

Difficult  
naviga-  
tion.

These islands are traversed by only three navigable channels, namely, (1) the Florida Channel to the north; (2) the Providence Channel just mentioned; and (3) the old Bahama Channel which passes to the south-west, between the islands and Cuba. The rest of the water area surrounding them is studded with rocks and shoals. The shores are generally low and flat. The highest hill in the whole range of islands is only 230 feet. Except in Andros there are no streams of running water in the whole group. The inhabitants derive their water supply from wells. Curiously enough the water in these wells rises and falls with the tide of the sea, although their contents are perfectly sweet and fresh.

Physical  
condi-  
tions.

Black  
beard.

It was said the little island of New Providence contains the capital and seat of Government. This is because it alone possesses a safe harbour, and that is only for vessels of very light draught. In the very early days it was a head quarters of lawless villainy, being a chief seat of the pirates previously spoken of. The particular desperado who made this his haunt was a buccaneer named Blackbeard, who killed all that fell into his clutches, crew or passengers, armed or unarmed.

A letter.

1492.

The story of these little islands is singularly interesting. San Salvador or Cat Island, one of the outer Bahamas, was the very first land to be sighted by Columbus on his first voyage. This was on the 12th October, 1492. He gave it the name of San Salvador—or Holy Saviour—after the curious religious fashion of those days. From New Providence, where he touched, he wrote to the King of Spain—Ferdinand—who sent him out. He must have sent the letter back by one of his ships, while he prosecuted his journey with the rest.

And its  
contents.

In this letter he said, "This country excels all others, as far as the day surpasses the night in splendour. The natives love their neighbours as themselves, their conversation is the sweetest imaginable, their faces always smiling, and so sweet and gentle are they that I swear to your Highness that there is not a better people in the world."

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