THE WEST INDIES.

CHAPTER I.

VOYAGE OUT.

MY REASONS FOR GOING TO THE WEST INDIES—THE PACKET-SHIP PANDORA—HER FIRST VOYAGE AND MANY GOOD QUALITIES—ARRIVAL AT BARBADOS IN TWENTY-FIVE DAYS.

Some men travel for their amusement,—others to acquire knowledge, and not a few in search of health; I was unfortunately of the latter class. That most severe of all human ailments, gout, had made such inroads upon a constitution, otherwise sound, and had so enfeebled a frame, originally strong, that before I was fifty years of age I could with difficulty walk a hundred yards, and was seldom free from pain and suffering for a week together. The usual remedies had failed to produce any permanent relief, and as a last chance it was recommended that I should try the effects of a warm climate.

When the opinion of friends so entirely coincides with one's own wishes, as this did with mine, it is

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pretty certain their advice will be followed. I therefore was not long in soliciting to be placed on the full pay of my commission as a Deputy Inspector General of Army Hospitals, being well aware that wherever an officer of my rank might be required, it would be in a more southern latitude than that of England. My request, after a reasonable time, was granted. I expected to have been sent to the Mediterranean, where the vacancy had occurred that admitted of my being employed, but in this was disappointed; an officer was removed from Barbados to Corfu, and I was ordered to the West Indies. I cannot say that I felt it as any very great disappointment. My principal objects in going upon service were active employment and to get to a warm climate, and I believed Barbados under all circumstances was just as healthy as Corfu. At any rate, the West Indies at that critical period, and when so great a change in the relative condition of their inhabitants was about to take place, presented a wider field for study, and a greater range for original observation, than could possibly be found in the isles of the Mediterranean, and more especially for such studies as through life had been my chiefest delight; consequently I proceeded according to orders, and embarked at Falmouth on the morning of the 9th of November, 1833.

The packet appointed to carry out the West India
mail on this occasion, was the newly-finished brigantine, Pandora. This was to be her first voyage, and as she was the first of her class built by Captain Symonds, upon his much-disputed plans and principles, and was intended to put these principles fairly to the test of experience, there was even some interest attached to the going out in such a vessel. It was very evident, from the moment we got on board, that the commander and his officers considered themselves as intrusted with more than the usual routine of their nautical duties, and had higher objects in view than the mere safe navigation of a packet-ship, and they proved themselves well qualified for the duties required of them. Of the ship’s best trim they were as yet perfectly ignorant, and when a sail was set it was more to ascertain its effects than to prove its necessity. But as every league we proceeded on our way was to afford us some valuable information as to the good or bad qualities, as a sea-boat, of this beautiful little vessel, we started with that kind of excitement which is often the chief ingredient in the ordinary composition of human happiness.

On leaving Falmouth harbour the wind was contrary, but moderate; and as it soon became more southerly, we were enabled to pass the Scilly Islands during the night, and to make a good west course. The Pandora was found to steer well upon a wind, and as
we experienced "a little bit of a gale," when near the longitude of Cape Clear, we had an early opportunity of proving various others of her many good points. Every minute particular, even to the setting of a sail or the pulling of a rope, was carefully recorded in the log; but all that I can find in my note-book, as claiming especial notice, is, the horrible creaking noise made by the beams and timbers, which, for the first week, most effectually banished sleep.

We were able to steer west and by south till the 15th of November, when the wind veered round right a-head, and made it necessary to stand on the other tack, a course about east and by south. We kept on this tack during the whole of the 16th, but on the morning of the 17th we again stood to the westward. It blew pretty fresh all this forenoon, but as the Pandora lay well up, we made a tolerable course.

To our great joy, however, about noon on the 17th, the wind became right fair, and blew a steady breeze, and our good ship's head was turned direct for Barbados. On the 20th at noon we were in latitude $37^\circ 30'\ north$, and longitude $20^\circ west$, with a fair wind and a following sea.

Our whole time was now spent in experimenting—in altering, newly arranging, and in trimming of the sails, high and low, before and abaft, and on both sides, so as to increase the speed or steady the motions
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of the lively Pandora; and certainly she did "walk the waters like a thing of life," and her speed may have been equalled, but was never surpassed, by any vessel under canvass.

If we discovered the mast-heads of a ship at sunrise, we had seen her hull down by noon, and such was the "arrow-like" swiftness with which we passed some of the craft we fell in with, that, as I heard afterwards, the crews of these vessels began to suspect that "the flying Dutchman" had been blown from his usual latitudes, and was now cruising in the Atlantic Ocean.

We made twenty-four degrees of latitude (or fourteen hundred and forty miles), and forty degrees of longitude (nearly two thousand and four hundred miles,—above three thousand miles of a direct run), in fourteen days, and without any necessity for alteringing a single sail, except for the amusement of the commander, or to exercise the men. We anchored in Carlisle Bay at five o'clock on the afternoon of Thursday, the 5th of December.

On the 22d of November (and thirteenth day of our voyage) my remorseless enemy (who had never completely left me for more than a few days during the whole of the previous twelve months) made a violent seizure upon the left lower extremity, and soon confined my observations to a very narrow space. The
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foot, the ankle, and the knee, became affected in regular succession, and the pain—but to the initiated I need only say it was inflammatory gout.

From the 22d of November till the 5th of December I could not move in, and far less stir out of, my cot; but when the cry of “land” was heard, I did beg to be hoisted upon deck, to see the green palms and velvet-looking fields of Barbados. In this I was kindly indulged, when I found we were approaching the shore near to that dangerous reef of rocks, called “the Cobblers,” and certainly the view which burst upon my sight was new and interesting, but not calculated to excite any great astonishment, even in the mind of a “Johnny Raw.”

After doubling the southern point we stood up along the west coast, and soon had a view of the ships of war and other ships anchored off Bridgetown. Five or six of his majesty’s frigates and sloops of war were then in Carlisle Bay, a larger number than usual; and a great many merchant-vessels were busily employed in discharging or taking in their cargoes.

We anchored, as I have said, about five P.M., and the commander went instantly on shore to deliver the mails at the post-office; but I was too unwell to be moved. With the dawn on Friday an effort was made. I was swung down into a boat, and as the
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tide answered, was rowed close under the walls of Hannah Lewis's respectable hotel, and carefully removed by two of her stout black fellows from the shore to the apartments that had been prepared for my use.

The severity of my sufferings soon began to give way under the genial warmth of the Barbados climate. In a few days I was able to walk about my room, and in less than a week to ride out. In twelve days I was quite well, and, thank God, passed three years without any very serious symptom of the enemy's return. I hoped that gout had taken its departure for ever, and was about to offer some sage advice to those who might suffer as I had done, “recommending a trip to the West Indies as an infallible cure,” but I had scarcely conceived the thought, when I received a very painful warning that, like many other “infallible remedies,” this, too, had failed. My disappointment was great, but the pain greater; and the only comfort I have had for many months has been in writing this book.

But I have said enough, and more than enough, of self. The reader now knows why I went to the West Indies, and the way in which I got there; and therefore it is time to put an end to this very uninteresting, but fortunately short chapter.
CHAPTER II.

BARBADOS.


I would say to such of my readers as intend to visit the West Indies, "Banish from your memories all that you may have read or heard of the country, the climate, or the people; and, with a mind as little fettered as possible by any prevailing theory or preconceived opinion, begin and study them on the spot each for himself. You will find the scenery, at whatever island you may arrive, new, and very beautiful; and every spot of earth in the Carribean sea well calculated to engage the attention of any one accustomed to study or to take an interest in the various productions of animated nature." The climate, according to the period of the year at which the traveller may arrive, will at
first be felt as more or less oppressively hot; and the people, whether white, black, or brown, will receive him with a pleasing openness of manner, and an apparent kindness of heart, which, whether real or affected, is at first very engaging; and certainly, all classes, particularly the higher, are most hospitable and courteous to strangers.

Notwithstanding many annoyances from poisonous reptiles, and from stinging insects, and from the sight of crawling vermin, and ugly creeping things, the newly-arrived may (if his own temper will permit,) enjoy tolerable comfort in any one of our West India colonies; and, as a physician, I may tell him, that unless by his own imprudence he lays the foundation of serious disease, there is nothing inherent in the country, the climate, or the annoyances he may meet with, that will lead to any sudden attack of ill-health, or induce either a plague or a pestilence.

The high degree of cultivation at which almost all the islands have arrived, has destroyed the virulence of that marsh-poison, which in former ages frequently proved most destructive to Europeans on their first landing; but, above all, the great and salutary changes which have taken place in the modes of living, and in the habits and customs of the people; the better education and more polished manners of the planters and merchants; and the greater attention paid to clean-
liness and to comfort,—have tended more than any other change to produce that diminished expenditure of human life which, for several years past, has been so remarkable amongst the higher classes of society in the West Indies, and particularly amongst the British officers.

I would, however, warn the reader, that on his arrival in these colonies, the temptations that surround him at first are great, and the incitements to indulgence almost overpowering, yet they must be resisted; for the facility with which disease is contracted, and the fearful rapidity with which it runs its course, ought never for a moment to be lost sight of.

On first landing, the craving desire for liquids is incessant, and most distressing; and the more we drink, the more our desire for drink increases, and by indulging this depraved appetite, there arises that vicious habit of tippling in the morning, which in the olden time too often ended in confirmed drunkenness. But if this desire for drink is resisted, and we endeavour by gentle exercise, constant occupation, and social amusements (as is now generally done), to forget our sufferings, we shall soon overcome that lassitude which is occasioned by unusual exhaustion, and that irritation and craving for liquids, which are encouraged and strengthened by solitary indulgences. The thirst as I have perceived, will become less and