

## CHAPTER III.

### ST. CHRISTOPHER.

St. Kitt's *Liamuiga*, the Fertile.—Historical Notes.—Governor's Warner and DEsnambuc.—English and French Settlement of St. Christopher.—Final Banishment of the French.—Sunrise in Basseterre Roadstead.—The Fleet of Bumboats.—Attacked by Fruit-sellers and Washerwomen.—Effecting a Landing.

THE Caribs, the ancient and warlike people once the lords of the beautiful island where we had cast anchor, called it *Liamuiga* (the Fertile), and well does it deserve that name. Columbus, passing near it in November, 1493, on his way from Dominica to Hispaniola, being charmed with its loveliness and finding it very pleasant, as we are told by an ancient chronicler, would needs give it his name. "He was engaged to give it this name from a consideration of the figure of its mountain, the island having at its upper part, as it were upon one of its shoulders, another lesser mountain, as St. Christopher is painted carrying our Saviour upon his, as it were a little child." The English, upon taking possession of the island many years afterward, rechristened their newly acquired colony, calling it St. Kitt's, by which name St. Christopher is now generally known. Columbus did not tarry long at the land that found such favor in his sight; indeed, it is by no means certain that he or any of his crew landed upon it, being eager to arrive at the continent which their imagination pictured to them lying within a few days' sail of the newly discovered archipelago. There is no evidence that the Spaniards made an attempt at any time to establish a settlement on the island. Its fertile, forest-covered valleys and hillsides had no attractions for them—its rugged hills yielded no gold,

the sole object of the avarice which tempted them in search of the fabled wealth of unknown worlds.

For one hundred and twenty-five years the Caribs remained in possession of *Liamuiga*, until the year 1618, when a certain Mr. Thomas Warner, an adventurous and enterprising trader, accompanied shipmaster Roger North on a voyage to Surinam, where he fell in with Captain Thomas Painton, who proposed to Warner that instead of endeavoring to establish themselves in a part of the world where the Dutch had already secured a foothold, they should attempt the settlement of one of the smaller Caribbean Islands. Painton gave so glowing a report of the beauty, fertility, and natural advantages of St. Christopher that Warner decided to repair thither with him, to the end that they two should found a colony. Painton died in Surinam, but Warner, returning to England in 1620, for the purpose of enlisting the co-operation of his patrons in this new enterprise, immediately busied himself to carry out the project, of which he now became the sole promoter. With great difficulty he induced fourteen adventurers as needy as himself to embark with him in a vessel bound for Virginia, where they arrived in safety after a stormy voyage across the Atlantic, and, sailing thence soon after their arrival, reached St. Christopher in January, 1623. It has been claimed for Barbados that it is the most ancient of all the British colonies in the West Indies, and it is indeed true, as I shall hereafter show, that the Olive Blossom, a British ship, having touched there in 1605, remained at anchor long enough to allow its commander to take possession of that island in the name of James I., but it is also true that no permanent settlement was established in Barbados until twenty years later; for the Olive Blossom continued on her voyage to countries farther to the west and south, leaving the Island Barbados desolate and uninhabited. The colonists sent out by Sir William Courteen, under the patronage of the Earl of Marlborough, did not arrive at Barbados till the latter part of 1624, more than a year after Mr. Thomas Warner had taken possession of St. Christopher. It is maintained by some historians that a number

of French emigrants, led by M. D'Esnambuc, landed on the island the very same day that Warner's little band pre-empted their claim to their settlement, in spite of the vigorous protests of the natives of *Liamuiga*, who attempted to prevent the landing of the unwelcome new-comers, but the French historian Du Tertre, who never failed to support any claim his countrymen saw fit to set up to any one of the Caribbean Islands, or, for that matter, to any part of the habitable earth, admits that D'Esnambuc did not leave France till 1625. Therefore St. Christopher can rightly lay claim to the proud distinction of being considered the oldest West Indian possession of the British Crown, all the pretensions of the Barbadians and the Frenchmen to the contrary notwithstanding.

During the first year of their residence on St. Kitt's, the English colonists saw their plantations utterly demolished by a hurricane, and by this disaster found themselves so reduced in circumstances that Warner was obliged to return to England to implore assistance. While at home he secured the patronage of James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, who fitted out, at his own charges, a ship laden with food and agricultural implements, and sent it with quick despatch to St. Christopher, where it arrived in the spring of 1624. Warner returned to his colony during the following year, accompanied by a number of new recruits. It is more than probable that D'Esnambuc, the captain of a French privateer whose ship had been disabled in an engagement with a Spanish galleon, sought refuge in one of the roadsteads of the island on the day of Warner's second arrival, thus lending some color to the claim that he shared with Warner the honor of first colonizing St. Christopher. Being constantly in danger of an attack by the Caribs, who made a brave resistance to the attempts of the strangers to drive them from their island-home, the English settlers received D'Esnambuc and his thirty followers most cordially, entered into an amicable agreement with them, and, having joined forces, ruthlessly massacred the natives and divided the island between them. The English settled at Sandy Point on the northwestern, and the French at Basse-

terre on the southwestern shore. After the massacre of the Caribs, an act of brutal barbarity which Du Tertre calls a glorious victory, the settlers were troubled no more by the natives, and the French and English colonists remained at peace with one another, cultivating the fruitful soil and increasing in wealth and numbers. Warner and D'Esnambuc returned each to his own country. Warner was knighted in 1625, receiving the appointment to the Governorship of St. Christopher, and came again that year to the island, accompanied by four hundred new recruits. D'Esnambuc, who, being taken under the patronage of Cardinal Richelieu, was joined by more than five hundred emigrants, put to sea in February, 1627, with his expedition, in ships so poorly equipped and provisioned that many of the company perished miserably during the voyage for want of food. The survivors were kindly received by the English settlers, for they took pity on the Frenchmen in their wretched plight and gave them such provisions as could be spared from their own scanty store; thus the people of the two nations for many years lived amicably together on their island-home.

In the reign of Charles I., during his war with the Dutch, France having declared for the latter the French settlers in St. Christopher, unmindful of past favors, drove the Englishmen from their settlement. The exiles thus unceremoniously driven away by their ungrateful neighbors, were however restored to their homes and lands by the Treaty of Breda. During the Revolution in England the French, pretending to espouse the cause of the abdicated king, expelled the English a second time from St. Christopher and remained for nearly a year sole masters of the island. This action on their part is alleged to have been one of the causes that induced William and Mary to declare war against Louis XIV. In 1690 General Codrington, Governor of Barbados, on receipt of the news of the Battle of the Boyne, fitted out an armament to capture St. Christopher. In this adventure all the English islands joined. The expedition consisted of three thousand armed men, of which number seven hundred were English sol-

diers, eight hundred from Nevis and Barbados, eight hundred from Antigua, four hundred from Montserrat, and two hundred gentlemen volunteers. This large force of men, conveyed in eleven men-of-war, accompanied by five tenders, met with little or no resistance, and experienced little difficulty in capturing the island, when about two thousand of its French inhabitants were banished to Martinique and San Domingo.

The French made several attempts to re-establish themselves on the island, and in a measure succeeded in doing so, a remnant remaining at St. Christopher until in Queen Anne's day, when they were finally driven from the island by the English, who held it successfully against all comers until the end of the war, when, by the Peace of Utrecht, St. Kitt's was ceded to Great Britain, in whose possession it has remained until the present time. During the war for American independence it is said that the people of St. Kitt's sympathized with the rebellious colonies, but were prevented, by the presence of an English fleet in their neighborhood, from actively participating in the war against the mother country.

The Island of St. Christopher lies in latitude  $17^{\circ} 18'$  N. ; in longitude  $62^{\circ} 48'$  W. The main body of the island is an oval, nearly thirteen miles long, little less than six miles in width at its broadest part, and contains an area of about sixty-eight square miles, or nearly forty-four thousand acres, of which thirty thousand are under cultivation. Its entire surface, except toward the southeastern extremity, is very mountainous. The Conarrhee Hills uplift their heads around the lofty and precipitous crags of Mount Misery, which towers heavenward in the centre of the island to a height of four thousand three hundred and fourteen feet.

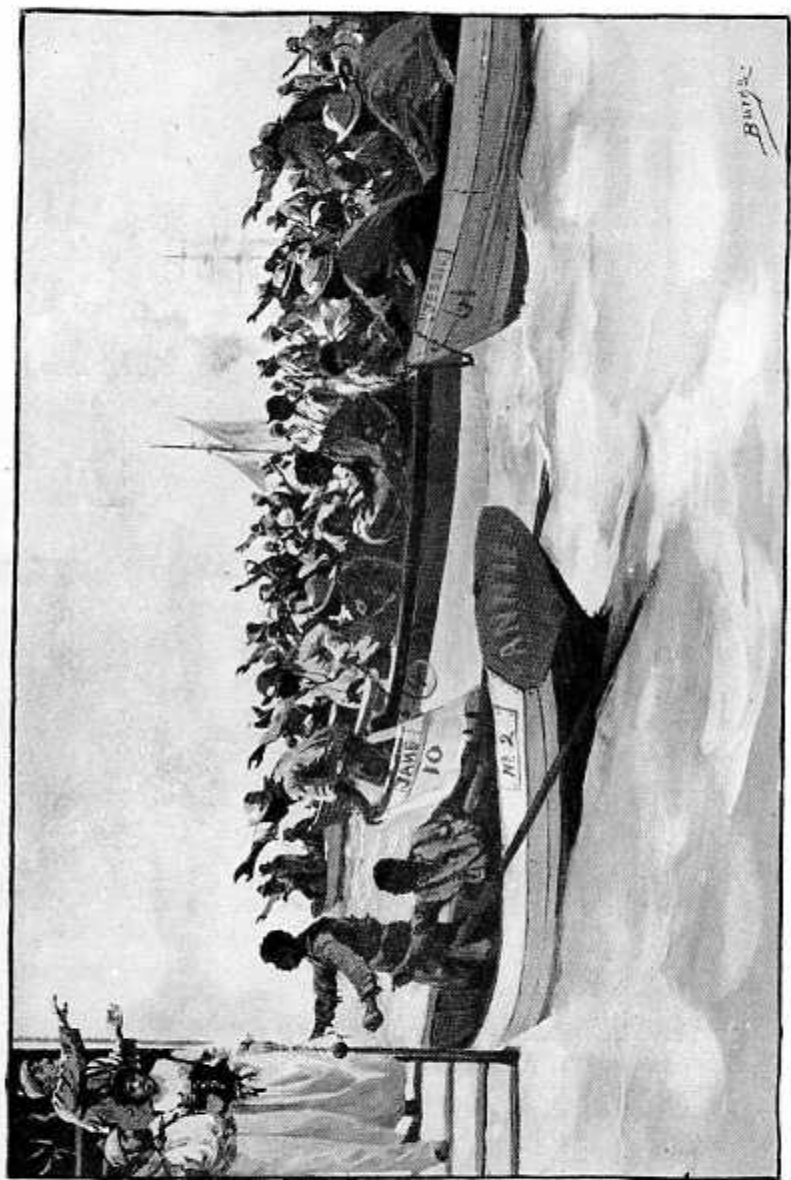
From the southeastern shore a long neck of uncultivated land, a quarter of a mile in width makes out for three miles or more into the sea, increasing, fan-like, in extent. The surface of the land at first gradually rises toward the south, then abruptly mounts upward, forming a cluster of conical hills called St. Anthony's Peaks, all of them



bare of trees but covered with a growth of bristling grasses, mimosæ, and a great variety of cacti such as thrive best in sterile, parched soil or among volcanic rocks.

The view looking north toward the land from the deck of the *Baracouta* at sunrise on the morning after our arrival at Basseterre was extremely beautiful and inspiring—a scene, not easily, if ever, to be forgotten. The steamer was at anchor about half a mile from shore; before us an amphitheatre of mountains enclosing the town extended from a promontory rising boldly from the sea on the north to high and rugged cliffs plunging into the ocean at the southeastern end of the island. The land ascends gently from a crescent of sand by which the harbor is bounded on the north and east. The picturesque little town lies close by the margin of the sea, and beyond it, sugar-plantations extend upward on the left of the picture until they join the dense forests by which the mountain-sides are overgrown; on the right, toward the southeast, spreading over the neck of land I have mentioned above, lies the valley of Basseterre, between Monkey Hill, one thousand three hundred and nineteen feet in height, on the northwest and the group of rugged cone-shaped heights on the southeast.

At intervals here and there among groves of palms, mango, tamarind, ceiba, and many other wonderful flowering trees the houses of the planters, who own all this fair country, overlook fertile meadows and valleys, the town and the harbor, with its great fleet of ships. The peaks and summits of the mountains rise, one behind the other, until in the background, overtopping all, the almost inaccessible pinnacle of Mount Misery pierces the clouds that seldom lift from the top of this once active but now slumbering volcano. On infrequent cloudless days, for it is a rare occurrence to see Mount Misery uncovered at any season of the year, the blackened, fire-worn crests surrounding and overhanging its hideous crater may be seen a hundred miles or more out at sea. The ruggedness and wildness of this magnificent mountain serve only to render the contrast of the cultivated country between it and the ocean more strikingly beautiful. Toward the south-



HUM-BOATS AT BASSETERRE, ST. KITT'S

east the grand, symmetrical cone of Nevis, rising from the seas beyond a narrow strait, stands out bold and clear against the sky, making a landscape of such surpassing beauty that it would be impossible to sail fifteen hundred miles, or, for that matter, any number of miles from Sandy Hook in any direction, and make a fairer landfall than the harbor of Basseterre.

Long before sunrise I had been awakened by a perfect babel of voices, and my first appearance on deck was the signal for a storm of shouts and cries from a multitude of boatmen in a fleet of small boats surrounding the steamer. There were stevedores and long-shoremen, fruit-sellers and washerwomen, venders of knick-knacks, flowers, shells, and coral, geological, and botanical specimens; all the congregation of traffickers howled at me, gesticulating frantically, as each and everyone besought, nay, commanded, me and my fellow-observers of the riotous scene to buy their wares, deliver up our raiment to be washed, or to take passage on their craft. The boatmen screamed out the names of their boats and their own names, they jostled their little vessels together in a fierce contest to approach nearest to the side of the ship or to bring their boats closest to the foot of the companion-ladder. They threatened one another with terrible cries and frantic gestures. From moment to moment we expected to see a dozen or score of them tumble overboard. At times it seemed as if riot and bloodshed were inevitable; indeed, as if a riot had already broken out. The noise and confusion were more deafening and astounding than that created by cabmen at a railroad depôt at home in New York, at times equalling the din and disorder of our Stock Exchange during a tight money market or a corner in stocks.

I happened to step to the side of the vessel for the purpose of bargaining for some fruit that had attracted my attention and for which my teeth watered; I was received with a stunning chorus by the entire flotilla. High above the general tumult and explosion of noise soared such *fortissimi* fragments as—

“Mary Jane’s awaiting fo’ you, dear massa.” Mary Jane, be it ob-

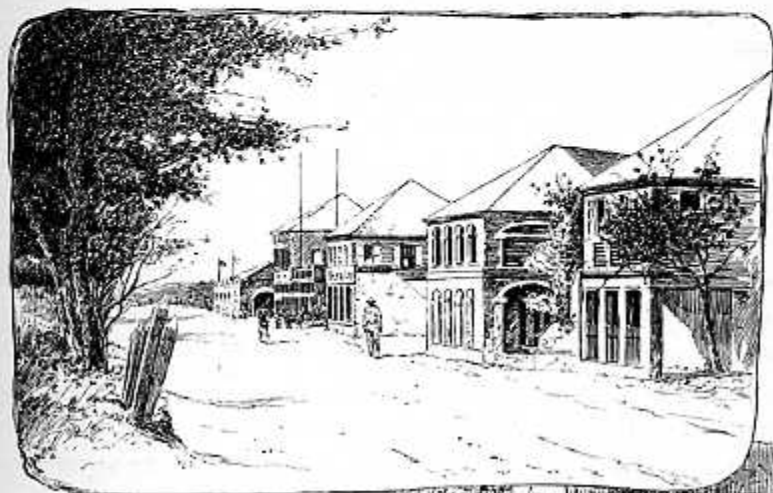


served, was the name of a boat. "Don't forget Aleck, sir!" "Cushions in dis boat." "Do yo' washin'." "'Member Lucy." Whether Lucy was a boat or a washerwoman I remain to this day in blissful ignorance. "I'se waitin' for yer, captain." "Here's yo' bes' figs." I learned afterward that figs signified bananas—fig-bananas. "Take yo' asho' jus' now." And so on. By a shake of my head I diverted the deluge of words from myself and my affairs, and the fickle crowd dedicated their remarks to one another. "Massa don' wan' yo' boat." "He won't trust hisself wid you." "He told you to go away." "I knock you in de water." "Shut you mouf, you nigger."

Here, as elsewhere, "nigger" was employed as a term of reproach among negroes. In the scramble and mimic battle oars were broken, rudders became unshipped and drifted away with the tide, boatmen lost their hats, fruit-sellers their fruits, curiosities were spilled into the sea, and I saw one great specimen of coral at least return with a splash to the ocean-depths that bore it. The darkies, roaring like wild beasts, seemed ready, or ever we came to the bottom of the ship's ladder, to rend us in pieces and take us ashore piecemeal. By and by, exhausted by long-continued frantic struggling, as well as by the wear and tear of the lungs and throats, after the storm and war of words there came a great and grateful calm of silence.

In the meantime, a large gang of stevedores had boarded the ship, the hatches fore and aft were taken off, and steam-winchies were set a-running. The work of breaking out and discharging cargo was going on with such wonderful rapidity that it took but little time to load six or seven lighters lying alongside, to start them shoreward, while their places were promptly taken by others in readiness to be made fast to the ship. As soon as storage-room was made below by removing such of the cargo as happened to be consigned to St. Kitt's, a quantity of freight destined to other ports was brought to the Barracouta from shore. In this manner, the operations of loading and unloading went on simultaneously and with remarkable activity throughout the live-long day until late in the evening. During our trip down the islands

our ship was compelled to anchor at a distance from shore, for the reason that at none of our stopping-places, save at Demerara, did we find any harbors, and were therefore obliged to lay at anchorage in open roadsteads. So far from finding these positions off-shore incon-



venient or undesirable, we discovered that our isolation was a great addition to our comfort, for, no matter how warm it may have been on the land there was always a cool breeze blowing across the water, therefore at no time of the night or day were we oppress-



Street Scenes.

ed by the heat, nor was our privacy invaded by a staring, gabbling crowd of wonder-seeking dock-rats and loungers. It was not monotonous to be thus cut off from immediate communication with the land, for in every harbor we visited in the West Indies the Barracouta became the centre of a fleet of small boats filled with darkies who, while keeping at a respectable distance, kept also a sharp lookout for our

spare change and were a constant source of amusement to us, entertaining us by their quaint remarks and grotesque behavior. At every port of call there were neat, clean-looking washerwomen ready to take our linen in charge, many of them by no means inexperienced *blanchisseuses*, for they did their work neatly, thoroughly, and promptly; received payment therefor graciously, earnestly soliciting our further favors, "Nex' time yo' come back, dear massa."

It was astonishing with what quantities of fruit we passengers on the Barracouta were tempted; and the cheapness of it, as well as the inexhaustible supply of all kinds, was still more to be marvelled at by those of us who could not rid our minds of the idea that tropical fruits were of necessity luxuries, in the nature of things costly, and therefore to be indulged in sparingly except by those whose purses were commensurate with their appetite for expensive delicacies of the kind. Oranges, limes, bananas, mangoes, pines, soursops, avocado-pears, and other juicy, tempting comestibles before untasted by us who were making our first discoveries of the delights of a West Indian voyage, were constantly in active demand; in fact, any appetizing morsel that appeared to be good for food or was pleasant to the eye commanded a ready sale, regardless of quality or degree of ripeness. We held as naught the old Spanish proverb which sets forth the varying metallurgical properties of fruit according to the time of day it happens to be eaten by human beings. The arrival of a fruit-seller's boat alongside the vessel was watched with eager interest; the discovery of any hitherto untried specimen was promptly advertised by cries of, "Hi! you there! how much are those? What'll you take for the lot, basket and all?" The inquiries frequently made by us of the hucksters we patronized, "Is it good to eat?" "Do you eat it raw?" invariably excited the unrestrained mirth of the colored by-standers. The fruit-sellers took a childish delight in showing us how strange varieties were to be made ready for the experimental bite, which was generally taken in the presence of a silent, expectant group of the purchaser's fellow-passengers.

A number of passengers, of whom I was one, were ferried ashore about seven o'clock. We landed in safety on a well-built pier projecting a hundred feet or more from the beach, on which the waves were tumbling within a few yards of the front walls of a row of stores and warehouses, built in a curve along the shore. Immediately upon setting foot on land we were surrounded by a host of fruit and flower-sellers, and those having cocoanuts and sugar-cane for sale; all of them, singly and collectively, and no less noisily than their brethren in the boats which had followed us landward from the ship, clamored for our patronage, thrusting their wares into our faces—indeed, I may say, with much color of truth, almost into our mouths. Being abundantly supplied, by reason of purchases made aforetime on board ship, we politely but firmly refused all the bargains which were offered with exasperating persistence not to say maddening reiteration, walked up the wharf, passed through a picturesque and ancient gate-way, ran the gauntlet of Her Majesty's customs-officers, and at last found ourselves in the metropolis of St. Christopher.

