

A FIVE MONTHS TRIP TO THE SUNNY SOUTH.

(CONTINUED.)

Talking aloud to themselves is a trait peculiar to the negroes of the Bahamas. As a proof of their love for large-sounding phrases, which are often used without the slightest idea of their meaning, I give a copy of a letter written by a soldier of one of the native regiments to his physician which was selected at random from a number of similar precious documents he had received:

"Feb. 23rd, 188—. Sir,—I, thy most worthy servant, have the honor, at this time, to implore and beseech thee, this 2d time to Pore this thy patient and impenitent hand Maid, for although it has pleased the Almighty to deal thus with her, as she at present is, still I trust that it may please him also to release her, out of her present pains and sufferings, to her former position again. And we trust that his Never failing providence may & will support thee to listen to the Tortures and cries of the afflicted, for his mercies sake. Sir the present positions of thy penitent hand Maid is thus, a severe and Protruberance pain in the back, and a cough in proportion to the pain in the back, & a pain in the stomach in proportion to the cough, and a standing weakness, and a stubborn faintness, with restlessness day and night, and Sir she stands at present in need of a good proportion of blood. for Sir she loose a good set, before she came to thee the first time. For Sir, she was losing it from Sunday to Sunday, which was eight days, and it began to abate on the ninth day. And Sir by the help of God and thy assistance, I implore thee to try for her for

I am thy humble servant."

Sponge fishing is one of the principal trades carried on in Nassau and the vicinity. In quality the sponge will not compare with that of the Mediterranean. The principal kind shipped from these islands are sheep-wool velvet, reef and glove. The sheep-wool is a very soft tough sponge and excellent for bathing purposes. The reef and velvet sponge is used for surgical purposes. There is also a kind called grass sponge, which has lately been extensively used in the manufacture of carpets: an average of about 400,000 pounds is annually exported from the island. I think the charge of laziness against the negroes almost altogether unfounded, if one but considers the severe labour the negroes often accomplish, as for example, in the sponge fishery, which gives employment to the owners and crews of 500 licensed craft of from ten to twenty-five tons burthen, and is carried on with some risk from the weather and much hardship, for the sponges are from two to three fathoms below the surface, and must be torn from the rocks with hooks attached to long poles. The position of the sponges is ascertained by means of a water-glass: on holding this perpendicularly over the water one can see everything through it as clearly as in an aquarium—fish, sponges, coral, or shells. The sponge-boats usually get in on Saturday, and the sponges are assorted in the markets, each boat load and variety by itself. On Monday they are disposed of at auction—only members of the sponge guild and those making genuine offers are allowed to bid, which is done by written tenders.

Wrecking is another branch of business for which the Bahamas have long been famous, owing to their intricate navigation. At one time this was very lucrative, but it has been falling off of late years. Formerly everything saved from a wreck was sold at auction in Nassau; now all goods not of a perishable nature and undamaged, are reshipped to the port of destination. Collusion between ship masters and

the pilots was also frequent, but increased vigilance on the part of the insurance companies has interfered with this nefarious business, while the numerous light-houses recently erected by the Government, with noble self-sacrifice, have operated in the same direction. Benjamin, in his book on the Atlantic Islands, says:—

"The uncertainties attending money-making in this precarious way have their effect on the character of the people, as is the case when the element of chance enters largely into business: the prizes in the lottery are few, but are occasionally so large as to excite undue expectations, and thus unfit many for any pursuit more steady but less exciting. For months they will cruise around, watching and hoping, and barely kept alive on a scant supply of sugar-cane and conchs; then they fall in with a wreck and make enough from it, perhaps, to keep them going another year. It is not a healthy or desirable state of affairs."

One Sunday morning a commotion arose quite unusual in the uncommonly quiet and orderly streets of Nassau. There was hurrying to and fro, and the sound of voices shrill and rapid indicated some sudden and extraordinary excitement. The wharves of the little port were thronged and positively black with eager negroes, and great activity was noticeable among the sloops and schooners. Some were discharging their cargoes of sponges, shells, fish and cattle in hot haste; others were expeditiously hoisting their sails and heaving-up their anchors, while the crews, black and white, sang songs in merry chorus as if under the influence of great and good tidings. What could it all mean? It meant this, another vein in the Bahama gold mines had been struck, another lead discovered, and the miners were off to develop it, each hoping to be the lucky one to turn out the largest nugget, and to retire on it for life. In other words, news had just been brought of the wreck of a Spanish vessel on the Lavadeiros Shoal, one hundred and fifty miles away. She was none of your wretched colliers or fruiters, with a cargo valueless to wreckers, but a ship whose hold from keelson to deck-beams was packed with a thousand tons of choice silks and stuffs for the black eyed brunettes of Havana, just enough damaged to oblige them to be sold at auction in Nassau where all goods wrecked in that archipelago must be brought for adjudication. Verily, we thought "it's an ill-wind that blows nobody any good." The misfortune which has wrung the soul and perhaps ruined the happiness of two or three in far off lands has made glad the hearts of several thousand darkies, mulattoes and whites in the Bahamas. But the branches of business which in past years have brought most wealth into Nassau have been buccaneering, privateering, and blockade running. The buccaneers were at one time in high feather there: they bought up or captured the governors, toasted and roasted the people when recalcitrant, and, hiding below the low keys or cays in their little vessels, spring out, spider-like, on any unwary trader quietly sailing by. Blackbeard was the most celebrated of the ruffian chiefs who at various times ruled over these islands. An immense silk-cotton tree stood until within a few years on Bay street, the principal business street in Nassau, under the spreading branches of which he administered high-handed justice. He was finally killed off the coast of South Carolina in a desperate fight, and the land had rest for certain years, the escutcheon of the colony bearing since that time the significant legend "*Eapul-sis piratis, restituta commercia.*"

There is a well in the barrack yard, Nassau, about which