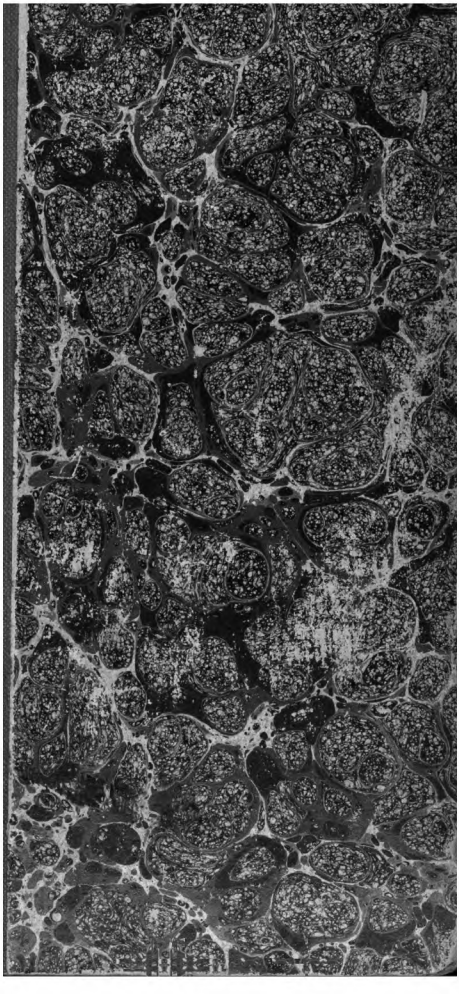

Stanton

ALICE SPINNER 1894

A STUDY IN COLOUR

"A quarto la novia
Y a quarto el novio.
¿Quien por dos quartos
No hace un casorio?"

SPANISH STANZA

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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NOTE.

THE term "Creole" in former times used to be strictly limited to the white children of white parents born in the West Indies. In the French islands the signification has never altered, and is rigidly confined to its original meaning.

In the English colonies, however, it is now used currently as a general term for anything West Indian, animate or inanimate, English and negro, animal and vegetable alike. Nay, I have no doubt that, at the present time, even a West Indian cockroach would, had he a voice, loudly proclaim his superiority as a "Creole" cockroach over the rest of his species.

TO

MY DEAR FRIEND,

CAMILLE OLIVIA ELISABETH G. DE L,

I DEDICATE

THIS LITTLE BOOK.

To you, and to you alone, these little sketches of West Indian life of right belong, for without you they would certainly have remained for ever floating in the vague annals of negro life. You will remember how they began.

Often as we drove along the dusty lanes, and passed the picturesque little negro huts, round which children of all shades and sizes played, you would say, "How I wish I knew the daily life of this strange people! What are their wants and cares, their joys and sorrows?"

Your words set me thinking, and

when you left us, and had gone home to dear old England, I thought still more.

As I pondered I began to regard with a new interest the dusky servants that came and went about the house. The servant question is to the full as engrossing a topic in the West Indies as at home, but it was not from a domestic, but from a human point of view that I was considering them.

Gradually I made friends with them ; I found they were only too willing to talk about themselves, when once their first constraint was over, and they realised that I was truly interested in their histories ; and as they talked there broke on me glimpses of a life so strange and fantastic, that at first I could hardly realize its existence.

Elita was a coloured girl of whom I heard a great deal from many of the servants. She was quite a beauty among her own people, and her tragical fate was spoken of with the greatest regret. I wrote her story out exactly as they told it to me.

I used to read what I had written, with, of course, certain reservations, to some of the servants afterwards, and they were delighted at hearing

" stories all 'bout ourselves, Missus," and used to criticise most freely, and tell me where I had made mistakes, and how I was to alter them. When it was right and they were satisfied they used to be so pleased and say, " Dat quite right 'last, Missus, dat 'xactly de way we lib." Then I felt proud, even although my audience consisted of but my brown nurse and a tattered and disreputable-looking old negress, cleaner-in-general to the household.

If you can join your approval to theirs, I shall feel that these little stories have received more than their fair share of praise.

I do not, indeed, feel towards them as a mother, but rather as one who, finding them wandering neglected and forlorn, took pity on the little foundlings, and, clothing them in simplest words, now sends them out into the wide world to seek their fate. It is from knowledge of your own universal goodwill and sympathy that I ask you to be godmother to the poor little waifs.

ALICE SPINNER.

SANTA ANNA, WEST INDIES.

A STUDY IN COLOUR.

I.

"THE MISSUS" was walking along the Port Albert Road one Sunday. The hour was early, for it was six o'clock in the morning, but at that time the Creole climate is simply perfection, for the sun has not as yet asserted his power and become too fierce to enjoy in comfort the luxuriant loveliness that surrounds one on every side. On that particular Sunday the mountains were even more beautiful than usual, and the Missus stopped from time to time to look at them. She knew them by heart, but for her they never lost their charm.

To-day they were amethyst, shot here and there with brilliant golden green, which faded away into the dreamiest and softest of blues on the more distant peaks. They filled

three sides of the horizon completely; on the fourth, the calm tropical sea lay like a polished shield, fringed here and there with slim and feathery palm-trees.

The long, straight road that led to Port Albert lay like a white streak before her; but from the early hour, and the absence of the usual week-day traffic, was as yet comparatively free from dust. Generally one waded ankle-deep in soft grey sand. Now every green blade of the tall guinea grass was heavy with dew, and the long, murderous-looking spikes of the Pinguin plants and cactus that edged the roadside glistened also with myriads of diamond drops. A little wooden shed stood close to the highway. This was a shop, and the owner, a cheerful-looking brown man, was apparently blessed with numerous relations, for the small "yard" attached to the shed contained several diminutive wooden and wicker-work huts. That he was prosperous might also be inferred from a glimpse through one of the half-open doors of a small mahogany sideboard laden with the glass and cheap crockery, that among negroes supply the place of family plate at home.

There was a board affixed to the rudely constructed counter, on which, in rather shaky characters, it was announced that the owner of the shop, "Josiah de Paz" was "authorised deler" in "Agricultural Produse" —a fact that a heap of green cocoanuts, a large bunch of yellow bananas, and a glowing pile of scarlet akees, assisted to emphasise. The value of the entire stock may, perhaps, have amounted to two shillings; but as far as beauty of colour was concerned, Aladdin's jewels could not have surpassed them in splendour. Josiah also sold the more prosaic molasses, and a few other simple household necessaries.

An edifice built up carelessly of the vivid blue soap that is so prized by Creole washerwomen was particularly noticeable, while a cluster of common tin mugs hanging from a string caught the sunlight most effectively, and kindly flashed it on to the darker corners of the little shop.

Some gaudy checked handkerchiefs were disposed flag-wise from the rafters, while, to complete the little picture, a gorgeous flamboyant tree in full bloom overhung the tiny shingled roof, and with its fern-like leaves of emerald

green and masses of blazing scarlet blossoms, transformed the homely little scene into a perfect study of gorgeous tropical colour. To a native it would perhaps have conveyed little, but in the English eyes of the Missus it signified a great deal, and she paused again upon her way in order to admire it more closely.

Two or three black women were standing by the store counter, gossiping on their way to early church. The shop was not by way of being kept open on Sunday, but fruit spoils quickly, and Josiah was therefore willing, and even anxious, to part with his last night's stock at a cheap rate. Akees, as all the world knows, become poisonous if kept, and he was always ready to oblige a neighbour; also, but this is an after thought, he had no shutters to put up.

The women accordingly chattered like parrots over the fruit, and made elaborate bargains.

It was a point of religion among them that no money should pass on the Lord's Day, and the transfer, therefore, had to be carried out by the promise of so many sugar-canes and so many mangoes, custard apples, or sweet sops, to be

produced later on in the future week. To settle these points exactly was a long business, and frequently led to complications, but the Sabbath was observed.

They were all in their best Sunday raiment, and the Missus found herself again regretting the very stiff cassava starched petticoat that invariably marks the full dress of the self-respecting "coloured lady." In their work-a-day clothes they would have looked characteristic, and even picturesque, but in their fine attire, and absurdly over-trimmed "church hats," they appeared at their worst.

Fortunately, like most of us poor mortals, they were sublimely unconscious of their own deficiencies, for in each other's eyes (which, after all, is where our standard of taste is to be sought for) their faintly coloured flowered prints and white Gainsborough hats, over-burdened with feathers and mock pearls, looked very correct, and what they themselves termed "stylish," even although they surmounted a collection of tightly plaited woolly locks.

The Missus gave a regretful glance at these adornments, and sighed softly even while she smiled.

Suddenly she heard a gay "Marning, Missus."

She looked around, and there, on the other side of the red pinquin spears, she saw a flash of crimson.

A tall, well-made brown girl was standing at the door of one of the low palm-thatched huts.

She nodded and smiled again and again. Her white teeth glittered in the morning light.

She was a handsome creature in her own style, and she seemed to know it. A pure blooded Sambo, her soft, smooth skin was of the tint of a well-ripened hazel nut. Her dress was straight and long, and of bright red calico, and her well-poised head was tied with a check handkerchief, in which the same hue predominated. She wore a blue bead necklace round her throat. Taking her as a whole, she matched the tall flamboyant tree very well, and her presence gave the final touch of colour to the picture. "Marning, Missus," she called once more, and the Missus accordingly stopped, and they had some conversation.

On the Missus admiring her red dress, she laughed again, and all the other coloured women, who had paused to listen to their talk, laughed shrilly too.

"Glad it please you, Missus. Plenty folk laugh when I buy it; but I tink I look berry nice in it, so I no care what dey say;" and she cast a semi-defiant look at the older women.

Evidently the garment in question had been the cause of some discussion among the black *élégantes* of the district. Clearly also the wearer was a young lady of unusual character, and possessed an original taste of her own.

The acquaintance of the Missus with my heroine might have begun and ended here, but some six weeks afterwards she chanced to stay for a considerable time at the Summerlands Hotel. Now there are hotels in Creolia, but their number is so limited at present, that I may be forgiven if I hint that at the time I speak of they were hardly up to our European standard of comfort. As far as the outer edifices are concerned, little remains to be desired, for in a moment of enthusiasm the Creolians erected various large and lofty buildings for the purpose. The beauty of the scenery of their lovely West Indian island, and the softness of its climate, held out hopes that a perpetual crop of winter tourists would speedily cause them to reap

a golden harvest for their pains. They were doomed to disappointments. The hotels were there, but beyond the name they were of small use to luxurious and consumptive visitors.

They afforded shelter indeed, and a tolerably clean and habitable room, but for food, attendance, and all the other items that are generally regarded as part of a hotel's duty to provide, the less said the better.

The food was either cruelly deficient in quantity or curiously defective in quality. The attendance, at the best vague, was at the worst non-existent. Complaints were received with stony nonchalance, or looked upon as an unwarranted insult to the hotel management, the result being that after a week or two of more or less patient endurance of the evils, all independent travellers vanished in search of more desirable habitations. The unhappy mortals who by their occupations or necessities were tied to the spot, dragged on from day to day a precarious existence, and consoled themselves for their short commons and numerous small discomforts by incessant but unavailing growls.

How the Missus came to pass

months in this unsatisfactory abode it is not necessary to inquire. For the Missus it was perhaps less hard than for most people. No management, however defective, could take away one tint of orange from the glowing sunsets. No ill-cooked stew or muddy coffee could rob the glorious mountains of their jewelled peaks. If the negro servants were lazy, they were also eminently picturesque. The Missus heard of their faults on every side, and with much truth, but she found them also, to her own knowledge, affectionate as children, and almost as spontaneous in their conduct. If they were not trusted, they stole —stole, too, with a frank-hearted enjoyment of their cleverness, that almost robbed the crime of its guilt.

If they were scolded, they lied boldly and deliberately, but only because, as they explained, "dey no liked to be 'roughed' or 'cursed.'"

Morals, as generally understood at home, were of the slightest, yet in their irregular domestic arrangements they were often most strangely and touchingly true to each other.

In all, poor black children, a queer compound of infantine vanity and pathetic humility, ready to do

valuable work in the world with proper care and guidance, but fit material also for deeds with which to match their own dark skins.

In spite of all their shortcomings, the Missus liked them sincerely, and they, with the wonderful instinct of children, found this fact out at once.

Her property was always respected, although it had been instilled into her from the time of her first arrival that all must be kept under lock and key.

She never followed this advice, and yet her ribbons and laces, her toilet soap and her scent bottles, remained untouched.

If any of the servants asked for a bow for their "church hat," or some "essence," wherewith to make a sensation at one of their parties, they knew that their request would be cheerfully granted, and in consequence they never took anything of the kind without leave.

I believe this method of dealing with them is unusual: whether it would answer in all cases is a question; but as the only excuse for the relation of this simple history is its veracity, I mention it here.

One exception I am, however, bound to make, and that is with

regard to food. The Missus *did* occasionally miss biscuits, white sugar, and other small European luxuries. No amount of teaching can imbue the negro mind with the idea that where food is concerned they are privileged. "Taking no stealing," they will assert, and in their own words, "Food God's gift an' b'longs to us all." It must be admitted that this theory is carried out with scrupulous exactitude, to the dire confusion and dismay of thrifty English housewives. In this respect the Missus could not lay claim to being any better off than the rest of her compatriots.

II.

OWING to the peculiar conditions of the hotel, it was not astonishing that the black servants of the establishment succeeded each other with almost bewildering celerity.

A fat quadroon man-cook, who owed his fixity of tenure more to his stolidity than his talents; a smart-looking mulatto boy, who attended to the bar, and answered generally to the name of Brown; and a mahogany-coloured female, of uncertain age and ragged aspect, who spent the greater portion of her life on her hands and knees floor-cleaning, might be looked upon as forming the permanent staff. As to the chambermaids, they came and went, leaving behind them a dim recollection of various faces—brown, black, and yellow—with which was indistinctly associated a memory of divers romantic

names, such as Clementina, Evadne, Ursulina, Maud, and Margarita. To individualise them was an impossibility.

One day, however, the Missus, on entering her room, was greeted by a "Marning, Missus," in a singularly distinct, although low voice.

A brown damsel was sitting at the dressing-table, languidly polishing the looking-glass, and admiring herself meanwhile. Most of the chambermaids would have contented themselves with simply doing the latter; but although the present process was a slow one, the mirror was certainly being cleaned after a fashion, and this in itself was remarkable. The polisher looked up, and gazing expectantly at the Missus, added in a markedly friendly manner, "I Justina, Missus. Come as new maid."

Now at that moment the Missus was in a hurry, so she had barely time to return the salutation; and although the dusky face seemed strangely familiar to her, a curious peculiarity in its smile struck her most, for the new chambermaid showed three apparently solid silver teeth in the front of her large but good-tempered mouth. The effect was uncanny and weird to a degree.

The Missus noticed this extraordinary attribute even more the next day, when Justina, in passing her in the corridor, bestowed upon her another glistening and silvery smile.

It mystified her altogether, for the negroes, like children, dislike pain and trouble, and will lose all their teeth, and suffer tortures from toothache, sooner than pay one timely visit to a dentist; also they have not the money for such things, and Justina's mouth represented much time, pain, and expense.

On the next occasion, however, the Missus had no difficulty in recognising in Justina her old acquaintance under the flamboyant tree; for her teeth shone white, as of old when she stood by the roadside hedge in her red cotton dress.

"Marning, Missus," she said, reproachfully. "One, two, tree days, Missus, dat you not know me 'gain, and yet I come to dis yar hotel jist cos I learn de Missus stay hyar."

At this absolutely gratuitous invention the Missus smiled. It was, however, perfectly characteristic of the speaker.

"I remember you now very well also, Justina," she answered. "I should have known you at once,

only your silver teeth puzzled me. What has become of them? You certainly had them yesterday."

At this direct question Justina looked down, giggled, hesitated, and at last took heart of grace and spoke out boldly.

"Well, Missus, see hyar. It best to tell de trut. 'Fore I come hyar, I lib two years as butleress down town wid Dr. Parratt, de 'Merican dentist. Mrs. Parratt berry good lady, Missus. I see all de rich ladies come to him. It was grand to see dem, only sometimes de poor tings bawl plenty, 'cos he hurt dem dreffful bad. Often, too, dey go 'way wid deir teeth all gilt. Den when I coming hyar, an' want to look fine an' pretty too, I tink ob my teeth. Dey white, Missus, an' I show dem plenty." And Justina gave here a specimen of her wide-mouthed smile. "Well, Missus, I tink I will hab fine gilt teeth too, same as de white Buckra ladies; so I tuk some pieces ob silber off ob de wine bottles in de bar. Brown he help me do it. Shampain wine dey call it, an' I cubber my teeth wid de stuff. True it silber, an' no gold, but it shines all de same, an' look smart, an' make me look all de same as de white ladies dat spend

so much on deir teeth. Dis marning de silber come off, an' so I shall hab to begin again. It offul trouble, Missus, to make it stick on praperly," she added, mournfully.

The Missus, however, expressed such energetic and complete disapproval of this novel adornment, that Justina, after some hesitation, was finally convinced that this time her original ideas of self-beautification were not likely to be received with general success, and agreed to allow her strong white teeth to remain as nature made them for the future.

I have not hitherto made mention that the Missus possessed a baby. She also had a husband, but as his country's requirements generally compelled his absence, and he has nothing to do with their story, we need not trouble ourselves about him.

The baby was a personage, and commanded attention. He was a little boy of some six months old. An affectionate, placid infant, with a faint cloud of fair, fluffy hair on his round and otherwise bald head, with blue serious eyes, and the adorable little hands and feet that are the rightful heritage of all babies. It was chiefly on his account that

the Missus endured without discontent the great deserted Summerlands Hotel, for being on the slope of the mountains, it was considerably cooler than the stifling streets of Port Albert.

The boy was a constant source of mingled anxiety and amusement to his mother, as is the wont of most only children; but the Creole climate appeared to suit him well, and he grew and flourished with almost tropical haste.

To Justina the pretty white baby-boy was a revelation indeed, and it was well-nigh impossible to keep her away from her small self-created deity.

Providence favoured her; for on the Missus's ancient and black nurse falling ill, Justina deliberately and unobtrusively slipped into her place, and, almost before she was aware of it, exchanged the exciting uncertainties of the hotel service for the more monotonous rule of the Missus.

This transfer afforded to the girl herself the keenest satisfaction. If too much devotion be a fault in a nurse, Justina failed in her duties, for her whole heart and soul were bound up in her little charge. It may indeed be said that she completely annexed the baby, but Baby Billy

seemed on his side perfectly contented with the new arrangement, and prospered even more than before.

Justina would play, romp, and talk with the baby with the frankest enjoyment, and for answer the little fellow would gaze at her with calm and solemn eyes, as if amazed at his attendant's frivolity.

The gravity of little children surpasses anything of the kind in grown-up people. Few men can attain to it. Even a bishop might copy it with credit and advantage.

Justina was indefatigable wherever her "lilly Buckra Massa" was concerned, and a cross or impatient word never crossed her lips where he was in question.

At five o'clock, when it was still dusk, and the only signs of the fast-approaching day were the orange streaks in the purple-blue sky, Justina arose and dressed with care her little "tredger," as she called Baby Billy. Her own toilet at this early hour was a rapid one, and the elaborate washing, combing and oiling that no negress omits, was put off until the heat of the day, when her "tredger" should be fast asleep. Now she merely unswathed her head from the weird-

looking white bandage with which, as was her custom (aided by castor oil), she vainly endeavoured to restrain the curliness of her woolly locks, slipped on her cotton frock and shoes, and she was ready for her walk. Indeed, I am not very certain that at this early hour she did not revert to the primitive habits of her childhood, and dispense with the shoes.

"Little Massa" must, of course, wear his best, for the road which she preferred for his morning walk was the highway to Port Albert Market, and to her the cream of the whole proceedings lay in the salutations and admiring exclamations that he received from the negro market-women.

Thus she shed salt tears over a neat and unobtrusive grey garment that the Missus, in a fit of virtuous economy, had made out of a new but unused dress of her own. In vain was its utility and beauty pointed out to Justina, she remained blind to its advantages.

"No, Missus! No. I nebber, nebber can say I like it. Dat my tredger Buckra Massa should wear ole tings! I quite 'shamed to tuk him out dressed like dat 'fore de market-women."

Nor did a new-fashioned cap, that had been sent out recently from England, fail also to incur her disapproval.

"It may be English, Missus, but it no suit de Massa one bit, an' de people here tink it ugly, so I no let him wear it."

She was so offended, that the Missus had to appease her wrath by the gift of an embroidered white apron, and the purchase of a wholly unnecessary white muslin cape for "the Massa," both of which articles of clothing possessed the Creole stamp of supreme elegance. She was even glad to escape so easily, for some gorgeous Chinese crapes and embroideries having been sent to her shortly afterwards, Justina fixed her affections on a small but brilliant scarlet and sea-green garment.

The Missus caught her in the act of clothing the baby in it one morning, and so promptly asserted her authority, that the rainbow-hued vestment was removed, amid a storm of tears, exclamations, and entreaties.

"Oh, Missus, I 'sprised at you! Do let de lilly Massa wear it. He look so grand for all the women to see him. Missus, dear Missus"—in dulcet tones—"dey tink so much ob him, an' dis dress de only one I

ebber see dat 'pears good nuff for such a most sweet infant."

As the Missus was silent, and even this flattery was thrown away on her, the plaint was resumed, but in another key.

"Missus"—angrily and reproachfully—"you no care for de Massa as I do, or you no dress him in de ugly grey dress." Another pause. "Missus, dear, nice Missus, let him hab de pretty cloak all red an' green. Jest dis once, Missus!"

But the Missus was like adamant, and the baffled Justina departed on her walk with Billy in his ordinary attire, and her own black eyes brimming over with disappointed tears. Generally, however, she was the merriest of creatures, and even on this occasion, by the time of her return had forgotten all her troubles, and was ready for the lengthy ceremonial of inducing the little Massa to sleep quietly during the heat of the day.

She was accustomed to sing to him for hours strange little snatches of Creole songs, none of them in the least like the so-called "nigger-melodies" that are in vogue in England.

Justina's songs were all rather sad, even when the words were gay, and

most of them were more in the style of a chant, than what we should term a song.

One of them in particular haunted the Missus like a dream, for it seemed to her like a far-off echo of some long-forgotten tragedy, belonging to the old slavery days:

"Jan was far away,
Floating on de sea,
Floating till de sea goes down.
She was a black piccaninny,
Jest from ober Guinea,
Only—two—months—old.

Oh! when dis chile was born,
It was a coloured chile,
Tie her to de rigger ob an oar,
An' feed her on bananas,
Feed her on potatoes,
Feed her till de sun goes down.

Hush! hush! baby!
Where is your pappy?
Ups an' down she goes.
Oh! I buy a lilly waggon,
To rock dis lilly woman,
Rock her till
de
sun
goes
down."

The half-savage air died away in a sort of wail, but what sorrows had originally inspired the quaint melody?—all past now and for-

gotten, and serving but as the means for soothing a little white child to sleep.

Another little song was almost pathetic in its simplicity:

"My sweetie lub me,
My sweetie kiss me,
My sweetie tell eberybody dat he lub me.
'When I come home fram
De—mer—ara—a
I—will—marry—you-u-u.'"

The air was sad and monotonous, but so, alas! was the theme; a very epitome of most Creole courtships. If Baby Billy, however, cried and refused to slumber properly, another lullaby was sure to be intoned:

"Oh! what is de matter wid de Massa?
Hungry an' thirstly, yeo—o.
Oh! whateber is de matter wid my Massa?
Tired and sleepy, yeo—o."

The adjectives varied indefinitely, although the dismal tune would last with maddening reiteration for hours. It was, indeed, a test of endurance between Billy's lungs and Justina's, but in the long run the tune always conquered. In consequence this composition may be termed the classic of the Creole nursery.

III.

IN spite of possessing some of the finest pastures in the world, the milk supply in Creolia is scanty, and at some seasons of the year almost fails entirely.

It was only, therefore, as a special favour that a kind friend of the Missus allowed her to deal with her for the Baby Massa's daily supply.

She also undertook that it should be sent regularly to the hotel by a "trustworthy messenger."

It appeared in due course early the following day. I use the word "appeared" advisedly, for it did so in three champagne bottles, standing upright in one of the shallow, round native baskets.

Somewhere under this basket, and quite overshadowed by its circling rim, was Angelina's small, round head. It looked a most unsafe arrangement, but she moved along

at a great pace, with all the ease that long training had given her. She had carried such loads, and far heavier ones, from her baby-hood, as her mother and grand-mother had done before her, and indeed would have been sorely puzzled how to do so in any other way. In Creolia, everything, from the heaviest water-jar to a mango, is carried after this fashion, with the result that all the lower class of negro women are upright as darts, and carry their heads like queens.

She was a droll-looking little mortal, with a delicious velvety bloom on her dark chocolate cheek, that made the Missus realize for the first time how little mere colour has to do with beauty of complexion ; for Angelina's complexion was beautiful in spite of its dusky hue ; and indeed, with her well-knit, upright little figure, shining white teeth, and bright, dark eyes, she was at this time a perfect model of what a healthy little negro girl ought to be.

The Missus grew quite fond of Angelina. She was so smiling and quiet, and her two knocks, and gentle "Marning, Missus!" made a pleasant little prelude to the long, hot days.

If occasionally the cowman "had

given the poor cows too much water," as the Missus diplomatically termed it, it was no fault of hers, and the delighted twinkle in her eyes, with which she engaged to give him the message, showed that she appreciated to the full the humour of the situation.

At first the milk used to arrive at all sorts of erratic hours, but the Missus found a remedy for that annoyance in the daily gift of a few sweets, if Angie was punctual. If she was later than she ought to be she got fewer sugar-plums, while if the milk was not forthcoming at the little Massa's breakfast-time, she was deprived of them altogether. On Sunday a small coin was added to the "sweeties" if she had been good throughout the week, as a reward of virtue.

Her costume on ordinary days consisted of a blue apron and a cotton gown, reaching to her brown knees, in a more or less tattered condition.

Although her mother was a dressmaker, and had a large circle of black and coloured ladies as customers, the idea of mending her little daughter's torn clothes never dawned on her.

To mend is an unknown verb in

Creolia, and "a stitch in time saves nine" a proverb that has never been allowed a chance of proving its own wisdom.

Your black housemaid will buy two or three new dresses, and have as many more in the recesses of her trunk, and yet will appear before you as a mere bundle of rags; and this strange habit gives often a perfectly erroneous aspect of poverty to casual visitors. This was the case with Angelina, for on Sundays she blossomed as the rose, and was gorgeous in pink and yellow calico frocks.

Her head-dress, however, except for church-going, was invariably the same: a picturesque red-checked Madras handkerchief, tied in some mysterious way with a peculiar twist, round her little woolly head.

It suited her very well, but Angelina hated it, although she could not discard it, for she knew too well that her hair could only be termed hair by courtesy. Oh, the hours that she wasted trying to coax it into a couple of stiff little pigtails! But it was very refractory, and at last, with a sigh, she had to return to the red handkerchief, which so kindly hid all its failings; but as to have a "tied head" is tantamount

to a confession of failure among the black girls, little Angelina felt it keenly.

Her woolly head was indeed at this time her worst trouble, for otherwise her small life was happy enough.

Her mother, Mrs. Orinthia Hall, was a decent black woman. Her father was black also. Her mother had consented to marry him rather late in life after a somewhat chequered past; and Angelina was her only black child.

Orinthia had two other daughters, before her marriage, but they were both light-coloured, and considered themselves very great ladies indeed, especially "Mrs. Thomas," the eldest, who was a mulatto.

Although both married themselves when it occurred, Orinthia's tardy alliance to a black man had been a great grievance to them, and the subsequent appearance of their little black half-sister had aggravated the matter. If their mother's marriage in itself had been, in their eyes, a slight, the woolly-haired Angelina was an additional and wholly gratuitous insult.

"What for you, Orinthia, want to marry dat black man?" said the

indignant Mrs. Thomas, on the occasion of their first introduction to their new little sister.

The two sisters had vowed never to put foot in Orinthia's new establishment, but curiosity to see the child, and rumours of the desirability of their mother's new abode, had overpowered their wrath, so they had arrived, although their visit was not altogether a friendly one. Orinthia looked up, apologetically, at her two scornful daughters.

"He berry good to me, daters; he neither drunk, nor beat me, nor bad in any one way—go to church too, an'—save money. Look, see hyar, at de house, he build it all himself. It nice lilly house for true. Look at de roof. An' he hab yams an' potatoes an' goats, an'——"

"Did you ebber hear de like," interrupted Mrs. Thomas. "She boast ob her things, an' hab no proper pride at all. I 'shamed for you, Orinthy, dat our moder should do such a ting, an' make such a marriage. Look at dis pic'ney hyar. Black as my shoe."

Orinthia looked regretfully at poor Angelina. She could not deny her blackness, but she once more tried feebly to defend herself.

"You both married now, daters—

married so well too, an' with luck, for dey fine light-coloured men ; but you know berry well dat you no like to keep me. I soon may grow ole. My eyes berry bad now for de dress-making." This was an entirely imaginary affliction, evolved under stress of circumstances at the moment. "When I no able to work longer, you no able to help me ; so better I marry David Hall, even if he black man, so dat he keep me 'spectably."

The sisters looked at each other. After all their mother had some sense. They knew well enough that their husbands were by no means disposed to support Orinthia in her old age, and, in fact, much preferred to ignore her black existence altogether.

So little Angelina was grudgingly accepted by her sisters, and their mother was made happy by a tepid forgiveness.

IV.

MRS. THOMAS and her sister soon found that their mother Orinthia's plebeian alliance had secured to them certain very tangible advantages.

It was a pleasant outing on holiday afternoons, and David Hall was always glad to welcome them in his home.

It flattered his vanity to see the two coloured ladies, in their gay dresses, condescending to partake of his hospitality, and the best and most floury of baked yams, the most savoury mess of salt fish and akees, and the choicest okra soup, were always ready for them.

In the evening they would return to town, laden with fruit, eggs, and vegetables from his garden.

As Angelina grew older she rather dreaded these visits of her sisters. They were so grand and fine, in their starched muslins and white

feathered hats, with their fans, their essence, and their violet-powdered faces, that it made her feel too much her inferiority.

Soon also Mrs. Thomas was accompanied by her baby girl.

Orinthia was inordinately proud of this little grandchild, who, although a sickly, puny, little creature, was unusually fair in colour, with almost straight hair. A greater contrast than little, vigorous Angelina presented to her drooping, sallow little niece, could not well be found, but the whole family rejoiced in the possession of such a superfine article as little Elvira, and Angie had her hands full in amusing and waiting on her to their united satisfaction.

It is to be recorded to her credit that she was very proud and fond of Elvira herself, although she never felt her own blackness, or the disgrace of her "tied" head so acutely as when she compared herself to the more fortunate yellow-skinned baby. What she liked best, however, was when Mrs. Thomas left the precious Elvira with Orinthia, while she went on various visits to her numerous friends; for Mrs. Thomas was gay, and liked to attend all the weddings

and merrymakings that were going on in coloured society.

Then, indeed, life was glorious for little Angie. She would be up with the sun. To roll up the little mat and pillow that served her as a bed, and make her toilet, was the work of a minute. A little stream ran close to their small wooden house, and made a splendid bath-room for the little girl. She was scrupulously clean, as far as bathing was concerned, like most West Indian negroes.

Then there was the early breakfast of cassava cakes and baked yams, and sometimes coffee, for Orinthia was a clever housewife, and David's goats and little plot of land gave them plenty of good food. He did some of the lighter work himself, but he had the wit to hire a Coolie man to do the more laborious parts as well. Orinthia paid his wages out of her dressmaking. It is thus that financial matters are generally managed out here. Angelina then set out to fetch the milk for the Missus.

The walk up to the "Pen" in the early morning was always a pleasure to the child, and the "quattie," and sometimes the extra

penny or so that it produced, was well worth the earning. Little Angie could not have defined her own sensations, but in some far off way I think the beauty of those exquisite tropical mornings reached her as well as the English Missus. It made her feel "good," she said, in some mysterious fashion.

It was indeed lovely to walk through the shadowy wood, with the light dropping between the leaves above on the narrow path. Tall guinea-grass rose on each side and nearly met her head; each blade hung with heavy dew. Now and then an emerald-breasted humming-bird would dart in front of her, and remain poised for a minute over a branch of sweet blossoms. Angelina always knew when there was a humming-bird near her, by the loud whirring sound it made with its tiny wings.

Ethereal-looking morning glories of softest azure wreathed each bush and twig at this hour. They had come out to greet the dawn, but later on these treasures of the early morning would vanish, leaving only tiny limp rags of faded lilac in their place.

Decidedly, early risers are re-

warded in Creolia. Sometimes Angie was even early enough to see the strange moon-flower, that vanishes, like its namesake, with the daylight —a fragile white disk hanging in convolvulus-like fashion from its supporting tree. It was so large, and looked so uncanny, suspended, as it appeared, in mid-air, that Angelina could hardly believe it was a flower at all.

When she found the Missus liked flowers, she would generally bring her a bouquet: sometimes a tiny bunch of blue water-grass, that West Indian substitute for a forget-me-not in colouring and size much the same, although differing in shape.

More often it was a bunch of glowing orange and scarlet "Ranger," with its long, red stamens; and at Christmas time it was sure to be an armful of snowy Christmas bells. The rest of the day was all happiness for little Angie, too. To help her mother gather the green "okras" for the soup, to pick the scarlet fruit from the akee trees, and afterwards prepare them for supper, was all delightful work. Angelina was a careful little girl, and could be trusted to throw away the poisonous

red filaments that make its cream-coloured flesh a danger to careless cooks.

Then she would play with Elvira, or go down to the stream, and wash clothes with the other neighbours, or grate and soak the cassava roots for starch and cakes.

"She was a most perfect little woman," as Orinthia would declare to David; and, indeed, when her fine lady daughters were not by, she was, poor woman, both proud and fond of her "little negro girl."

The evenings were the best of all, for then her good father, David, came home, and after their nice meal of nondescript stew, in which okras and coco, yams and anatto, sugar-beans and rice, flavoured with "negro peppers," blended to form one savoury whole, they would sit and rest around the doorway.

Then was the time that the neighbours would drop in to laugh and chat.

Old Aunt Maria, the Droguer woman, who lived over the way, would perhaps come round, bringing the last local gossip she had collected during her day's wanderings.

Angie loved the Droguer woman,

who was also some distant relation of her father's.

The child often thought that when she grew up she would like to be one herself, and have a "Drogo bowl," and sell tapes and laces, collars and pieces of print, as Aunt Maria did. The old woman was very kind to Angelina, and often gave her a piece of ginger candy, and once a whole new dress that had got somewhat damaged during the Drogo bowl's journeys; but what she really liked her best for was her talent in telling A'nansi stories.

She would sit in the dark for hours and listen to the tales of foolish Brother Tecuma, and how Brother A'nansi, who was always "so 'cute," outwitted him, and all the other tales, both grave and gay, that have gathered round that mysterious spider-like personage.

Delicious, too, it was, while sitting safely close to her father, to tremble over the terrible tales of the "Jumbi," and "Duppies," that haunt the waysides and deserted houses after dark and terrify belated travellers.

Angie's very flesh used to creep at these tales, but they fascinated her all the same.

Aunt Maria knew them all, and told them with quite dramatic force, especially when she spoke of the "Rolling Calf," that dreadful "Duppy," who, with fiery eyes and rattling chains, lives on the lonely hill sides. How he will run after and terrify men—ay, and little children too, if they stay out too late at night!

"Dat is, if dey no 'stand de way for to treet him," concluded Aunt Maria, sagely; "for de Rolling Calf can nebber run up hill. 'Pears curious, but so it is, an' if you once git abud him you safe."

"Did you ebber see him yourself, Aunt 'Ria?" asked little Angie, in a shaky voice.

"No, chile, not I myself 'xactly. I tuk care nebber for to be out so late, but it is a fact, and' all de *ole* people dat know, tell you de same."

"What de Rolling Calf do to you same he catch you?"

"'Cho', chile! nebber ask such foolishness, nebber see you 'gain once he catch you, dat you may b'lieve fe true."

Angelina shivered. She resolved to be always very good and never stay out late. It would be dreadful to be caught by

a Rolling Calf, worse still to "die wicked," and perhaps run the chance of becoming a Rolling Calf herself. There was an old black Obeah man, who lived in the next village. She knew he was a bad old man, although no one dared call him so, for fear of his laying "Obeah" for them. Certainly, one of these days his master, "de big debbil Satan," would take him for his own. Probably he was in a fair way even now of becoming a Rolling Calf. She ventured to hint her belief to Aunt Maria one morning, fortified by the bright sunshine, but old Maria looked so frightened at her audacity, and hushed her so vigorously, that Angie dared not say another word, and when the best kid got staked in the fence the next day, and Aunt Maria gave her to understand "it might come from foolish talk 'gainst wise men," it was certainly "strange," and Angie grew even more afraid than she had been before at the sight of the ugly old negro with his one earring, who sat all day in the sun and did no work, and yet grew richer than any one else in the parish.

It was whispered that Aunt Maria had herself bought a charm from

him, and that was the reason why she did such a good trade with the Drogo bowl, but this Angie did not like to even think of. Yes! these were indeed happy days for the child could they have lasted.

V.

NOW Justina, in spite of her undoubted good looks, was a respectable girl. This in Creolia was in itself somewhat remarkable, and she made herself no secret of the fact that it was mainly owing to the care and caution of her brother the storekeeper.

"Josiah, my brudder," she was wont to explain, "he offle 'ticular man. He marry a 'spectable light-coloured woman himself, an' so he try hard to keep me good an' nice too. Beat me plenty eber since I ten years ole, if I so much as laugh or chat wid de men passing. He beat me well last month, Missus, when he first hyar I coming to de hotel, beat me so dat I bawl plenty. He say now he only let me stay 'cos he lib himself close by an' I wid de Missus"; and Justina heaved a

gentle sigh, but whether as a tribute to the memories that the beating evoked, or to the rigid respectability of Josiah, must remain for ever unknown.

"But, Missus," she went on after a pause, "he need no fear but dat I keep good. 'Course I want to marry some day—marry like him an' improve my colour, an' I no tink ob being a white gentleman's housekeeper eider. If I can, I mean to marry real praperly. I nuff wid white people to understand all 'bout dat. An', Missus, dat de berry reason dat I confirm last year, for dat help me keep good; for you know, Missus, arter one confirmed it offle sin to hab baby 'cept you praperly married. I keep my card dat de Reverend Daniel gib me, an' de Missus may see it. Pay my six shillings a year too, an' so be real 'spectable church member."

It was satisfactory for the Missus to hear such edifying remarks from one of her brown handmaids. In Creolia such views were rare indeed, but as from this moment Justina confided all her numerous love affairs to her mistress, it was occasionally rather embarrassing to that white lady.

I have before hinted that the social ethics at Creolia are not all that could be wished, although up to a certain point it is both possible and wise to ignore many things.

Living in an hotel, as the Missus was just then constrained to do, this seamy side of life was perhaps brought more prominently before her eyes than would have been the case elsewhere.

Justina was attractive, and had, of course, admirers in plenty. The black and brown ones she dismissed at once with careless disdain.

"I no eben tink ob dem, Missus. I no 'stand to hab a dark husband. Dey common as pineapples, to be had for de tukin up;" and she tossed her head proudly, until her earrings jingled.

The Missus noted quietly in her own mind that the black men always addressed Justina with a view to marriage, and approached the subject with diffidence and timidity. With the lighter coloured ones this idea was more vaguely expressed, and their courtship was far more audacious, while with the white, or almost white, men, marriage was most pointedly ignored, without, however, the slightest misgiving on their part

that their suit might be refused in consequence.

Justina was perfectly well aware herself of the state of the case.

"Missus," she would say, to the mingled annoyance and amusement of her mistress, "dat old Irish gentleman, Massa Magrath, he want me to be his housekeeper. He talk to me on the road dis marning as I come back with de little Massa. He say he gib me ten shillings a week, an' a woman to do de rough work. Yes, an' a pair ob new shoes too, an' a red parasol for Sunday church, but I say 'No,' 'cos although he white, he berry bad ole man. I hyar he get drunk too, an' I know he chew terbacco, an' make all his rooms in dreffful mess; an' arter all, Missus, ten shillings no so much, 'cos he keep a boot an' 'brella store down town, an' so get de red parasol an' de shoes cheap nuff."

It was impossible for the Missus to disguise her amusement at Justina's worldly wisdom, reprehensible as was the recital of her tale, especially as, after a moment's disgusted reflection, the girl went on pensively—

"Yes, Missus, he tink he get me berry cheap, but he not know dat his partner, Massa Woodford, dat come

up hyar last week to visit him, an' so see me too, pramise me twelve shillings a week, an' a woman to clean de floor, an' a nice little house too, 'sides de shoes de same as Massa Magrath, an' a blue umbrella too. An' he no so ole or ugly as Massa Magrath, but I said no, 'cos I berry well as I is. 'Sides, Missus, I still hopes to get married fair, an' I 'fraid ob what Josiah say an' do." And Justina folded her arms with dignity, and looked the embodiment of virtuous patience.

The knowledge of these irregular courtships gave some uneasiness to the Missus, for she liked Justina, and trusted that she would keep out of mischief as long as she remained with her. She kept her, therefore, in consequence as much as possible under her own eye, and often rose early and accompanied her and the baby in their morning walks.

An excuse was ready to her hand. The air at sunrise was good for fever, or at least so the black people affirmed, and the Missus was rather subject to fever.

It was amusing also to her English eyes to see Justina's delighted pride in showing off

Baby Billy to her friends the market-women.

They were a motley crew, good-tempered and merry. The richer ones drove before them heavily laden donkeys, with panniers heaped with fruit, guinea-grass, and strange-looking vegetables. Pineapples and sour sops, plantains and yams, were piled high on either side, while balanced above them were great bundles of knotted sugar-cane, and nets of green cocoanuts. The poorer women carried enormous loads of the same kind on their gaily tied heads, and all had their garments kilted up to their bare, dark knees; but those who aspired to be fashionable had of course stiffly starched skirts, that crackled and flapped as they walked along, while the low flat baskets that they balanced so deftly on their heads were painted in gaudy colours. There was a Coolie man who lived down the road who had made quite a small fortune by thus decorating baskets.

The most prized possession of all was a shallow tray of rudely carved wood, but this was really rare, and principally affected by the wealthier "Droguer women," or those who sold cakes and sweetmeats.

"Marning, Missus," they cried, as they passed by. They could not nod, for that would have upset the balance of their goods.

Now and then an old mountain negress would vary the greeting by a smiling "How are you, my lub?" And often also Justina's heart would be gladdened by a word of warm approval of "de lilly Buckra picney" who in his turn laughed and cooed his delight.

So loudly and often indeed did he crow and coo, that he earned for himself a nickname among the coloured folk of the road, and the Missus became aware that his proper designation was replaced by that of "Gru Gru," the native name for the ground dove.

Justina was delighted. "It fit him well, Missus," she remarked complacently; "for dis chile most blessèd, an' coo all de time just de same as de pretty doves. Oh! Missus," she added with sudden passion, "you are 'deed blessèd yourself for habing such a most sweet Buckra baby. Dere is no one ob us dat not ready to suffer anyting to hab a chile like him. Missus! I would die wid joy to hab such a fair chile."

The Missus, not unnaturally, here

suggested that one day Justina might also look forward to having a husband of her own, and little children, whom she would love dearly, but Justina disclaimed such an idea with impatience.

"No, Missus, I see you no understand at all. Most likely I marry as you say, marry an' hab plenty children, but den dey no *white* children. I sure to lub dem too, for perhaps dey nice little tings, but dey not de same ting at all, an' I nebber could lub a black little chile same as I do de white. I worship de little Massa, an' if I lucky, eben I may hab a fair chile one day. Not, ob course, a real white one, dat asking too much, but still one dat is almost white, an' den I worship it, an' work for it fe true. Dress it nicely too, in clean white clothes, wid shoes an' all, jest like a Buckra baby. You shall see, Missus, one day how nice I keep it, when it comes, if it is fair."

"And if it is like you?" asked the Missus.

"Oh, den, Missus, 'course I no be unkind to it, poor little ting, but it no be de same at all. 'Sides, I hope I nebber hab a black or dark chile to shame me. I no

'stand my cousin Margaret, she dat nurse of de oder English Missus, wanting to marry dark man. She mulatto, an' so she higher dan I, who only Sambo, but I nebber do such a ting." And Justina looked as genuinely shocked as must have been King Cophetua's relations when discussing the elevation of his beggar-maid.

"No," she continued a little sadly, "arter all, Missus, it no much good talking. Likely I nebber hab baby, although I no wish to ride de grey horse in hell eider. You know, Missus, dat is what de ole folk say happen to you if you die unmarried, widout leabing a chile behind you. Perhaps dat happen to me, for I know well no real white man want to marry me, an' if I tink ob anyting else my brudder Josiah beat me for true; an' as for marrying dark, dat I nebber do, not if dey pray me on deir knees for it day and night."

Josiah was the terror, if he was also the guardian, of his sister. He was very proud of her good looks, and being exceptionally "'spectable" himself, he kept her in great order. He sternly forbade her attending any of the negro balls and picnics of the neighbourhood, to which Justina often had the

mortification of seeing the other maids, less select as to their choice of society, depart, in high glee and multicoloured ribbon bows, leaving her disconsolate behind. She would have found it harder even to submit to this, had it not been for her devotion to little "Massa Gru Gru," which at this time engrossed her whole heart, and was the uppermost feeling in her nature. I say "at this time" advisedly, for in this lies the whole key to the negro character. It is the popular idea that they are devoid of any deep feeling, and radically insincere, but the truth is, that although their actions often would seem to bear out this belief, they are neither the one nor the other, but their emotions succeed each other with a rapidity that is unknown to more northern races, and they in consequence can only be compared to the luxuriant tropical vegetation of their own soil, which springs up, flourishes, and passes away before a self-respecting English oak would be aught but a sapling.

VI.

A VISITOR of considerable importance in the quiet life of the Missus, was Rosa the washerwoman. She was Justina's maternal aunt. All the women servants in Creolia appear to be related more or less, and if you are fortunate enough to secure one that suits you, you will be wise to shut your eyes and accept her, together with such of her sisters, cousins, and aunts as she deems fit to introduce to your notice. Most probably you will be taken in by them, but you will, at any rate, have the satisfaction of knowing that they will protect you against the wiles and impositions of any other branch of the family. The Missus had accordingly intimated to Justina that if Aunt Rosa chose a trial should be given her.

To be strictly accurate, it was

Aunt Rosa who graciously said, "*She* tought she would try Justina's new Missus, for to see if she like her too."

This sounds odd to English ears, but we at home do not realize that in Creolia nowadays the old traditions of service have long since faded away, and at the present time black "ladies" are practically our mistresses. The reason for this is so beautifully simple that it escapes most people's notice, the English ladies not being able to dispense with servants, cooking, dusting, washing, and house work at 85° and upwards in the shade being no joke; whilst on the other hand, the black population in this favoured land of lotus-eaters can very well exist and thrive without us or our wages. Often did the Missus hear the English residents laugh at the love of finery shown by the black women, but she herself never saw a negress dressed in her Sunday best without a feeling of thankfulness which made her forgive all the incongruous feathers, flowers, and bright-flounced skirts, for were it not for this feminine weakness she felt they would all be permanently servantless.

Rosa came in the early morning. In appearance she was frankly

hideous, being a tall, hard-featured negress, with a powerfully built frame. Her upper teeth were absent, which made her very prominent lower jaw an even more unattractive and prodigious feature than would otherwise have been the case.

She was dressed with great care, and, as the Missus was afterwards informed by Justina, in her best Sunday clothes.

A voluminous skirt, much starched, of gay pink calico, stood stiffly out round her gaunt figure, forming an agreeable contrast to a frilled jacket of bright sky-blue print. This was also starched to the last degree of stiffness, so that Rosa fairly crackled as she walked.

I suppose, being a laundress, this might be excused as a kind of advertisement of her powers, but the effect on the Missus, who was then unused to it, was at first peculiar and startling to a degree.

On her head, the wool of which was carefully and laboriously greased and divided into little pigtails, pinned into a fair imitation of a chignon, she wore a white sailor hat trimmed with red ribbon, and jauntily set on one side, and a general air of extreme self-content pervaded her very being.

Considered in the abstract, her character, judged by home standards, would have been held defective in several essential respects. Here in Creolia she was called "a most 'spectable woman, Missus—berry good washerwoman," but then in Creolia, as has been seen, female morals are sketchy, not to say non-existent, directly one descends below a certain stratum of society.

As a laundress she was, however, perfection, clean and punctual, careful and honest, and her predilection for an excess of cassava starch was, after the Missus's first hint that she was unworthy to appreciate it, restricted to Aunt Rosa's own garments.

Rosa chose to be accompanied on this her first visit by her eldest son, a bright-looking mulatto boy of about fourteen. She made some pretext of bringing him to assist her in carrying the linen bags, but as she was herself immensely strong, and never brought him again, the Missus had reason to believe, when she knew West Indian ideas better, that Rosa wished to impress her with the great fact that, although coal-black herself, her son was fair, and that, in consequence, she was no ordinary washerwoman, but a

lady of some social importance. This would hardly have been the case in England, as she was unmarried, a fact that she emphasized by desiring the Missus to be most particularly careful to address her in all business communications as "*Miss* Rosa Foster."

She then looked at the clothes spread out for her inspection with a professional eye, and condescendingly remarked—

"Well, Missus, I no mind if I do wash for you, for Justina gib you berry good name."

The Missus and she had then a short discussion as to prices, and made the needful arrangements for the transit of the clothes. As a matter of course she asked a little more than was customary, but it seemed reasonable enough, and with this point settled, she became quite cheerful and conversational.

"Yes, Missus," she said, in answer to the English lady's inquiry, "I hab two children, both boys. Dis big one Cyril dat you see hyar. He fourteen or so, an anoder little one, Caleb, he quite a pick'ny, 'bout one year ole. Dey cost me a heap ob money, but dey nice little boys, an' aldo Caleb he not so 'clear' as

Cyril hyar, he no black eider," she concluded, with a triumphant little laugh.

"Oh, yes, Missus," broke in Justina, apologetically. Justina had been so much with English people, and had been so drilled by her brother Josiah, that she had a flickering sense that her aunt's remarks might strike the Missus as unbecoming. "Yes, Missus, dat is fe true. Dey are both much lighter dan Aunt Rosa. Eben Caleb is a nice clean little boy, and chocolate coloured, not black. Yes, Missus, I know dat it is all berry wrong, an' de Reverend Daniel he berry angry an' say it sinful not to marry in church"—here Rosa, I regret to say, grinned most irreverently—"but Josiah an' I, an' my oder aunt (de one ob de five dat *did* marry), we all scold Aunt Rosa, an' she pramised us dat arter Caleb it shall nebber happen more. You see, Missus, Rosa good cook, and so she housekeeper to a white gentleman, an' it *always* happen when she housekeeper"—and here Justina gave a slight and wholly perfunctory sigh —"but now, Missus, it all right, 'cos she say she jine de church an' be confirmed by de Reverend Daniel, an' den she berry sinful

wicked woman if she hab more chil'en."

Justina stopped for want of breath, and Rosa, feeling it incumbent on her to say something suitable, sighed profoundly, and said—

"Yes, Missus, fe true I tinking 'bout it, for Caleb's fader sick an' gwine away likely soon. He only quadroon, but berry good gentleman, better dan Cyril fader dat was white, for Caleb's gib me ten shillings a month to keep Caleb."

It sounded rather confusing, but to Rosa appeared such a matter of course, that the Missus could find nothing to say. She glanced at Aunt Rosa again, and in spite of the glories of her starched pink and blue garments, felt that her personal appearance ought by rights at least to have placed her beyond the reach of temptation, but that was purely her British ignorance. While she was searching her brains for something to say Rosa departed and her voice was heard from below—

"Ta, ta, Missus, I bring Caleb next time."

On the following Saturday she returned with the clean clothes and Caleb. As she was obliged to carry the latter in addition to the im-

mense bundles, and did it with the greatest ease, although the child was a very substantial little personage, the Missus's suspicions that the blonde Cyril had been brought the week before merely to exalt his mother in her eyes were confirmed.

Caleb was a dear little chocolate coloured imp some two shades lighter than his mother. His wool was plaited in pigtails in the same manner, but in his case, being very short, they stood out straight from his head with a most comical effect. I need not say his small garments were as white and crackly as soap, cassava starch, and his mother Rosa could make them. He wore also shoes, an unusual adornment, and one that he was evidently unused to.

He could just toddle about, and called his mother "Bee" or "Rosa," and then the Missus learnt how rarely the negroes call their parents by any other than their Christian name.

Justina, who affected to be quite English in her ways, certainly spoke of her deceased mother as "pore ole mama," but this was looked upon as a token of her superior culture, and was most unusual, and the beautifully simple

word of "mother," as a term of direct address, was quite unknown.

I suppose, properly considered, Caleb's very existence was a mistake, but he was such a deliciously quaint little mortal, with such roguish-looking eyes and sedate little ways, that the Missus praised and admired him to Rosa's heart's content. She was honestly proud and fond of her little child, and on this score alone deserved encouragement, for black mothers are often very cruel to their own little ones, although they make the best of nurses to white children; for in this, as in many other ways, they appear to defy and contradict all natural expectations.

VII.

"JUSTINA got a dreffful bad hat for Sunday church, Missus," said Rosa, in an authoritative voice one Saturday morning. "I 'most 'shamed to see her in it."

She had just counted over the clothes, and was sitting in a self-assertive manner on her niece's small trunk. She had made some trivial mistake in the number of little pinafores. It was nothing to signify, but she detested being found fault with, even in the gentlest way, and generally managed to square accounts with the Missus in some other manner afterwards.

"It no possible, Missus, for Justina to wear dat dere hat 'gain," she repeated, with indescribable scorn, while Justina stood by, with the offending headgear in her hand, looking rather uncomfortable.

"Why, Rosa, I thought it a very

nice hat," the Missus ventured to interpose.

"Well, Missus, perhaps be nice, but she wear him tree times, an' no lady—*no one*—wear a church hat more dan tree times to church, *hyar*."

The Missus felt quenched. Public opinion was, she felt sure, against Justina's hat.

"De hat she wear so plain, too, Missus; not a bit tasty, no style at all, so I bring her one to try. Only two shillings, Missus. See hyar," and she whisked a large bright pink object out of an enormous paper bag.

It was really a few seconds before the Missus realized that it was a hat at all.

Imagine a sailor shape of coarse millboard covered with highly glazed calico of a vivid pink. A large topknot or rosette of the same aggressive material was placed in the centre of the crown, and involuntarily made the Missus think of the "great Panjandrum with the little round button at top."

Justina, for once in her life, was at a loss what to say. She did not exactly admire Rosa's taste, and at the same time, after her aunt's strictures on the incorrectness of

again appearing in her old one, she did not like to refuse.

For Justina to wear that dreadful pink abomination the Missus resolved was impossible, but Rosa only consented to take it away on the Missus compromising to the extent of undertaking to retrim Justina's old hat in time for the morrow's service.

The Missus found out afterwards that these hats were most fashionable among the black and coloured ladies of Port Albert, and that, according to her lights, Rosa was absolutely in the right.

In Creolia, as elsewhere, questions of fashion are not to be decided by any abstract rules of grace or suitability.

Shy, Rosa never could be termed, but as she grew to know the Missus better, she became more conversational, and would inform her of any stray bits of local news.

Occasionally she would bring long strings of the polished grey seeds, called here "Job Tears," to sell for her black friends, also lacebark trifles, and bamboo joints cut into rude flower-jars.

From time to time also the Missus was called to hear her own accounts of her lectures to Justina's cousin

Margaret on the enormity of her behaviour in being engaged to "a berry dark young man."

Margaret and her failings was Aunt Rosa's special hobby at this period. They had lived together at one time, but had now parted and were on the worst of terms.

That Rosa was black herself, and that the young man was both steady and well-to-do, as well as otherwise a good match, made no difference to the indignation with which she regarded such a *mésalliance*.

"I just tell you all what I say to her, Justina, in case you ebber tink of disgracing yourself like your cousin Maggie; but no, I'se sure you more praper pride dan to go an' do such a ting. As for dat Maggie, I'se dead 'shamed for her. She wish to degrade herself an' go down by marrying him. I real 'shamed for her as my niece," was her invariable conclusion, and she would add, with a contemptuous sniff that expressed volumes of disapproval, "I black, Missus, I know I black, but tank de Lord! I nebber *marry* black man," and depart in all the magnificence of conscious superiority.

VIII.

THE Missus's pleasant morning walks were brought to an end by the approach of the rainy season.

Apart from this doleful but necessary period, the Creole climate, although hot, is very good, but it must be confessed that the rainy season brings down the average of its excellence very considerably. For nearly two months torrents of heavy rain descended from leaden skies without ceasing. Occasionally this was varied by terrific thunderstorms, when the lightning — blue and yellow, green and violet, pink and orange — played over the lurid heavens like a vast storm-fiend, while the thunder crashed a magnificent accompaniment.

Sometimes the sun struggled out for an hour or two, and then the whole face of the country literally

steamed. His appearance was the signal to hang all possible clothes and stuffs out to air, for if left more than a few hours mould and mildew collected on everything, and all garments felt clammy to the touch. There are few sights more depressing than a row of shoes and boots covered with a fine greyish growth in all its various stages, from the delicate blue bloom of incipient mildew to the unwholesome-looking green patches of the fully-developed fungus. In spite of the heat, which increased rather than lessened, the Missus often felt that a fire would be acceptable, if only to make her remember what it was to feel dry; but fireplaces, naturally enough, were not contemplated in the construction of any of the dwelling-places about, and damp she had therefore to remain.

The baby, strange to say, seemed little the worse for the weather, but for the Missus it was a trying time. Insects and "creatures" of all kinds took refuge in the houses, although normally for a tropical island Creolia is singularly free from such small plagues. The Missus was rather interested than otherwise by her first experience in this line, and bore with equanimity the invasion

of rats, lizards, and ants great and small.

A large and lively rat, who selected her nice travelling bag as his temporary quarters, and in consequence was therein ensnared, afforded her real amusement, and the study of four separate kinds of ants, who shared her apartments, proved most instructive, although rather a tax on her store of English provisions.

Spiders, house wasps, tarantulas, fleas, and beetles she treated with amiable contempt, but a cockroach awoke in her a sense of disgust that she found it impossible to control.

Now the Creole cockroach is a peculiarly loathsome creature. He is large and plump, and in life noisome, he remains even in death a revolting spectacle. Not sweet at any time, his colour, dark and sooty, makes him seem dirty at the best.

He is not an innocent insect either, for, although he does not sting or bite, he devours the covers of your pet books, nibbles and defaces your best shoes, and makes unsightly holes in your favourite clothes. He runs in an unpleasantly swift manner, making a dry pattering sound meanwhile, and he is

also provided with large and powerful wings, which, however, he most deceitfully conceals from view, so that you are never safe from his approach. Windows in these climates being unnecessary, their place is for the most part supplied by open jalousies, so that the Missus used to be terrified by sudden showers of these obnoxious insects appearing on her writing-table. She would then shriek for Justina, who tried to disperse them, and by the help of her weighty slipper endeavoured to demolish the enemies. As a rule, she met with but scanty success, for they were too quick for her, and if she did slay any, their corpses were such disagreeable sights that it generally ended in the Missus, in an utterly demoralised condition, taking refuge under her mosquito curtains.

Justina was greatly surprised at the pusillanimity of the Missus on this point, for otherwise she had a great and wholesome opinion of her superior judgment ; and one evening, after a more than usually thrilling cockroach massacre, she delivered herself of a small lecture on the subject.

"Missus," she said, addressing the still trembling mosquito curtains, "I 'sprised at you. Why on de

earth you so 'fraid ob de 'roaches? A 'roach can no bite you. He 'fraid ob you his own self. It past me dat you, a fine Missus, dat know all manner ob tings, an' no 'fraid ob rats or bats, so 'fraid ob de poor 'roach.

The Missus, from behind her protecting curtain, admitted the truth of Justina's remarks.

"But, Justina, is there nothing that frightens you in the same way. I know perfectly that a cockroach cannot harm me, but to see one makes me turn and quake. I believe it is their long, quivering horns that I cannot stand."

"I catch them, Missus, by dose berry same horns," retorted Justina, with withering contempt; "but de Missus is right, now I come to tink, and maybe she cannot really help her fright, for, although I no fear de 'roaches, I hate a worm. Oh! when I see a worm, specially de large ones on de bushes, I wild wid terror. I die wid fright if I should touch one. I could beat out my brains if any one put worm on me." She paused a moment, with a shiver at the bare recollection of the crawling horror, and then, putting both her hands devoutly together, said in a very solemn voice and manner, "Missus,

listen. Tree tings I fear, and I pray de good Lord to deliver me fram day an' night, an' 'cos I hab faith He help me, an' save me fram de fear ob dem. Dey are de earthquake, an' de bad hurricane, an' a worm. Faith help me 'gainst de earthquake an' de hurricane, but oh! Missus, faith he no good 'gainst a worm!"

And the Missus, with an echoing feeling in her own heart, felt it was impossible to sum up the question in a neater way.

IX.

ALTHOUGH the little Massa absorbed most of Justina's time and care, she took the Missus also under her protection from this time forth, and as the days rolled by instructed her in many half-forgotten bits of Creole lore. She told her "Nancy" stories; of "A'nansi," that queer compound, half-spider, half-man, and of his cunning and wit. Of "Bredder Tecuma," foolish and simple, and how "A'nansi" made capital out of his credulity.

She told her also awesome legends of the "Rolling Calf," that haunted the lonely hills, and "duppy" tales by the dozen, when she found the Missus did not laugh at them, but listened with suitable gravity and attention.

It was Justina who, when the Missus had fever, used to wander into the "bush," and out of that seemingly inextricable tangle of shrubs and creepers bring back herbs and weeds, with which she compounded "teas" that, mixed with scrapings of green ginger and sugar, she duly administered to her submissive mistress. The ingredients were perhaps not to be found in the British pharmacopœia, but they always did good; and so the Missus grew to have a great opinion of the simple negro remedies.

Justina's mother had been quite noted in the district for her skill in herbs, and her daughter had picked up enough when a young girl to give her a fair amount of practical knowledge on the subject.

Thus the Missus learnt that "pignut" tea was good as a tonic, and that the bitter infusion of the graceful "cerasee," with its long trails of finely indented leaves and primrose-coloured flowers, was "grand" as a substitute for the more expensive quinine. As to the lilac spikes of the ubiquitous vervain, when mixed with lemon grass, and taken with hot water, no medicine was like it for stopping an incipient attack of fever.

Justina knew also how to make wholesome cooling drinks of sour sops and tamarinds, and could manufacture the delicious guava "dosey," and preserved "Jimmielins" and cachews.

She was very proud of her knowledge of these arts, and on one occasion her entreaties for two "quatties" (otherwise threepence) wherewith to buy sugar and ginger for cocoanut candy, were so urgent that the Missus departed from her usual rule, and gave her the money.

It was difficult to refuse, for the Missus had just been sent a royal gift of cocoanuts, and was wondering how she would dispose of them, and at the moment they lay in a picturesque heap on the floor.

Justina selected two magnificent nuts, and thereupon vanished for a good three hours.

She returned at last, hot, but triumphant, bearing aloft a huge tray heaped with sticky-looking blocks of brown candy flecked with white. There was sufficient, it seemed to the Missus, to disarm the appetite of an ordinary boys' school.

"Dere, Missus," she exclaimed, as she put the tray down with a thump, "I make all dis, an', Missus,

I make dis also." And into the astonished Missus's hand she slid ninepence halfpenny in the large nickel coins that replace coppers in Creolia.

"You see, Missus," she exclaimed proudly, "I make dis in de big kitchen, an' it berry soon 'gin to smell most d'licious, an' so all de sarvants at de place run to find out what it is. I say, 'It b'longs to de Missus, an' it no possible for me to gib it,' but as it too much, I see, for de Missus or little Massa to eat, and dey all wild to taste it, an' all begging me for bits, I say at last, 'Well, I no gib it, but I *sell* it for a gill an' a quattie a-piece.' Dey all run quick an' berry soon find de money, 'cos it smells so good dey feel dey must hab some. Dat no wronging de Missus, so I teck it, an' here it is too."

It was a disappointment to Justina when her subsequent suggestion that she and the Missus could make a lucrative business on the same lines, was not received with the alacrity that she thought the proposal deserved.

These essays in cookery on her part did not begin and end in candy. Shortly afterwards a terrible row occurred in the kitchen,

between the amateur cook and the rightful inmates of that dark and unpleasant resort, in which Justina and a tin of condensed milk played the principal parts.

Dire was the confusion that followed, and great the babel of tongues.

The Missus first became aware that something unusual had taken place, by Justina rushing like a whirlwind into the verandah and breaking into incoherent cries and tearless sobs of rage, assuring her "Dat de Missus must no rough her, for Satan had entered into her heart, an' she had killed Claude de cook—dat is, he no exactly dead yet; but she would, yes, she must kill him one day. Oh! yes, she know dat God would be angry wid her, but Satan had entered into her to possess her, an' she no could help it."

Somewhat alarmed, and remembering that not long before Brown, the barman, had actually "chopped" the coachman, greatly to the damage of the latter's thick skull, and that "chops" and blows more or less serious were neither infrequent nor harmless among the coloured domestics, the Missus descended to the vast hotel kitchen. It needed

to be large, for the heat was most oppressive. Apart from this, it was a horrible spot, dirty and gloomy, and pervaded by an unpleasant odour of food, past, present, and future. The kitchen utensils were grimy and unwashed. Various empty tins that once had contained canned meats and jams did duty for saucepans, for, with the exception of two huge cauldrons, the original kitchen battery provided had gradually vanished, and had found its way into the negro huts of the vicinity, each servant on leaving deeming it a duty to carry away something useful and portable as a souvenir of the hotel.

There was a sudden hush when the Missus entered, and most of the excited servants fell back.

Claude, the quadroon cook, stood stolidly in the midst of his domain. He was unhurt, but trails of slimy condensed milk wreathed themselves about his fat face, and decorated the beams of the ceiling. A milky way showed plainly on the smoky roof, and traces of the same milk, sticky and glutinous, were visible on the dirty floor of beaten earth. In the corner a battered tin was lying. It seemed, at a first glance, impossible that its innocent contents should

have been capable of such astonishing results.

Claude gave a satisfied smile when he saw the Missus. It was right she should see for herself the destruction her nurse had wrought.

"I jist wanted de Missus to see what dat dere Sambo girl hab done. I no touch anything on purpose. She one debbil when she roused. I not angry, I not demean myself to be angry, an' den I no hurt. I like sperrit, too, but she one debbil when she roused, for certain."

"Did you provoke her?" asked the Missus, hesitatingly. She was annoyed herself at the incident.

"Well, no, Missus. Not to call provoke her. We only laugh and joke, an' call her some little pleasant names, just for fun, you know, Missus." And still smiling and placid, Claude began a specimen of his jokes that sent the Missus flying, leaving him still wondering, with a vacant smile, on "de curious ways ob de English people, 'specially de ladies."

The effects of this scene were twofold. First, as may be inferred, the Missus, from this time forward, forbade the kitchen to Justina; and secondly, the "sperrit" evinced by the latter awoke the hitherto

slumbering admiration of the lethargic quadroon. Until now he had not deemed "dat Sambo girl" worthy of his august notice.

Justina brought her perplexities, as usual, to her mistress.

"Claude, de cook, now say he no see why I not marry him, at least for as long as we both stop here. I hab told him 'No,' 'cos, as de Missus know well, I wish to marry in church, an' honourable, like a white girl; but he tell me I awful big fool, when he gib me such a good chance."

The Missus exclaimed in horror as the full meaning of Claude's proposal dawned on her.

"Yes, Missus, I know all dat, but still dere something in what he say too. He tell me he married nine women in de different places he been in, in de berry same way, an' dat dey all hab such nice fair children, an' one ob dem twins. Tink ob dat, Missus! He quadroon, you know, Missus, an' if I marry him I might hab almost white chile."

Dismay and vexation were, however, so plainly visible on her mistress's face, that with the ingenuous mendacity that was one of her many charms, the girl added hastily—

"But no, de Missus need hab no

fear, for I tell Claude he berry bad man. 'Sides," she ended, with more truth this time, "I 'fraid ob de beatings of my bredder Josiah."

X.

THE Missus was showing an English picture-book to Angelina one morning, when Aunt Rosa came in. The book was Baby Billy's property, but as he insisted on eating it, and paper even of the best quality is not exactly food for babes, the Missus had quietly confiscated it for Angelina's benefit.

It was an amusing book, full of coloured pictures of wild animals and creatures of all kinds, and Angelina took the liveliest interest in it.

Rosa, alert and curious as usual, crossed the verandah, and with her strong hands clasped behind her back, in imitation of Angelina's schoolgirl attitude, demanded to "look too, Missus."

Her attention was at once ar-

rested by a striking illustration of a snake.

Now the mungoose has destroyed nearly all the snakes in Creolia. That lissom little animal was imported to eat the rats that were destroying the sugar-canes. He ate some rats, and all the snakes and lizards, and then preferring feather to fur, he left the remaining rats in peace and turned all his energies to ravaging the fowl-houses of the island, with the result that chickens are now extremely scarce and dear. He devoured at the same time most of the small birds, hence the plague of ticks that renders parts of the lovely island well-nigh uninhabitable at some seasons of the year.

This is sufficient explanation why the mungoose deserves the dignity of being spoken of in the singular, for he has attained to the importance of a calamity to the island.

In consequence of the mungoose, few of the island negroes, at any rate those living round Port Albert, had ever seen a live snake, but the reverence and dread that surrounds the creeping, crawling creature still remains—a relic of the times when "Obi" the serpent was their god in very deed.

"See, Angie," Rosa exclaimed in

a voice hoarse with suppressed excitement, "see, chile, look at de snaake! See how natural. Oh my! Missus, he berry clebber person dat made dat so living like."

At this juncture Justina came up to look too, with Baby Billy on her arm.

"Tell de Missus about dat bag dat dey found in de Solus Market not long back, Aunt Rosa," she said, suggestively.

Now it is a hard matter to get any of the negroes to speak on such subjects, and although the Missus had often tried to extract some of their snake stories from them, she had hitherto failed; but Rosa, absorbed in the picture, and fortified by the presence of two of her own people, looked round doubtfully, and then spoke in a hushed voice.

"Well, Missus, it just a bag dat was picked up in de market, full ob notes an' silber, tree pound seventeen shillings an' pennies too—dat terrible lot ob money, but a lilly black snake he coiled up 'long wid de money in de bottom ob de bag, an' dat 'counts for it, ob course Missus."

"Dey say dat b'longed to Mrs.

Barnett," put in little Angelina, her eyes gleaming with intelligence.

"Yes, we all know dat," answered Aunt Rosa, "but Missus Barnett no able to claim de money 'cos de new law says dat all who use charms an' Obeah, an' are found out, go to prison; so no one like to tell, an' so de constable tuk away de bag an' de money, an' de snaake he killed too —so I least hyar."

"Dat snaake he must be berry weak Obeah," remarked Justina, reflectively.

The Missus was silent. She perceived that they had quite forgotten her presence. She withdrew herself a pace or two, and after a pause the talk began again.

"I hyar anoder story, Justina, de oder day. Dat ole women who sell cakes in de corner ob de public gardens years ago. You 'member her too, I 'spect, Angie. She once friend ob ole Aunt Maria."

Angie nodded.

"Well, many years she sit dere an' sell heeps ob cake an' grow rich. None ob the oder women who hab cake bowls could sell as she did. Dey talk plenty, an' wonder offen how comes she sell so well, eben on bad selling days.

"One day last year, while she sit dere selling, sitting quite quietly, when oh! my! a great black an' yellow snaake he crawl out from under her skirts. Such a monster! an' de women scream an' run 'way, an' a crowd come, an' den de constables, an' dey beat de great snaake to pieces wid dere sticks so he dead. An' do de woman she go back arter some days to her place, an' sell de berry identical same cakes, she nebber do well 'gane, an' soon die too."

Her listeners gave a sympathetic shudder. They had drawn closer together, and their dark faces were working with excitement at their own tales of mystery. They were very close to their original African stock as they whispered this among themselves. It was plain that the layer of English ideas that had been superadded was but a thin one when all was said and done.

"My patience!" murmured Justina, with a sigh of horror, "dat serb de ole ting right. For sure she must hab gone to de Obeah man. Certain he must hab given her de monster snaake."

"P'raps, Justina," answered Aunt Rosa, guardedly, "but p'raps too she keep de snaake from de time it

baby, for it is a fact dat dey berry clebber creatures, an' lub deir masters well, an' help dem always to get money, do I hate de name ob dem all.

"Alligators are berry good, too," she continued, after an imperceptible pause. "I 'member a 'heegler' woman, called Clara Davis, she keep a stall in de Victoria Market, all de same place as de one dey now call Jubilee arter Mrs. Queen, an' she sell bread kind an' fruit an' coffee. Well, she always keep a big huge barrel in her stall, an aldough all de neighbours always wanting to know what 'tis she got in de barrel, she nebber will say.

"One day, eider de barrel oberturned by some one jes' to see what it is (or else, what *I* tink myself, she forget to feed her 'friend,' an' he grow hungry an' come out to find someting to eat himself); but a huge 'normous alligator creep out. Oh! gracious me! how all de people scream an' bawl, an' oh! my! how dey run! He monster, Justina—he so long an' big, his tail fill de whole market from Clara's stall to de door." At this incredible statement her hearers' eyes became round with horror, and Aunt Rosa,

satisfied with the effect she had produced, proceeded with her awesome recital. "Clara, she call, an' chirp, an' try hard to get him back an' 'tice him under de barrel again, but he no willing to go once he out, an' 'sides he too big. She cry an' scream to him, but all no good at all, an' so de constables hab to come, an' de white 'spector too, an' take Clara 'fore de judge, an' de alligator he killed, an' I hyar gibben to de doctors to cut up."

"But, Aunt Rosa, how did de monster alligator get into de tub if he so fearful big?" asked, hesitatingly, Angelina, with the inexorable logic of a child.

"You ask foolishness, Angie! 'Cho', you not know dat dose kind ob creetures an' tings can make demselves small ways we not understand. 'Sides, Clara, she hab him likely from de egg, an' so he all curled up, an' fit well into de barrel until he let out.

"Poor Clara," she went on, having delivered this snub to Angie, "she wicked to do such tings, but she nebber grow rich once de alligator dead arter she came out ob prison. He powerful charm, for true.

"No, Justina," in answer to an

inaudible query from her niece, "*I* nebber go to an Obeah man. I know some, for as you know, one can mostly tell dem by dose earrings dey wear. I been to a French [*i.e.* Haitian] card cutter, but dat is quite different. He tell me fortune, 'bout what luck I hab, an' how many chiler, but dat kind not often take money. Dey do it mostly for nothing, but I leave mine a sweet potato pudding. I tink it better. It is not vile to go to them as it is to de Obeah men. De card cutter do noting wrong, only help one find tings sometimes."

"Yes," answered Justina, "dat dey do nicely. Find my silber brooch dat I lose once, I know. Dese only good in dat, but de Obeah men dey die an' go to hell. 'Member, Aunt Rosa, dat great one, he called 'Loaf Sugar,' how he die de oder day. Oh, Angie! he scream fearful an' yell for tree days 'fore he die. He bawl out so dey hear him all down de high road, an' call he burning, burning, an' he already feeling hell fire all ober him, an' den he call for a bottle of proof rum, for he say as he burning so already he may as well hab de more rum while he can. How frightened all de people dat go to

him be when dey hear him cry out 'bout hell!"

"Dey 'gin to believe in de Reverend Daniel's talk den," Rosa interposed, with a queer little smile.

"Yes, 'deed," asserted Justina, gravely, "an' when ole 'Loaf Sugar' die, dey find in his house heaps upon heaps ob tings b'longing to all de white ladies and Massas, dat deir servants bring to him; not stolen you know, Aunt Rosa, but jes' dat dey bring as charms—sticks an' pins, handkerchiefs an' gloves, for, you see, once he get hold ob anyting ob yours he can charm you, an' he leave piles an' piles ob money. I heerd two mule carts full."

"Money, Justina," said Rosa, grandiloquently, "is good, berry good, but not worth burning in hell for, for ebber."

And with this pious maxim, the worthy washerwoman departed to unpack the clean raiment of the Missus's household.

XI.

NE day Angie brought the milk very late. Her eyes were swollen by much weeping, and no one thought of scolding her for unpunctuality, for she told Justina, amid choking tears, that her father was ill. "He tuk sick last night, right sick, Justina. Tell de Missus 'bout it. We try all manner of herbs, ginger tea too, an' at last we send for de doctor, an' he say he berry sick."

The next morning Angie never came at all. Her good father was dead. She was very sorry, and cried bitterly for days. Orinthia cried too, although her grief was mitigated by the prospect of having the place all to herself. She buried him properly, and even Mrs. Thomas and her sister condescended to grace his subsequent "wake" with their aristocratic presence.

Angelina was too much a child to assist at these solemnities, as she told Justina when, after the lapse of a few days, she reappeared with her milk basket as usual.

Her two half-sisters now deigned to bestow much more of their company upon their widowed mother, more especially Mrs. Thomas, whose own matrimonial arrangements were at this time somewhat strained, owing to her gaiety and extravagance. She proposed therefore to Orinthia to pay her a visit of indefinite length.

Her mother felt flattered, and was so genuinely devoted to little Elvira, that she assented at once; but it pressed hardly on the poor little black daughter.

Harder and harder had she to work now. There was extra cooking and extra washing too, for Mrs. Thomas "could not tink of going down to de stream wid all dem common negro women."

Orinthia, in her devotion to her eldest daughter, would right willingly have done it herself, but she had the house to attend to, and, besides, now David was gone, she had to hire the coolie man to work all her plot of ground, and her dressmaking could not be neglected. Indeed,

she had to work hard, too, although the burden and heat of the day fell on little Angie.

Extra cassava roots had to be grated to starch and iron Mrs. Thomas's voluminous skirts, while Elvira's small garments also had to be considered. Mrs. Thomas was a careful mother, and sedulously looked after Elvira's appearance, although she never did any work for the child herself on principle, if it could be managed otherwise.

Angie would get hard blows if she did not "do dem up properly" to the degree of stiffness that Mrs. Thomas considered necessary.

Angie's heart burnt with resentment when she was required to spread the table with coffee and fruit for her sister's guests, when, arrayed in her best, that lady would receive her many friends from town. Angie had to do all the work, and yet be made to feel she had neither part nor lot in her own home. Orinthia was certainly, although reluctantly, allowed to be present, but only because Mrs. Thomas could not well help it; but with a scowl, and a "Go 'long, you little negro girl," Angie was relegated to the kitchen and the small back-yard.

How she hated the sound of the taunt, and how earnestly longed to be lighter in colour! She tried hard to imitate Mrs. Thomas, but her efforts were not very successful, nor indeed always judicious.

Thus it must have been somewhat trying to that lady when, one Sunday morning during church, she saw the triumphant Angie enter with well-oiled head, and a general strong perfume of Ess. Bouquet that betrayed she had "borrowed" some of Mrs. Thomas's precious "English essence," even if the large white dabs of violet powder on each of her black cheeks had not emphasised the liberties she had taken with her sister's belongings.

Alas, poor Angelina! She passed a sad afternoon in consequence, and renewed her acquaintance with a heavy bamboo cane; but at least for an hour or two in church she had had the genuine, although erroneous, satisfaction of imagining she looked "fairer an' more like sister and Elvira." Disabused on this point with painful and unnecessary violence by the aggrieved Mrs. Thomas, she cast about her for another and more ingenious plan of mitigating her own colour.

It is recorded of the great Barnum, that man of fertile resources, that when he first exhibited his famous white elephant, he did not resort to the commonplace expedient of whitening it, but instead ingeniously darkened all the other elephants so that the new arrival might look the lighter by contrast.

Some such idea in an evil hour crossed little Angie's mind. Since it was vain for her to make herself whiter, would it not be possible to blacken Elvira? She would be careful not to hurt the child, but a little "sienna an' bark stain, same as dey use for de floors," was surely permissible and harmless.

Elvira was quite willing to lend herself to the experiment, and the project was carried out with brilliant success, when the appearance of Mrs. Thomas on the scene, filled with righteous wrath, turned Angie's elation into woe. The sight of the precious Elvira, drying slowly in the sun, was so deplorable, that it would have excused the indignation of a less violent woman.

Angelina's feeble protests that the stain would wash out, and that she had not cut Elvira's hair, were unheard, and over the beatings that followed I draw a veil.

She was stiff and sore with the blows, and limped as she carried the milk up the next morning. The Missus questioned her, and she told the tale truthfully enough. The Missus gave her some healing oil to rub on her bruised limbs, and what good advice she could under the circumstances. But it was a delicate matter for an outsider to interfere with.

Old Aunt Maria found the child crying by the cassava press in the yard that evening.

"Lord! whateffer is de matter, chile!"

"I so tired; I beaten an' ache all ober. De sister she curse an' quarrel wid me all day long. Dey rough me for sure too much, Aunt."

The old Droguer woman looked at her keenly out of her little cunning eyes. It did not escape her that Angie had grown strangely thin of late, and that the little dark face was sharper and more hollow than it used to be.

"You berry meagre, chile!"

"Yes," said Angie, wearily, "I'se meagre, I'se black, I'se altogether vile! I'se like to git 'way; I believe I run 'way some day, too."

"S'pose I ask Orinthy to let you come wid me for a lilly bit. I want

a chile to help carry my tings. You might sell candies too, for de pic'neys oftentimes ask me for sweets, an' I no able for to carry such tings along wid de ribbons."

Angie's eyes glowed at the prospect of such a magnificent career, but she shook her head sadly.

"Dey nebber let me go, Aunt 'Ria."

"'Cho'! chile, we see 'bout dat."

Luckily Mrs. Thomas was out visiting, and the injured and lately scrubbed Elvira, sitting solemnly, with a rather streaky face, in her stiff white frock and blue ribbons, had no voice in the matter.

"See, Orinthy, dis chile Angie pining, an' you no want her to die same as her fader. She work now too hard for sure."

"My dater say she lazy," protested Orinthia, feebly. She was sorry for Angie, but she was terribly afraid of Mrs. Thomas.

"Rock 'tone an' Ribba botton, no feel sun hot," quoted old Maria, oracularly. "Missus Thomas grown woman, an' no do de same as dis poor chile. 'Sides, Orinthy, I'se drefful 'fraid if I' you, dat her fader David's duppy come to see how Angie is, an' get angry when he see her so pining an' meagre, I know

dat you not able to afford much of a gravestone for him."

This was too much for Orinthia. The idea of a duppy's wrath overpowered any human terror of Mrs. Thomas. She burst into tears and protests, and besought the astute Maria to take Angie off with her there and then.

XII.

ANGELINA announced her new career to the Missus the next morning, when she arrived with the milk as usual. She had brought it, she said, for the last time, and presented her with a huge bunch of bright orange ebony blossoms as a farewell gift. Her little black face was radiant behind the brilliant feathery spikes of flowers. She was glad of the change.

Aunt Maria came too, as a matter of course, and squatting down on the red-stained floor, insisted on unpacking all her goods and showing the Missus the beauty of her wares.

The Missus bought a hideous pink ribbon, just for Angie's sake, and Justina three yards of twopenny lace, so they departed cheerfully,

very contented with their partnership.

Angelina was in great glory, for she carried a little painted tray full of strange-looking "candies" on her head. Aunt Maria had had the tray painted in scarlet and blue, on purpose for her, by the old coolieman who lived down the road, she told the Missus, and it was very beautiful in her eyes.

Angy offered Baby Billy also a "candy stick" gratis. It was pink and brown, and I believe "ginger an' cocoanut were in it," since Angelina affirmed it; but the Missus never had the courage to try it herself, although she extracted it with some difficulty from his chubby hands afterwards. Angie was going to the races at the end of the week, and as she said "Good-bye," merrily told the Missus to be sure "fe to look for her dere."

It was a lovely morning, and with each step Angie felt as if she were leaving all her home troubles behind her.

Aunt Maria was an excellent travelling companion, and had a smile and a joke for every one she met on the road.

The lemon-scented logwood trees were in full bloom, and the mangoes

were also in flower, showing young red leaves and feathery tufts of indistinct greenish blossoms.

"I like dis," said Angelina, softly, her small face one grin. "I offle glad to get 'way from de sister. Aunt Maria, why is it? I like black people, I like de white Buckra, but I hate de coloured ladies. Dey real nasty, an' so proud!"

Aunt Maria smiled. She did not love coloured people either, and had suffered many things at the hand of Mrs. Thomas.

A huge flapping "John Crow" vulture rose up from the side of the path, and lazily descended again a few feet farther away. He had found some hidden carrion.

Aunt Maria's eyes followed him.

"You know de story ob de John Crow, Angie? Well, it is a fact dat dere is a king 'mongst de John Crows. He perfect in ebbery way, and pure white, an' all de oder John Crows dey hab to serve him well. If a cow or oder beast die, no one ob dem birds dare to touch it or taste one bit 'til de king he come down. Den de king he fly up an' sit on de head ob de dead beast, an' all de oder John Crows sit round hungry, but nebber say word until the king ask—

"'What killed this?'

"And den dey all say together—

"'Fat killed him, Massa.'

"Den de king he pick out de eyes ob de dead beast—dey de best part—an' he fly 'way, an' leab all de rest for de oder hungry John Crows. Dat is a fact, an' although I nebber 'xactly hyar de king speak, I see him once, an' he was a berry big crow and perfectly white, not a brown fedder on him anywhere."

Angie listened with all her ears, and the old woman went on, as if half to herself—

"'Pears always to me as if he like de white Buckra. He take de best, dat natural enuff, but he no bodder you. He take what he like, but den he go right 'way, an' leab de rest for de poor oder crows; but de coloured people neiber one ting nor 'nudder, an' dey take all, bod from de black an' de white, an' I not like dem at all."

Angie's face shone.

"I'se glad I black den, Aunt 'Ria; but when I'se wid Missus Thomas and Elvira, I feel so vile an' ugly. I nebber tink 'bout it until dey came to lib at home wid us. I'se like de poor lilly snakes dat no know dey snakes until dey go to Half-way House Market,

an' hear de women talk, an' den dey hear dey snakes, an' creep 'way so sorry an' distressed."

Aunt Maria changed the subject. She did not like "snake talk." Perhaps, after all, there was some truth in the rumour, that the old Obeah man had given her a little black snake to keep as a charm. Aunt Maria was a Christian woman and a church member; but certainly there was one mysterious package in the recesses of the Drogo bowl that Angie was forbidden, under crushing penalties, ever to touch or even look at.

That week was a week of delights for Angie; she went everywhere, and her candies sold so well, that old Maria felt more than pleased she had undertaken her charge.

. . . . .

It was the last day of the Port Albert races.

Every one from far and near, black, white, and coloured, was on the racecourse—for any excuse is good for a holiday over here, and horses are by far the most popular form of amusement in the West Indies.

"Heiggler" women selling cakes and sweets were common as blackberries at home.

The Missus looked out now and again for her little black friend, but could see nothing of her ; the crowd was too great for it to be easy to distinguish individuals.

A black crowd, too, looks so strange to unaccustomed eyes, but the bright dresses of the women make it a picturesque, if not a pretty sight.

Suddenly there was a general stampede—one of the racehorses had got loose. What possessed the animal no one could tell, but instead of bolting away along the clear space on the opposite side of the course, he plunged right in the thick of the surging crowd.

There was a rush, and a babel of shrieks and screams, and then comparative silence. Some soldier had caught the horse, and was standing by its now submissive and panting head.

Then the crowd parted a little, and on the ground a small dark form was seen lying, prone and motionless.

One glance at the little yellow frock and blue pinafore warned the Missus whom it must be, even without the sight of the little painted tray, now lying crushed and broken in the dust.

She started off, but the stand had many steps, and by the time she could reach the spot the little red handkerchief was dyed a yet deeper red, and the small dark face was fast turning into that ghastly grey tint that could only presage the worst. Poor little Angelina! Her eyes opened languidly as the Missus called to her, but she was past seeing and hearing. "Aunt 'Ria," she murmured, "Orinthy, Elvira, I'se——" but none of them were there, and so alone among her own people she passed into that Great Unknown Land where all things are forgotten.

Poor old Maria was in a terrible state when she arrived a few minutes afterwards. Orinthy wept for her little negro girl for some days, but Mrs. Thomas so undisguisedly gave her to understand it was the best thing that could have happened for the family's good, that in course of time she came to think so too.

The Missus and Justina cried alike over the poor child's fate. They missed her little form and daily greeting more than they could say.

The whole story created a good deal of gossip among the black

people, and no one who knew the facts was very surprised when later on Mrs. Thomas found her health required a change of residence. She began to pine away, and as Aunt Maria said one evening, after a visit to her friend the Obeah man, "Folk dat do such mean tings oftentimes find dat deir duppy more 'count dan when dey 'live."

Aunt 'Ria, you see, had been really fond of poor little Angie!

XIII.

IT must have been about this time that the Missus made a new acquaintance, through the medium of Miss Leonora Pinnock, the black dressmaker, that lady having most graciously consented to assist her in manufacturing a new muslin dress for the Port Albert races.

Hitherto the Missus's experiences in that way had been signally unfortunate, excepting perhaps as a means of practising her virtue of patience to its utmost limit.

Miss Leonora, however, was well spoken of, so she had some hopes of her. She had made a great favour of coming as far as Summerlands, but on the appointed day she arrived, although some two hours late. She was followed by a pretty light-coloured girl, who carried a bundle, an elaborately trimmed parasol, and a small sewing machine.

"I brought my girl, Missus, Miss Elita Gordon. I could not walk up de long way from de car station widout some one to help me."

Miss Leonora affected to be overcome by the heat and journey in the tramway. She had studiously held the parasol over her shiny black visage on the walk up the approach, yet it required much time and lemonade to restore her, while 'Lita sympathisingly waved a fan over her mistress's moist dark brow to assist in the cooling process.

They sat in the Missus's shady verandah all day, while the breeze blew through the half-shut jalousies and caught the little tendrils of Elita's wavy hair. She brushed it severely, but it always would curl perversely, in spite of all her efforts to make it lie straight.

She was pretty, silent, and idle. I do not think she set two stitches during the whole time, but she held the sewing machine on her lap as Miss Pinnock worked at it energetically.

Leonora would have found a table far more solid and convenient, but she appeared to derive great moral satisfaction from using her apprentice as an article of furniture.

In the evening, when Miss Pin-

nock departed after duly gathering up her numerous belongings, the Missus appreciated for the first time the reason of Elita's presence, for Leonora walked proudly in front under the shelter of her parasol, while Elita meekly followed, humbly bearing the remainder of her mistress's impedimenta. It was a gratifying moment for the black dressmaker, and she had the satisfaction of knowing that the full dignity of her position was not lost on the hotel domestics. They swarmed like ants to the verandah to see the sight. Justina was especially excited. She rushed into the Missus's room like a small tornado.

"Jes' come and see, Missus," she cried. "Come an' see. Leonora look grand! See how proud she walk, wid dat poor light 'Lita following her behind. She 'bliged to do it, 'cos she Leonora's 'prentice."

Viewed with their eyes, it was indeed a preposterous piece of self-assertion on the part of Miss Pinnock, but it none the less elevated her considerably in their opinion, and from that time forward her prices were raised by a shilling or so to all the inhabitants of the hotel without much remonstrance on their part.

Poor Miss Leonora! In spite of her black skin, she was as wise in her generation as the most finished dressmakers of London or Paris.

Young Mr. Woodford, who was smoking a cigar on the verandah outside the bar-room door, and had had his attention also arrested by the little stir amongst the servants, languidly raised his eyeglass to his dull eye and caught sight of Elita. It was difficult to tell in the fast falling dusk, but it struck him that she was wonderfully pretty for a coloured girl. He sauntered to the steps, and followed them leisurely down the dusty road to the little station.

'Lita stole a glance at him under her long eyelashes. She was cruelly mortified at having to obey Miss Leonora, but the knowledge that a "real white gentleman" evidently admired her did much to console her, and she felt happy in spite of those odious packages. She was glad, after all, that she had insisted on coming to Port Albert instead of staying in her quiet home in the mountains, as her father had wished.

XIV.

JUSTINA knew all about Elita, and it was through her that the Missus learnt the outlines of her previous history. She came originally from the parish of St. Agnes. Her father's name was Gordon. Her parents were decent married people, near neighbours of Stephen de Paz, an uncle of Justina, who lived also in that parish.

Mrs. Rita Gordon was a mulatto, and Mr. Gordon a rather light-coloured man, but of what precise grade I am unable to tell you with any certainty. That he was generally known as "Mister Gordon" will show you he was a person of some consideration among his fellows. He was a hard-working fellow, and a devout church member.

They had married early, and had had many other children, but they had all died as infants. They owned,

indeed, quite a row of tiny graves in the churchyard, each with a nice flat stone slab properly placed on the top. The heavy slabs were a source of great satisfaction to Mrs. Gordon, and she regarded them with immense pride and pleasure.

"Dey cost a dreffful lot, tree dollars an' more apiece, but den it so nice to tink dat now dose lilly duppies nebber can worry us more in de house," she would declare every Sunday as she passed them on her way home from service; and the other mothers who had lost their babies, and could not supply them with heavy gravestones, would agree, and envy her accordingly, for the tormenting antics of baby "duppies" are well known to be most wearing to the nerves of their maternal parents.

A heavy gravestone is the only means of obviating this evil, but you must make sure that it is weighty enough to frustrate the efforts of the deceased child to lift it up.

"T'ank God! dey all die so berry lilly, and so weakly, too, dat a tree-dollar stone heaby 'nuff for de biggest," Mister Gordon would remark. Baby duppies only annoy the mother, so he thought it rather

an unnecessary expense, but he was a good husband and humoured Rita in this and many other ways.

Elita was their only living child, and they thought a great deal of her. This was but natural, and all the more so as Elita in her way was a beauty, or at any rate one judged by their own standard, for she had nice black hair—real hair, and her skin was what the neighbours called a "preety broonette." I would rather myself compare it to the polished inner surface of an almond nut. It was smooth and delicate, and in its own way very beautiful. She had fine white teeth, a not by any means common thing among coloured girls, and soft black eyes, and if her nose was rather wide and flat, and her lips somewhat thick, we will pass that over. For the rest she was of the medium height and prettily made, while she walked with that peculiar dawdling grace that is so commonly found among Creole women.

The dawdling is natural, and arises from their innate laziness; the grace is acquired from the universal habit of carrying everything on their heads, but the combination from an æsthetic point of view is singularly successful.

Mr. Gordon owned some good coffee trees, and took far more care in the cultivation and preparation of the berries than most of his neighbours; consequently he was well to do, and there was not the slightest occasion for Elita to leave home, or to work for her living. She found it very dull there, however, for her heart was set on being a dressmaker, and going to Port Albert to learn her business.

Now Elita was quick and clever at her needle. The white English lady at the big Pen near by sometimes would send for her to help her with her work. Elita enjoyed those visits, and the sight of the wonderful clothes that the lady showed her on those occasions. Once even she had seen a whole silk dress there. A dress made entirely of silk was indeed a marvel, and this one was only rather spoilt in her eyes by being of sober black. She would have preferred one of bright pink or green, but English ladies were "curious people," and, Elita privately thought, had not very good taste as to colour. She was, however, shrewd enough in her way, and knew well that even in the wilds of the St. Agnes hills there was a feeling after fashion,

and that her chance of success as a dressmaker depended on her gaining the reputation of having learnt her work in Port Albert.

All things are comparative in this world, and in Creolia, Port Albert is the synonym for all that is gay and fashionable in this world.

She was tired of home also, and longed for a change. The lovely crumpled looking hills, with their blue and violet shadows, were nothing to her. She was oppressed by the very peace and stillness of everything. The broad-leaved plantains and the magnificent bread-fruit trees, in which her father took such honest pride, were a weariness to her, and she took far more pleasure in her new hat that he had brought her as a present from Port Albert than in anything else around her. It was trimmed with a spray of villainous artificial flowers, but she liked them better than all the wealth of purple bougainvillea blossoms that made their little wooden house a perpetual feast of brilliant colour. Mr. Gordon was proud of his bougainvillea. He had planted it himself long ago from a slip he had brought from the big Pen.

"I know it no de use dat a granadilla would be, or eben a

sweetcup vine, but it most pretty, an' de flowers look beautiful 'gainst de green, jes' de same as de red fedders in de parrot's tail seems to set it off so well," he would say; but 'Lita shook her head dissentingly. She would greatly have preferred the parrot's tail, for then she would assuredly have stuck it in her Sunday hat along with the flowers.

Elita wore her best clothes when she went to church with her father and mother, but I do not think it was to admire the hat that the young men for miles round used to wait at the church door for her coming and the chance of a word.

Rita Gordon and her husband had, however, fixed ideas for their daughter's marriage. Both were ambitious, but their views unfortunately did not run in the same direction.

Rita's dreams soared high, and she hoped for a white man. Such things had happened, although, she owned, but rarely.

Mr. Gordon's were more modest and tangible, and resolved themselves into a prosperous small native planter; he was to be good and steady, and, if possible, light coloured—an improved edition of him-

self, in fact, with of course Mr. Gordon's own ideas as to the management of coffee trees. The culture of the coffee trees would hardly affect his daughter's domestic happiness, but he was tenacious on this point.

As to Elita herself, she would have none of all the dusky admirers that had as yet presented themselves; and that, in spite of this, every one liked Elita, spoke well for the general lovableness of the girl.

Some of the young fellows consoled themselves, and married less bewitching and more attainable damsels, but one, Samuel Mackay, really took his refusal to heart.

He was a Sambo young man. As his name implied, he was on one side of irregular Scotch extraction. Possibly this fact may have accounted for his possessing singular steadfastness for a negro.

He was very dark, darker indeed than his birth warranted, but otherwise a rather good sort of fellow. That he was extremely ignorant, and his ideas bounded by the limits of his own little village, was hardly surprising, for he had never been out of St. Agnes.

He possessed a nice plot of land

which he worked very well. He had three bread-fruit trees, some mangoes and cashews, besides bananas and plaintains. He was the owner of a patch of yams and sweet potatoes, and was therefore, as may be seen, amply provided with means to support a wife. Although he was rather darker than Mr. Gordon fancied, he did not altogether frown on Samuel as a son-in-law. Had not the younger man begun to plant some young coffee plants, and did he not consult him on every point concerning their growth? Similar means of ingratiating one's self with a possible father-in-law are, I believe, not unknown in Europe. In Samuel's station it showed unexpected diplomacy, and must indeed have been an inherited trait from his canny Scotch forbears.

It was all lost upon Elita, unfortunately, and she begged her father so hard for Port Albert and a year of dressmaking that he gave in, and promised to take her with him next time he went down to sell his coffee.

Rita knew she would miss her daughter, but the idea of the latter's visit to town was full of delicious and vague possibilities to both the women alike.

"You promise me be good girl, 'Lita," she said, tearfully; and added with even more earnestness, "at least you nebber hab anyting to say to black men if we let you go."

And 'Lita promised with a willing heart, for her own ideas ran in much the same groove as her mother's.

She had worked very hard at curing and husking the coffee berries, and her father took down with them a good stock for sale. Beautiful berries all carefully picked and dried. Gordon had to hire two strong donkeys beside his own old mule to carry the loads, for even Elita's light outfit took up space.

The girl was radiantly happy. She had a letter to the chief dressmaker in Port Albert in her pocket, which the English lady at the large Pen had given her.

To that address Gordon escorted Elita the next morning. Elita was nervous and shy, but full of hope, but they had no room for an apprentice, and only as a favour recommended Elita to the notice of Miss Leonora Pinnock. She was a less exalted personage, and lived some way out of town, and 'Lita, rather than go home to St. Agnes, decided to accept the offer. Miss Pinnock

welcomed the girl very kindly—indeed she was charmed to receive such a pretty coloured girl as her apprentice, for it added to her credit with her customers.

It was a disappointment to Elita, for she had of course dreamt of being assistant in a white establishment, but if there was no remedy for Miss Leonora's colour, at least there could be no doubt of her claims to fashion, for no skirts could be too scanty, no sleeves too balloon like, no collars too high for her not to endeavour to outdo them in her own attire.

These were the events that led to Elita being Miss Pinnock's companion on her visit to the Missus at Summerlands—a visit that, as time rolled by, and that lady's stock of English clothes wore out, was very frequently repeated.

XV.

IT was quite a relief when, on the next occasion that Justina confided in her mistress, marriage *en tout bien et honneur* was the only matter under discussion. Considered as an individual, the new suitor was, unfortunately, even more objectionable than any of the former ones. As in Claude's case, his only attraction apparently lay in his lightness of hue.

He was the new driver of the hotel omnibus, who had arrived to fill a vacant place at very short notice, and consequently without even the slight and sketchy references which did duty for a character in the island. His own story was that he came from the other side of the mountains, and he gave the name of Malcolm Branday. The negroes transposed the two names,

for, contrary to most of them, he was fond of a drop of spirits.

He was not ill-looking, and scarcely darker than many Spaniards, but although his hair was laudably straight, and his skin comparatively fair, his shifty, bead-like eyes and thick-lipped mouth argued no very pleasant character to deal with. He took a violent fancy to Justina on his arrival, and proposed marriage to her in the course of his very first conversation. She was flattered by his notice, and greatly gratified by his matrimonial intentions, especially coming as they did after Claude's proposals.

She did not pretend to love him, "but to get married fair" was, after all, no easy matter to this poor brown beauty, and as she herself remarked with painful sagacity, "S'pose, arter all, I no do much better, since I want marriage."

In vain the Missus begged her to wait a little before formally engaging herself, for, by a curious anomaly, in this strange land where marriage is so lightly thought of, a betrothal counts for a great deal, and indeed is almost as binding as a marriage. The other domestics shook their various black and brown heads over the whole affair, and whispered

among themselves dark hints of Malcolm's past history; but Justina heeded them not, and appeared one morning with a fine gilt ring on her third finger, and defiance in her eyes.

She had, it must be allowed, stipulated with Malcolm that her marriage should not take place until the Missus left the island; an event that seemed at that moment far from unlikely.

"I could not leave my blessèd little Massa," she asserted warmly, "for twenty husbands. I b'lieve I no tink ob marrying only I know my heart clean break at finding myself alone when he go. If I hab fair baby ob my own, well it no so good, but it better dan noding, any way, but oh! even den, my tredger! it nebber can be to me 'zactly like you."

Troubles in plenty lay before poor Justina, if she had only known it.

In the meantime the negroes chattered among themselves. Malcolm was, according to even their liberal ideas, "berry bad man." They retailed various bits of scandal as to his former career. Many stories, apocryphal and true, were current at this time about him, and

all were to his discredit. They declared he had had two legal wives already, and had beaten them both, and moreover swore, with more truth, that he had been in prison continually.

Justina at first thought they were merely jealous of him, but gradually became indignant, and finally uneasy. She held somewhat aloof from Malcolm in consequence. He became angry, and they had a violent quarrel, and the usual reconciliation. The result was that soon afterwards she came to the Missus with an open letter in her hand. She stood silently by her for some moments, gazing dubiously at that lady's face, but at last presented the missive to her, saying with some hesitation—

"Dis fram Malcolm, Missus. He write dis here to his moder, an' he say I am to show it to de Missus, dat you may see for yourself what a berry good man he is. You may read it out, Missus," she added, with some condescension.

This gracious permission she endeavoured to make unconcerned, but the truth was, she was burning herself with inward curiosity. Print, large plain print, she could read easily enough, but for the interpre-

tation of written love-letters she had to depend on the learning and good-nature of her friends, although it was her constant endeavour to conceal the fact of her ignorance.

The letter was enclosed in a blue business envelope, and written on thin ruled paper. The Missus unfolded it slowly. She too felt rather inquisitive as to its contents. The writing was quite legible, although rather crooked and spidery in places. The coloured population of Creolia is nowadays far from behindhand in education, although much of their intelligence and acquirements are devoted to the concoction of anonymous letters, or to the more harmless love epistles that make the joy of their life. As far as the technical part was concerned, the document did Malcolm sufficient credit. It ran as follows :—

"My beloved Mama,—This is to acquaint you that I return to you as the prodigal son did from the Swine.

"I am amending my life, and hope to now do well. I am working at this cursed hotel. Pay is bad and work hard, but I do not remove, for, beloved Mama, I have here become acquaint with a most

beautiful young lady. She is indeed most fair, and so I think must come of people of importance.

"She live now along of an English Missus, whose husband is a great Massa and a Captain in our glorious British Army, and she is most good and innocent, O my Mama. I die for sure if I no marry dis girl. Ilda is no well, and the Lady where she live want seven shillings more for her——"

"Who is Ilda?" here interrupted the Missus.

"His little dater, Missus," rejoined Justina, placidly. "He hab two children dat I hear ob—Ilda an' a lilly boy down de town. Ilda's moder dead, so he hab to pay a lady for her keep. I hear dey both berry fair an' nice little tings."

The Missus sighed. The ways of the Creole negroes were indeed hard to understand. Fairness was apparently confused with charity in their minds, if it did not altogether replace it. It certainly covered a multitude of sins.

The letter continued—

"Now I no hab money, and Mama you must send me ten pounds to make a fine wedding for

this young lady, for I gree to promise her mariage, and no must make big fool of her now. A good wedding would cost all that, and you very well can afford ten pounds, because I know my father leave you well off, and you heaps of money, so just you give me some now.

"Beloved Mama, the people here most vile, and they eben tell my young lady that I married man, which is a shameful lie, for you know well that I have children but never think of mariage before.

"Your respectful son,

"MALCOLM BRANDAY.

"P.S.—The young lady called Miss J. de Paz. Send me the money quick."

I am afraid even these noble sentiments did not produce the favourable impression that the writer had expected on the Missus, but Justina thought they were beautiful, and was charmed with the whole composition.

"He write lubly, Malcolm," she declared, "quite de same as de Massa."

Her universal benevolence extended even to the gratuitous existence of the unnecessary 'Ilda.

Indeed she saw nothing to find fault with in either of the two children, and the Missus's warnings to be careful fell on heedless ears.

"It no large family, Missus," she murmured.

XVI.

"JUSTINA, Justina!" called an unexpected voice, one afternoon, from the outside of the verandah.

The tones were the well-known ones of Aunt Rosa, but it was neither the day nor the hour that she was wont to pay her weekly visit, and to arrive at this unexpected time evidently betokened some special business of her own.

It must have been somewhat pressing, for there was at this period a slight estrangement between aunt and niece. Malcolm's courtship was at the root of this also.

Now, Aunt Rosa did not, on the whole, disapprove of Malcolm. Her principles were against that, for in her mind his visible fairness more than replaced his lack of moral

virtues; but her own feelings were rather hurt, for Justina had told her distinctly not to presume too much on her position as aunt at this critical juncture. She had been obliged to speak plainly, for Malcolm had evinced great disgust at finding his sweetheart was so nearly related to a pure-blooded negress.

His mother, he said, with cunning worldly wisdom, would very probably refuse to send him any money for his wedding, did she hear of "such a low person" being an aunt of his future bride.

This was so likely, that Justina had of late done her utmost to throw poor Aunt Rosa as much into the background as possible. For instance, she now never sat in the same pew with her at church, or spoke to her in any of the public rooms of the hotel.

Rosa quite saw the advisability of her niece's behaviour, but she none the less tacitly resented it, and until this occasion, had made the rest of the family feel that her continuing to wash their clothes for them after her niece's remarks, was only owing to her own extraordinary kindness and condescension. She approached Justina, and whispered long and earnestly to her, and at last, leaving

her with some reluctance, drew near to the Missus.

The Missus was sitting in her rocking-chair, with her hands lying idly before her.

It was a glowingly hot day, and work of any kind was almost impossible. The air was like the breath from a furnace, and the very light seemed quivering with the heat, making the clear outlines of the mountains appear indistinct and wavy to the sight. A long spray of brilliant alamanda blossoms had forced its way through one of the green jalousies. It was very beautiful, and to sit and look in silent admiration of its glossy green leaves and soft golden-hued cups seemed profitable occupation enough to the Missus.

She was, indeed, so absorbed in watching the play of light on its neatly furled buds of richest brown, that she quited started at hearing the unlooked-for voice close to her elbow. The words conveyed even a more surprising announcement.

"Missus, I settled it all. I become 'good,'" said Rosa, with decision. "I going to be always good now; an' de Reverend Daniel, he so satisfied wid me, he say I can go to Confirmation next week. I

'tend his Bible-class long time past, but I only mak' up my mind to turn good jes' now."

The Missus withdrew her gaze from the alamanda to the black human Rose before her.

"You have quite made up your mind?" she inquired.

The question was not unnatural, for Rosa had so often spoken of such a possibility as belonging to a very distant future, that the Missus may be excused for feeling slightly sceptical of her ever altering her ways.

"Quite certain sure, Missus," replied Rosa, briskly. "Massa Jones, dat I lib with so long, an' dat Caleb's papa, he gitting sicker an' sicker ebbery day. No good at all now, Missus; much better he go home quick to his own people in Barbadoes, where he come fram. He gwine blind, too, an' deaf."

Her voice grew quite jubilant as she recounted each fresh affliction of her "master." It was, I suppose incorrect, but instead of the Missus feeling rejoiced over Rosa's tardy return to the paths of morality, her first impulse was rather one of disgust; but Rosa, poor soul, was sublimely unconscious that she had betrayed any want of feeling.

"Yes, Missus, he go now, an' so it fine chance for me to confirm—den perhaps I able to stay good," she added.

"Yes, Aunt Rosa," put in Justina, with the cruelty of youth, "tink you might by dis time. 'Sides, now you hab less excuses since you 'gin grow old and lose your teeth."

But personal remarks are so general among her class, that Aunt Rosa received the little taunt without anger; besides, her mind had other things to settle.

"I must hab all new white clothes, Missus, an' a tulle veil; so please, Missus, gib me some ob next week's wash money to buy dem."

The Missus could not refuse such a laudable object, and so Rosa departed, filled with glee, to buy her various requirements for the ceremony.

The Missus and Justina were to have attended the function, but the night before the great day was stormy, and the heavy rains that fell had converted the sandy gully between the hotel and the church into a raging torrent, well-nigh impassable to carriage and horses.

Rosa's little house was also on the wrong side of the gulley, but having once made up her mind, she

was not to be baffled by any surmountable obstacle.

In her oldest rags, her petticoats well kilted up above her bare knees, she half swam, half forded the stream, her snowy attire carefully packed in a basket and balanced on her head. She reached the opposite bank in safety, and having placed her precious clothes in a secure spot, returned to carry over Caleb in like fashion, and lastly fetched Cyril, who with her help managed to cross the fast running waters.

I have the story from Justina, who went with them to the water's edge, and who, although a brave girl enough, was fairly daunted at the sight of the current. Indeed, even to a strong woman like Rosa, the peril was considerable.

She re-dressed at a friend's hut close by, and thus, clad in virgin white, with a son on either side, she was escorted to the church for the solemn rite, that dimly in some way, to her poor ignorant mind, took the place of her omitted bridal.

XVII.

JUSTINA was rather taken aback when she awoke one morning to find the hotel ringing with the news that her lover had been arrested on a charge of theft. He was marched off between two constables, to her terror and dismay, and to the glee of the whole household, who I regret to say were openly and childishly exultant over his downfall.

Malcolm himself took it most phlegmatically. He was a philosopher in his way. Possibly, also, he was not unused to the experience.

Justina shrieked with undisguised fear when she herself received a summons to appear as one of the witnesses. She was perfectly innocent of any knowledge of the facts, but, being known to be his lady-love, was supposed to possess

valuable information. It began to dawn on her that even the proud possession of Malcolm's hand and heart was not without drawbacks, and she imagined, at the very least, that she would have to be imprisoned also.

The Missus was powerless to help her in this dilemma, and had to see her depart dejected and trembling, although the occasion seemed also to warrant her gayest clothes.

The poor girl spent a truly miserable day outside the court-house—a large box-like building of white painted wood. The sun shone pitilessly down on the dusty square, that lay before its door, and she was obliged to take refuge under the great mango tree along with a very doubtful lot of negroes, all, like her, awaiting their turn to be called. She disliked and despised her companions, who, quick to perceive this, did not spare her in their laughs and broad jokes. To add to her discomfiture, Malcolm's seat being near the court-house window, from time to time he would slyly make a most hideous grimace at his late adored sweetheart from this point of vantage. He rightly guessed that after this she intended to break with him,

and to annoy her thus was a salve to his wounded feelings. He considered himself a most injured man.

After all, Justina was not called upon to give evidence, and by some mischance Malcolm also escaped condemnation, although it was only by the skin of his teeth. Enough respecting his former career had come to light to cause his summary dismissal from the hotel, and to do more than justify the generally unfavourable opinion of his character.

Every one laughed at poor Justina, and she felt it acutely, and for at least a week went about her duties with mournful resignation.

The men servants who had been secretly jealous of the straight-haired coachman did not restrain their satisfaction at his humiliation, while the women who had looked upon Justina as a dangerous rival were equally pleased with her pride having a fall, and jeered at her about the unlucky love affair without mercy.

She felt angry and sore with every one of them, most of all with herself, but she was genuinely sad also.

The little "Massa" at this juncture was her one comfort.

He was growing in beauty and intelligence daily, and troubled, childlike, by the sight of a distress he could not understand, used with his fat dimpled hands to try and wipe away his nurse's tears of wounded pride, until Justina, at last smiling with eyes still wet, would declare "It's most worth crying to see de blessed chile's sweet ways," and took heart again; which the Missus observing, she left them often alone together, recognising that in this trouble no one could help the poor girl so well and truly as her unconscious little child.

These were happy days, however, in comparison to those that lay before them, for even before they knew it, a sorrow, the more dreadful and terrible from its suddenness, fell upon them. The little Massa, smiling and healthy one day, lay white and gasping on the morrow. The doctors, summoned in frantic haste, could do nothing. One of those rapid tropic illnesses that lie in wait for childish victims had smitten down their little house treasure, and hope vanished as the truth was known. In vain the Missus and Justina outdid each other in unavailing cares. Death had come, and come to conquer.

When all was over—and death is very swift in those islands of the sun—the Missus and Justina looked in each other's grief-stricken faces in awestruck silence.

What they had suffered in those two dark days no words could tell, but it was written plainly alike on the drawn white features of the mother, and the dusky countenance of the poor brown girl. Of the two, indeed, the latter at first looked the most to be pitied. Her despair was terrible to see—the unreasoning, uncontrolled grief, as much physical as mental, that belongs to emotional natures like hers. For days she had neither slept nor eaten. No one could comfort her, until at last the Missus herself, white and broken, arose and set herself to the task. What the Missus found to say to her I cannot tell. Grief had drawn the two women very near together, and perhaps at this time the Missus herself found more consolation in the sight of poor ignorant Justina's inarticulate woe, than in the more finished sympathy of her English friends. They sat beside each other, without saying many words, until the long hot day darkened into night, and the moonbeams stole softly through the

jalousies and made white bars upon the polished floor.

Then Justina found words. "Missus! dear Missus," she sobbed at last. "God help us both, but I worse off dan you. You hab husband; you go home one day; you see de blessed little Massa 'gain in heaven: but what is dere for me? Yes, Missus," in response to some murmured words, "I know all dat. I know dey say we go up dere wid you just the same, but do you really tink that, Missus? Can you eben wish that for true? No, Missus, I scarce b'lieve dat. I know we all God's children, so dey tell us in church, an' so I b'lieve, but—our ways are not your ways, nor our thoughts your thoughts. De black and de white like de two banks ob a ribber. You may trow bridge ober, but nebber, nebber make de two one. I lub you true, but oh my Massa, my own dear little Massa, you now in one ob de many mansions ob de Lord, but I love you, my tredger! for ebber. Chance I see you far off one day, but is it likely in de blessed heaven you need your poor ole nurse."

Her voice broke into a wail of anguish, and it needed all the Missus's courage to soothe her, for

her own heart was full well-nigh to breaking, but when at last the poor creature, worn out, slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion, the Missus awake, and gazing longingly at the eternal stars, lost, perchance, part of her own grief in prayer and sympathy for the sorrow of the other.

After this the Missus went home. She could not bear the place where she had gone through so much. The very loveliness of the island added to her misery. All seemed so fair, so smiling, so luxuriant, that it harmonized badly with her aching heart. Every flower, every tree, every old sight and sound, reminded her poignantly of her lost little one, and she longed for home and England, like a tired child. So she went home, and her departure was another blow to Justina's poor bruised heart. She went down to the wharf to see the steamer off, and other friends were there too—Aunt Rosa and Caleb, Orinthia and old Maria; even Elita, looking duller and older than she used to do, was standing on the quay. But the last impression the Missus retained of her West Indian life was a sad brown face, convulsed with an

agony of tears. Justina never did things by halves, and her sobs were as passionate and unrestrained as her affection had been.

XVIII.

SHE, too, went home. Not to her brother Josiah's, but to old Aunt Maria, whom she liked. The old woman's house was a tidy little wooden shanty, half hidden among broad banana leaves.

The kindly old negress was rather proud of entertaining her handsome coloured niece, more especially as it created great jealousy in Aunt Rosa's bosom. The two had long been rivals.

Justina felt weighed down with woe, but the smell of a real negro stew, full of red peppers and okra, was comforting, and she ate it with a better appetite than she had done for weeks. It was a satisfaction also, later on in the day, to exhibit to the admiring and envious eyes of old Maria and her neighbour, Orinthia,

various garments and gifts that had fallen to her share on the Missus's flitting. She had not had the spirit to take much interest in them before, and although naturally none of them were really valuable, they were treasures in the sight of her friends. By night time, the Missus and all the last eventful months of the girl's life seemed a long way off. The old negro talk and ways, the old atmosphere of what was in truth her own world, were taking once more hold on her, when the chance sight of a tiny shoe, accidentally forgotten among the other things, awoke all the old passionate regret in her heart, and she sobbed herself to sleep on her mat, laid on the hard mud floor, with the poor little relic pressed to her heart.

She spent three days at old Maria's. At first she was very happy; it was nice to sit about in the sunshine and do nothing. But as the sunny hours passed languidly by, her mind changed. A spirit of vague discontent possessed her, and on the fourth day she announced to her hostess that she felt tired of her life there, and would, as she termed it, "go seek for employment."

It was no difficult matter to find a place. She was well known to be

a good nurse, and servants, even bad ones, were scarce.

The Missus had also provided her with an excellent written recommendation, which, I regret to state, she devoted much of her energies to proving a deception, for she did nothing, made impertinent remarks to her new mistress, and calmly and deliberately maintained that she always expected late dinner. Although this curious conduct proceeded in reality from her still aching heart, no mistress could be expected to put up with it. She accordingly was politely requested to leave at the first week, which she did with openly expressed scorn, having a cutting tongue when she liked to exert it.

Alas! for poor Justina, I fear she was far indeed from being a model heroine. She had not got half a mile from her late mistress's door before she met Malcolm. He put his tongue out at her, and she retorted by a scathing remark. This hardly seemed a propitious renewal of their ill-starred courtship, but it led to words. Half an hour afterwards they were walking arm-in-arm between the red-tipped pinquin spikes, discussing their immediate marriage. How

they arrived at this surprising result I do not pretend to say. I merely mention the fact.

Old Aunt Maria, to whom they announced it that evening, said she thought it "no bad ting arter all," for Justina evidently wanted a beating, and "she sure get plenty of stick fram Massa Malcolm; 'sides, she nebber likely to hav so many fine clothes 'gain." Aunt Maria was above all a practical woman.

. . . . .

They were married in due form some three weeks afterwards—married in church with some pomp, Malcolm having by some occult means procured money for the ceremony and the expensive feast he gave afterwards in honour of the occasion.

Justina wore a white dress with a train, an orange-blossom wreath and tulle veil, also a very decided dab of violet powder on each brown cheek. According to the lights of her own circle she was a most fashionable bride. She found the week's honeymoon, however, very trying, for even her independence did not venture to break through the negro etiquette that had to be observed during this time, and she dared not venture

out of her own little hut. Old Aunt Maria brought her food to the door, and she counted the hours to meal times like a prisoner.

Malcolm ought, by rights, to have kept her company, and to have remained also in seclusion, but he laughed at convention, and adjourned to the neighbouring rum shop, where he spent countless "quatties" on cheap rum, and generally enjoyed himself. His appearance in public thoroughly scandalised the whole community, for every race has its own laws of propriety. It is so very easy to dispense altgether with marriage in Creolia, but if one is married, one must observe decorum.

Justina wept for very shame when, through the door, she heard old Maria's shocked remarks on her husband's want of manners.

"He back ob de world. Sho! for all his white face an' fine straight hair, he ignorant same as mountain negur. Sure chile, you pick up rotten star apple when you marry such a worthless fellow."

The poor bride pined for daylight and fresh air herself, but she knew too well that if the old negress had even caught her on the doorstep, she would have been also stigma-

tised as a "brazen puss," if not worse.

Aunt Maria had dispensed with marriage in her own case, and looked upon it as by no means necessary, but that did not prevent her dealing out hard and strict measures to her niece now, rather the reverse. This is the way of society, irrespective of shade or clime.

In the long dark lonely hours, Justina had time to ponder a good deal. "Marriage hab teeth," she repeated often to herself. "De ole folk know well what dey mean when dey say that. Dat berry wise saying," and then she wept, and was obliged to comfort herself with thinking of the glory it was for her, a Sambo girl, to secure such an aristocratically white husband. To require assurance that one is perfectly happy is, however, the most certain proof of the reverse, and Justina, poor soul, was no exception to this rule. "Marriage hab teeth," she repeated again, even more sadly, a month later, when Malcolm was arrested once more for theft, and she discovered that the wedding and its festivities had been paid for out of the proceeds of his spoil. It was an aggravated case this time, and the police had been

more cautious, so that he was caught completely. He was tried, and duly sentenced to a well-deserved three years' imprisonment with hard labour.

Aunt Maria and all her acquaintances were loud in their congratulations. Justina had fine luck, they said openly. She would now, they all agreed, enjoy her liberty to the full.

Malcolm had been a very bad husband to her, and had fully justified the old woman's prediction that he would use the stick to his wife. He did not spare it indeed, for Justina had already been beaten much and often. A little correction, the folks around thought, was all very well, and indeed might sometimes be salutary, but no man had a right to break good sugar-canes over his wife's shoulders as Malcolm had done. Sugar-canes hurt; besides, he must be a mad as well as a bad man to spoil the good God's food.

Justina, luckily or unluckily for her, was not quite like the rest of her fellows. Instead of following out their advice and leading the merry idle life that was expected of her, she betook herself to a poor little mud hut not far from the

prison walls. It was one of a row of straggling little shanties that stood apart and formed a miserable little colony, chiefly tenanted by the wretched hangers-on of the gaol. The inhabitants thereof were rather looked down upon by the other negroes, not so much from the prison atmosphere that seemed to cling to them all, as because, without exception, they were very poor—human nature, wherever found, even among black people, being much the same at the bottom. And Justina was very poor at this time. Poor, that is according to the liberal West Indian interpretation of that sad word, for here, even in the greatest penury, cold and hunger are practically non-existent. The climate precludes the possibility of the one; and as to food, in a land where the best of fruits grow practically wild, it is hard to be very hungry. It was fortunately the mango season, and the rich luscious fruits were to be had everywhere for the picking. The trees were weighed down beneath riches of their burden, for heavy oval balls, red and crimson, orange, purple, green and yellow, were suspended on every bough. No Christmas-tree could look more

gaily decorated than any one of them. Heaps of mangoes, sweet and juicy, lay rotting beneath the branches. In places they were even a serious drawback to health, for although the entire negro population was subsisting on them, together with all the horses, cows, and pigs, it was impossible to utilise all the wealth that was so lavishly flung about by kind nature while the season lasted.

The very ground was slippery in places with the flat fleshy mango stones. From the English ladies, who daintily essayed a "No. 11," to the poorest little negro child on the road gnawing a huge "hog mango," all were eating the beautiful fruit. The very insects had their share, as the clouds of pretty yellow butterflies testified plainly enough. It was a very carnival of tropical nature.

The mangoes helped Justina very materially. She did not mean to go to the wall, and had a plan of her own ready. She sold, although reluctantly, some of her best clothes, and bought soap and charcoal. She washed well, for Aunt Rosa had taught her the art long ago, and readily got some odd jobs in that way near to where she was.

The Creole population, no matter of what shade or class, is never chary of clean linen. Starch is the universal luxury, that is allowed to the poorest.

The small sums she earned at first only paid her rent, but they increased as time went on, and with what she gained she managed to buy a tin wash-tub and one of the unwieldy and curious self-heating irons that is so dear to the heart of every Creole laundress.

In this way she was able to improve her position, and to aspire to the privilege of getting regular employment from some of the higher prison officials, for she could now "get up" shirts and collars. She attained, indeed, to a degree of quite surprising perfection in the latter art, which awakened astonished gratitude in the breasts of those personages.

Hitherto they had wavered between universal limpness, and crackling stiffness all over. Justina, they admitted joyfully, had discretion, for she only starched the fronts and cuffs of their shirts. The little hut was small enough, but it was kept very clean, and gradually two or three things were added to it that gave it an air of comfort.

Around the prison, and in front

of Justina's tiny abode, nothing was to be seen but a large waste piece of land, that sloped gently to the far-off sea beach with its fringe of foam. This space was barren and dried up, the only visible brown patch in a land of vivid green.

A few stunted guava trees tried to grow on its edge, but even they did not do well; but prickly cacti, thorns, and dagger-like aloes, bearing aloft here and there huge spikes of bloom like May-poles, flourished in abundance. It looked a land of Cain. At foot all was hard and arid. At the least breeze, clouds of fine white dust swept over the whole surface of the flat, and smothered everything with impalpable grit.

It was not a cheerful spot, but still Justina stayed on, impelled by some invisible influence. She would have found it hard herself to put into words the reasons for her determination. She used to go down to the prison every day, and gaze curiously at its high white stone walls, so unlike the frail, gaily painted houses that she was accustomed to see elsewhere.

She questioned the prison officials at first for news of her husband, but they did not encourage such inquiries, and after a few brusque

words on their part, Justina gave it up.

To be "roughed" by a white person was a thing she never could stand.

XIX.

GORDON took leave of Elita with a good deal of regret, but it was only for a few months, he reflected, for he could easily make some excuse of business connected with his coffee or chocolate beans, and run down to Port Albert to see how she was getting on.

He hoped she would become more cheerful, for it fretted him to see her so discontented at home. When she came back, he thought, she might after all settle down as Mrs. Samuel Mackay, and then he would have her near him always.

"Rita and she both sot against it," he said to an old friend, a black man, whom he met on his journey homewards, "but de land jines so nicely, an' it would be such a good ting for my coffee, if dey did mak' a marriage. Samuel real good boy.

Help me work, I know, when I git ole; but gals an' women hab ideas an' tink foolishness. Rita say noting to me, but I know well 'nuff she tink always ob a white 'Buckra' for 'Lita."

His friend gave a grunt of disapproval. Like most dark men, he disliked the patent truth that every day they were shunted by their womenkind in favour of the lighter coloured "gentlemen."

Old Gordon observed the disapproval, and continued:

"'Lita pretty 'nuff and good 'nuff, too, for any one, but I'se no want my dater go 'way fram me, same as 'Becca, in de Scriptures—no, not if dey gib her rings ob silber an' jewels ob gold."

Gordon always drew a moral from the Scriptures if he could. He knew the Old Testament pretty well, as befitted his position as an elder of the Church.

Rita was much interested in hearing all about their daughter's new surroundings, and the eccentricities and "stylishness" of Miss Leonora's garments lost nothing in the telling by her husband. I think that was the part that pleased her the most. Gordon and she both found the little shingled house very dull without

their child. They had not thought they could miss her so much, quiet as she was in all her ways.

"It seem all dead as de humming-bird's nest when de lilly birds are flown," sighed the old man one day. And sooner than he had intended, he discovered that his coffee business at the Port Albert market peremptorily required his personal attendance.

He went to Miss Pinnock's before he went to the market, for his heart hungered to see his daughter. He was quite impressed with her good looks and elegance.

"Say, 'Lita, chile, what style you hab now!" he exclaimed in an almost awestruck voice.

Elita looked down with some complacency at her ruffled pink cambric. She had made it herself, for Miss Leonora could teach well when she liked, and by this time Elita could cut out and make dresses almost as well as her mistress. She had also trimmed the white sailor hat that she wore tilted coquettishly over her low brow. The whole costume was simple enough, but it suited her very well. Somehow or other she had latterly adopted a quieter style of dress than Miss Leonora's, who had at first repre-

sented her ideal of fashionable perfection.

As she was now, except for her brown complexion, she might have passed without remark in New York or England.

Without analysing in what it consisted, Gordon felt there was an indefinable change. The one fact he could grasp was the plainness of her clothes, and in his simplicity he hoped this promised well for the fulfilment of his dreams.

"I see Samuel Mackay de oder day, 'Lita," he remarked hesitatingly, after the pause that followed the first inquiries after Rita and the coffee crop.

He found it quite difficult to say all he had intended on the subject of Samuel. This graceful young lady seemed so far removed from the Elita of olden days.

"He doing berry well," he continued. "He still tinking ob marrying you."

Elita shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"I shall nebber marry him."

"You might tink ob it, chile," half pleaded her father. "He built a nice little wooden house wid what his coffee fetch. It hab a piazza, an' two rooms. All so nice, 'Lita.

He learn to read, too, fram de schoolmaster, an' all manner ob knowledge."

But 'Lita responded nothing, and when it came to the question of her returning home with him the next day she would not hear of it; and half persuaded, half conscious that no entreaties on his part would move her, he came back to St. Agnes alone.

Rita grumbled a good deal, but she felt very proud when she heard of Elita's dresses and general prosperity. The girl had told her father she had plenty of money, and did not need any help from him. He had brought her a five-shilling piece as a present, but she had told him indifferently that he might keep it. He had felt a little disappointed at her refusal, but dressmaking was evidently a paying trade.

She had sent her mother a dress of lilac-flowered sateen, made by herself, and a new hat that astonished the little congregation the first time Rita wore it at Sunday church, she also sent some trifling gifts to many of her friends at her old home. Amongst them a bright tie for Samuel Mackay.

Samuel was very pleased with his

tie, and so was Gordon. Perhaps that was why Elita had thought of it. Women are artful all the world over.

"I not going to leab her at Port Albert. No, I not," he said, half apologetically, to Samuel, "but den she ask for you, Sammy, an' 'peak ob sending you dis tie, an' den I tink dat for her to stay down dere for a bit is de bes' plan, sin' she so set on it. Young gals, we all know, want to hab dere gay times, an' when she come back, bress de Lord, she more pleased to stay up hyar an' lead a country life."

And Samuel listened and accepted the explanation as simply as Mr. Gordon had given it. So they both waited with a touching patience for the girl's return.

XX.

TOWARDS the end of the year Justina's baby was born.

It came at Christmas-time, when the whole countryside breaks into the clustering white blossoms that the Creoles call "Christmas Bells."

Even the desolate prison waste had its share of the universal snowy blooms, and looked quite festive.

The pretty bells clustered round the prickly cactus shoots, and hung in flowery garlands from the tall aloes.

Justina thought that it was just as if they wished to do honour to her new treasure.

The day after its arrival found her again at her wash-tub, for Nature does not deal hardly with the women of her race and clime. She had a heavy day's washing, for several white shirts were required

by the prison officials in which to eat their Christmas dinners. She felt she could not afford to be lazy, now that she had another to work for besides herself.

She was overjoyed, in good truth, with her baby. It was a fine boy, and here again, as though to compensate her for her other troubles, Providence had favoured her, for he was singularly fair for a coloured child.

English people would hardly have thought his dingy, sallow colour an improvement on his mother's satin skin of golden brown, but in her eyes it was his greatest beauty, and rendered him perfect beyond her wildest dreams. She prided herself on keeping him as daintily as she had done her beloved "little Massa."

One day, indeed, the summit of her ambition was reached, for some ladies fresh out from England took him for a compatriot, and his proud mother for his nurse. That was indeed a compliment.

The black people are not often as careful of their own children as they might be, and Justina's attention and devotion to her infant was thought absurd and even reprehensible, although the fairness of the baby accounted for a good deal.

Nothing that her neighbours could say, however, hindered her in carrying out her ideas of what she thought proper. His name was a difficulty, for she would not hear of calling him after his father. At last she settled on "Prince George," as being at once suitable and simple.

That year a distinguished royal personage had honoured the West Indies with a visit, and "Prince George" hats, shoes, and ribbons were the only fashionable wear among the coloured population of the island.

"'Sides," as Justina said to old Aunt Maria, "spose if de name good 'nuff for good Missus Queen's grandchile, it fine 'nuff too eben for my baby. An' he splendid chile also, just like a prince." So "Prince George" he was christened, and his mother called him "Prince" for short.

She had him baptized in due form at the parish church.

She would not for the world have had the ceremony omitted, and it was characteristic that throughout all her poverty she had never forgotten the payment of the yearly six shillings that was due from her as a church member.

Go to church she could not, for

firstly she had no one to attend to her baby in her absence; and secondly, although like all true Creoles she looked upon church-going as the most pleasant of dissipations, she could not now afford a "church hat."

Old Aunt Maria, who herself contrived in some marvellous manner to attend three separate services and a Methodist prayer-meeting on each Sabbath, was sorry for her, but the hat difficulty was really insuperable in her eyes, for to go to church without a specially smart affair of the kind would have been thought unheard-of audacity.

Justina did not, in consequence, get much outward spiritual support at this period of her existence.

She abstained from washing clothes on Sunday. That she would have thought both wicked and unbecoming, and while Prince slept, she would sit alone on the doorstep, with her hands crossed idly on her lap, and her eyes fixed dreamily on the prison.

Sometimes the clouds of dust would, for an instant, hide it from view; sometimes, too, they would be caught up, and forming miniature whirlwinds, would dance in tall columns across the waste, as

if they were possessed by living spirits.

This used to terrify her, for she believed that they were devils; but on the whole she enjoyed the restful Sunday amazingly. At first she had been often asked by the younger men to go to the neighbouring merry-makings. She was still very good-looking, and would have had no lack of admirers if she had given the slightest encouragement to any one of them; but the old days were past, and that she "was offle queer and mighty p'ticular" was soon known to all.

It seemed incomprehensible to them, but the general idea was that she was still devotedly attached to her errant husband, and although her fidelity was looked upon as a strange and even as a slightly ridiculous weakness, it ended by commanding a certain respect.

In this way her life slipped by, only marked by the various stages of little Prince's development.

On such a day he cut his first tooth. Such an ivory miracle of a tooth in his mother's eyes.

On such another day he made his first effort at locomotion, crawling on dimpled hands and knees across the low threshold to his mother,

standing before the door at her eternal wash. A sight like this was worth living for, thought poor Justina, and her heart sang within her for joy.

Her voice, too, sang now, loudly and even merrily at times. All the old songs were remembered and sung again, as in the days of her first beloved nurseling, but little Massa's" own lullaby she always chanted with a certain hushed reverence.

Some things pierce too deeply to be ever quite the same afterwards, and little smiling Prince little dreamt that his baby words and caresses, although they caused his mother ecstacy, aroused often also the old passionate regret for the lost English baby in her faithful heart.

XXI.

MUCH had happened during this time in St. Agnes. At first the Gordons and Samuel had enough to do in the mere effort of waiting. Patience in itself, although a passive, is a most exhaustive virtue. They waited through the long summer months. It is always summer in Creolia, always hot and always green, but still there are degrees and distinctions, and the heat as well as the incessant verdure are more salient at some times than at others.

They waited until the golden oranges and purple star apples had long since passed, until the last chocolate pod had ripened on its woody stem, until the feathery mango flowers had slowly changed into the hanging luscious fruit and

vanished in its turn—and yet Elita never came.

She sent a letter from time to time, but letters were poor substitutes for her living, breathing presence.

Then Gordon fell sick. He caught a cold while weeding his coffee plants one stormy morning. Like most coloured people, although normally healthy enough, he had no constitution to resist the slightest attack of illness. He was indeed sick unto death.

Rita grew frightened. She had never seen him ill before, and she sent a letter to her daughter. The old English schoolmaster wrote it for her, but before it had even reached Port Albert Gordon was dead.

"Make 'Lita come back and lib wif you," he had said before he died. "I liked well to hab seen her 'gain, an' it please me to tink ob her up hyar wid de coffee an' de chocolate. Samuel Mackay knows all 'bout my ways wid de coffee, Rita. Mind dat, an' pay 'tention to what he says. Don't you be too fixed on dat chile's marrying white. De coffee he sell well dis year, an' it's all for you an' 'Lita," and he turned his face to the

wooden wall and passed away with a quiet sigh. Rita had barely time to pull the pillow away from him, according to the time-honoured usage.

Then Rita sent another letter to Port Albert. It was short, and told the facts simply, almost brutally, but still Elita delayed.

Rita grew quite worn and anxious. It was wearing work going through all the elaborate ceremonies attendant on a burial alone, but she was powerless to do aught else but to wait on still. Gordon's grave was quite overgrown with thick grass, and the gravestone was nearly ready for it, before Elita walked in.

She looked ill and weary. She was not alone. In her arms she carried a bundle, a light yellow baby a couple of weeks old.

"Yes, Rita, it's mine. I'se back before when I hear of all your distress, but I was sick, berry sick. Yes, 'tis a boy; I call him Ferdinand, after his fader. I engage to de fader," she added, after a pause, with some vanity. "He white gentleman, real Buckra, berry good and kind. No, he no here now; he gone back to see his parents in Manchester, England way. He went back in de ship with Justina's English missus, but

when he come back 'gain he marry me."

Rita was overjoyed to see her daughter, but she eyed the baby doubtfully.

"I really b'lieve, chile, your poor fader vexed at your bringing dis pic'ney back wid you. He so sot on your marrying dat Samuel."

"Samuel!" interrupted 'Lita, disdainfully, "'cho, Rita! see, I do better dan dat alreddy."

Rita hesitated. Some of her late husband's precepts rose to her memory.

"Dis Mr. Ferdinand Woodford most good to me. See, he gib me a silk dress, an' dis real gold ring, an' a real coral necklace. Five pounds, too, when he left Port Albert."

Rita was fairly dazzled at these glories. After all, the yellow baby was a nice little creature, and the engagement of her daughter an agreeable way of explaining matters to her friends.

"Still, 'Lita, I'se glad yer fader no hyar of it, for he so offle pertic'lar, an' he nebber make much count ob any ob de white Buckra gentlemen."

"Mister Ferdinand Woodford, he perfect gentleman," returned Elita.

"He first gentleman at Massa Magrath's store, an' I often see him when I go to buy ribbons an' tapes an' tings at de next shop for Miss Leonora. He berry good to me, Rita, for true," she added rather pleadingly. "Rent me a nice little house an' garden, an' hire a black woman to do all de rough work for me. It all berry nice, an' he do eberyting praperly."

And her mother was satisfied. It was a great pleasure having her daughter at home once more, and she had always thought her husband's views unnecessarily narrow. What call had folk to set themselves up against their neighbours? "Same as dat ole starched Josiah de Paz, dat eberybody laugh at," she thought inwardly.

Her only dread was that the "Reverend Dupont," for whom she had a superstitious fear, should not "curse" her too much; otherwise she felt she need not trouble more about the matter. From long experience, the reverend gentleman did not take a very harsh view of the affair. Elita ran away and hid herself with her baby in the bush, when he paid his next parochial visit, and this in itself argued that she had some shame left; and Rita

was most polite, and professed extreme penitence on her daughter's behalf. Consequently he did not "curse" (*i.e.* scold) more than he thought was actually incumbent on his position; besides, poor good man, to him it was such an old, old story that he hardly expected anything else.

As to the rest of the neighbours, after they had inspected the baby and pronounced it undoubtedly "a fair an' pramising chile," they had nothing but congratulations to Rita on its arrival. A few men were less enthusiastic about its charms, but that was simple jealousy, and the general verdict of the women was, "Dat 'Lita done real well for herself. Missus Gordon was blessed to hab such a dater."

With the weight of her "lady friends'" approval to sustain her, Rita was therefore well able to disregard the Reverend Dupont's perfunctory words of reproof.

XXII.

OF course Samuel Mackay heard of Elita's return home, and of the new addition she had brought back with her to the Gordon household.

What he thought, he kept to himself, but two days after her arrival he walked up, carrying a tray full of fine yams for "Miss Elita." Elita was polite but distant. She was fast recovering her health and her looks in the pure mountain air.

He next wrote her a flowery proposal of marriage. Elita formally declined it, in a little badly spelt note, which was, however, written on very pink and highly scented paper.

This made him very downhearted, for he had written the letter himself in his own beautiful new hand-

writing, and he had expected great things from it.

He confided his sorrows to the schoolmaster. That personage was a quiet Englishman, and much liked by all the people about. He had come out to the West Indies years ago, and delicate lungs and want of means had kept him there ever since, to the great advantage of the inhabitants. He had known trouble himself, for his wife and child's graves were to be seen in the little churchyard, and this made him peculiarly gentle in dealing with his dusky little scholars.

He was a pure pessimist at heart about the permanent advancement of the negro race; but one would never have guessed it from his conduct towards them.

He had melancholy eyes and a tranquil expression. The certainty that all his work would result in failure bestowed a species of placidity upon him which was, although no one would have suspected it, the twin sister of despair.

He now listened to Samuel's grievances with his customary kindness. He had got to know him well during his lessons in the last year, and knew all the reasons of his sudden thirst for knowledge.

He also appreciated, better than any one else could do, the labour and toil it had been to the young man to acquire even what scant learning he now possessed.

"'Pears now as if 'Lita nebber would hab me," sighed the disconsolate Samuel. "I pramise her, too, I be real good to de little pic'ney, but all no use. She tinks dat de fine Buckra gentleman come back, but I know better. Dey nebber do come back to de girls dey leab here, specially when dey leab dem so much money : but she so foolish an' trustful, an' dat ole Rita jes' de same. Ole Massa Gordon de only one fer true wid any sense." And the schoolmaster assented with sincerity to this opinion.

Samuel sent Elita no more letters, for she had sent back the second to him unopened. He tried sending her fruit and vegetables as presents, but she would have none of them either, and she forced the unwilling Rita to return them.

At least Elita was consistent. Her mother, on the contrary, although she did not precisely want Samuel as a son-in-law, hankered after his gifts, and, cunningly concealing the fact from her daughter, gave him secretly to understand

that any specially choice morsels would not be refused by her if offered with discretion.

As time went on, Samuel grew morose and sullen. His eyes had a wild gleam in them as he thought of Elita's treatment of him. He gave up coming to church, and his evening lessons with the schoolmaster.

One night the schoolmaster met him in the narrow lane leading to old Joe Barnett's shanty.

Joe Barnett had no good name. He was an old African, and, as every one very well knew, practised Obeah under the rose.

On this night Samuel looked strange and excited. He had been drinking rum, and he muttered and whispered under his breath as he went along. He had a roughly knotted red handkerchief in his hand. It appeared heavy, and as he moved it jingled as if full of coins.

"Come home with me, Samuel," said the schoolmaster.

But Samuel was half drunk, and with a rough laugh and a smothered curse on all "de white trash" he went his way, and walked down the crooked path towards old Joe's cabin.

The schoolmaster sighed. Although he was a pessimist in theory, in practice he was always hoping to find exceptions among his black friends. He had liked Samuel, and sometimes thought he might turn out well, and it grieved him to see him so demoralized.

Later on he remembered too well the evening and the little incident.

There was a wild storm that night. The old people said it was no ordinary storm, but that was afterwards. At the time they were very well pleased, for although it did some damage to the bread-fruit trees, it was just what the yams wanted.

A small basket of cakes and 'cashew nuts was left at the Gordons' door next day. Rita guessed, indeed knew, they came from Samuel, but had no scruple in appropriating them for the use of the family; indeed she congratulated herself when she saw the unsuspicious Elita eating them, nor did her conscience prick her when her daughter thanked her for providing such a stock of her favourite dainty.

Rita's conscience was most conveniently elastic when she thought her own interests could be served thereby.

XXIII.

A DAY or two later, little Virginia, the ten years old daughter of Justina's uncle, Stephen de Paz, was playing in her father's garden. She ran aimlessly hither and thither, as is the way of children, and at last found a more settled amusement in climbing up and down the stile that divided their own yam patch from the Gordons' little garden. The fence was made of stiff cactus plants, covered with sharp prickles, and old Gordon had put the stile there himself to prevent Elita tearing her dress when she passed through. Before he did this there had only been a gap, and it was thought rather unnecessarily "fine" of him to improve on the ancient path. Stiles were uncommon in the district, and this one was always

known as "'Lita's stile" in consequence.

Virginia saw something shining sticking up out of the fresh red earth. There had been a good deal of soil washed away by the effects of the late heavy rains, and the ground was very moist. It was just on the other side of the fence, and easy for her to reach, and when Virginia looked closer she saw it was part of a tightly corked small bottle. She pulled it up without much trouble, for it was not buried deeply, and carried it to her father.

Stephen de Paz turned grey when he saw it in her hand.

"Where you find dat?" he said, in an odd, frightened voice. "Ober de border ob 'Lita's stile? You quite *sure* ob dat? gospel sure, chile? It not on our side for certain?"

The sweat stood in heavy beads on his brow. He was shaking all over.

"Quite sure, Stephen. You can see de hole where I take it fram."

Stephen's face cleared. He held the little phial up to the light. There was some whitish powder at the bottom, two sheep's teeth, a dead cockroach, and a tangled lock of dark hair. He looked at it long

and curiously, with an awestruck expression on his shining mahogany face.

"Dis Obeah, an' put certain sure for Elita," he said at last. "We must take it straight to her, chile, an' tell her 'bout it."

Elita was sitting at her table sewing placidly. She looked quite English in her prettily made print dress, but her eyes were heavy, as though with unshed tears. The little room was neatly and even tastefully arranged, according to the new ideas she had picked up at Port Albert. She laughed when she saw the bottle and heard Virginia's tale, but her mother trembled with fear.

"Heaben help us, 'Lita. Dat powerful Obeah! Dat Sammil Mackay, for certain. I hyar he so angered he go to ole Joe last week." Her voice quavered as she spoke.

"Samuel gwine 'way," remarked Elita, calmly. "He came 'gain last evening while you, Rita, was out seeing arter de yams," an' he begged me 'gain to marry him. Yes, he cursed an' prayed fearful, an' say I must lub him, but I say 'no,' an' so he gwine."

"Gwine!" exclaimed both her mother and Stephen in consternation.

That Samuel should leave his dearly prized little house seemed wildly improbable.

"Yes, he gone by now, I tink. He leab de island altogebber. Gwine way to Panama to help on de works dere. He get good employment, an' sign for two years. He say he no stay here more unless I marry him, an' I no do dat."

Old Stephen and Rita shook their heads.

"Yes, Mr. de Paz, I know what you tink, but jes' take dat ole bottle to ole Joe Barnett, an' tell him dat I, Elita Gordon, laff at him an' his obeah. It is not a dead roach in a bottle dat would make me lub a black man like Samuel."

'Lita turned cold and pale even as she said these words, but she was very angry, and that she felt frightened also only made her speak the more bitterly.

Stephen and Rita quaked as they heard her reckless speech. They silently took the bottle outside to the corner of the yard where the kitchen fire was built. They dared not take it back to old Joe, much less give him Elita's scornful message. Finally, with many hesitations, they smashed it with a hammer over the fire. There was a vile

smell, and then a thick, evil-smelling smoke arose. Rita burst into tears.

"Don't tink too much 'bout it, Missus Gordon," said Stephen, kindly. "Maybe it no harm 'Lita arter all—Joe berry ole man now." But his neighbour shook her head sadly, and silently with downcast mien passed into the little house.

. . . . .

A week afterwards Elita, hatless, shoeless, her dress torn and dirty, ran wildly into Stephen's garden, and began to tear the oranges off his best orange tree. Stephen came out in astonishment. Such a sight he had never seen.

"You here, Miss 'Lita," he said in surprise, "an' with no shoes on!" But 'Lita only looked at him vacantly, and went on breaking the orange twigs. She gnawed the oranges she had in her hands in a savage fashion, very unlike her usual studied "genteel" manner.

Stephen looked at her gravely for a minute, and then, taking her gently by the hand, he led her to her own home. She made no resistance, but suffered him to lead her like a little child. Rita met them at the door. She looked scared.

"I no rightly know what come to 'Lita. She no do sewing, or play wid de chile, or 'pear mind anyting I say, an' no 'peak at all. But, Massa Stephen, please tell no one; maybe she only sick an' it pass off."

Elita looked at her mother in a strange way. She said not one word, but suddenly burst into a fit of loud and senseless crying.

At the end of a few more days it was useless to disguise the fact, and far and near it was no secret that Elita Gordon was mad. Her mother was in despair.

'Lita would eat nothing that was set before her, but would run out like a wild creature up and down the dusty roads, and dashing into a negro hut from time to time, would seize what food she could find lying about. Whatever it might chance to be, were it flesh, fish or fruit, she would tear it with her teeth like a dog and eat it raw.

Old Joe Barnett met her one day. He came stumping up the road with his charmed stick and his one earring.

"Oho! you fine lady! You Buckra Missus! Where are you? You dat laff at ole Joe's stuff! You better hab married young

Samuel when he want you. I no tink he want you now!"

Elita did not hear the taunt, but indeed no one could have recognised the pretty, trim Elita of olden days in the dirty, ragged vagrant before them.

She grew from bad to worse, and at last became so savage that they had to tie her hands and feet; but she broke all the cords. Rita wept helplessly over her daughter, but tears availed nothing.

At last they chained her in an empty hut, while awaiting help from the Port Albert Asylum, but the officials were dilatory over the matter.

The neighbours found her lying dead one morning on the hard mud floor. She had died alone in the night, and although her hands were clenched in pain, her face looked peaceful and gentle as a child's. The negroes, however, whispered "Obeah" more than ever among themselves, for the body of a stillborn negro child, misshapen and black, lay beside her.

No one had guessed she was likely to become a mother.

It was an uncommon case, the doctors said, and there was at first some talk of an inquiry into the

matter, but Samuel had disappeared. He was probably dead too, lost among the thousands of lives and dollars that lie engulfed in the canal at Panama.

Old Joe Barnett was even more exalted and dreaded in the parish than before, although I do not suppose any reasonable person can believe that a dead roach and two sheep's teeth in a bottle can produce such tragical results. "Obeah," however, is a wide term, and old Joe's knowledge of herbs and plants was likewise extensive.

The tale is true enough, although it seems rather incongruous to think of such things taking place in this enlightened nineteenth century under British rule.

The tale was repeated often among the negroes, and versions of it reached Justina's ears before long, causing her to hug her own baby closer, and shudder as she thought of the fate of poor, pretty Elita.

XXIV.

WHEN her darling was a year old, Justina—rather flush just then of money, for she had had an extra quantity of work, resolved that he should be indulged in a pair of new shoes. True, he did not exactly want them, for he managed to get on very comfortably on his own fat brown feet, but to possess shoes was a sign of great wealth and distinction, and, indeed, would at once raise him above any of the neighbouring negro children. Although Justina herself had but a fourth part of white blood in her veins, she was most fully alive to the fact that her boy was of very superior extraction, and she liked to keep up his position accordingly. Now she dreamed of a pair of brilliant red shoes.

Small things often turn the whole tide of life.

Justina, with Prince in her arms, walking happily and briskly to the town, thought of nothing more serious than whether her boy's new foot-gear should be morocco or polished leather.

She loitered along the principal streets, taking a childish pleasure in examining the various goods in the shop windows. Port Albert, to her, was a magnificent city, and she could imagine nothing more splendid than its squalid streets. To the eyes of a stranger it was not so attractive, for open drains full of dirty sewage ran along the centre of each thoroughfare, and as the smart little buggies drove past, they splashed the noisome black contents far and wide; but the inhabitants were used to this, and they avoided the danger mechanically. In this as in other matters, custom is everything. The upper part of the town, where the richer people lived, was attractive enough outwardly, with clean-looking white houses, the verandahs of which were half-smothered in yellow alamandas, and the purple trails of the bougainvilleas; but the shops were the great and most delightful feature to

Justina, especially when, as now happened, she had money that burnt in her pocket.

A shoe store with fine plate-glass windows, where shoes and boots of all sizes, shapes, and colours were temptingly displayed, aroused all her admiration. Umbrellas and parasols in many gay tints formed a background, while full to the front a row of children's boots, in red and blue morocco, with bright gilt buttons and silk tassels, were arranged to the best advantage.

Justina clasped Prince closer in her delight.

"Darlin'," she exclaimed, "dat pair made for you. We must go into dis fine place and get them straight 'way."

She went in. A mulatto boy, who was acting shopman, was rather disdainful. Justina was too dark and too poorly dressed to have much claim to his august attention. He declared superciliously that he was sure the shoes were much too costly for her purse.

She was vexed at this. When she had the hardly-earned money ready, it was a shame, she felt, that her pride and pleasure in her purchase should not be enjoyed to the utmost. She protested, but the

mulatto was provoking. She raised her voice in the heat of the discussion, and at the sound a man came leisurely out of the inner part of the shop. He had a pipe in his hand, and he looked at her hard.

It was old Mr. Magrath, more elderly, and considerably more unattractive, than when she had last seen him at the Summerlands hotel. He recognised her at once.

"What are you doing now?" he asked.

"Buying shoes for my boy, Massa," she answered, rather shortly. "I merried now."

"Married! are you?" he said, carelessly enough. "Well! remember you can come to me when you are tired of your husband, for I still want a housekeeper."

He laughed as he spoke, but there was a suspicion of seriousness behind the words, as Justina very well perceived; but she made her face perfectly expressionless, and said not a word in reply.

Old Magrath watched her try on the baby's shoes in silence. He was not an unkindly old man at heart, so he let her have them cheap. He offered, indeed, to make her a present of them altogether, but this she declined, for half the

triumph of having the shoes lay in being able to tell old Maria what they had cost her.

Her refusal quite impressed old Magrath.

"You can think over what I said just now, if you change your mind," he called after her down the street, but Justina made as if she did not hear.

It was, however, very soothing to see the impudent mulatto boy, quick to notice and follow his master's lead, respectfully bow as she passed him on her way out. She swept by him with the air of a princess, and he was quite overcome by the novelty of the situation and by her grand manner. She told Aunt Maria of the little incident, but that astute old lady merely blinked and said nothing.

She would not have continued to be a washerwoman had she been in Justina's place, but some people never would take the good chances Providence offered them. By this time, however, she knew her niece too well to venture to say a word.

"For Justina mighty proud, an' de less she has, de prouder she get," she confided in another old lady, a mutual friend of them both. "She stranger dan any one ob us. Guess

she got plenty of her mad ways from dat Buckra Missus. Dey mighty odd people, I b'lieve."

And so Justina continued to wash shirts.

XXV.

LITTLE by little, in the thousand trivial ways that such things happen, the outline of the story became known to the gaol officials. Which of the prisoners her husband was they were ignorant of, for Justina never gave her new surname, and was generally known simply by her first name; and although her skill as a laundress had caused them to be kindly disposed towards her, they did not attach sufficient importance to her existence to trouble themselves to look up the facts of the case.

On her side, Justina made no effort to see Malcolm, although prisoners were occasionally at stated times allowed to see their friends. She had remained faithful to him, but more from instinct than from

any well-defined reason, and she retained no pleasant memory of her short married life. She never looked forward to her husband's return save with dread and dislike; indeed she never thought of it at all if she could help it. With her temperament it was easy enough to live only in the present, and let things drift on.

The reckoning, however, always comes sooner or later, and the convenient system of drifting too often ends in shipwreck. The time of Malcolm's release was at hand. She was told of it by all the neighbours. They were most minutely interested in the sentences and careers of the prisoners, and were not likely to make mistakes. Besides, Prince was now over two years old, and so she knew that the three years' sentence must be nearly up.

Then she grew rather troubled. She even thought secretly of running away, taking her child with her, but the dread of a strange place and ways, and the certainty that if Malcolm thought it worth his while he would follow her, deterred her. It would be best to be conciliatory, she reflected.

She consulted with some of her neighbours as to what she ought to

do under the circumstances. From their constant intercourse with the gaol, they were quite versed in the proper etiquette to be observed on such occasions.

It was thought the correct thing for the family to meet their long-lost relative at the prison gate. It was a festive occasion and best clothes were imperative, while a good meal should be awaiting the newly restored member of society at home.

They gave their advice volubly and good-naturedly, if with a shade of patronage. Up till now Justina had rather vexed them by her superiority, and it was pleasing to find that they at last could give her hints as to suitable behaviour.

She dressed herself, therefore, in her best clothes, which happened to be the identical red garment that she had worn long ago, when the Missus first saw her under the flamboyant tree.

It was now old-fashioned, and as she donned it, she regretted its absence of frills; but she looked her best in it still. She had a bright blue bead necklace round her firm brown throat, and the checked handkerchief bound round her head was new and fresh, and as clean

and stiff as washing and cassava starch could make it. It was tied in a crisp bow on one side, and she had stuck a blossom of rose oleander over her ear on the other, which gave quite a coquettish look to her whole costume. As for Prince, he was arrayed in all his bravery, from the bright shoes on his feet, to his clean white dress and new straw hat.

She wondered what his father would say to him. He could not but admire him, she felt sure.

She had sent Malcolm a message telling him of the birth of the boy, but had heard nothing in return, which had caused her wonder and a little surprise, but she accounted for it by the message having failed to reach him.

She tidied her hut, and looked with pardonable vanity on the transformations she had worked in it since she first installed herself there. Then it had been the most dirty and tumbledown of all the row of cabins; now, thanks to her industry, it was the show one of them all. The roof was mended, the floor clean. She had a chair and table, and two glass carafes and tumblers. A creeping granadilla clambered over the roof. She

watered it carefully, and it now was bearing fruit, and the gigantic smooth globes showed freshly and delicately green beneath the large leaves.

She had a nice stew prepared, and baked yams. Malcolm's heart and temper could not but be mollified at such attentions on her part.

She walked slowly to the prison gate. It seemed only too short a distance to her reluctant feet.

She stood for some time at the door, trying to screw up her courage to inquire.

One of the warders, who knew her, called her by name, and asked what she wanted. This helped her, and she approached, and told him her errand plainly enough.

"Branday," he said, "Malcolm Branday. No prisoner of that name is to be let out to-day. We have no one of that name here now. I am certain of that. You must be mistaken."

"He ought to come out to-day, de folk say, if he sentenced tree years back," persisted Justina with gentle obstinacy.

"Maybe he got out on a ticket of leave some time back," suggested the warder. "I have not been down

here very long myself, for I was transferred here from the Santa Barbara prison."

"Ticket ob leave! What's dat, Massa?"

The warder explained. Such innocence was not common, but Justina shook her head.

"If for good conduct, make sure clare an' certain Malcolm nebber get dat," she stated with conviction.

Finally, after more conversation, as she evidently showed no intention of leaving or being put off from her purpose, he, with many assurances of what an exceptional favour was being shown to her, conducted her to where the higher prison powers were assembled.

This was an unusual proceeding, but so were the circumstances, and besides, she was known to them all in connection with their shirts and collars.

The whole business filled Justina with awe. The silent white corridors, the iron bars, the heavy locked doors—all was so bare, so white, so still. The very sunlight glittered with a hard brilliance on the well-scrubbed floors. She could not imagine Malcolm existing in such a place and among such uncon-

genial surroundings. How his lazy, good-for-nothing nature must have revolted from the silent order of everything!

To be a professed thief was almost regarded as an honourable profession in certain of the lower grades of "coloured" society, and although Justina did not share this opinion, she certainly did not possess altogether our English ideas on the subject; but she then and there made up her mind that, come what might, little Prince must never follow in his father's footsteps. The punishment was too dreadful.

The warder paused at a door. There were a few explanatory words with his superiors. Justina, standing upright as a sentinel in the doorway, saw, as in a dream, a huge book produced. She thought it must be at least a Bible, if not the great Book of Judgment itself, for, except in church, she had never seen any volume so imposing. She caught indistinctly the words:

"Flamingo Island." "Yellow fever." "Dead." "Better tell her at once."

Human nature may be bad, and is thoughtless, but it is rarely wantonly unkind. Something in the woman's strained attitude and eager eyes

caught their attention, although they misinterpreted her expression. Three years of patient endurance had given her a certain air of dignity, and the warder had imparted already to his chiefs what little he knew himself of Justina's history. It was therefore in a kindly voice that the head official addressed her, reflecting that she was not only a fellow-creature, but his own most excellent washerwoman.

"My good woman," he said, "we find by the books that your husband, the prisoner Malcolm Branday, for whom you are inquiring, was long ago transferred, with several others convicts, to Flamingo Island. They were employed on the convict works there." Here he coughed slightly, but continued. He trusted the woman would not make a scene. "The reports show, however, that he died of yellow fever some six months back."

Justina stood straight as ever. There was a curious expression in her eyes, and then, by one of those inconsequent changes that are such a cause of perplexity to all who have to deal with her race, she burst into a fit of laughter—laughter so loud and shrill that it startled her listeners. It echoed uncannily

down the long, silent passages, causing the child to cry with fright and cling close to its mother's hand.

"So he dead all dese months, Massa, an' nebber in here at all, arter all my waiting. Oh, Massa, dat too good joke," and she laughed again.

It had no pleasant sound.

"Just like one of those creatures," commented the chief. He felt rather ashamed of his late sympathy. "Even the best of them have really no feelings."

"Poor thing, she must be mad," said some one else more charitably. He was young and fresh from home, and therefore more soft-hearted than the others.

Justina, however, was very sane. She felt, indeed, as if she were awaking out of a long dream. She made a hurried obeisance to the gentlemen, and, snatching up the bewildered Prince, followed the slightly disconcerted warder to the outer gate.

"Well, you are a rum lot," he muttered, as he locked the door on her retreating form, and watched her tall figure vanish swiftly in the distance among the huge poles of the aloes.

He had not known her life, and

judged it only from his own scanty information. He admitted, however, that, as a washerwoman, she possessed distinct merits.

XXVI.

SHE went straight to old Aunt Maria's cabin to tell her the great news. The old negress was sitting on the ground outside her little hut. A tiny pan of charcoal was before her, and she was engaged in boiling sweet potatoes, when Justina burst in on her.

"Malcolm he dead—dead at last, an' we nebber see him 'gain. Better still, Maria, dead at Flamingo Island, 'cross de great sea, an' buried dere. No fear eben ob his duppy coming back to tease me more."

Aunt Maria looked up, and a broad grin of sympathetic joy illumined her toothless old face. She appreciated the fact of the ocean lying between them and Malcolm's duppy at its full value.

"Dat good ting for true, Justina! You hab real luck in dat."

Justina was a different woman already. She laughed and sang. Little Prince caught the infection and laughed gaily too. Aunt Maria glanced at them from time to time approvingly. There was some spirit left in Justina after all.

The sweet potatoes were quite done by this time, and Maria heaped them bountifully on the two tin plates of the establishment.

"Eat, dearie," she said, hospitably; "eat it all up. I plenty more in de pot. Dat right, Justina. It fine to see you so gay again. You look like ole times. What you tink to do now?"

The question sobered Justina at once. The future had not occurred to her before; the present had been enough. She sat down on the hard mud floor, and, with her arms round the child, gave herself up to thought. The sweet potatoes were set aside, but Prince's fingers were busy with them. He had no perplexing problems to take away his appetite.

Thinking was a new occupation to Justina, and it tired her more than scrubbing clothes. At last she spoke aloud.

"Aunt Maria, you speak wise words. I no tink ob dat. One

ting I sure of—I no stay on where I am now. Plenty ob oder folk tief, an' dey call him chile ob a tief too."

Aunt Maria grunted. Such delicacy of feeling did not appeal to her. The old woman's best friend had only that morning assured her "dat de Lord most gracious to her, for, tank God, her son grow up big tief," and Maria had both appreciated the blessing and endorsed the thanksgiving. Justina's remarks accordingly struck her as foolish.

"If you gwine on as you do now, chile, you nebber get on at all," she said, in a querulous voice. "What does your washing bring you?"

"Five or six shillings a week at most, but den dere de rent; I no get any room under two shillings, an' den I hab to buy soap an' coal, yes, an' de cassava starch to pay for out ob dat."

"Dat true 'nuff," nodded old Maria, "but dat no bad, if you not so grand, an' let your chile run 'bout as de other pic'ninnies."

"Dat," retorted Justina, with flashing eyes, "is just what I nebber will do."

"An' de schooling? an' de clothes? an' all de oder fine

tings?" sneered the old lady. "Tink you bring him up like a Buckra boy on five shillings a week an' a chance quattie now an' den? 'Cho! you fool altogeber, Justina."

And Justina sat silent. She knew only too well that Aunt Maria, disagreeable as it was to admit it, spoke truth. Suddenly an idea struck her. It was not a pleasant one, but it showed her a way which, if successful, would ensure at least her child's future prospects.

She went down to Port Albert that very afternoon. It was perfectly in keeping with her ideas, and she saw nothing incongruous in the fact that she attended church on the way.

It was a Saint's day, and service was going on in the parish church as she passed by, so she stepped in. Among the worshippers none prayed more earnestly or sang more devoutly than Justina. She felt she had a great deal to pray for just then. Her sincerity was as great as her ignorance, and possibly the dear Lord God excused the one in consideration of the other.

She left the church, feeling convinced that her faith was strengthened for what she had determined upon in her mind. She walked

straight up the principal street of the town.

Her head was erect and proud, and she led her toddling boy by the hand. She stopped only when she reached old Mr. Magrath's store.

The old Irishman was sitting near the doorway in a comfortable cane lounging-chair. He looked up in some amazement when he saw his visitor.

"Massa," she said, slowly, "you same mind still about wanting me as your housekeeper."

He nodded. He had a quid of tobacco in his mouth, and speech was difficult.

"I come den, Massa, to tell you I can come now, for my husband Malcolm dead—dead an' buried 'cross de sea."

Magrath nodded again. He began to realize the situation.

"Den, Massa, cos I no so pretty as I was, for I seen a heap of trouble"—she spoke with difficulty —"I come to you for ten shillings a week, widout de shoes or de red umbrella you once pramise me. I serve you well, Massa, and true"—here her voice faltered and changed into a sudden sob—"but, Massa, you—must—pramise to—take—my fair chile too."

The old man again made a sign of assent.

The child looked at them both with wondering eyes, then turned and broke into a spontaneous laugh, but there were tears in his mother's eyes as she stooped and, without a word, lifted him over the threshold.

. . . . .

She is still living at Port Albert. Her boy is getting on well, for she has contrived to induce old Magrath to give him a first-rate education. On her own side she makes the old man very comfortable, and has kept faithfully to her agreement.

She is a good deal looked up to by her neighbours, and indeed, from their point of view and her own, is a most respectable and prosperous woman. Even the rigid Josiah is proud of his sister's success in life, and admits that, though at one time he had doubts about her, she is now a credit to the family.

For my own part, I do not presume to offer an opinion on such a delicate question.

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