and the soles of the feet become so heated, that it is necessary to dance up and down in the most ridiculous manner. The air is then strongly impregnated with bitumen and sulphur, and the impression of the feet is left upon the face of the pitch. During the rainy season it is possible to walk over the whole lake nearly, but in the hot season a great part is not to be approached. Although several attempts have been made to ascertain the depth of the pitch, no bottom has ever been found. The lake is about a mile and a half in circumference; and not the least extraordinary circumstance is, that it should contain eight or ten small islands, on which trees are growing close to the boiling pitch. In standing still on the lake near the centre, the surface gradually sinks, forming a sort of bowl as it were; and when the shoulders become level with the lake, it is high time to get out. There is a metallic substance thrown up by the pitch fountains, much
THE PITCH LAKE.

resembling copper ore. Science is at a loss to account for this extraordinary phenomenon, for the lake does not seem to occupy the mouth of an exhausted crater, neither is the hill on which it is situated of volcanic origin, for its base is clay. The flow of pitch from the lake has been immense, the whole country round, except near the Bay of Grappe, which is protected by a hill, being covered with it, and it seems singular that no eruption has taken place within the memory of man, although the principle of motion still exists in the centre of the lake. The appearance of the pitch which had hardened is as if the whole surface had boiled up in large bubbles, and then suddenly cooled; but where the asphaltum is still liquid, the surface is perfectly smooth."
NEGRO AND INDIAN HEADS.

It may be requisite to remind some of our readers, that the Negro and Indian form two of the five great varieties, into which modern science has divided the whole human race. In this plate is shown in how marked a manner the distinction is traceable in the form of the head. The young physiologist may need to be informed, that the forepart of the skull is supposed to contain the organs of the intellectual faculties, which in their full development are peculiar to man, and the back part those of the grosser passions, which are common to him with the lower animals. The narrow, receding forehead, and the disproportionate size of the back part of the skull, indicate, in characters not to be mistaken, the feeble intellectual powers, and predominant animal propensities, for which the Negro is remarkable. The low forehead, deep set eye, and compressed lips, denote the mean capacity, supplying by subtility or obstinate endurance, the deficiency of physical power, which have ever characterized the American Savage.

* Sir C. Bell has the following ingenious observations on the position of the lower part of the Negro face: "Professor Camper attributes the elevation of the face to the heaviest part of the head being behind. But I think the reverse. The head being movable on the pivot of the vertebrae, must be always balanced; and, if it were heavier backward, it must be inclined forward, to relieve the muscles and balance the head. But, being heavier before, and falling naturally forward in the Negro, it is thrown backward to oppose and relieve the muscles which support the head behind."
NEGRO NURSING.

The manner of carrying their children astride on the hip, which, it is believed, is peculiar to the Negress, is represented in the following plate. Notwithstanding that it causes a constant inclination to the other side, it never produces deformity. This is supposed to be attributable to the strength their bodies acquire in the unconstrained movements their limbs enjoy, from the almost total absence of clothes during infancy. The female is in the usual dress worn by the Negresses in the occupations of the field. It consists of a chemise of cotton, confined by a girdle; sometimes, of a vest down to the waist, and a loose petticoat from thence to the knees. The neck is covered with several rows of coral and glass beads, and the ears adorned with immense earrings. The head is bound round with a Madras handkerchief, in the becoming arrangement of which, on Sundays or other holidays, all the taste of the wearer is exhausted. The more coquettish, by perseverence and a plentiful use of oil or tallow, sometimes succeed in seducing a lock of their short woolly hair into the stunted resemblance of a Buckram* curl. The effect produced is attempted to be shown in the plate.† The usual form of negro hat is given in the background. The walls, consisting of a kind of wicker-work, covered with a thick coating of mud, afford abundant protection in so fine a climate, and as they are kept neatly whitewashed, present an appearance of comfort which a European would not anticipate. The roof is thatched with what is locally called "trash," that is, the dead leaves of the cane, which are stripped off two or three times during its growth.

In the hand of the figure is a tootoo, one of the numerous vessels formed by the Negroes for domestic purposes from the shell which covers the fruit of the calabash tree.

* Buckra, the Negro term for a white.
† Also in plate of Negro and Indian Hands.
SUNDAY MORNING IN THE COUNTRY.

The markets in the West Indies are supplied almost entirely by the Negroes of the surrounding country. As their absence from the estates on week-days would have been a great loss of work to their masters, they had been allowed to acquire a kind of prescriptive right to the Sunday morning for that purpose. Early on that day, the roads leading into the chief towns used to be crowded with Negroes, chiefly women, bringing to market the stock and produce of their provision-grounds. It has been attempted to give as characteristic a representation as possible of the usual travelling costume of the Negro, and of his mode of addressing a friend. The opening salutation, to one whom it is desirable to treat with respect, is generally, "How di, compé?" or (if to a female), "macommé?" to which the usual reply is, "Heb, compó, da same ting alway; how you'self?" The conversation then proceeds, with great animation and abundance of action, in a mongrel lingo, locally termed, "talki-talki," a jumble (unintelligible to a novice) of corrupt French, Spanish, English, and native African. The half-civilized custom of carrying the shoes on a journey is universal with the Negroes. They are however careful to put them on, when about to enter a town.

On the right of the observer, is given a specimen of a young Papan-tree, distinguished by its straight stem, and circular form of its foliage. On the left, a Cocoo-nut-tree is introduced.

* The Sunday market has been since suppressed.
† "Compó," and "macommé," are corruptions of the French "compère" and "macèrent."
BED-STOCKS.

This is one of a series of plates, in which it is proposed to exhibit the various kinds of stocks directed by Government* to be used in the Crown Colonies before the Abolition Act passed. It may be seen, from the care taken for the ease of the prisoner, that no punishment is attempted in the Bed-Stock beyond confinement of the person. They are generally placed in some of the out-houses belonging to the estate, where the offender may be denied the society and encouragement of his friends or accomplices. The Bed-Stocks are usually, indeed, employed in cases of drunkenness, when the individual is callous to the shame of exposure. As the Negro is often unwilling to bear the pain caused by a dressing, which may have been applied to a wound or sore, it is requisite on such occasions to confine the hands behind the back, to prevent him from removing the bandages. A plentiful provision of warm clothing is rendered necessary by the total inability of the Negro to bear cold, without serious injury to his health. A tin mask, such as is put on the heads of Negroes addicted to the unaccountable propensity of dirt-eating, is seen hanging against the wall.

* An Order in Council, dated Sept. 2d, 1834, restricts the use of the Bed-Stocks in these terms: "For the confinement of the feet, during the day, only provided, that for such offence the period of confinement shall not exceed six hours."
NEGRO FIGURANTI.

As a Negro dance is given elsewhere, we shall confine ourselves at present to a few remarks on one or two attitudes used by them on such occasions, and which, for greater distinctness, we have illustrated more minutely in the annexed plate. It will appear to the most cursory observer, that all their movements in dancing are marked by great activity. They seem to seek in muscular exertion a means of letting off a portion of the superabundant animal spirits of which they appear to keep a supply in reserve for such occasions. The bending of the body forwards, shown in the two female figures, which is accompanied by an indescribable wriggling motion from side to side, is worthy of notice. The musical instrument called a shakshak, in the hands of another female, will be mentioned on a future occasion. The putting of one leg over the shoulder, and dancing on the other, will be recognised as a common trick with clowns and mountebanks at our fairs. Such boisterous mirth is characteristic of this light-hearted race, one of whose chief resources, in the absence of more intellectual pleasures, it was, doubtless, intended to be.
PITCH-LAKE PALM.

It is at all times exceedingly difficult for a person to give an interesting description of even well known specimens of natural history. But in the case of new or uncommon species, the delicacy of the task is only to be overcome by the necessity of circumstances, or by the hope of exciting some more experienced person to apply to the subject the stores of a more extended knowledge.

This plate represents a splendid specimen of the luxuriant vegetation of the Torrid Zone. It is called in Trinidad, “the Pitch-Lake Palm,” as it is found indigenous in no other part of the Island. But the most celebrated Botanists, to whom the drawing has been shown, profess that they are unable to identify it with any of the known varieties of the Palm. Under these circumstances we will give from memory, and without any attempt at systematic description, a few particulars which we learned during our residence in the Island.

The trunk is of a pale ash colour, as is the case with the Palm tribe generally. The foliage presents the tints of Spring and Autumn at the same time, the rising branches bursting forth in the most lovely green, while those below fall in rich autumnal browns, and as they decay leave those indentations, which are visible in the plate. The flowers, which are yellow, hang like beads from strong sweeping branches, producing a most beautiful effect. As they decay they become dark brown, fall, and like the leaves are soon succeeded by a fresh race as ephemeral as their predecessors.

To the left is seen an Indian hut, which, on comparison with that of the Negroes in a former plate, will be found essentially to differ from it. It is formed of bamboo wattled together with great ingenuity. The roof is covered with dried Palm leaves, while the projecting gable at the end forms a rude portico, under which the women labour and the men doze away their listless hours in all the dignity of idleness.
THE numerous Works, which have recently appeared describing the West Indies, their Scenery, and the condition of their motley Population, having been generally unaccompanied by Plates, they have failed in giving the vivid impression which Drawings can alone convey, or the clear illustration which the subject so well merits.

To supply this deficiency will be one of the principal objects sought to be attained in the proposed Work. Trinidad, having received the deserved title of the "Indian Paradise"* from the charms of its scenery, affords a happy subject for illustrating the striking features of the regions, of which it forms so interesting a portion. It is presumed, the subjects selected will afford a better idea than mere words can give of the various produce and objects, to which a West India Planter has to devote his attention, and which characterise in so marked a manner the far-distant land in which his lot is cast.

The Negro Characters will be chosen, as much as possible, with a view to exemplify their condition and peculiar habits. Most of the Punishments depicted are those now authorized to be inflicted.

The Process of making Sugar will necessarily be connected with the scenes introduced in the course of the Work. A few specimens will also be given of the Vegetation, which rises with such magnificence and beauty in a tropical climate. They will give some idea of the luxuriance, rapid growth, and majestic grandeur of the vegetable kingdom of that Land of the Sun.

As many of the subjects may be considered as Illustrations of preceding Works, little more will be attempted in the Letter-press which will accompany the Plates, than may be deemed requisite to explain them.


W. BAYT, PRINTER, NEWSTEAD STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE.