

H A Y T I .

CHAPTER I.

HAYTI, ITS GEOGRAPHY.

THE island of Hayti, formerly Hispaniola or St. Domingo, placed between the 18th and 20th degrees of north latitude, and from 68 to 75 degrees west, has a length of 360 miles from east to west, and a breadth, varying from 60 to 120 miles. Its circumference measured by an even line, excluding the bays, is nearly a thousand miles. This island so important for its situation and great natural advantages, is four times as large as Jamaica, and nearly equal in extent to Ireland. It is situated at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico: is one of the four larger Antilles, and holds the second rank after Cuba, from which it is distant only twenty leagues. Jamaica lies westward of it about forty leagues; and Porto Rico, a large and now populous island belonging to Spain, twenty-two leagues eastward. On the north are the Bahama islands, at a distance of two or three days' sail; and southward, separated by 700 miles of ocean, is the great continent of South America.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

The principal islands adjacent to Hayti and belonging to it, are Gonave, La Saone, Isle de Vaches, and Tortue, all of considerable extent ; but all through the policy of the government uncultivated. Hayti presents the aspect of a large territory composed of mountains and plains, watered by a few extensive unnavigable rivers and innumerable streams : it abounds in forests of mahogany wood and other fine timber—affords a great variety of climate ; and, displays a grandeur and beauty of natural scenery, not surpassed in the tropical regions of the New World, or perhaps of the globe itself.

Like all the other islands of this region, it is subject to awful tempests, known by their Indian name of huricanes, and is liable to frequent shocks of earthquake. The latter formidable phenomenon in 1564, destroyed the newly founded city of Concepcion de la Vega, and has occasioned at several different and distant periods, the overthrow or disturbance of Port au Prince, its present capital. A line of demarcation, in some places artificially drawn, formerly separated the Spanish part of the island from the French ; but there is now no political distinction of territory, the whole country being united under one political head subject to the same laws. The ancient part of the island where the Spanish language is still spoken, embraces more than two-thirds of the soil, and contains only one-sixth of the inhabitants. The population of the Spanish part is estimated at a hundred and thirty thousand ; of the French part, nearly seven hundred thousand. The French or western territory, is the only part of the island that has numerous towns and villages, and it is here principally, that commerce carries on its exchanges with other nations. A large quantity of mahogany

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

GEOGRAPHY OF HAYTI.

3

wood is exported from Santa Domingo, and a good deal of tobacco from Santiago and Port au Platte, all towns once belonging to the Spaniards, and still Spanish as to language and the customs of the people; but the great staples of coffee, cotton, mahogany, and dye-wood, are collected on the French side and shipped from Cape Haytien, Port au Prince, Cayes, Gonaives and Jacmel.

The mountains of Hayti are many of them of great height. The principal range, is that of Cibao, near the centre of the island, from which other chains of hills diverge in different directions. The peak of Cibao is 7200 feet above the level of the sea. The mountains bearing the name of La Selle, Le Mexique, and Le Maniel, are parts of the same range terminating on the southern coast. La Selle has an elevation of 7000 feet, and bears south-west of Port au Prince, at a distance of forty miles. The La Hotte mountains rise in the neighbourhood of Cayes, some of which are said to be as high as those of La Selle and Cibao. Besides these, there are the mountains of Monte Christo running from the north of the island eastward to the Peninsula of Samana, from the summits of which, Columbus gazed with astonishment at the extent and fertility of the plains below, since that period deprived by death and massacre of its original inhabitants, and now known by the expressive name of *la despoblada* or the unpeopled. The other ranges are those of Cahos and Los Muertos, which are rather hills than high mountains, having a mean elevation of about 2500 feet. "This configuration," says Moreau de St. Mery, "and the height of the mountains is the cause why, notwithstanding the great extent of many of its plains, the island when viewed from seaboard appears mountainous altogether,

B 2

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

and that its aspect is so forbidding. But the observer," he continues, "who contemplates these vast chains and all the branches that diverge from them, and pursues their various ramifications over the surface of the island, will see at once the cause of its fertility: they form an immense reservoir for the waters which are distributed to the soil by rivers without number: they temper the heat of a burning sun, arrest the fury of the winds, and multiply the resources of human industry to an astonishing extent."

The most spacious of the plains, is that of Vega Real, which traverses several of the northern departments: its length is 220 miles: it is exceedingly fertile and well watered. Its chief produce, is tobacco of an excellent quality: it grows also sugar and cocoa, and affords pasturage to large herds of cattle; but owing to its present sparse population, yields comparatively little of food or agreeable luxuries to the wants of man. The noble rivers Yague and Youna which traverse its whole extent, will serve greatly to facilitate the transit of its produce, whenever a large and active body of settlers may devote themselves to the cultivation of its soil. This plain alone might well support its million of inhabitants. That of Santa Domingo is the next in importance, and has very few people upon it, although from its fertility and extent of surface—700 square leagues—it would yield, if cultivated, an immensity of produce. The plain of Azua has a surface of 150 square leagues, and that of Neybé eighty square leagues. Of the remaining plains, it is only needful to mention, *La plaine du Nord*, near Cape Haytien, and *Le cul de sac*, near Port au Prince, in both of which, sugar was formerly cultivated to a great extent, and

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

GEOGRAPHY OF HAYTI.

5

where a large number of sugar works and distilleries are still in operation to furnish syrup and rum for the home market.

The principal rivers are the Yague and Youna before mentioned and the Artibonite, whose entire course is 160 miles long in almost a direct line, and which, during the time of its floods, floats on its bosom to the sea, those vast logs of mahogany that find so ready a sale in the markets of Europe, under the name of Spanish mahogany.

Hayti has some lakes of considerable size, where alligators abound: it is rich also in mineral springs, and is believed to possess vast treasures of iron and copper ores, together with gold and silver. The mines that contain the precious metals have long since been abandoned for want of capital.

Such in its physical structure, is one of the islands we proposed to visit on our leaving home in 1839, for a voyage to the West Indies.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

CHAPTER II.

OUTWARD BOUND—SHORES OF HAYTI—JAMAICA—ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE WEST INDIES.

IN the latter part of the year 1839, I left home, accompanied by my wife, on a missionary tour to Jamaica. After stopping by the way at Barbados, Martinique, Tortola, St. Thomas, and Porto Rico, our vessel the Hecla steamer made for the windward passage, and coasted the northern shores of Hayti. The bold outlines of the mountains, which in many places approached to within twenty miles of the shore, and the numerous stupendous cliffs which beetled over it, casting their shadows to a great distance on the deep—the dark retreating bays, particularly that of Samana, and extensive plains opening inland between the lofty cloud covered hills, or running for uncounted leagues by the sea side, covered with trees and bushes, but affording no glimpse of a human habitation—presented a picture of gloom and grandeur, calculated deeply to depress the mind; such a picture as dense solitude unenlivened by a single trace of civilization, is ever apt to produce. Where, we inquired of ourselves, are the people of the country? Where its cultivation? Are the ancient Indian possessors of the soil all extinct, and their cruel conquerors and successors entombed with them in a common grave? For hundreds of miles as we swept along its shores, we saw

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

OUTWARD BOUND.

7

no living thing, but now and then a mariner in a solitary skiff, or birds of the land and ocean sailing in the air, as if to shew us that nature had not wholly lost its animation, and sunk into the sleep of death. Towards the north-west extremity of the island our course became a little enlivened: we entered the bay of Cape Haytien, formerly Cape François, since Cape Henry, and now, for brevity's sake, The Cape. The terrible fortress of La Ferriere, which commemorates the rule of Christophe, and which serves as a mausoleum for his remains, looked down upon us from a distant mountain; two forts commanded the entrance to the harbour, in which were numerous merchant vessels lying at anchor, taking in or discharging their cargoes; and on our right hand, flanked by forest-crowned hills, rose the city itself, once denominated the little Paris—the handsome city of the queen of the Antilles. Our stay was short: we landed for two hours, left the mail from Europe, spoke to the British Vice-Consul, visited the markets, conversed with a few of the black citizens, and again set sail. Before we had passed through the narrow strait that separates Tortue (the Turtle island) from the main-land, we were gratified with a distant view of the town of Port de Paix, rising in amphitheatre on the hills, illumined by the rays of the setting sun. Soon after we headed the Cape St. Nicholas Mole; and the following day landed at Santiago, the eastern capital of Cuba. Here as at Cape Haytien our stay was limited to the time allowed for post-office business; the next day we reached Kingston in Jamaica. It is not the object of this little volume to detail the incidents of our travels in Jamaica, an island so often visited and so well known; but we

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

cannot, in connexion with it, avoid a brief notice of that memorable event which has done so much to change the condition of its people, and seems fraught with such inestimable blessings to posterity. Here we trace the interesting spectacle of a colony, once deeply distressed and clamouring for fiscal aid to the mother-country; now smiling in prosperity and brightened by mercantile hope; not long since distracted by civil disturbances, the fruits of oppression inseparable from its institutions; now enjoying peace and tranquillity, with a docile, loyal, industrious population, whom the Queen of England, or the ruler of any nation, might well be gratified to own as subjects. The grand experiment of giving unqualified freedom to the slaves of Jamaica and our other West Indian islands, has been attended with the happiest success. All classes of the population rejoice in the result. The prognostications of the planters and the mortgagees of colonial property, that the slaves when emancipated would become an idle vagabond race, a nuisance to the soil—that the fields would go out of cultivation—the lives of the white inhabitants be endangered—and the properties ruined—these and other prophecies of the same sackcloth cast, are all falsified by the most gratifying facts. Just the reverse of all this has taken place; and Jamaica and the other islands have begun a new race of prosperity. “*Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.*” The labourers work well for wages, and squatting and vagabondage are unknown. The cane and coffee fields partially neglected at the coming in of freedom, owing to the injudicious attempts of overseers and attorneys to coerce labour, by means of rent, are recovering their former fruitfulness. Two years have passed away in which we

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

have seen diminished produce, the consequence of unwise conduct on the part of the planters; and a third, in which the deficiency has sprung from a visitation of Divine providence in a long continued drought. Sounder views of political economy, and a wiser conduct than was once pursued have succeeded; the seasons are again propitious, and there is now every reason, with regard to the future, to look for extended commerce and increased prosperity. In passing through Jamaica (and we went into almost every district) we scarcely met with a single individual who seemed to regret the change that had taken place—not one who professed a wish, even for gain's sake, to return to the former system of slavery. We conversed with men of every rank and condition, from the Governor and Judges of the island to the Clerk who serves in the counting-house, and all bore their unqualified testimony to the important fact, that freedom works well. That it works well for the labourer is obvious at every step of the stranger's progress: the proofs are on every hand; that it works well for the proprietor is demonstrable by a few simple and striking facts. The estates of proprietors, in numerous instances, are worked at a less cost now than under slavery. Penn or pasture land, we were told as a matter of common observation, may be worked cheaper than before: some of the large coffee plantations we know are so worked, from the testimony of the managers themselves; and we have in our possession a letter from the attorney of some of the largest sugar estates in the island, in which he distinctly tells us, that he sees no reason why sugar properties in the district where he lives should not be cultivated as cheap as ever they were. To all the proprietors of such lands,

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02438-9 - Brief Notices of Hayti
John Candler
Excerpt
[More information](#)

it is quite evident, that the share of the twenty millions which fell to their lot, was given them for nothing. The compensation money paid by Great Britain to the planters, however it might be intended to operate, serves, not as an indemnity to meet losses accruing from the great and happy change from slavery to freedom, but to clear off the accumulated and fast increasing incumbrances which the oppressive and wasteful system of slavery had induced. A large proportion of the estates in the West Indies had been brought dreadfully into debt, and made subject to heavy mortgages. The compensation money has served to unlock the iron chests and set the securities and title deeds free. Instead of being subject, as formerly, to all the heavy charges of an imperious consignee, imperious and unbending, because the estates were under his power, the planter is now at liberty to send his produce to the best market, to choose for a correspondent the ablest merchant he can find, and to bring the expenses of transport within the utmost economical limits. One step in economy leads to another: he looks about him on every hand: pleased with the success of one experiment, he tries another, and going on as a cautious, prudent man ever will do, gets delivered from the consequences of former poverty, neglect, and waste. The consequence of the present state of things: of physical freedom to the slave, and commercial freedom to the master, is this, that landed estates are rising in value. The former money-value of the slaves has already, in perhaps the majority of instances, been transferred to the soil, many properties in land now selling for a much larger sum, than during the agitation of the slavery question the land and the slaves would have sold for together.