

A LEAF FROM "A VOYAGE TO PORTO RICO."

Monday, Dec. 8, Latitude 39° 30', Longitude 68° 30'.

AYE, old Ocean! heave, heave on! restless like meaner things, journeying from shore to shore; ever commercing with the skies; spreading thy lap to receive the storms which thine own exhalations bred in heaven; type of thy great Author, who takes but what he gave; — heave, heave on! Though strange to me and to my fellow travellers, the hens, who turn their little red-rimmed eyes inquiringly upon the green field not their own, "*nunc alieni imperii*," yet, I doubt not, thou hast thy kind side. The winds, the wind-borne birds, and ships the winged bird-like messengers of man, sweep familiarly across thy bosom. For me, I trust thee not, — not yet. Pardon, good sea, but "confidence is a plant of slow growth."

Jan. 23. A short voyage, whose very monotony was to me a variety, brought me on the evening of the 22d December to anchor, in the beautiful bay which makes the harbor of St. Johns, Porto Rico. The Moro or Castle shoots its white perpendicular rock a hundred feet or more up from the Ocean, and we pass so close under its walls, as to be able to measure their height pretty nearly, by seeing the royal heads of the ship about on a level with the battlements. On rounding this majestic fortress, you come in full view of the town, which slopes upward from the water. The city looked gloomy and tomb-like from the deck, the houses low, chiefly of dead wall, stained with dirty yellow white. On entering the gate, however, the city smelt like an orange, and I was astonished at the lively face put upon the whole, by the sight of the motley population all astrid in their business or sport. Here stood a whiskered soldado on guard, and close by, his comrades stretched in a lazy group on the ground; a muleteer driving his patient animal with panniers laden with charcoal or grass; here sat negro women at their stalls, laden with plantains, eggplants, taiotas, and what not; everybody in the street, and everybody chattering. There are no wheeled carriages in St. Johns, and the horses are little meek creatures, about half the size of ours, so that the public streets, under this mild sky, are used for the same purposes as our parlors and kitchens.

Almost all social intercourse and many domestic operations, which we should be shocked at exposing to the public gaze, are here carried on in the street, and with a freedom that seems to say, You are welcome to look and listen. Multitudes of naked children are playing in the dirt, or crawling about the doors. Observe too that the rain is the only scavenger in St. John's, — yet the air is usually sweet and cordial.

When my new friend, Mr. M., led me into his house, had I not known it to be the mansion of a wealthy merchant, and seen it to be like those near it, I might have taken it for the county jail, so strange to me were the heavy gateways, the long passages, and spacious brick-floored, rough-timbered chambers, which are so well suited to the climate, and which soon please the taste. This house, and generally those of the rich, are extensive buildings, running from one street to another, cut into square, lofty, rough-finished rooms and long passages, and enclosing a court-yard, whilst servants seem to have lodges here and there in different quarters. The extent and details of the mansion have throughout an air of baronial state. All the floors and stairs are of brick or stone. The style of building is adapted to the warmth of the climate, and to security from vermin. For this reason, they use no carpets, nor any furniture which cannot be often moved; so that the interior of the houses, even of the wealthy, never wears the look of fixedness and comfort, which belong to northern homes. But from their balconies the gentry look out upon a country which looks to me like nothing but Allston's landscapes, so warm and softly shadowed, smooth waters, and dark-browed hills.

The climate puts every body into good humor, and the courtesy of the citizens, black, white, and dark-mixed, whether it lies in the Spanish they speak, which is the most complimentary of all tongues, or in their own breeding, is a sort of welcome for which you feel grateful. I am partial to the negroes. They do not look poor and blasted as in our cold region, but strut about the streets like kings and queens of the land. They carry bundles on their heads large enough to load a small truck withal, yet they bear themselves so loftily under their baggage, that I mean to have this kind of truckage introduced into our seminaries for young ladies, when I come home, as a callisthenic

exercise, to teach what so few ever learn, the accomplishment of a handsome walk. Then they talk with so lively an air, so much gesticulation and clatter, that a sober northerner finds his faculties somewhat taxed to meet the excitement of the conversation.

In the city there is no peace. We are kept awake half the night by a negro ball, with its endless *ya, ya*, whilst those evenings which lack this diversion are supplied with lesser melodies of guitar, or songs of children, begging guirlandas. We have just been throwing coppers to little girls, who sung at our door, in pretty Spanish, a ditty whose burden was something like

May you go to Heaven,
May you go to Heaven,
And, after, enjoy your kingdom there.

Of the beauty of the climate and country, I fear I cannot give a New England man a conception. Here have I been now a full month, and have not seen a stormy nor an unpleasant day. Except two or three, all have been delightful, with a steady sun and refreshing breezes. I go to bed with the same certainty of my fine morning, as of my waking or breakfast, and no plan of business or sport ever refers at all to the weather, and no mention of such a thing is made when friends meet, so that I soon left off my Yankee salutation, "A charming day, Sir." It is strange how the vegetation finds moisture enough to keep it good. It is all green and fresh, yet there has been no rainy day for two months, and the showers that have now and then dropped would be swallowed as nothing by our thirsty farms. The dews are very heavy, but they are dried in an hour or two. Nature in these latitudes seems to have a better constitution than with us: she does more and craves less.

Every morning I am up, like Bunker-hill monument, "to meet the sun in his coming." I bestride my poney, and we brush with hasty step the dews away. I ride to the tops of hills that overlook the country, and there feast my eyes with the carpet landscape rolled out beneath my feet. You see below you thousands of acres of cane-fields,

"And vast savannahs where the wandering eye,
Unfixed, is in a verdant ocean lost,"

interrupted by no roads or fences. The prospect is enlivened at intervals by the small clusters of buildings which stand in the centre of each plantation. The view reminds the New Englander of the meadows of the Connecticut, as seen from Mount Holyoke, at the close of summer. It is chiefly cocoas and palms, towering here and there on the plain, like stately columns, that mark the scenery as tropical. The palm is the only tree I would steal for our own scenery. Much of the beauty and almost the whole of the peculiar character of the landscape comes from that single magnificent vegetable. There is a lustre in the atmosphere and a vigor in the vegetation beyond what nature attains in our latitudes. But there is also a drowsiness over all the landscape: there are no bright contrasts of colors; few insects are on the wing; the birds have no song, and we miss the brilliant variety and the high spirits of a northern summer. Many flowers cultivated in our gardens and greenhouses are among the most common weeds. Sensitive plants and prickly pear overrun the ground, and the ipecacuanha grows wild in profusion.

In the city I felt homesick, after the novelty was a little worn off. I tired of square houses open to the air in the middle; of oranges and sweetmeats; of negroes and negroesses; of Dons and Senoras; and felt like a prisoner within those massive walls, forever under the eye of a sentinel. So I came to Santa Barbara, a plantation of Mr. M.'s, and have, for the time being, a whole house to myself. The house looks like one of our northern barns, which somebody from whim had furnished with sideboard, tables, and chairs. But my barn is like Cinderella's pumpkin, which at a word was changed into a chariot and six. For I have only to open shutters and let down the sides of the building, which turn on hinges, and the beauty of the fields and the glory of the skies and mountains pour in, and my shed becomes a palace. Make Nature your friend and she will not fail you at your need, but wherever you go, the intimacy, like the masonic tie, will be acknowledged, and you will find in it comfort and support. The air, the fresh green, the flowers, the fruits, the goodly prospect, the silence, and again the sounds of rustic life, soothe and entertain me. I ride morning and evening, and these little pacing ponies are very good things: they scale hills and

pierce thickets, where it would not be easy to manage one of our stately beasts.

In a fine afternoon, in the midst of clouds and showers, I went to see an old negro who brings vegetables here for sale, and who lives by himself on the top of a hill in the corner of his master's plantation, being, as it were, an Emeritus, and no longer called on for work. We crept along a tunnel rather than an open road, through woods and bushes, with now and then a window on our side, from which we could see far off palmy plains, like painted pictures, until we gained the summit of the hill, and found the little peaked hut of the old man, as lone and romantic a hermitage as ever I fancied. It was such a place and person as Wordsworth loves to paint. One feels a strong interest that is almost pathetic, in a solitary being, white-haired, living so independent of everything but the pension great Nature allows him. Old Tita, so they call my new acquaintance, built his own house, roofed it with the jagua of the palm, and it sits perched upon the hill-top, like the nest of a bird. The woods are left uncut upon one side at a little distance from his door, while the other side is cleared and planted. Here he raises plantains, yams, potatoes, beans, ochre, and other vegetables in request on the plantations. He has a cross erected just outside his door, "so that when thunder roll, he no knock 'ee." No persuasion, I suppose, could induce him to exchange his cross for a lightning rod. His only companions, his dog and kitten, he seems to make much of. What struck me, standing on the threshold of his cot, was the contrast between his lowly condition and dwelling, and the grandeur of the spot, which some fine instinct led him to choose for his abode, looking down over all the neighboring hills, and over the intervening valleys and fields, to the distant mountains and the blue ocean. It was a prospect which made the gazer involuntarily feel high and stately.