

We expect to reach Jamaica on Saturday, when we shall lose nearly all our most agreeable fellow-passengers, and then Dulness will have her reign. Meantime, the captain here, and all the officers, are most civil and obliging. The doctor is an amusing and gentleman-like person."

LETTER V.

THE PASSAGE FROM ST. THOMAS'S TO VERA CRUZ.

*On board the "Forth," 350 miles from
Havana, 9th January, 1851.*

THE first day of the year set in with rain; and every place on board being then shut up, the smell was close and disagreeable: the heat was suffocating. But the weather cleared up as the day advanced; and in the evening we had one of those glorious sunsets which at once astonish and delight the first visitors of a tropical clime. No pencil which ever obeyed the sublime inspirations of the highest genius, could transfer to canvass the splendour and gorgeous colours of a tropical sunset, such as that which we witnessed on the first evening of the year; so I must leave to your own imagination the grandeur and beauty of the bright, but evanescent, scene, which is better than dimming and obscuring all its glories in a vain

attempt to shadow them forth in the meagre colourings of language.

We got into the pretty bay of St. Thomas's about six A.M., Tuesday, the 2nd of January; and when we anchored within three-quarters of a mile of the shore, heavy showers again unfortunately commenced. We saw another steamer in the roadstead; and judging that it waited our arrival, previously to sailing for England, we began to rejoice that our good luck had so opportunely sent us into St. Thomas's.

We were destined to be wofully undeceived. In a quarter of an hour, we learned from Captain Sturdee, who commanded the "Forth," the steam-packet in question, that the one bound for England, despairing of our arrival, had sailed the *night before*; that he himself had waited five days at Bermuda for us; and that *now* the "Avon" must proceed no farther on her original voyage. At Havana so strict a quarantine had been established, that no vessels direct from England were even allowed to touch there: that, accordingly, the "Forth," which had been on inter-colonial service, was waiting to take the mails and the passengers forward; and that the poor "Avon,"

and poor Captain Hast, were to replace Captain Sturdee on disagreeable colonial duty.

Surprised and disappointed at this unlooked-for change, we were nevertheless constrained to leave the "Avon"; but meantime, the day being fine, we proceeded to spend a couple of hours on shore.

Making up a party in three of the shore-boats which had come off, each manned by two "darkies," one rowing, and the other sitting idly in the bows, we landed at a little jetty, on which stood a group of the dingy denizens of St. Thomas's, male and female. The previous, or New-Year's, day had been kept as a high holiday, which many were careering into the next, with an easily understood disinclination, on the part of the *ladies*, to doff their gaudy garments too soon.

Amid the chattering and laughing of these light-hearted beings, and walking along a row of pretty cocoa-nut trees, on which, in great abundance, hung their fruit, we presently found ourselves in the town. After regaling ourselves with ices and sherry-cobblers, we perambulated the principal street, unpaved (of course), irregular, and uncomfortable. The "stores" and shops were mostly Yankee or Danish. We were much

1020001191

amused by some of the Negresses and Mulattoes who came round us, trying to sell their wares. One very smart young lady, "a yellow gal," such as the serenaders at St. James's theatre might have taken for a study, wore, in ostentatious display, much finery, bedizened with many nick-nacks, and was full of lively and ready talk. The damsel had five plain gold rings on her marriage-finger, though she assured us she was single; and, indeed, the number of her other trinkets, and the care with which she was dressed, certainly indicated that she was rather bent on conquest, than that she had already five lords and masters.

Time having been given us to *dine* on shore, we had an excellent repast at the truly comfortable hotel they have here, with abundance of good claret, a bottle of Madeira, and dessert: the charge, for the dinner was the extremely moderate one of nine dollars for eight persons. In the wide corridor, the great heat was alleviated by the sea breeze, and pleasant we found it, after our hot walk, here to sit down and rest.

After dinner, when we had got to music and dancing, and were in high glee—Boom! went the

warning gun, to recall us on board; and, for a moment, we were electrified. Hurry ensued. Our hill was bawled for; down stairs flew the ladies, tying their bonnet-strings as they descended, and, in double post haste, half afraid of being left behind, we got into our boats waiting at the jetty.

St. Thomas, you know, is a Danish settlement, and has long been a striking instance of the good fruits of Free Trade. Created a free port, it became, as such, an entrepôt; and although in itself a poor place, it soon grew into a rich and a prosperous island.

The Forth was ready to get under weigh when we reached her. We bid an affectionate farewell to our Avon friends, particularly to Captain Hast, leaving behind the following passengers, who remained either in the Avon, or at St. Thomas's:—

Mr. G—, bound for his family property, in Barbadoes.

Señor B— and two *Attachés*, bound for St. Domingo.

Mr. D—, he of the black beard.

Mr. L—, the Bermuda slop-seller; the poor old Dutch planter, "Surinam;" a Swede, from St. Kitt's; and

Mr. M—, the quiet and unobtrusive, but very sensible lawyer of Nassau.

Our greatest loss here was Mr. G—, for his good nature and many estimable qualities had made him a universal favourite on board.

We sailed at half-past four, P.M.* With splendid moonlight weather, we came abreast of San Juan de Porto Rico, at two A.M., on Wednesday, and, to save time, Captain Sturdee sent the mails in by a boat, which returned at six, when we proceeded on our passage. We had a fine view of the castle and fortifications of San Juan (or St. John's, as generally called), which are equally strong and handsome. They stand on a promontory; and the land thus running out peninsular-wise, a strait is formed, by which you run up to the inlet or harbour of San Juan; while the town, lying on the inner declivity, is covered from the sea-view. The island itself is very beautiful, well cultivated, thickly populated (comparatively with the other islands), and, I fancy, from being left so much to itself, the most populous settlement (except Cuba) in the West Indies. It belongs to Spain, and presents the anomaly, although it constitutes a highly

* On applying to my waistcoat pocket for my watch, I recollected, when too late, that I had left it hanging in my cabin, on board the Avon.

interesting and significant fact, of being almost entirely cultivated by the free labour of whites, of whom there are three hundred thousand, with something under fifty thousand slaves. This has arisen from the colony having been originally a penal settlement, whence the white population is mostly composed of descendants of Spanish convicts. During a great part of the day, we sailed along the coast, obtaining fine views of its rich, diversified, and romantic scenery.

On Saturday morning, the 6th, after a delightful run, (I speak not of the intermediate places at which we did not touch,) we made Jamaica, once so rich and renowned as the chief West India possession of Great Britain, now so notorious for its lamentable decay. The people at home view the Jamaica planters as prodigal sons, who have wasted their substance in riotous living, far distant from their own homes — reckless of their own affairs; and who must, therefore, take the consequences of their folly and profusion. The Jamaica "Interest" accuse John Bull of having deserted the children of his first love, for the sake of the family which has grown up, since he wedded that

low, vulgar, but imperious creature, Madam Free Trade. Loud are the complaints—bitter the criminations and recriminations on both sides; and some people think that, in this, as in many similar cases, the reason and equity of the question are, more or less, removed from the two extremes—that, if each party conceded something, matters might begin to mend. I myself, however, profess the opinion, after hearing much debate on the question, that, if there were no absenteeism—if the estates were cultivated with science and economy, by their own resident proprietors; they would not suffer from the want of labour; neither would they require protection.

In the meantime, having no wish to pronounce dogmatically, seeing the problem is *not* of such *very* easy solution as some folks fancy, I proceed to say that at one, P.M., Saturday, the 6th, we hove to, or stopped our engines off Port Royal, whence the panorama is imposing, having the Blue Mountains in the back ground. Port Royal, on a tongue of low land, is a naval station, and, as our guide book * says, “is formed by an inlet of

* Written by Mr. Osborne, and authorised by the Royal West India Steam Packet Company.

the sea, between the main land, and a long sand bank, called the Palisades, on the point of which Port Royal stands.”

Thence to Kingston, we had about six miles to sail across the harbour; and, as we approached the rough, dirty, rude little quays which line the shore, and are supported by coarse wooden piles, nothing could be more unpromising than the look we here got of the town. The streets appeared to be straight and regular, but narrow, filthy, and unpaved, and the houses dilapidated. However, the quay, or shore part, may be considered, I suppose, the Wapping of Kingston. The guide-book gives, or borrows, a very glowing description of the surrounding country; but I fear it is, in part, a representation of what the thing was, not of what it is. The grandeur and dark sterility of the mountains remain; but the “extensive cane-fields” have too generally disappeared; while the “pride of cultivation” is fast sinking into apathetic abandonment of the finest lands. This is truly lamentable; but I cannot help thinking that, till the Jamaica proprietors dismiss from their minds all hope of what has become (right or wrong), the *ignis fatuus* of protection—that, till they

throw off all dependence on extraneous aid which they will never receive—; they will scarcely make a stand against what appears to be at present a too palpably impending ruin. “God helps them,” says the old proverb, “who help themselves”; and I think the planters would do well to lay this indubitable truth to heart.

On the Forth getting up to its own station, we found the wharf crowded by dirty-looking negroes, who were the porters, carters, cocheys, and boatmen of the place. No police—no order; and the parties, who landed with their luggage, were themselves lugged about with the most unceremonious freedom, by the “darkies.” It was highly amusing to us, who remained on deck, to see how they hustled Capt. F— and Lieut. C—, as they were coming on board; the whole scene giving us a very low opinion of the municipal management of Kingston.

We almost all dined on board; and we were told that, the only thing we could do in the evening, was to take a drive to “Upper Camp,” the barracks of the town; where two of our fellow-passengers were now to take up their residence—Lieutenant C—, and Ensign R—, both of the 1st West India regiment.

Our agreeable friend Mr. S—, who has not only large estates in Jamaica, but is head of an eminent mercantile house there, was at hand to order for us what we wanted. So, after dinner, a very good turn out—a phaeton and pair, with a very decent looking “darkie” as driver, being in readiness for us, we took a kind farewell of Mr. and Mrs. S—, with mutual assurances of renewing our acquaintance in England, should we happily get back to our native land. H— and Miss F— got into the phaeton, Miss E— F— and I took our places beside our coachman, on an ample dickey, and away we drove through the streets of Kingston.

As we advanced, we found some tolerable houses in the town; but still the appearance of the whole was poor, and every here and there very desolate; for, wherever a house had been burned down, had fallen down, or had been left unfinished, there it remained in its ruins: and of such houses, or carcasses of houses, we saw very many. Not one street is paved; and a superficial sandy soil, overlaying a clay stratum, with innumerable deep ruts and holes, formed a rough, unequal, and uneasy carriage-way. Pigs, blackies, and brownies, young and old, large and small; rum-shops, and queer-

(or, if you like, *rum-*) looking stores, were mixed up in the streets with the better sort of houses; and, altogether, I should pronounce Kingston, or the chief town of our chief West India colony, a sad disgrace to our colonial character.

As we approached the outskirts, the aspect of affairs improved; and once fairly out of the town, the scene gradually became pretty and picturesque. A singular conformation of the hills, a rough and broken surface, with a peculiar red tinge of the soil, gave them a pleasing and novel aspect; and the villas, or "penns," which lay scattered on either side of us, lent beauty to the drive. These villas are not kept with the care and elegance of our velvet-lawn country retreats in England; but the shrubs and trees and flowers which everywhere abound, display all the luxuriance and beauty of a tropical clime. The enclosures, too, composed here of the orange, and there of the aloe, although to me "familiar as household gods," always strike the stranger as giving a "foreign" aspect to the scene.

A spacious area has been cleared away for the barracks; and they look airy, roomy, and healthful, commanding a fine view of the harbour. We

were told that, after all, they might have been better placed. After driving round them, and seeing young R— in his mess-room, we returned by a different and more sequestered, but still extremely pretty, route (the distance being only two miles), and we drew up at Mrs. Bogle's boarding-house, a comfortable-looking place, where Captain F— had fixed on staying till he could get off to his own head-quarters. We remained for an hour and a half; and we took our leave with the feeling that we had seldom fallen in with a more estimable family than that of Captain F—.

We now hastened on board, to turn our thoughts to England; and to assure you all, through our letters, of our constant reminiscences of home. We were to sail at six in the morning; so we had heavy epistolary labours to accomplish in a limited time.

We were regretting, as we drove to the quay, that some mischance had denied us the pleasure of saying good-bye to Captain D—; but as we entered the gateway, we heard some one hallooing after us, and presently up came our friend. He had left his party, to bid H— and myself farewell; so we shook hands, amid many expressions of

mutual regret at parting. He was, with justice, looked on as the *facilis princeps* of our passengers.

These being now very much diminished in number, I got transferred to a better cabin, where I sat down, accompanied and assisted by H—, to write letters for England. At half-past twelve, she retired. I closed at half-past two in the morning; went on deck to breathe the balmy air, to take my last view of the scenery, now made doubly serene by a soft, clear moonlight, reflected back from the bosom of the placid sea. The murmuring ripple of the waves fell mournfully on my ear, and led my mind to a somewhat melancholy contemplation of the vicissitudes of life, and to the wonderful variety of scene and fortune which the course of time offers to the restless mind of man. In such mood, I sat on deck for an hour; and, after retiring, ere I could bring sleep to refresh my weary frame in my crib, the bustle of getting under weigh began. The dog-watch sounded four bells, and as at last I fell into an uneasy slumber, I felt that we were once more steaming on the Atlantic.

LETTER VI.

PASSAGE FROM ST. THOMAS'S TO VERA CRUZ
CONTINUED.

*At Sea, Lat. 24° 20' N., Long, 84° W.
Friday, 12th January, 1849.*

I have said, in the course of my letters, that a large English packet, running to foreign parts, presents an epitome of the society of the world at large; and now the many devious and unexpected turns which our voyage has taken, may entitle me to call it a pretty accurate representation of the mutabilities of life. This will be best seen, perhaps, when I come to sum up our passage.

We had a delightful run from Jamaica to the Havana: splendid moonlight nights, a favouring breeze, smooth sea, and deliciously balmy air. We were much on deck, and many and various were the nautical games brought out to amuse us:—"Bull" and "Monkey," "Rooster-quarrel," and