THE CIGAR OF DOMINICA

A MORNING WALK IN THE NARROW STREETS OF ROSEAU.

A CENTIPED MADE TO ORDER—SOME ODD THINGS FOUND IN A VERY SMALL SHOP —THE LORD BISHOP.

Gradually we were moving further southward, and gradually the weather was growing warmer. It is warm enough in these latitudes at any time of year, but this time that I had chosen—September and October—is said to be the hottest of all. Antigua is about in latitude 17, and Dominica, which the Trinidad now approached, is just north of the fifteenth degree. After leaving Antigua, coming almost due south, we passed close to the westward of the island of Guadeloupe; but this was not one of our stopping places, and we were only near enough to see dimly its mountain peaks. And almost adjoining Guadeloupe, west of it, is Deseada, a long narrow island; and just south of this the island of Marie Galante, (a French possession, I believe.) But we went past them all, bound for Dominica. Domin-*eck* is the local pronunciation of the name; Domin-*eck*-a will do, but never pronounce it with the accent on the second syllable, as you would naturally do. Guadeloupe is also a French island, and its capital town, like that of St. Kitts, is called Basse Terre. It is one of the largest islands of the Caribbean group, and just above it are too small islands called "The Saints." The mountains of Dominica, according to the guide books, are the highest in this part of the world, reaching to nearly 5,000 feet. When we first saw them their tops were enveloped in clouds—dark, thick lowering clouds; so they were all the time we were there; and so they were still when we left them. It would not be much use for a mountain to be more than 4,000 or 5,000 feet high in this part of the world, for its summit would always be in the clouds. Perhaps it is because the islands stand so close to the sea, so that the clouds cannot find anything else to rub themselves against, but whatever the reason, every high mountain peak is almost constantly shut in from view. Sometimes, but at St. Kitts, this gives them a very handsome appearance, with green cane fields running right up into the sky. But when, as was the case at Dominica, the mountains are covered with timber, and the rain resting on the summits are black and stormy looking, the effect is more startling than handsome, and one can hardly help thinking that the place must be cold and bleak. This impression, of course, is never cold, and it is anything but bleak. It is the wildest and most picturesque English island in the whole West Indies. It is very thinly populated, and large tracts of it have never been explored. Unlike most of the other islands of the Caribbean group, it has creeks and rivers, large mountain lakes and beautiful cascades, in many places dashing hundreds of feet down again, and forming boiling springs, too, but they are so far in the interior that they are seldom visited by strangers. For there are no roads in Dominica—outside of Roseau, not a road on the island worth the name. Tracks made by the island ponies, that are as much at home on the hillsides as on a level. Whatever communication there is between the little settlements is with ponies. Where there are roads, of course there are no wagons or carriages; and when you go to Roseau you need have no fear of being run over. Why Dominica is not better settled and cultivated I will not pretend to say. It is fertile, of course, like everything anything that can be grown in a warm climate, and almost any weather desired can be had—from the great heat of the sea level to the cool and always breezy mountain sides, or the almost chilly mountain tops. Residents told me, after I got there, that they frequently suffered from cold in going over the mountain paths. I went no further than Roseau, and I only suffered from heat; I did not suffer from cold there.

We left Antigua on the afternoon of Monday, Oct. 5, at 5 o'clock, and when Tuesday morning dawned we were lying in the roadstead of Roseau. The run had been a hasty one, for although these ports early in the morning, timing her departures purposely so that she would reach the next place in time for a fair start at the day's work, as well as a pleasure trip, for in the far West Indies early morning is the time of all times to stir about—the time to exercise, to see new places, and to enjoy the fresh, cool air. Our short trip over from Antigua had not been an uneventful one. Having been 10 days at sea, we were all beginning to feel the want of a little amusement in the ship's cabin in the evening, and coming over from Antigua we found it. We had a lady passenger on board who was in deathly fear of centipeds. Wherever she went ashore, they were the dread of her life. Somebody, seeing how she feared them, had maliciously told her that they were frequently brought on board ships in barrels of fruit, and that she could not be too careful, particularly in examining her berth thoroughly before retiring. I had never heard anything lesser telling her, not long before, that the bite of a centiped was not necessarily fatal—that sometimes (but rarely) the victim escaped with nothing more than a fever that lasted for three or four months. The lady believed this, and said that she always examined each article of bedding thoroughly before getting into her berth, and then took extra precautions to sleep in three or four thicknesses of clothing—which must have been comfortable, considering the weather. Her stateroom was one of the "inside" ones, on the main deck, opening off the saloon, and it was lighted and aired by a ventilator that opened from the ceiling to the upper deck. In fine weather this ventilator of course was always open, but there was no communication between the upper deck and the lady's stateroom. Some passenger had come aboard at Antigua with a great quantity of plants growing in boxes, and these had been left standing on the upper deck immediately adjoining the ventilator that led to the lady's stateroom. As soon as she saw this she began to worry. Perhaps the wicked passenger put the notion into her head, but at any rate she was sure the plants were full of centipeds, and that they would crawl down into her stateroom and get into her berth. So she hunted up the stewardess, and nothing would do but those plants must all be moved away and carried to the other side of the ship. This was a work that required some time, and made a good deal of amusement for the other passengers. The wicked passenger was abroad again, and suggested that it would be a good plan to make an imitation centiped and put it in the lady's room. The notion took strongly, and I was appointed a committee of one to make the centiped. Although I had seen any number of these charming creatures, and had assisted in the destruction of a dozen of them, I had never had any hand before in the manufacture of one. But I undertook this commission, with what success you shall soon hear. Among the plants that had been moved were some large ones with thick brown stems about twice as thick as a lead pencil and supplied by nature with great numbers of joints, not more than an inch apart; the stems could be divided into many sections, like a bamboo fishing rod. The stems themselves looked about as much like so many centipeds as anything I ever saw, barring the head legs, and tail. So I got possession of one of the stems, and used that for the beast's body. A piece cut out of the skin of a green lime, (a piece about the size of your little finger nail,) made a beautiful green head for him, and answered for a bit of toothpick. Another piece of green lime skin, well forked, gave him a handsome tail. And innumerable short pieces of toothpicks, stuck into his sides at an angle gave him the necessary legs. I was half afraid of him myself, when I had him finished, he looked so lifelik and savage. And I don't blame my self for that, because the lad afterward declared positively that she saw him squirm. At any rate the wicked passenger took charge of him, and somehow he made his way to the lady's pillow. A I was not in the stateroom when he was discovered, I cannot give exact particular of the result: but there was a great ring ing of electric bells, calling for stewards, a running to this particular stateroom, some little screaming, and a half hour's extra work made for the stewardess, who (being in the secret) merely pretended to quit task of quieting the lady down, which she could not accomplish till she took the green-tailed monster in her hands, and broke him to pieces before her eyes. But even after this the lady remained firm in her conviction throughout the entire voyage that she saw the centiped squirm as he lay on her pillow.

Once more Capt. Fraser kindly gave me the use of the ship's boat, and with my little party I started ashore to see the beauties of Roseau, the capital of Dominica. We landed at a stone pier and stood in the front and main street of the town, facing the water, with a row of rather old buildings on the one side, and a heavy sea wall on the other, which showed signs of frequent hard batterings by heavy waves. These buildings in the front street were built of stone and two stories high—with one exception. This was a large wooden house, (with some stores underneath,) which is occupied by Mr. Stedman, who represents the Anchor Line of Government steamers. They were curious old buildings, these along the water front, with places for shops, most of them, in their first stories, and sometimes a narrow balcony overhead, projecting over the narrow sidewalk. But I did not see that any business was in progress in any of them. Occasionally, in walking along, we came to a pony hitched in front of one of the buildings, and tied to doors to dodge him. When I spoke of the sidewalk a moment ago I meant the street, for there are no sidewalks in Roseau. The streets are narrow, all paved with rounded stones that are about the most uncomfortable streets I ever walked in. The gutter is invariably in the middle of the street, and both sides slope down to it with a very steep slant, so that in walking you have to step one foot up in the air and the other down in a valley. About the first thing we noticed in Roseau was the heat. We noticed it so suddenly and so emphatically that we were glad to take shelter without delay for some shade. It was only between 8 and 9 in the morning, but the sun shone as I think I never saw him shine before—and I have seen some sunshine in Nicaragua in Vera Cruz, which is said to be one of the hottest places in the world. We walked down the front street one block, and then turned up into a side street, with a shop about being at the corner. All this time we furnished much amusement and apparently much gratification to all the natives within sight. They followed us about, watched us unceasingly, and evidently for their friends to have a look. It was almost a repetition of Montserrat, but not quite so bad. However, we were growing used to being the wonder and admiration of the natives. Anybody who thinks about being stared at and audibly commented upon in the street, cannot do better than spend a few months in some parts of the West Indies. The first week or two will harden him to the trying ordeal, and he will rather enjoy it. There is something novel and flattering when you walk through a town to think that the entire population is talking of you. I think we saw one or two white men in Roseau, down by the wharf, but none after that. We went several blocks up the side street into which we turned, and reached at last to various directions (keeping in the shade as much as we could) till we had seen pretty much all there was to see of the town. One colored man came up to us and asked whether we wished to be shown the way to the hotel, but this attention we were forced to decline. Other young gentlemen came to us, at various points, to inquire whether we desired to go to any particular place. Very civil people, and they say—extremely polite to strangers. Extremely anxious, my dear Sir, to make a sixpence. But we had no need of a guide, not caring whether we went east or west, north or south; and then a town is made up of four or five streets running one way, and four or five other streets running at right angles with them, a New-Yorker is not, as you may have noticed, particularly likely to get lost.

We strolled here and there and everywhere, without any object in view, through the burning, but very picturesque rough and jolly cobble-stones, when the extreme limit had been reached and that I could go no further without refreshment. So I asked a young native where I could buy some cigars. He directed me down the street to a shop on the corner. We all walked down and entered a little shop. The part in it allotted to customers was not any larger than some of those tiny "cigar boxes" in New-York, where there is barely room for one man to stand, one customer at the same time. We found a very polite young man (colored, of course) in attendance, and a stout, elderly colored dame, evidently the proprietress, overseeing things. The short counter and spaces allotted to customers was littered with boxes, baskets, jugs, and various things that hardly belonged there, and there were two or three chairs and a small light metal table, for the use of such as were invited customers were in the habit of taking such beverages as were dispensed in another part of the establishment, and which we could see plainly enough through a sort of wooden railing, much like the railing of a horse's stall. The elderly dame, I should have mentioned, was decidedly French and spoke with a strong French accent. Everything about the place had a strongly un-English air. Dominica is near the French colonies, (and, I believe, was once a French colony itself,) that half the people talk Creole French, and everything has a little the air of it, as described by Stevenson by lightning. In this shop I am trying to describe the chairs we sat on were light French chairs; the metal table, I venture to say, came originally from Paris, and was probably cheap, and as the stout colored lady mixed cooling drinks for customers in the small pen beyond the racks, she talked to them in French. It may not have been pure French, but only such as I, who could not understand a word of it; and I am such a good French scholar that I can order several French dishes off a bill of fare with great *savoir vivre*. As soon as we were settled by the Madame in charge of the department of the racks and bottles, and came in where we were and invited us to be seated. She inquired where we came from, and how long we should stay, how long we would stay in Roseau. She invited us very politely to inspect everything in the shop. And would not the ladies drink a glass of iced lemonade? Or perhaps we might like some. We had heard the rattling of ice in the glasses, and until you go down to a hot place like Roseau, and stroll for half an hour through the baking streets, you will never know how delicious iced drinks are. Certainly, we would all try a glass of iced lemonade; and the sooner the better. And what do you think she brought us? Here in this country, where lemons are as thick as apples do at home—where hundreds of bushels of them go to waste every year, where in any month or any season Summer or Winter, you can step out into the back yard and pick a lemon, she brought us a quart bottle of some French stuff, imported from Paris and called lemonade. There came with it a plate of cracked ice, and this at least looked tempting. We poured out a glass each, and found it quite as vile as we expected. But this was their idea of a good glass of lemonade. To make it out of lemons off their own trees would be much too commonplace and ordinary. We went into the shop and saw several shelves full or queer shaped jugs and pitchers made of red clay some of which we bought. They came from Spain. We found one thing that we had been looking for, and which we were glad to get. It was a genuine Carib basket. I had heard a great deal about these baskets on the ship, and had seen some of them, but had not had the chance to buy one. I had understood that their name was "carry baskets," from the ease with which things could be carried in them. But I learned better in Dominica They are made by the Caribs of the island, by three small bands of whom still live on this and other Caribbean Islands. They are sometimes larger than a steamer trunk, and from this run down in size till they are no larger than a cigar box. The most curious thing about them is that they are waterproof. They are very closely woven of something that looks like split bamboo, in two parts, an outer and an inner. Between the two a layer of large leaves is put, and they are then firmly woven together. The basket is made in two sections, a base and a cover, both exactly alike, except that the cover is the merest little bit larger than the base, so that it will fit down over it. When the two are put together they are like a trunk, without any trays or drawers inside, and a strap or a cord around them holds them tight together. The large ones make good trunks, and are extensively used for that purpose in the southern West Indies. They are commonly said to be waterproof, and I had the curiosity to try the small one I bought and see whether it would really hold water. A week or two here in Northern Carolina I filled it up with Croton water brought down in the ship's tanks. I found it as nearly waterproof as any ordinary trunk would be. It leaked a little, but not much. So much, I imagine, as a steamer trunk would. But not a basket it was much nearer waterproof than anything else I ever saw.

After leaving this odd little shop, having bought some of the worst cigars (from one of the neighboring islands) that anybody could wish for, we walked a little further about the town. The buildings were nearly all of stone, most of them small, and generally only one story high. They came flat up to the street in every instance. I did not see one with even an apology for a yard in front of it. Presently we started back for the boat, as we seem to be believed, all the beauties of Roseau. Consul Jackson, at Antigua, had given me a note of introduction to Mr. Stedman, but we were to be in the place such a very short time I thought it would be useless to present it. When we reached the landing we found Capt. Fraser and another gentleman just coming up the steps.

"I believe you are acquainted with this gentleman," said Fraser said to me.

I said I thought not.

"Oh, yes you are," said the other gentleman. "I am Mr. Dupont, and I was purser of the Orinoco when you went out to Bermuda in her three or four years ago."

Of course I remembered him then, and of course was glad to meet him again so far away from home. The ships running to Bermuda and Nassau during the years to the Windward Islands are owned by the same company—the Quebec Steamship Company—and Mr. Dupont had made a change of base, and instead of running to Bermuda was going back and forth among these islands, acting as supercargo and general agent for the ships. He had then spent a good many months among these islands, and knew them thoroughly. During the years to the Windward Islands are owned by the same company—the Quebec Steamship Company—and Mr. Dupont had made a change of base, and instead of running to Bermuda was going back and forth among these islands, acting as supercargo and general agent for the ships. He had then spent a good many months among these islands, and knew them thoroughly. During the years time on I found him a better source of information than the New-York Directory, the Gazetteer, or even a cyclopedia. I do not think I have asked him a question about any of the islands that he could not answer. We had adjoining staterooms outside, (for he went on down to Trinidad with us,) and I do not know any more pleasant part of the voyage than our after-dinner chats on deck, when, having drawn our steamer chairs up to the rail and loaded our pipes, we sat down and discussed the places we were just going to or had left.

When we returned to the ship we found on board the Lord Bishop of Dominica, who had come out to bid good-bye to Gov. Lees. I had the pleasure of meeting him, and found him not only a gentleman of substantial man physically, but agreeable and communicative. He told me some things about the Catholic church on the island and about his own life there, among others that he usually went all over the island on pony back. However, I did not know till just as he was going that he was the "Lord" Bishop, and then I heard Lady Lees on his departure say, "Good-bye, my lord!" and knew I had been talking to him for half an hour just as if he had been any ordinary man. Soon after his departure one of the mates came up and said to me:

"Do you want to see Robinson Crusoe on his raft?"

Looking over the port side, we saw about the smallest raft that ever was put together. It was made of two logs not more than eight or nine feet long, with two cants nailed across the top, and on this two colored boys, a keg full of oranges, and a small box of limes. The boys were on a trading expedition, and wanted to sell their oranges and limes as soon as we leaned over the side they asked us to buy.

"How much do you want for your oranges?" I asked.

"A shillin' a hundred," the largest boy replied, that meant an English shilling—24 cents. The keg held only about 50 or 60 oranges.

"And how much for limes?"

"Sixpence a hundred," meaning 12 cents.

I bought all they had, just to encourage West Indian trade. We lowered a little basket with a rope, and they filled it with oranges and we drew it up. It took several drawings up to load the entire cargo; and when, at the end, we lowered a small silver coin, and they were not able to make change, and we told them to keep the sixpence that was due us, they hardly seemed to know what such a thing meant. But they showed a great deal of enterprise for West Indian boys in paddling a quarter of a mile out to the ship on such a raft to do a little business. If American boys should do anything like that I think there was a circus in town and they were anxious to go, but there was no circus in Dominica. I doubt whether there ever was one there.

On our way home there was a funny scene aboard the ship at Dominica. I mention it here in describing the downward trip because I most likely shall never return to that evergreen island either bodily or in the spirit. We lay there on the downward trip for some hours, including one entire evening. This time we were anchored further from the landing place than I should think nearly a mile. Just about dusk boatload of people came out to see the ship. This was nothing unusual, for the Trinidad has only been down in the West Indies four or five times, and she is so far ahead of any ship that we are accustomed to see that they still swarm out to look at her, and marvel at the electric lights and wrestle in vain with the wonderful faucet to the water cooler, which they try to get to this and that, never thinking of just pressing down on it. So we were not at all surprised to see a boatload coming aboard. Presently another load came, and another and another—all either old natives and young, black natives, and some nearly white—but all of the male sex. There were soon enough of them to fill all available space on the after deck and to crowd them somewhat forward also. So poor passengers had no chance but to move far up aft and sit under the awnings. Down in the cabin wines and whiskies and cocktails were chasing each other all over the tables. It was a great night for Dominica, and they made it a great night for us aboard the ship. Discussing the matter wonderingly under the awning, we concluded it must be a picnic party, and it was not until the gathering broke up and the convivial souls emerged from the cabin that we found the cause of all this festivity was a farewell dinner to one of the young flowers of Dominica, (a yellow flower,) and the sad farewells of his friends. This young gentleman, of the mulatto type, was just about starting for England, and he went up to the Windward Islands first. He had a great number of black leather trunks, (as we afterward learned,) all marked on top in bold white letters, "Mr. Charles ——, England." When this young gentleman came out of the saloon to see his friends start for the shore he was in that beautifully mellow condition only to be reached through the necks of several bottles. He took his station over the steps and bade each one good-bye in turn. But they did not content themselves, these young gentlemen of Dominica, with shaking farewells out of each other's hands. They clung to each other, embraced, and shed tears, and each one, as he passed, bestowed upon "Mr. Charles ——, England," a sounding smack upon the cheek, the heartiest sort of a smack which we could hear away up at the after part of the ship. The tearful partings of "Good-bye, Charlie, ole fel; God bless you," and the kisses and the hugs were heartrending, even to one unsympathizing spectator, but "Charlie, ole fel," securely braced against the rail, was equal to the occasion, and to each of these salutations he returned a cheerful "Fare thee well!" which was always accompanied by a dramatic wave of the hand. It was not, however, till Charlie's father came up to say good-bye that the young man came out strongest. The old gentleman shed tears. Charlie tried to comfort him.

"Now, be a man, father," said he. "Be a man; be a man for my sake!"

WILLIAM DRYSDALE.

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