

LETTERS FROM THE FLEET.

No. II.

TOPICS OF THE TROPICS.

Our cruise in the West Indies was not a very enjoyable one. The first island we touched at was Dominica, by far the loveliest of the group. We only spent one day here, but all were delighted with the scenery, the climate and the fruit. The later was most luscious and plentiful, and even a midshipman's pockets held enough coin to purchase sufficient to satisfy his appetite. The natives nearly all talk French, or rather a "*patois*" of that language: the island has much fallen from its high estate in the days of slavery; its planters have gone, their horses and lands are desolate, but few vessels ever call there, nor is there any trade to speak of. It only requires a little energy and capital however, to make this island one of the most productive, as it is the most beautiful in the West Indies. Our next harbour was St. Lucia, where we took in coal, which was put on board at a rapid rate by black women. These poor creatures addressed a petition to Prince George, that he would ask the Queen to pay them better, the superscription on the letter being "To Captain Sir Prince George of Wales." They receive about 10d. a day for their labour. The white inhabitants of St. Lucia gave us a ball which went off very successfully, the jovial junior Surgeon of the flagship contributing much to the hilarity of the evening. Dancing was kept up with unflagging spirit to quite a late hour. Next morning we left for Jamaica, and arrived there after a week's cruise, during which we rolled and tossed heavily, groaned at the heat, as all ports and scuttles had to be closed, and cursed our fate generally, especially when the ice and fresh food ran out. At Jamaica, we assisted to open the Exhibition. Prince George landed in state looking uncommonly well in his uniform and Garter ribbon, under the salutes of all the men of war in harbour. He pulled in an eight-oared galley through a double row of boats, whose oar blades flashed in the sunlight as they tossed them in honour of His Royal Highness. On shore he was received by a guard, triumphal arches had been erected in his honour, and the streets were gaily decorated. One inscription put forth that the shade of Rodney was there to welcome him, but as the "d" was rather badly formed a wag immediately read it out as "Shade of Rooney," and then asked for Annie. I need not give any description of the exhibition, which was much the same as any other. The most disappointing thing about it was that there was so little that was West Indian in it. The night of the opening was rendered beautiful by fire works and illuminations. The Russian war-ship 'Minein' was the most admired of all the men-of-war in port: her masts and yards were all picked out with small lanterns, so that the tracery of all her spars could be distinctly seen.

While we were at Jamaica there were several dances given, all of which were much enjoyed, notwithstanding that dancing in this climate is rather warm work. The Governor, Sir Wm. Blake, gave a fancy dress ball at which he and Lady Blake appeared as Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain respectively, their stately figures suiting well the handsome dress of that period. The naval officers attended in uniform, as a sea kit rarely includes fancy dress. One of the best disguises was that of a postman, who went about the room delivering letters to all the guests. This dress was worn by a well known Canadian official. On board the ships the only entertainment given was a lunch to the Governor. There was so much work to do and so much going on on shore, that it was found impossible to fit in a day for an afternoon dance.

We left Jamaica on the 7th February, none of us being sorry to say good bye to Port Royal, of all places the most wretched, and after a long and harassing cruise we arrived at Trinidad. Here we were quite unexpected, as our programme had led them to look for us some days later. Owing to sickness at Havanna, however, we had not visited that port and so we were in advance of our date. This was a great disappointment to the Trinidians, who had organized no less than three committees of welcome,—

which were now dissolved, their occupation having gone. Notwithstanding this, and the great distance we lay from the shore, the fleet enjoyed themselves very much. The island is a snug, pleasant one, and being more opened up than most West Indian ones, excursions to various parts of it were made. Wherever we went we were heartily welcome, and no pains were spared to make us happy. The Governor gave a ball which one officer found fault with because he could find no cigarettes; the Colonial Secretary gave another which was the scene of a very amatory display between a young officer of the flagship and a young lady of Trinidad, and at which another officer expressed himself loudly about some turkey and ham, to the laughter of the bystanders, the riflemen of Trinidad shot a match against those of the fleet and entertained them at a capital lunch, the cricketers following suit. —in fact the days of our stay were so closely filled up that even the most pleasure loving was forced to cry "Hold, enough!"

We left Trinidad with many regrets and arrived at Barbadoes in a day or two, after our first pleasant sea trip. Here Prince George presented the York and Lancaster with new colours, in honour of which event the officers of the regiment gave a grand ball, and athletic sports were held. Prince George's speech on this occasion was suitable and neat, but the gallant colonel's reply was lost, for his nervousness was so great that though his lips moved, no sound came forth. The ball would have been better had there been more men, a want owing to only a few from each ship having been asked. There was an afternoon dance on board the flagship which was well attended. Barbadoes is becoming quite a fashionable health resort, and would soon be far more so if there was a decent hotel. There were several visitors who had come out from England to escape the winter, among them Mrs. Atkinson, who came to join her husband Capt. Atkinson of the Comus, and who looked all the better for her stay at home.

A polo match was played between the garrison and the fleet, the latter team being made up by Prince George, Lieuts. Trowbridge and Faussett, and one of the garrison. Prince George played very well and was much applauded. It was very amusing to hear the comments of the coloured spectators when he got away with the ball, the hush of expectancy each time that he was about to strike, and the sympathetic groan of disappointment that burst forth if he missed it. The navy was beaten, as might have been predicted, but by very little.

While at Barbadoes we had our sailing regatta—the pulling part of it having been held at Port Royal. The Comus was the most successful ship, Lieut. Burney in his cutter winning the blue ribbon of the day, the Admiral's cup, Lieut. Meade running him a close second in the Comus' other cutter. Lieut. Bridson in the flagship's cutter was one of the favourites, and very nearly won, but just at the last the wind, which was shifty, baffled him and threw him out. After a stay of about ten days we left Barbados, bidding adieu to its waving palms and white beaches in the hope that we shall not see them again for a long time, and departed on our way to Halifax, via Bermuda. It is supposed that we shall stay some time at the latter place, a stay which will probably prove very irksome to some of our young sparks.

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