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AT LAST:

A CHRISTMAS IN THE WEST INDIES.

BY

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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AT LAST.

A CHRISTMAS IN THE WEST INDIES.

CHAPTER IX.

San Josef.

THE road to the ancient capital of the island is pleasant enough, and characteristic of the West Indies. Not, indeed, as to its breadth, make, and material, for they, contrary to the wont of West India roads, are as good as they would be in England, but on account of the quaint travellers along it, and the quaint sights which are to be seen over every hedge. You pass all the races of the island going to and from town or fieldwork, or washing clothes in some clear brook, beside which a solemn Chinaman sits catching for his dinner strange fishes, known to my learned friend, Dr. Günther, and perhaps to one or two other men in Europe: but certainly not to me. Always somebody or something new and strange is to be seen, for eight most pleasant miles.

The road runs at first along a low cliff foot, with an ugly Mangrove swamp, looking just like an alder-

bed at home, between you and the sea; a swamp which it would be worth while to drain by a steam-pump, and then plant with coco-nuts or bamboos; for its miasma makes the southern corner of Port of Spain utterly pestilential. You cross a railroad, the only one in the island, which goes to a limestone quarry, and so out along a wide straight road, with Negro cottages right and left, embowered in fruit and flowers. They grow fewer and finer as you ride on; and soon you are in open country, principally of large paddocks. These paddocks, like all West Indian ones, are apt to be ragged with weeds and scrub. But the coarse broad-leaved grasses seem to keep the mules in good condition enough, at least in the rainy season. Most of these paddocks have, I believe, been under cane cultivation at some time or other; and have been thrown into grass during the period of depression dating from 1845. It has not been worth while, as yet, to break them up again, though the profits of sugar-farming are now, or at least ought to be, very large. But the soil along this line is originally poor and sandy; and it is far more profitable to break up the rich vegas, or low alluvial lands, even at the trouble of clearing them of forest. So these paddocks are left, often with noble trees standing about in them, putting one in mind—if it were not for the Palmistes and Bamboos and the crowd of black vultures over an occasional dead animal—of English parks.