

H. Hoffmann

ST. THOMAS,

AS A

Naval and Coaling Station.

BY

CHARLES EDWIN TAYLOR, M.D., F.R.G.S.,

*Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain,*

*Author of "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies,"*

*"Jumby Hall," &c., &c.*

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

ST. THOMAS, D. W. I.

PRINTED BY J. N. LIGHTBOURN.

1891.



Established 1838.

Double Distilled

# Bay Spirit or Bay Rum

FOR THE TOILET AND BATH.

---

Distilled by

**A. H. RIISE,**

ST. THOMAS, W. I.



# ST. THOMAS,

AS A

Naval and Coaling Station.

BY

CHARLES EDWIN TAYLOR, M.D., F.R.G.S.,

*Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain,*

*Author of "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies,"*

*"Jumby Hall," &c., &c.*

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

ST. THOMAS, D. W. I.

PRINTED BY JNO. N. LIGHTBOURN.

1891.

X

## A FEW WORDS TO THE PUBLIC.

THE *raison d'être* of the following pages, may be briefly summed up as follows:

For the last few months there have been sundry rumours of the probable transfer of St. Thomas to America, and as nearly every mail from the United States brought newspapers to this island containing articles more or less in favour of the project—notably the "New York Herald" and the "Sun"—it caused people to believe that sooner or later something more definite would be done in the matter.

Unfortunately, these articles were not always correct in their statements, some of them bearing on their face evidence of having been compiled from old Consular reports and other sources, which to say the least of them, do not entitle them to be considered as a true picture of what this island is to-day.

In view of this, it occurred to me that a little *brochure* showing our actual condition and the few mistakes, which have crept into the "Herald's" article of Sept. 25, would be useful at the present moment.

Nearly thirty years residence, and the fact of having already written its history in "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," may be an additional excuse for doing so. That it may serve to correct erroneous impressions of a place, which is, undoubtedly, the most commercial, has the best harbour, the greatest facilities for vessels seeking its port, and is, most assuredly, the best location for a Naval and Coaling Station in these waters, is the sincere wish of

THE AUTHOR.

St. Thomas, D. W. I., Oct. 8th 1891.

## ST. THOMAS, AS A NAVAL AND COALING STATION.

### CHAPTER I.

The island of St. THOMAS, Danish West Indies, is situated in Lat 18° 20' 42" N. and Long. 64° 48' 9" W. Its length is about 13 miles East and West with an average breadth of three miles. Its appearance is that of a range of high dome shaped hills running from West to East. This reaches an elevation of 1,515 English feet. towards the Western part, and makes a striking picture when looked at by a stranger arriving for the first time from Europe or America.

Few of the West India Islands have had such a commercial history. for long before the year 1701, when Père LABAT first visited it, we find it spoken of as an *entrepot* for the commerce which the English, French, Spaniards and Dutch did not dare pursue in their own islands; and in time of war the refuge of merchant ships when pursued by privateers. Here they sold their prizes, bought their stores, and trafficked with its people, and many vessels were accustomed to proceed from St. Thomas to the coast of South America, whence they brought back much riches in specie or in bars, and valuable merchandize.

As far back as 1680 St. Thomas was a market of consequence, and for over two hundred years its enterprising merchants have done business with their neighbours, and if to-day

they are suffering from a commercial depression which has more or less affected its prosperity, as it has done many another place in the world, it cannot be gainsaid, that even at the present day, it is activity itself when compared to other islands with greater internal resources.

That there should be many reasons why St. Thomas should have always played a commercial part in the history of the Antilles is self evident to anyone who is acquainted with its admirable geographical position, its great facilities for vessels seeking its safe and commercial harbour, and the energy of its enterprising people. Whatever may be urged to the contrary by envious rivals\* it is yet, and can never cease to be, an important port of call, and to occupy the first rank among the lesser islands of the West Indies as a coaling station, and should such a nation as America or Germany seek to acquire it as a naval depôt there is not the slightest doubt, but what at very little expense, comparatively, it could be so fortified as to make it impregnable.

Not that I am quite sure that Denmark is so willing to part with it but as it no longer brings any grist to the mill of the Mother country, there is a possibility of such an event, more especially if the people were agreeable to the change and there were no risk of their exchanging a mild and equitable government, in which, to day, they have a voice, for a despotism which might prove fatal to its interests.

It is not so long ago, that the islanders were agitated with the rumour that they were about to be sold to Germany, which, it is well known, is desirous of becoming a first class naval power. This, however, was promptly contradicted. Yet it did not seem improbable, inasmuch as any nation aiming to be such must have convenient coaling and naval stations in different parts of the civilized globe, such as belong to England, which, undoubtedly owes its naval supremacy to the possession of such advantageously situated spots as St. Thomas.

Having said sufficient, I trust, to show the importance of the position of this island as a centre for commerce, and its

\*Notoriously Barbados.

desirability as a coaling and naval station, I shall now say a few words with regard to

THE GENERAL FEELING OF THE INHABITANTS IN THE MATTER.

A glance at the condition of the people themselves and the town, Charlotte Amalia, in which they live, is sufficient to show that law and order, and a certain amount of prosperity prevail. The town itself is situated upon three hills and presents a pretty picture as seen from the deck of a steamer or vessel in the harbour. Two old castles, one to the east and the other to the north overlook the town and rejoicing in the names of Bluebeard and Blackbeard, carry back the imagination to the days when piracy and privateering were flourishing trades in the West Indies and the Spanish Main; and these worthies, perhaps, walked swaggeringly along the streets of St. Thomas with their followers.

You land — conveyed to shore by a boatman who is civil to you, and rarely overcharges you. If you have had an experience of these gentry at Barbados you will at once mentally compare the difference, and wonder if your "black brother" on shore is as well behaved and courteous.

And you will not have been very long rambling about Charlotte Amalia to notice this fact and how orderly a town it is. From the trimly kept Fort, used as a prison and police station, and the handsomely built barracks, down to the smallest building you will be struck by the air of cleanliness which prevails. All the streets are macadamized, with gutters at each side of them, and paved with stone. The three principal watercourses or "Guts," as they are called, are paved in the same manner, and carry down the water from the mountains to the sea.

The stores are massive, brick built, extend to the water's edge some four hundred feet, have iron tracks running alongside of them for the carriage of goods and are solidity itself. There are probably a hundred such, built, many of them at a cost of \$50,000 to \$60,000, apiece. Each has its wharf for the landing of goods and some of them, powerful cranes to hoist

them up with. There are six churches in the town, handsome buildings, and a Synagogue picturesquely situated on one of the hills. Here the Lutheran, which is the State Church, the Roman Catholic, Moravian, Israelite, Episcopalian, Dutch Reformed and Methodist, fraternize, as indeed all shades of opinion are tolerated, everyone being at liberty to think as he pleases provided he does not interfere with his neighbour.

It is warm, but a cool breeze sweeps over the island from the east, and permits you to walk about town, where you will note how well behaved are the people and how polite they are to strangers. Not a drunkard on the streets, not a brawler nor disturber of the peace. True many of the faces which you meet are black or brown, but they belong to good natured, amiable persons quite ready to help you should you make an inquiry of them or require their services.

Perhaps you may encounter the chain gang at work, repairing or cleaning the streets, but even here they do not present the repulsive features of such like gangs in Europe. The man who drives them, carries only a small switch in his hand, and the prisoners, the women especially, will sometimes respectfully salute you as you pass. To account for such good order may seem difficult to any one fresh from witnessing a bloody revolution in Hayti, or the way local affairs are managed in such places, unless it be the presence of a few helmeted policemen walking along the streets here and there, certifying to the watchful care of a good government and the proper working of one of the best police forces in the West Indies.

Perhaps you get acquainted with some of the families, who, whether Creole or foreign, live comfortably and happily in elegantly furnished homes, surrounded by objects indicating their taste and refinement. Among them you will hear ventilated of course, the all absorbing topic, whether the island will really change hands or no. Whether they are to be American or German. — You listen, and if you be American you note with satisfaction that the leaning is decidedly towards your own beloved country, not out of politeness to you because you are an American, but because there is an undercurrent of



dread at the prospect of belonging to Germany, which, enlightened and civilized a nation as it is, yet lives under a form of government not as liberal as that of America, and may be involved in war, at any moment, with one of its powerful neighbours.

Perhaps it may surprise you to find nothing but English spoken in a country of which the Danes have been masters for over 300 years, but the fact is there; the Danes themselves become excellent English scholars after a short residence. How it came about, at first, is difficult to trace. It seems incredible that the English, who only held the island but a few months in 1801, and from 1807 to 1815, a period of eight years, could have supplanted the Danish customs and language of the country in so short a period. It seems more probable that English, being the language of a commercial country, and the business relations of the St. Thomians being mainly with the two great English speaking countries, England and America, the English language, as a matter of course, became gradually introduced and eventually the general medium of conversation among them. It is much to the credit of Denmark that in no way was there any attempt to enforce the learning of the Danish language upon the people, as is the case with many other European nations upon their colonies or other possessions. All this you will note, and you will be astonished to perceive how thoroughly Americanized are the inhabitants in their ways. They are active—"cute," in a matter of trade—"cuter," if I may coin the word, than you will find them in many of the neighbouring islands—and ever so much more friendly and polite than in Barbadoes—I speak not from prejudice—but I have the testimony of many who have visited that "favoured" spot of earth—I put it as kindly as I can—that the conceit of the average "Bim" is intolerable. Perhaps they did not make the acquaintance of the superior "Bim"; I wish they had, for I like to speak well of the West Indians, and I count as friends among the Barbadian people some of the best hearted men I have ever met. Whether this applies to all shades of society in Barbadoes I

am not prepared to say, but from personal experience I can vouch for the fact that my "black brother" of the lower class of Barbados, who has not been blessed with education sufficient to teach him that all men are *not* free and equal, is sadly deficient when placed beside my "black brother" of St. Thomas who is, at least fifty years ahead of him in respectful, courteous behaviour and intelligence. And this really applies to both sexes in this island, the very coal women whose lives are the most laborious and who, "when other people are in their beds" are staggering along a narrow gang-way reaching to the steamer with a hundred or so of coals upon their heads—these very coal women are as orderly and decent a people, for the class to which they belong, as you would meet anywhere in the world. They have not been inaptly termed "The Firemen of St. Thomas," for the untiring energy which they display on the occasion of a fire. The first to rush to it with bucket in hand to render assistance, they are the last to leave it until it is put out. A whole chapter might be written on this subject, as indeed might another, speaking of the good behavior of the so called lower order of St. Thomas.

---

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT deal has been accomplished of late years to make the town and harbour of St. Thomas attractive, and to induce vessels to seek its port. It was plainly seen as its commerce declined, that unless something were done in that direction, with the keen competition which menaced it from Barbados, that its shipping business would also fall away; so with commendable energy its merchants set to work to "put their house in order," and by reforming old abuses and offering greater inducements, bring back some of the tide of prosperity which threatened to flow from it.

If it be considered that nearly every book published on the West Indies during the last twenty five years, has had its

ing at St. Thomas, that one noble author\* has said that "the place does not look very inviting," that another has said "that it is as veritable a Dutch oven for cooking fever in, with as veritable a dripping pan for the poison when concocted in the tideless basin below the town as was ever invented;" that another, in a book called the "Lesser Antilles," written apparently for the special glorification of St. Lucia, has repeated this atrocious slander, and that there is yet a black mark against it for insalubrity on the Admiralty books, it is no wonder that many people who have never put their foot in it, like all the authors above quoted, know very little about it, and to conceal their actual want of knowledge of the place, merely repeat these observations which for many years have been, and are, especially to-day, as false as they bear malice on their surface.

Fortunately for the island there stands more than one honest, truthful utterance concerning it, notably that which is to be found in the record of H. B. M. S. *Challenger*, in which Dr. Thompson says "After careful inquiry I am inclined to the opinion that St. Thomas has been very much maligned, and that it is not the undesirable nor unhealthy spot it is generally believed. There are no noxious mangrove swamps to breed malaria as in Jamaica and other places, and receiving as it does the full strength of the salubrious "trades," all the year round, it possesses unusual advantages from a sanitary point of view."

I refer to this particularly, because so much stress has been laid upon the unhealthiness of St. Thomas by its neighbours and particularly by Barbados, whose merciless quarantine for five months against St. Thomas for two or three cases of mild variola, which were promptly isolated to our fine Lazaretto, is yet remembered; as indeed are all her attempts to cripple St. Thomas, whose natural advantages so outweigh her own; and which should it once fall into the hands of America and capital be expended upon it to make it still more attractive as a port of call and as a Coaling Station, would simply mean the return of a large portion of its trade and a correspond-

\*The Marquis of Lorne.

ing decline in her own fortunes. Not that I think St Thomas will ever lose the *prestige* which it has always enjoyed as a place for the refitting and repair of vessels. Even should it still continue to be a Danish dependency, it would always possess these advantages, as anyone who has lived there or who remains there for a sufficient length of time to examine its unsurpassed facilities in that direction, may satisfy himself.

Beginning with its Lazaretto and its comfortable accommodation for passengers afflicted with contagious diseases, its lighthouse which sends its rays far out to sea as a guide to the entrance to its harbour, its enormous Floating Dock capable of receiving steamers and large vessels of over 3,000 tons. Marine slip and railway for the repairing of smaller craft, its immense cisterns for the storage of water, for the supply of vessels, its Factory, where almost every conceivable kind of iron work for the repair of steamships can be turned out, where a shaft or boiler can be made, or a propellor repaired, or iron launches built, its stevedore's service for the loading and discharging of vessels, its Telegraph Station, its hospitals, its admirable sanitary arrangements and medical staff, its Ice house for the supply of ice to the shipping, its contractors for ship's supplies, its Ship brokers, its ship carpenters and caulkers; and lastly the great coal wharves of Messrs. Brøndsted & Co., alongside of which large steamers drawing 27 feet can be moored and coaled day or night at the rate of 60 to 100 tons an hour. must be seen to understand how St Thomas is yet a port of great importance and that for years to come the energy of its inhabitants will triumph over every difficulty which may present itself as an obstacle to their progress.

One must pay a visit to Messrs. Brøndsted & Co's coal wharves at the hour of midnight, when one of the United States and Brazil Mail Co's steamers is coaling, and watch the dusky figures of hundreds of women, each with a basket of coal on her head, swarming up the steamer's side busy as bees, and running back again with them empty, to be refilled; one must hear them singing their songs in a quaint minor key—see the *flambeaux* lighting up coals, women, overseers, officers of the

steamship alongside; one must contemplate such a scene, and then he will know the reason why St. Thomas yet lives as a commercial centre and a coaling station, will comprehend how the stimulus to industry and commerce which this firm gives by the employment of so much labour, contributes so largely to this end and how valuable such a place would be as a coaling and naval station, where everything is at hand for the purpose, and not bare rocks—bare land, no industry, no enterprise, as at Mole San Nicholas—and Samana Bay, where millions would have to be spent to erect suitable wharves and premises, and probably millions more to keep them, just as the capricious nature of each of the small Republics to which they belong may choose to assert itself in case of a Revolution.

A number of large steamers coal at Messrs. BRONDSTED & Co's wharf every month. From eight to ten thousand tons of coal may be found piled up in a stack at a time. I have heard it said by steamship captains that this firm can coal a steamer faster and cheaper than any other firm in the West Indies. Those who go to St. Lucia, just now proposed as the station of the R. M. S. P. Co., find out to their cost the difference, and those who go to Barbados, where every bit of coaling has to be done in lighters, do the same.

Then there is the Natural Dry Dock, just between the German Company's wharf and that of Messrs. BRONDSTED & Co. As if Nature had predestined St. Thomas to be the future Naval Station of such a power as America, which must eventually become mistress of these islands: there is a cove, oblong in shape, only requiring a pair of gates to make it the most perfect and commodious dry dock in the West Indies. Think of it! Only a pair of gates and the necessary appurtenances, and at the smallest expense, comparatively, there would be a Dry Dock capacious enough to accommodate the largest vessel afloat. If we add to this, that an Arsenal and store-houses could be built alongside its shores, perfectly sheltered from an enemy's shot or shell, in case of an attack, and I think I have pretty conclusively shown the immense natural advantages which the harbour of St. Thomas possesses above all others in

the West Indies.—That it could be made impregnable I have said before. More than one naval authority supports me in this opinion and as it would cost but little to fortify, that is one additional reason why St. Thomas would be the best place for a Naval Station in the West Indies. This has also been said by Capt. N. H. Farquhar, who appears to have been interviewed by the "New York Herald's" reporter before the article on St. Thomas as a Naval Station appeared in its issue of 25 Sept.

Commander A. S. Barker was also said to have stated that "There is no better place in the West Indies for the establishment of a naval rendezvous, and as everybody admits that the United States should have a port of its own there, the opportunity of securing St. Thomas should not be allowed to pass."

Commander C. M. Thomas also said, after alluding to it as a small Gibraltar in itself and its advantages and facilities for making dry docks and stations &c. "that his nation ought to be quick to grab the chance for securing this valuable site."

The late Admiral Porter's opinions as to the advantages which would accrue to the United States by having St. Thomas as a Naval Station in case of war, are too well known for repetition here, and are also quoted in the "Herald's" article.

Unfortunately the first of these gentlemen, Capt. N. H. Farquhar, thought fit to qualify his good opinion of the island by stating, "But for the reputation which St. Thomas has for earthquakes, it would be his first choice," and Commander A. S. Barker to qualify his, by saying, "But for that unfortunate earthquake some years ago, St. Thomas would now be in possession of the United States," leaving this, one of the chief grounds for its rejection by the Senate in 1867, in the hands of any opponent of the scheme now, to again advance as an actual fact, and one which might outweigh any natural advantage which St. Thomas possesses, unless properly explained.

It is with this assertion,

"UNFORTUNATE EARTHQUAKE,"

that I now propose to deal.—If that really was one of the chief objections which the United States had against ratifying the

treaty so nearly concluded between itself and Denmark with regard to the sale of this island in 1867, it is very strange indeed that no particular pains were taken to ascertain how much of St. Thomas was shaken to pieces after this great convulsion of Nature.

I was living there myself at the time, and though the damage by the tidal wave was very great; especially to those structures fronting the sea, the wall buildings never moved an inch, and with the exception of a few old houses, whose sides cracked here and there, not one of them tumbled down, as you will occasionally see gingerbread edifices in New York, which collapse without even a shake, as witness the calamity in that great city only a few weeks ago, when a whole building caved in without a note of warning to its unfortunate inhabitants.

I am willing to confess that to feel the ground trembling under you, is far from being pleasant, especially if all the tales you hear about its opening be true; but when, as at St. Thomas, such things never occur, not so much as a tile falling from your roof or a wineglass from your sideboard, on the occasion of a "shock," and that such an earthquake like that of 1867 has not occurred more than twice in over three hundred years, then you wonder at naval officers of such experience, referring to "unfortunate earthquakes," as one of the probable reasons why the United States did not fulfil its agreement with Denmark, and become its possessor in the year 1867.

And now that I am on the subject of these convulsions of Nature, I would observe that both as regards hurricanes and earthquakes, St. Thomas is singularly free from them as compared with Barbados, St. Lucia, and other places—only that of 1867, can I record during my long residence, as being of any consequence, and it is the only important one noted in its history, if I may except that which took place on Sunday, 9th April, 1690; so long ago as to be scarcely worth while mentioning, were it not to show how seldom they occur.

With regard to the frequency of hurricanes, St. Thomas has only been visited ten times in a period covering 397 years out of nearly 140 hurricanes and severe gales which have com-

mitted more or less injury in the West Indies. They undoubtedly do a great deal of damage to fences, crops, and the smaller wooden tenements, unroofing houses and wrecking vessels in the harbour, should its violence be sufficient to cause them to break away from their anchorage. Sometimes there will occur great loss of life when the people are taken unprepared, as was the case in 1867, when there was scarcely a barometer in the place to indicate the coming of a storm and nearly every house was unprovided with bars to close up its windows securely. No one expected such a calamity, for within the memory of the oldest inhabitant there had not been a hurricane. On the other hand one must judge of these visitations by their after effects. True, as I have said before, a great deal of damage is done at the time, but the seasons become more regular, rains fall with greater frequency and the climate becomes more equable. And it is wonderful how soon the people begin to clear up and recover from the disaster; how soon everything resumes its former aspect, often improved. So much so, that it would seem as if no such thing had happened. Who would believe, looking at St. Thomas to day, that it was subject to unfortunate earthquakes, or that a hurricane or tidal wave had ever devastated it? To my mind, and I have in the course of my early travels witnessed both; a blizzard or a tornado, such as can sweep away half a city in the United States in a few moments, are far more formidable visitants. Change their names to hurricane or cyclone and I think Uncle Sam can beat the West Indies hollow, in such matters, just as he does the world in nearly everything where natural phenomena are concerned.

I now come to another point which if not of great importance with regard to the adaptability of St. Thomas as a Coaling and Naval Station, has been made much of by those who are least acquainted with it. — Take up any average description of the place and you will generally find it spoken of as a "barren rock," producing nothing for the consumption of its inhabitants, or as the "Herald" puts it, in its article of Sept 25th, "the soil is sandy and the greater part of it remains unproductive."



Now, nothing is wider from the truth than such a statement, though I willingly absolve the writer from any wishful intention to exaggerate. Most strangers, if they land on the island at all, spend but a short time, here, perhaps only a few hours, and like Mr. Froude, when he visited the West Indies, fill their note book with "first impressions" which are not always the best and most reliable.

To explore the lofty range of hills and valleys which first greet their sight would be a labour of weeks, though not an unpleasant one—as such a writer and naturalist as Frank Ober now U. S. Commissioner for the Chicago Exhibition to the West Indies, would surely attest; for no more fertile and romantic spots in the West Indies can be found up among those same hills and valleys. And if many of the estates are out of cultivation, it must not be forgotten that slavery, with its usual train of evils, is the cause—for no sooner was freedom proclaimed in the year 1848,—than the estates were deserted, the slaves flocked into town, sought more lucrative employment among the shipping, and places which had heretofore yielded handsome revenues to their owners fell to rack and ruin in consequence. The very name of agriculture was hateful to the slave, and the spade and the hoe but badges of a detestable servitude, which always recalled it to his memory when he looked upon them.

It has required years to eradicate this feeling, but now that compulsory education is beginning to exert its sway, and you cannot find apter scholars than many of the coloured children at the public schools, their eyes are being opened, they are beginning to understand that in that same soil which has been called "dry and sandy," there is a mine of wealth, or at least enough to secure them an honest independence, and our black brothers in St. Thomas, to day are once more turning to the cultivation of small holdings, which by easy payments become in a short time their own.

An Agricultural Society formed of influential gentlemen, merchants and planters, looks after this important scheme, and from the success which has attended its efforts, hitherto, by and

by we shall find St. Thomas exporting something else besides "straw hats and pearls."

Fruits and vegetables of all kinds are grown here. Coffee of an excellent quality; also tobacco can be raised. They were so, in large quantities, by the early settlers, why can it not be done again? One has only to look at the island as it was one hundred years ago to answer that question. As far back as 1775 there were 69 plantations; 27 of which were of sugar cane, the rest being devoted to the raising of stock, cotton, tobacco and other produce. In 1792 there were 74 plantations, 40 in cane and 34 in cotton. Hence we may infer that St. Thomas was not only commercially prosperous in former days, but remarkably so as an agricultural community. "A dry and sandy soil," forsooth! Come up with me in the mountains, and I will show you bits of colour and places clothed with such beautiful verdure and such a variety of ferns, creepers and shrubs that you have rarely seen before outside of these Virgin Isles. On all sides will you see wonders of Nature's own providing. Here a broad gut or gully, down which a tiny stream of water is trickling musically among the rocks. It is overhung with trees of several kinds. There the morning glory and acacia bend low with last night's showers. Birds few in species, but many in number, burst out into song. Tamarinds, palms and soursops (*Anona muricata*) grow here with others, as the sugar apple (*Anona squamosa*). And in wild profusion trees and vines are hidden beneath thousands of air plants and parasites, which are the most conspicuous vegetation. A lizard runs out and looks curiously at you, as you step upon a twig which crackles under your feet. You look below upon the little town whose busy hum no longer greets your ears. The sea looks like glass and is dotted here, and there, with many a sail which seem as specks upon the water. Hill and valley luxuriant in tropical foliage, roll beneath you. The shore lines are broken; huge rocks stand out grey and bare, alternated by level bays. Fleecy clouds float airily along, casting their shadows upon the land, changing its aspect at every moment. But the noontide sun now warns you to de-

ascend. You do so lingeringly, wondering where the "dry and sandy soil" is, and resolving that other walks like these to other spots as beautiful, shall not be left untried while you are a sojourner at St. Thomas. This is the picturesque side of this "dry and sandy rock." Now let us contemplate it from one more practical.

### CHAPTER III.

Baron Eggers, author of a valuable work on the Flora of these islands, published under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, says in 1883, "that a new era of industry would open up in St. Thomas, if it were made to bear products, which would have not only a local value, but also could be exported and disposed of in the world's markets. The palatable guinea corn (*Sorghum*), which grows here with astonishing luxuriance, could to a great extent replace the now generally used corn meal."

"Coffee can also be produced as well as an endless variety of vegetables and tropical fruits. The large areas, which at present give no return could, however, so far as they could not be used for the cultivation of vegetables or as pastures, be made at least as profitable as the more fertile areas, which are now used for other purposes, and that, without requiring so much capital to do so."

"On these worthless stretches of land, the valuable product known as divi-divi (*Lebidibia coriaria*), which is found growing wild in all the islands, mostly in St. Thomas, can be grown in large quantities and as this article is worth from \$60 to \$70 per ton, and the cost of cultivation is small; it would pay owners of such tracts of land to raise it, and if the tannin could be extracted from it on the spot, the cost of freight being saved, there would in a short time be a valuable article of export available."

"Of the fibre producing plants, there is the agave, which

grows wild in great numbers, everywhere in the island, often upon the naked rocks. The plant attains an immense size—the individual leaves often being over eight feet long by one foot broad and weighing over fifty pounds. These leaves contain a countless number of fine, strong fibres, which make up eight to ten per cent of the total weight, and in strength and appearance are equal to the best Manilla hemp, which they surpass in durability under water. The value of its fibre in England is from £30 to £40 per ton."

It is not within the limits of this pamphlet to speak of all the valuable plants which this eminent botanist enumerates as growing upon the island of St. Thomas, and which by proper cultivation and the employment of capital could be made the source of large and profitable incomes. It is sufficient to name the bark of the sea side grape (*Coccoloba*) the bark of the mangrove (*Rhizophora*) as other tannin producing trees growing here. And of the fibre producing varieties, a plant of the pine apple variety (*Pitcairnia*), the wild growing pinguin (*Bromelia Pinguin*) several species of *corchorus* from which jute is manufactured, the guanatail (*Sansoniera guineensis*), the commercial value of which is about \$250. per ton. The cocoa palm, the wild horseradish (*Moringa*) the seeds of which contains a fine oil which never becomes rancid, the castor oil plant, the well known aloe, which grows wild and could easily be planted on a large scale, not to speak of a variety of plants and spices of great commercial value and into the detail of which space precludes us. Sufficient I trust, has been said to show that from such a "dry and sandy soil," as St. Thomas is said to be composed of, no such endless variety could be produced. All that is wanted is capital—and should, some day, the island pass into the hands of the U. S. A. as its coaling and naval station, there is not the slightest doubt, whatever, but what that important element of progress will not be found wanting. Then will many of our own small capitalists, timid to day to launch into agriculture, regret the lost opportunity, when land was cheap and the way clear before them, and be sorry to see the Yankee with his proverbial "smartness" make money out of what is

now a sealed book to them.

Having said so much of the town and island of St. THOMAS as illustrating its desirability as a NAVAL AND COALING STATION as well as from an Agricultural and Commercial point of view, I shall now refer to one or two of the remarks made in the "Herald's" article on this island, of the 25th Sept. It states that "The British Mail Company alone lost during the hurricane and earthquake in St. Thomas in 1867 about *eight million dollars* worth of property, and the consequence was, that they changed their station from St. Thomas to Jamaica, expecting eventually to change it to Antigua."

Where did the "Herald's" reporter get this astounding piece of information from?

The facts are these:

There never was a British Mail Company in St. Thomas. The "Herald's" informant must mean The Royal Mail S. S. Co., which certainly did not lose eight millions of dollars. The total damage done to town, shipping and harbour did not amount to a tenth of that sum, and that is allowing plenty for the actual loss.

The Royal Mail S. S. Co. did not leave St. Thomas because of the earthquake and hurricane, nor cyclonic disturbance, as asserted by the "Herald." It continued there for *eighteen years afterwards*, not leaving St. Thomas till 1885—and then only because it was made a condition by the English Government, to their obtaining the subsidy from England and the subsidies from the different English islands, that they should make their headquarters at one of them. This they did at Barbados—not at Kingston, Jamaica, as is stated in the "Herald."

The only true thing in that paragraph is that the French adopted Martinique as their port of call for their steamers, but it is also true that they *came back again to St. Thomas*, and as if to compensate for the loss of the Royal Mail S. S. Co., which yet sends two steamers a month besides cargo boats, and retains its large Factory there, on account of the very profitable return it still gives to them; the American and

Brazil S. S. Co. doubled its line of splendid steamers, and the Hamburg-American S. S. Co, which has fifteen steamers calling at St. Thomas every month, is slowly but surely monopolizing the carrying trade which formerly belonged to the Royal Mail S. S. Co., which, it is said, regrets ever having changed its itinerary, and unable to return, owing to its contract, contemplates moving to St. Lucia, where, at least, so it is reported, they will not have to complain of such treatment as they have received at the hands of Barbados. Though how they will fare there has yet to be seen. The merchants of that island are only beginners, and without the two hundred years' experience of St. Thomas and its natural advantages, cannot be expected to meet all the requirements of a first class port of call.

The "Herald" also says that, "the removal of the English and French Companies did much towards ruining the commercial importance of St. Thomas."

No such thing—more steamers call at St. Thomas at present than there ever did before in its palmiest days, and it is to this facility of intercourse by direct communication that St. Thomas owes the loss of much of its commercial importance. Every island in the West Indies—every spot on the Spanish Main, which used to send its purchasers to St. Thomas and its produce, now does so direct; steamers calling almost at their doors for it. But there is every reason to believe that if a great manufacturing country like America with its enterprising merchants, would make St. Thomas a depôt for its productions, selling at such low rates as to attract purchasers who have transferred their custom elsewhere, they would return, and once more the place would recover a portion of its former prosperity.

Given a free port for vessels to come and go, with such moderate charges as now exist, large stocks of goods to pick and choose from, at fair prices, and business would soon be doubled, and this, independent of the fact of its being the Naval Station of so great and civilized a country as America.

The "Herald" says, "our principal exports are straw

hats and pearls," perhaps it alludes to the large shipments which are made from this port, of Panama hats—certainly the largest in the West Indies—and to the valuable conch pearls which our fishermen now and again find in the crustacean of that name, but it has forgotten to speak of the Bay Rum and Bay Oil for which St. Thomas is famous throughout the civilized world, large quantities of it being exported to America and other places, and which may be said to be the forerunner of a host of similar manufactures in the future, when fresh blood is infused in this industrious community.

With these few exceptions and one or two others of minor importance the article of the "Herald" speaks correctly of us, and I am glad that the errors which appear in it have given me the opportunity of placing matters in a right light before those who are interested in the welfare of St. Thomas and who, maybe, would like to see the star spangled banner floating over us instead of that dear old Dannebrog which for so many years in kindness and peaceful good will has been the flag to which most of us have sworn allegiance. For it is but just to the Mother Country to say, that if circumstances have arisen which have prevented her from doing all that she might have wished to further our progress—we at any rate owe much of that we now possess, to her mild and equitable rule, to her consideration of our wants—not always reasonable—and to the many good things which an impartial examination reveals as belonging to her Administration. Few would care to lose a voice in the Council—a say, at least, in our Government, and the manner of expending the public funds, few would care to have our taxes or duties raised, without corresponding advantages, few would care to see the death penalty put in actual force, the Reconciling Court or any of those valuable Institutions abolished, which have contributed so greatly to our civilization. Not that further privileges might not be expected from so great and free a nation as America, should she ever acquire this island for a Coaling and Naval Station; not that we might not expect; to paraphrase the words of His Majesty King Christian IX in His Proclamation to the people of St. Thomas

and St. John when they were about to be transferred to the United States in 1867, *That a mighty impulse, both moral and material would be given to the happy development of the islands under such a Sovereignty as that of America.*

---

### POSTSCRIPT.

Since penning the above, I am in receipt of a copy of the "New York Herald," dated 4th October. This contains Pen and Pencil Sketches of St. Thomas, and is certainly a great improvement upon the article of Sept. 25th. Besides giving a fair description of the place, and how advantageous it would be as a Coaling and Naval Station for the U. S. A. it speaks favourably of its buildings, banks, schools, its form of Government and its people. It is mistaken only in saying that now and again it suffers from a water famine. This I beg leave to correct. As I have already stated, there is always a surplus of water; sufficient to supply vessels calling at the port.

Taken as a whole, it is gratifying indeed to find St. Thomas figuring so prominently in the pages of one of the greatest and most ably edited newspapers of this century.

St. Thomas, Oct. 27, 1891



• J. SVENDSEN.

P. AUBECK.

• KLINGBERG KREBS & CO.

**COMMISSION MERCHANTS,**

**Provisions, Wines & Spirits,**

**WHOLESALE & RETAIL.**

**ST. THOMAS, W. I.**