

Not by Sun Alone

George Mikes



Drawings by Papas

GEORGE MIKES

Not by Sun Alone

GEORGE MIKES loved Jamaica. He has written in his inimitable way about many other countries, but never with greater warmth than he does about this seductive island.

The features of Jamaica he discusses range from minor ones such as the real colour of her Blue Mountains and her gift for turning her magnificent coffee into a horrid brew, to major ones such as her heritage from the days of slavery and colonialism, and her admirable attitude towards grandmothers. Luxury hotels and the slums of Kingston, tourists and Rastafarians, religious zeal and sexual tolerance, racial equality and bizarre forms of snobbery based on colour — Jamaica embraces many contrasts such as these, and George Mikes perceives them all with affection, raises a quizzical eyebrow, plants his dart of shrewd and humorous comment — and ends by leaving us not only laughing, but also wiser and kinder.



Jacket design by Papas, whose Jamaican sketches accompany the text.



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GEORGE MIKES

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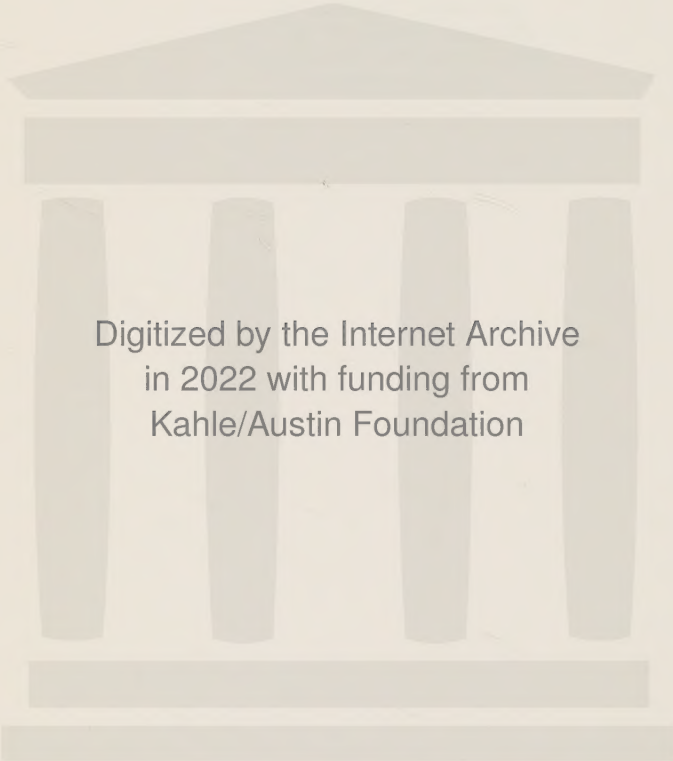
Drawings by
PAPAS



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To Hope, who was my guide



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Part One

ISLAND IN THE SHADOW

INTRODUCTION

A Double-Decker

Having just arrived at Kingston's Sheraton Hotel, I donned my shorts, my tropical shirt and an old straw hat, settled down by the swimming pool and ordered a sandwich. The tropical sun was shining benevolently but with no excessive zeal; all around me, stretched out on colourful deckchairs, people were sipping Planters' Punches.

This for me was high life, which I always find slightly embarrassing and a trifle silly. I prefer low life. Alas, one's chances of living a happy and informal low life are diminishing rapidly. What's the use of not being a millionaire if one has to live like one? Indeed, in these days one lives better than millionaires: they have all the responsibilities and worries that go with being rich, I only have the pleasures under the tropical sun, by the swimming pool of a luxury hotel; they have to go yachting all the time which they detest, while yachting is not compulsory at all in my income bracket; they, on top of it all, may lose their millions, I cannot possibly lose mine. All the same, I do not play this game properly. Lying there by the swimming pool, I should have noticed only the white Americans diving into the water or ordering highballs and dry Martinis, yet I not only noticed but was more interested in the black Jamaicans doing the menial jobs around us.

Then my sandwich arrived. It was a huge American monster, a double-decker, consisting of three separate

layers. I looked at it with hostility. When I had uttered the word *sandwich*, I did not have this massive conglomeration of agricultural products, this triumph of skyscraper-building skill in mind. All I wanted was a sandwich.

Yet that sandwich was symbolic of Jamaica. Not only because it was American, and the whole country is getting more and more Americanized. But mostly because it consisted of three separate and non-communicating layers, like Jamaican society. On top (or is it the top?) you have the large number of tourists, almost exclusively white, who bring in vast sums of money; underneath is the coffee-coloured middle class, charming and cultured people, with exquisite middle-class manners, slightly more English than the English, black Europeans all; and finally, at the bottom, the overwhelming majority of the people, the black masses, sometimes poor but happy, more often poor and unhappy, but whether happy or unhappy, always poor. You may be a tourist in Jamaica without descending into the other layers of the sandwich, without indeed realising that the entire nation does not really consist of waiters and barmen; more surprisingly, you may be a middle-class Jamaican, without knowing much about the poverty and misery of the so-called masses, without running into any 'unpleasantness' (poverty is regarded as unpleasantness for the casual onlooker, never for the man who is starving); and, of course, you may be a black villager, never seeing a tourist and hardly ever a brown man.

I took out my pen and notebooks and looked around sternly determined to find out *how* European Jamaicans really are. They lived under British rule for 300 years; how much, I wondered, did they learn from it?

It does not take you long to find out that you are in the land of pleasant people. Sometimes they may be sullen;

sometimes they flare up and cut each other in half with their machetes; but they are rarely malicious. You see a man on a bicycle swerve suddenly and carelessly in the path of a fast-moving car and avoid death by a hair's breadth. Yet, a few seconds later, driver and cyclist will grin at each other, broad, happy grins. They are graceful people: little girls, coming home from school, move like ballet-dancers, carrying huge piles of books on top of their heads. Jamaica is a new country – a 'developing' country, if you like – yet there is very little aggressive nationalism in the air. They love their island of Jamaica all right; they rarely mention the Jamaican nation. Having noticed these matters an alarming thought occurred to me. Perhaps it is not a question of how much have they learnt from us but of how much can we learn from them? A little good humour, perhaps? More grace? Perhaps even a little tolerance? As well as asking how English they have become, we might also examine the question: how Jamaican are we?



I, perhaps, may claim to be an honorary Jamaican. I, too – like them – am inclined to listen amiably to everybody, nod agreement, smile approvingly and then go on doing exactly what I meant to do in any case. And I, too, dislike fuss as much as the Jamaicans do, which is demonstrated by one of their remarkable achievements: while the rest of the Commonwealth is debating the problem how to decimalise our unwieldy currency, Jamaica has solved the problem without even trying. The dollar is pretty decimal and that's what they use nowadays, at least in all trades connected, however remotely, with the tourist industry. All prices are quoted in dollars, and change is given in dollars. The patriotic side of my Jamaican heart rose in protest against this self-destructive practice, but it was of no avail. I told them that the Jamaican pound was still legal tender in their country but they refused to believe me.

Sitting there, munching away at my monstrous sandwich by the swimming pool, I watched a black woman pass in a ridiculous contraption of a hat, decorated with flowers and vegetables. 'Black women look comical in American hats,' I jotted down in my notebook. But within a few minutes, a glance at another passing woman drove me to the conclusion that they looked no more comical than white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant women.

The problem, then, was not so simple, but still I tried to put it to myself in the simplest possible terms:

(1) Why do hundreds of thousands of people leave their faraway countries to settle, or at least become tourists, in Jamaica?

(2) Why at the same time do hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans leave their beautiful Island in the Sun, to become bus conductors in Birmingham?

The following pages attempt to answer these questions.

How Blue was my Mountain

The fame of the Blue Mountains had reached me long before I reached Jamaica. Who hasn't heard of the celebrated coffee, named after the Blue Mountains?

[I should like to remark in brackets that this brand is one of the mildest and most aromatic in the world. Yet, the Jamaicans have succeeded in turning it into an even worse and fouler-tasting black soup, masquerading under the name of coffee, than any American brand. No mean feat. Any developing nation might justly be proud of making worse coffee than the people of the mighty United States.]

'Why are the Blue Mountains called the Blue Mountains?' I asked the charming young lady who had been delegated by the Tourist Board to accompany me.

'Because of their colour,' she replied shrewdly.

'What colour?' I asked her.

'Well, it is not exactly blue just now, but it very often is.'

'Will you kindly draw my attention to it the next time it is blue?'

She never referred to the subject again, but some people in Kingston heard that I doubted the blueness of their mountains and this irritated them. They used to ring me up: 'Look now. Just look out of the window. What colour are the mountains *now*?'

'Grey,' I would reply.

An hour later, another voice : 'And now?'

'Green, like the other mountains behind.'

After a few weeks in Jamaica I became worried. I had taken to the island and the islanders more than to any other country I had ever written about. This, I knew, just would not do. The judge in *Trial by Jury* could marry one of the parties before him; but the author of a travel-book cannot fall in love with his subject. I fortified my soul; I frowned; I looked around sternly.

On the day of my departure, I looked at the Blue Mountains again; they were deep, dark blue, indistinguishable from the azure sky.

Then I knew that Jamaica had won and I had lost.



Looking Around

I promised the editor of a literary magazine that while in Jamaica I would hop over to Costa Rica, to collect material for an article. The plan had to be cancelled. One might as well say (as indeed one does) that while in the United States, one will hop over from New York to Los Angeles. Or while one is 'in those parts' one will hop over from Australia to New Zealand. I had looked closely at the map of the Caribbean, and Jamaica looked extremely close to Central America. The distance, in fact, is about 800 miles – London-Edinburgh return – which is too long for a hop; such a distance requires a leap.

In the minds of most of us, *the West Indies* is a vague geographical notion, depicting a number of islands south of Miami and east of South America. It is the ill fortune of these islands that everyone is ignorant about them. Their modern history, in fact, begins with a blunder: Columbus, their discoverer, thought he had arrived at the East Indies when, in fact, he had arrived at the West Indies. No one else – to my knowledge – has committed quite such a bloomer in the subsequent four and a half centuries (though someone may have booked his ticket through a travel-agent friend of mine who is quite capable of sending people to the West Indies instead of the East Indies. Indies, after all, are Indies – so why fuss, why complain?)

What do we know about these parts? Names like the

Antilles, Windward Islands and Leeward Islands may buzz about in our minds. We know that some islands are English-speaking, others Spanish and others again French-speaking. We remember – if we do – that there are three large islands north of Jamaica : naughty Cuba which – for the Americans – is becoming almost as non-existent as Red China; Hispaniola, shared between Papa Doc's French-speaking Haiti and the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic, of Trujillo and Rubirosa fame; and Puerto Rico, one of the colonies of that uncompromisingly anti-colonialist power, the United States. Having reached Jamaica, one hears a few remarks about the various other islands : faraway Trinidad, Jamaica's great rival, comes in for the strictest censure. Trinidad is urban, agriculture there is far less important than in rural Jamaica. Trinidad is of course also the true land of the Calypso. You hear of Barbados, which – as is often pointed out – has the highest literacy rate in the West Indies. People there are supposed to be trustworthy, thrifty and industrious. 'This is their tradition,' it was explained to me, 'their slave-masters were cruel but honest.' The phrase 'cruel but honest' turned out to mean that they beat their slaves to death (wasteful but permissible) but never stole sugar. Barbadians are famous for their wonderful cricketers; and they can also claim a revolution unique in history. The slaves of Barbados rose in revolt because they were determined to remain slaves. They rebelled against the threat of freedom. Perhaps Barbadians are even more honest than we realize : their revolt may be unique but it was certainly human. People keep talking of freedom while in their hearts wishing to remain slaves. In the human heart the burning desire for freedom is equalled only by the burning desire for slavery. Freedom means responsibility; slavery has its own peculiar freedom : freedom from responsibility. (More of the traces, results and traditions of slavery later.)

The Bahamas are a rich colonial paradise, reminding

one of the Victorian Empire. People there still wear morning coats on the slightest provocation, and secretaries (this habit is not so Victorian) earn £50 a week. The place is still ruled by a few families who hold commerce, industry, banking and a great deal of political power in their grasp. Bermuda is the tourist island *par excellence*; it is said indeed that the tourists outnumber the native population. Bermuda is the capital of the flourishing honeymoon-industry and is as wealthy as Barbados. (These *islands* are wealthy, not all their inhabitants.) These are thumbnail sketches, drawn by Jamaicans. After you have garnered such and similar descriptions, that conglomeration of many islands – the West Indies – slowly begins to mean something and each constituent unit begins to gain individuality and a profile of its own. Of course, there is such a place as the West Indies, just as there is such a place as Europe. One West Indian may be as different from another as a Portuguese is from a Swede.

My own island, Jamaica, is the largest of the English-speaking islands. It is one hundred and forty-six miles in length and fifty-one miles in extreme breadth. It would take the average jet almost a quarter of an hour to traverse the island from tip to tip. Jamaica's territory covers 4,411 square miles. The island is about as large as Cyprus, and a veritable giant compared with Malta – to mention two other independent island-states. The county of Yorkshire is half as large again. Although the average Yorkshireman is more nationalistic about Yorkshire than the average Jamaican is about Jamaica, Yorkshire, try as she may, has no hope of becoming independent of England, but Jamaica *is* an independent, sovereign state and won her independence almost without trying.

The index of the official *Handbook of Jamaica* has an entry: *Army, Salvation*, but the national army of the land is distinguished by its absence. It does, however, exist; it consists of one regular battalion. The Air Force is called

an Air Wing and operates a few helicopters and even fewer light aircraft. The Navy consists of patrol launches. The difference between the armed forces of Jamaica and the armed forces of the United States is that the forces of Jamaica are more than adequate for her needs, since no one wishes to attack her, while the forces of the U.S. are hopelessly inadequate. (Yorkshire is in an even more pitiable position: for her defence she has to rely on foreigners, a medley of Britons, with only a sprinkling of Yorkshiremen in their midst.)

France, the United States, West Germany, Israel, Holland, China and Korea are the countries which have deemed it necessary to appoint ambassadors responsible for Jamaica. Jamaica herself has only a handful of diplomatic missions abroad.

Jamaica consists of three counties: Surrey is the neighbour of Middlesex, which is quite regular, but both are the neighbours of Cornwall, which is nonsense and displays a shocking lack of knowledge of English geography. Kingston, however, is in Surrey, which is the proper place for it.

Jamaica, in the era when independence became fashionable, was first a member of the West Indian Federation but later opted out and became independent in August 1962. (The last vestiges of the Federation are found in two great institutions: the University of the West Indies and, as we all know, the West Indian cricket team.) Jamaica was only following a fashionable political trend. The world is becoming smaller and smaller almost every day, larger and larger units seem to be required, yet smaller and smaller units come into existence and even they tend to become smaller still. The West Indian Federation was small enough, but it broke up; Cyprus is minute, yet she, too, is split like an atom between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. This development may be surprising but it is not unfavourable. It is the Great Powers who threaten

the world, not the Tiny Powers. Cyprus, it is true, did her best to cause grave international trouble but did not get very far. The job of setting fire to the world must be left to our protectors, the great, leading nations. So Jamaica followed the right road when she smashed the Federation and caused it to disintegrate. The United States should follow suit. How happy New York would be without Alabama or Mississippi. Abraham Lincoln was a little rash when he prevented the secession of the Southern States. Who wants them? The world would be a much more peaceful place if the Soviet Union consisted of fifteen truly independent republics, not only nominally independent ones. A threat of secession by Turkmenistan would always ease international tension. And whatever statesmen – German and others – would dare to say, the division of Germany is a blessing and a real contribution to world peace.

Division and fragmentation are among the most hopeful signs of our times. So Long Live the German Democratic Republic! Long Live Independent Turkmenistan! Long Live Independent Alabama and Independent Yorkshire! And long, long live Jamaica!



Whose Shame?

My ancestors were lawyers at Siklos, in Southern Hungary. I can state with a clear conscience that they were never engaged in the African slave trade. One of my great-grandfathers was a gendarme. According to family rumours, he was responsible for some minor irregularities but never – never! – did he sell or buy a slave for profit, or even at a loss. Yet, moving around in the streets of various non-tourist towns of Jamaica, I knew that I was not only conspicuous because of the colour of my skin but was also held responsible for slavery, and I resented this. First of all, try as hard as I may, I cannot think of any group of people, whatever the colour of their skins, in terms of ‘we’ and ‘they’. The white trash of the American South is not ‘we’ for me; the teaching staff – or the undergraduates – of the University of the West Indies and a large number of cultured, civilised and generous people whose hospitality I enjoyed over there, are not ‘they’. I wish I were entitled to claim more kinship with them.

This slavery business is particularly annoying. My resentment is not that of a man who washes his hands of a crime which either he or his ancestors committed. I happen to be innocent. And then again, there are crimes and crimes. I might well steal, cheat, lie and embezzle; I might agree to be kept by a woman (indeed, this has been a longstanding dream of mine, hitherto unfulfilled);



I might commit forgery, rape, arson and murder – but I could not own a slave. I could not even become the benevolent, kindly and fatherly master of a gentle and obedient slave. I have throughout my life always refused even to have a secretary or any other employee. I hate giving orders and I accept none.

If the breath of the past touched even me, a casual visitor, a stroller in the streets, how much more real must it feel for those who live on those shores and whose present is a derivative of their past. If I pose the question: in what does Jamaican society differ from all other societies I know? the answer would be: in their slave-past and also in their attitude to sex and grandmothers. (About sex *and* grandmothers: these are two different subjects: 1, sex; 2, grandmothers; and not one single subject: sex and grandmothers.) About sex and grandmothers I shall have some more to say later. Here I only want to emphasise that slavery is really the dominant issue because the Jamaican attitude to sex and grandmothers also stems from the traditions of slavery.

(When I mentioned some of my ideas which I describe below to a sociologist friend in Kingston, he dismissed them somewhat haughtily as 'speculation'. They may perhaps be called speculation; they may also be called, more kindly, observation, inference, conjecture, reasoning. The trouble with modern sociology is that there is not enough speculation in it and it is too much influenced by facts. And 'facts' only mean figures, silly answers to badly put questions, and data processed by computers. To notice trends and phenomena even if they cry aloud, is anathema. Man keeps on creating Gods and surrendering to them. In ancient times it was the God of the Bible; today it is the Computer. Perhaps an improvement. But the act of surrender is just as regrettable.)

* * *

How could the brutish, greedy, dehumanised and despicable system of slavery produce such a gentle, basically good-tempered and tolerant people? Easily, of course: human systems and actions often have strange by-products. A lot of good may come from bad deeds. A criminal can – and often does – leave his ill-gotten gains to good people or worthy causes. Nietzsche distinguished between master morality and slave morality. He thought master morality was better, but he rejected that, too. He said that evil was the slave's primary concept 'from which he then derives, as an after-image and counter-instance, a "good one" – himself.' So even Nietzsche – no admirer of slaves – held that the good in one's self might be found through the evil of the masters. Something like that happened in the West Indies.

Yet, one of the first surprising facts one learns in those islands is that to have been a slave, to be a descendant of slaves, is shameful. White men behaved like beasts; black men were their victims. Yet, to be white means status; to



descend from slaves is shameful. The white man's career in the West Indies is Auschwitz twice over – the horrors rivaling Auschwitz even in magnitude. (And the third Auschwitz, the real one, was, of course, also a product of purely white civilisation.) In Jamaica, white rule started with genocide. White men arrived and exterminated the Arawak Indians. At the end of the Fifteenth Century – when Columbus discovered Jamaica, in the course of his second journey – there were three million Arawaks in the Caribbean Islands; a hundred years later there was not one of them left. According to Bartolomeo de las Casas, 'the Spaniards, with their horses, their spears and lances entred into townes, borowes and villages, sparing neither children nor old men, neither women with childe neither them that lay in, but that they ripped their bellies, and cut them in pieces'. Yet, 'these Arawak Indians' (writes John Hearne, the distinguished Jamaican novelist) 'whom the Spaniards exterminated within forty odd years of the

first landing seem to have been the gentlest, least aggressive, most benign people who have ever lived'. Nevertheless, in those days it was a glorious thing to be a Spaniard; to be an Arawak Indian had no snob-value at all.

The first round ended with the knock-out of the Arawaks. Then the British and sugar arrived and the gong sounded for the second round. Sugar-production needed cheap labour, to perform cruelly hard but unskilled work. Representatives of our white civilisation went to the west coast of Africa, caught naïve and unsuspecting Negroes in their thousands and shipped them to the West Indies in murderously overcrowded cattle-ships, stinking of sweat and excrement – rather as the victims of the Nazis travelled to Auschwitz. The slaves were auctioned away, families broken up (it was regarded as bad for morale to keep slave families together) and then again, as in Auschwitz, they were worked to death. There were no gas-chambers, but there were gangs, heavy bundles of cane, pregnant and old women to carry them and all of them – old and young, men and women – worked under the lashes of Scottish and Irish overseers, until they fell down and died. Slavery was more efficient than Auschwitz: an average slave lasted for seven years.

Yet nowadays, it seems, this system is deemed to be *their* shame, not *ours*. (Very well: *theirs* and *ours*.) To descend from slaves brands one with a stigma; to descend from slave-owners covers one . . . well, not with glory, but at least with prestige.

Slavery, in the long run, improves the slave and corrupts the slave-owner. Jamaican society was a pure slave-society, unlike ancient Athens, where slaves formed a small percentage of the total population. In Jamaica, by the time slavery was abolished in 1832, a small percentage of whites lived amidst a vast number of black slaves and a number of freed men. The plantocracy was as much part of this wild, brutal, repulsive system as the slaves themselves.

More, since it was the plantocracy which had created the system. Physically the planters lived an incomparably better life; morally they were slaves, too.

The slave, after all, also owns his owner; it is not only the owner who owns the slave. The plantocracy became greedy, obsessed with money, boorish, uneducated and brutal. The slaves, at the same time, developed a number of lovable and helpful traits which, although they were typical slave-characteristics, improved Jamaica in the end, and if accepted more widely, would improve the world.

Even a slave society is a human society, so it needs its snobbery not only among the owners but among the slaves, too. There was a shortage of women, so white men slept with their female slaves and the result was the appearance of coffee-coloured children. The women thus honoured by the white men were treated reasonably well; their offspring even better. ('We are here today as Jamaica's middle class,' a friend told me, 'because the Scottish and Irish overseers were kind to their bastards.') These favoured women and children immediately turned against the common mass of black slaves. They regarded themselves as the élite. The *Creole* (the Jamaica-born slave) and even the *salt-water Creole* (those born during the passage) regarded themselves as infinitely superior to the despised *Guineaman*, the African-born slave. The slave-owners succumbed to a slave-mentality; all they managed to give to those who aspired to be like them was a measure of the worst kind of European snobbery.

* * *

What, then, are those true slave-characteristics mentioned above, those characteristics which could improve humanity? First of all, a slave is not heroic. Jamaican society is not heroic. Jamaican history is not heroic. English history in Jamaica is not heroic. This is how John

Hearne describes the British conquest:* 'On paper the great Cromwell's Western Design was one of the most daring and ambitious projects in England's imperial history. In fact it remains one of the most dismal failures in British military annals . . . From their arrival in the Caribbean, this considerable force [9,000 soldiers and sailors] had done little to enhance the prestige of the England that had produced Cromwell and the New Model Army. On the Franco-British island of St Kitts, one of the Commissioners, while trying to recruit fresh troops, falls off his horse vomiting drunk. In Hispaniola, which Drake had captured and held to ransom with only a thousand Elizabethans, an engaging local Irishman, instead of leading them to water, brings them under the guns of a Spanish fort. Attacked by a detachment of Spanish lancers, General Venables hides behind a tree, emerging after the fight to accuse his troops of cowardice . . . Between soldiers and sailors there is such suspicion that the army always insists on embarking first in case their naval comrades up anchor and depart while the military is still ashore.'

That's how British rule began. It ended in a much more civilised but not more heroic manner. Jamaican nationalism was no flaming firework, no eruptive force. Independence was not achieved by an outburst of national fervour. There was no revolution, no riots, not even an illustrious band of imprisoned rebel leaders. Independence was not exactly thrust on Jamaica, but it was offered on a silver platter. It was all rather pleasant. Someone called it independence by immaculate conception. There was no violence, just the lowering of one flag and the hoisting of another. Some white people moved out of the Big House, some black people moved in.

This lack of heroic gesture is a most pleasant and valuable heritage of slave times. A slave, whatever his in-

* *Ian Fleming Introduces Jamaica*, edited by Morris Cargill, André Deutsch, 1965.



clinations, cannot be heroic. You can act the hero when facing a gun; but not when facing – or rather turning your back to – a lash. The pages of human history describe some shining and uplifting deeds of heroism and we read about them with admiration and gratitude. But heroism is often no more than an empty gesture, a futile pose. Heroism is sometimes humanity at its noblest but more often it is bragadoccio and showing off. Athens was not a heroic society; Sparta was. The Renaissance was not heroic; Nazism claimed to be. The would-be hero is often a loud-mouthed adventurer; the slave who has learnt to wait for the storms to abate and seemingly hopeless situations to sort themselves out quietly and painlessly, is a less romantic figure than the hero, but a wiser and a maturer one.

Another result of slavery is anancy-ism. Anancy is an African spider who always succeeds in getting out of a tight corner with his cunning, patience and sagacity. Anancy-ism is parallel to lack of heroism on a more everyday level. Low cunning, deceit and cringing are not attractive, but anancy-ism is not these: it is resourcefulness, the triumph of wit over the lash, the victory of the poor and defenceless slave over the cruel and all-powerful overseer. Anancy-ism is clever and lovable roguery; lifted to a higher plane – where it does not belong – anancy-ism is the triumph of diplomacy over brute force.

‘Jamaicans,’ a European industrialist in Kingston explained to me, ‘want more pay for less work. *That’s* anancy-ism.’

‘Possibly,’ I replied. ‘But you find a lot of the same thing in England. Britain, too, is rampant with anancy-ism. How do you explain that?’

He thought for a moment, then found his explanation: ‘Too many Jamaican immigrants.’

But the anancy-mentality also means something else. It breeds a certain lack of responsibility. *You* are not responsible for any mishap: only circumstances are. If you cannot

get a job, or miss the ball at cricket, or fall off your bicycle, it happens because of (a) somebody's wickedness or (b) your own bad luck. Probably some naughty spirit, encouraged by a magician, tricked you. To express the same idea in Jamaican phraseology: a duppy might have been put on by an obeah man. It is always somebody else's fault; never, never yours.

Another blessing slavery left behind is contempt for the land. Our feudal heritage makes us admire everything connected with the land and despise commerce and industry. Commerce and industry may inspire few people to rhapsodies, but what is so magnificent about cows, manure and hay? The Jamaican slave, who cultivated sugar and bananas – in other words who did an inhumanly hard job – saw nothing attractive in farming. He used his machete, cut things and carried them – and that was all he had to do. There is no yeoman tradition in Jamaica. They are not proud of their connection with the land – theirs was not a connection to be proud of. They are not proud of their farming skill because very little skill was involved in this kind of farming. Nor are they believers in the modern 'do-it-yourself' snobbery. They always 'did it themselves'. There was no one else to do anything for them. Manual skill has no prestige in Jamaica. They had to use their hands much too much.

Slavery is part of the Jamaican past but Jamaicans are not servile. They are smiling but not chummy; they are kind but not over-anxious to please. They do not stress their equality: they just are equal. Perhaps modern developments – even tourism – have helped them in this. Perhaps they needed the invigorating influence of American bad manners. It helped to restore their psychological balance.

Slaves are not rebellious people: they are explosive. They do not plan ahead; they do not scheme; they do not conspire. When they cannot bear it any more, they simply

blow up. They learn to suffer and their suffering makes them more humane. They may grow wild but they are not malicious; they may kill in desperation but they are not wicked. They may be two-faced (indeed if they want to survive they cannot show their true feelings to their masters) and this Janus face survives in present-day Jamaica. Proximity to their masters who eat, play, quarrel and make love under their noses, breeds contempt in their hearts. They see with their own eyes that these people are exactly as they are. But if they are so similar why are they entitled to such different lives?

This leads them to the question of identity – a tormenting question in those parts. Where do we come from? Where are we going? How many of our ancestors were slaves, how many were plantation owners, how many were overseers? Was my grandfather at the distributing or at the receiving end of the lash? Did *my* grandfather beat up yours? Or yours mine? Or did one of my grandfathers beat up my other grandfather? Well – who am I?

These questions may be a wonderful exercise in self-torment but they amount to little more. Problems of ethics, behaviour, politics, economics, psychology and religion are real problems; problems of identity are almost completely irrelevant. What does it matter who you are? If your ancestors were slaves, then they were slaves. I, for one, would prefer to descend from the slave rather than from the slave-owner. Just as the racial mixture in Jamaica of Chinese, Indian, African and European has produced some of the most beautiful women in the world, so their history and past – including slavery and all its sufferings – has produced an attractive and lovable people, and that is what matters.

Who are they? They are people. Like me. Like you. The unit of humanity is man.

That's enough for me.

It should be enough for them.

Sex—For or Against

Not everyone is free who is not a slave. Indeed, in some respects the slave is freer than his master. This is illustrated in the matter of sex.

Sex is not a new invention. It was neither the juvenile delinquents nor the fans of pop-singers who thought of it first. It has been with humanity since, at least, the age of Ovid and probably even longer. Yet, mankind has never succeeded in getting used to the idea of sex. Sex has always excited humanity in more ways than one. Humanity has been defined in many ways. It has been said, for example, that man is the only animal with a soul. Well, I have my doubts about the soul but I feel sure that man is the only animal with a neurosis about sex. Bulls, horses, budgerigars and rattlesnakes just have intercourse when they feel like it and there happens to be a suitable partner about, but this is too easy for humanity. Humanity has always felt the need for a tremendous guilt-complex about sex, partly because it is so enjoyable and partly because it preserves the race. Humanity has always felt guilty for staying alive – and I see its point. But why worry about the *pleasures* of sex?

I am for sex. Wayland Young is for sex. Earlier Christian fathers – I mean earlier than Wayland Young and I – were against sex, at least theoretically. It was on their minds all the time – much more than it is on mine or on

Young's. They kept talking of it all day and dreaming about it all night. They went on explaining more and more loudly how bad, how very, very bad sex was. Bad? I do not question their sincerity; but I doubt their judgment.

Sex outside marriage – and sometimes even between husband and wife – was described as sin. Petronius declared that 'the pleasure of the act of love is gross and brief and brings loathing after it'. The New Testament (Romans, viii. 6) tells us that 'to be carnally minded is death'. One could add several hundred quotations similar to these. What does poor Dryden's feeble and noble cry of 'Sex to the last!' amount to in this chorus of opprobrium? Even a compromise solution, suggested by the French in the last century – 'There are three sexes – men, women and clergymen' – did not take us any too far. Clergymen – after some hesitation – have ceased to be a Third Force in sex; they just refuse to follow de Gaulle's example in politics. While de Gaulle left NATO (perhaps the stronger camp), clergymen joined the males (probably the weaker sex). Nor did the Great Converts – St Augustine, Tolstoy and the rest of them – help us very much. They led a debauched and lecherous life – St Augustine prayed to God: 'Give me chastity – but not yet!' – until, at a ripe old age, they decided that love-making was silly and sinful and advocated abstinence. Perhaps they only meant that abstinence was less tiring. They were rogues and rakes, grown impotent, that's all. They begrudged humanity what they themselves could no longer enjoy.

Fortunately, however, there was a category of people who escaped this blight. Saints and philosophers did not concern themselves with slaves, so their sex-life (the sex-life of slaves, not the sex-life of philosophers) could develop on more uninhibited lines. Slaves were encouraged to breed. Few people were concerned with *their* souls and *their* chastity. More slaves were needed, so those already in existence were encouraged to be sinful. An increase in



their number was good for the economy. And mankind has always cared considerably more for Economic Salvation than for Spiritual Salvation.

Slaves – for a long time – were left to themselves, spared from the advice and guidance of purists, church-fathers, impotent philosophers and other neurotics, and consequently they could develop natural and human ways. In Jamaica today sex is regarded as something almost natural. No one is ashamed of it. Jamaica is a *pro-sex* society. People have their first sex-experience very early in life, and I have heard it said that if a girl has not had her first illegitimate baby by the age of fifteen, she is regarded as a ‘mule’ – in other words, barren – and she is thoroughly unhappy. People also believe that lack of a sex-life is bad for health, causes headaches, tiredness and general ill-health; they also maintain that a woman, for health-reasons, must bear a certain number of children. Add to this the fact that women are in a majority and it is easy to see that Jamaicans are not exactly sex-starved. The result is that sex is not on people’s minds all the time. There is no undercurrent of obscenity and pornography in the air. Striptease is not a popular art – not in public, at any rate. There is an easy-going nonchalance about the whole thing, which goes with the climate. Prostitution as a trade is kept alive mostly for the benefit of the tourists. Civilised American and European visitors insist on their prostitutes, so they can have them.

Male prostitutes seem to be more popular than female ones. Perhaps the men in question should not be described as prostitutes, but just as gentlemen of great – and widely known – sexual prowess, who do not refuse small (or even large) donations for services rendered. Some lonely American lady may spend a few days and nights in the company of one of them and then – if she is of charitable disposition – pass on his name and address to other prospective tourists in her home town. So it sometimes happens that

American ladies arrive in Jamaica equipped with proper and formal letters of introduction to the more famous of these performers.

In Jamaica women outnumber men; love-making is cheap while contraceptives are expensive; there is very little other entertainment in any case, and as electricity has not reached many villages, what else is there that one can sensibly do in the dark? The result of this is that Jamaica's population is increasing at a faster rate than almost any population in the world.

All the above goes for the so-called 'masses'. The mentality of the middle and upper classes does not differ from that of our own. They are 'virtuous', as we are; 'sin' is publicly condemned and only privately practised, as here. All the same, I must make it quite clear that the Jamaican women of the lower classes are not immoral or even more easy-going than other women; they simply have a different — and to my mind more decent — moral code. They start their sex-life early and live it vigorously; but they are not promiscuous. There is nothing at all wrong in sex — they believe — but they also believe in stable relationships. One can go and live with a man; but with one man only. One ought to have a home. If a girl becomes known as a knock-over, she is despised. As a result, casual sex-relations are carried out surreptitiously, just as in the more highly developed social spheres of Jamaica and elsewhere all over the world.

Living with a man is one thing; marriage is another. Marriage is taken seriously. As Jamaicans do not like seriousness, comparatively few people marry. Marriage is a grave step which needs careful consideration. Quite a few people ponder a decade or two before they decide that the woman they are living with is worthy of holy matrimony. Then they ask for her hand and are, as a rule, accepted. The children and grandchildren act as bridesmaids.

They are impulsive people on the whole, but in this single matter they refused to be hurried. Marriage after less than ten years of cohabitation is regarded as a mad, reckless rush. It may happen that after thirty years of hard and conscientious thought, the would-be bridegroom decides that the woman who has shared his bed and has given him sixteen children, is after all not his type. So he turns her down. Which means that he goes on living with her for another twenty-five years, as before. Concubinage, as some of my readers may have guessed by now, is, after all, also a form of marriage. It is true that it can be terminated at any moment. But try to terminate it after thirty years and you will see whether it is quite so simple as all that.

Marriage is also a bit of an economic bore in Jamaica. A wedding is frightfully expensive. A man, even a very poor man, may have to spend several years' income on it, sacrifice all his savings or land in debt. This is a primitive, tribal habit, learnt from the West, primarily from the British. A few days ago, I was invited to the London wedding of two well-to-do but utterly silly and unattractive people. The reception must have cost quite a few thousand pounds. About four hundred guests queued up to shake hands with the young couple; some must have stood in that line for an hour or more. Would it not have been much better for these people if they had adopted the Jamaican folk-habit and decided to live in concubinage? I personally could not see how either of them could be expected to endure the other's company in marriage for more than a week – say nine days, which would include two week-ends. Would it not have been more sensible to do without the wedding, save a lot of guests a lot of boredom, and live in sin for a little while – say twenty-five years? The money saved by forgoing that silly, ostentatious wedding reception could then have been sent to me, c/o my publisher. I solemnly promise that when the first

largish sum arrives, I shall set up a Pleasure Without Children Fund and send the money to Jamaica, to be devoted to the propagation of contraceptive methods.



Grandmothers—For or Against

Grandmothers are one of the great institutions of mankind. They are wiser and more mature than mothers; they know more about children. True, they are often more possessive and jealous than mothers, but as babies are less involved with them than they are with their mothers, they do as a rule less harm.

No one has yet written a proper study – not even a trifling monograph – about grandmotherhood. We do not even know when grandmothers started. It seems that the Phoenicians and the Babylonians already had grandmothers of their own. Judging by their behaviour Visigoths and Vandals cannot possibly have known these gentle creatures. Romans: yes. Huns: no. One can easily imagine Seneca's grandmother; but can you visualise the grandmother of Attila, the Hun? Thanks to regrettable neglect by historians, we do not even know when the present system of everybody having two grandmothers began but it seems that by the early Middle Ages the practice was well established. The early Church had something to do with it and – as far as records can be trusted – even the Reformation did not think of changing it. To mankind's shame it has never paid its due to grandmothers and it is to the eternal glory of Jamaican society that it outshines the rest of humanity in this respect. Jamaican grandmothers resemble telephones in one way. Bell did not in-



vent the telephone; Edison did, but Bell modernised and modified it and put it to effective use. Similarly, grandmothers were not really invented by Jamaicans, but they put them to proper use.

Jamaica is a poor country (as we shall see) and a sexually uninhibited country (as we have seen). Sociologists declare: 'contraceptive methods have not yet made a deep impact on the Jamaican countryside.' This is one way of putting it. Another way would be to say that they are breeding like rabbits. The father begets the children, stays with his concubine for a year or two and then drifts away. The mother has to go out to work and the children have to be left with their maternal grandmother who looks after them, brings them up as well as she can, and is very often for many a year the only symbol of authority and love in the children's lives. The adult male – the so-called father-figure – is very often missing from the poor Jamaican family. He is a distant and mystical figure, rather disreputable, something of a vagrant who abandoned the lot of them. Most Jamaicans meet their first male figure of authority when they take their first job. (Many of them cannot go to school because there are not enough schools, not enough teachers. And in many schools, of course, there are in any case women teachers only.) Sometimes the father stays with his family because he has nowhere else to go, but in such cases he is no figure of authority, just a poor, oppressed male – a pathetic and ridiculous figure.

Men often grow sullen when they clash, for the first time in their lives, with male authority; the protective love of Grandmother has made them vain and open to flattery; it has also inculcated a certain amount of scheming charm in them: they have learnt that nice words, false promises never meant to be kept and tricks and cunning can always mellow Granny's heart so that they can have things their own way. But Grandmother has also turned them into gentle creatures without turning them weak; they become

graceful without becoming too feminine; they become stubborn but rarely rebellious and violent; they become impulsive but they are also mature at an early age, wise and sane and inclined to treat human folly and meanness with a deep sigh, accepting the unalterable. In other words: they are grandmotherly.

Thus slavery has in yet another way contributed to the evolution of an admirable and likeable group of people. In my first few days in Jamaica I thought that it would be a good thing if slavery — its modern version, I meant — could be, at last, abolished. This was, of course, a pious hope. Man — as I have already pointed out — does not really want to be free; man does not dare to be free. Man is more afraid of freedom than he ever was of slavery. Freedom means responsibility and — to a great extent — loneliness, the two worst nightmares of mankind throughout the ages. This fear of freedom, the desire to be enslaved, helps to create tyrannies, blind devotion to causes, dictators, parties, movements and creeds; it creates the organisation man, it creates class-consciousness, stupid snobberies, chauvinism and silly clannishness of all kind. To be a slave is a nasty fate. But to be descended from a slave means a certain amount of freedom: a society which once knew slavery is, at least, less afraid of freedom than most of us. Most other societies are occasionally darkened by the shadows of Hitlers and Stalins: Jamaican society is only threatened by the shadows of Hitler's and Stalin's grandmothers.



An Irrelevant Obscenity

The black maid came into the room and announced to the lady of the house that Mrs Barton was there to see her.

‘Mrs Barton?’ asked the lady puzzled. ‘Who is she?’

‘Mrs Barton,’ answered the maid laconically, logically but perhaps not too informatively.

‘Is she white?’ asked the lady.

‘Yes, she is white,’ nodded the maid.

‘Show her in.’

A few seconds later, in came a pitch-black woman. She was beautiful and elegantly dressed. She wore long white gloves and was smoking a cigarette from a long, golden holder.

I was a little taken aback. But the lady of the house showed no surprise at all.

‘Louise is not colour-blind,’ she explained later. ‘But because Mrs Barton was so elegantly dressed, she was white as far as Louise was concerned. The white gloves, reaching up to her elbows, made her even whiter. The long holder, of course, made her snow-white.’

This attitude was confirmed to me by another story.

A professor at Kingston University – who lives on that wonderful campus of theirs, with the Blue Mountains in the background – was expecting a friend for coffee, after dinner. It was a quarter past nine and the visitor had not turned up. Half past nine – still no sign of him. At a

quarter to ten my friend, the professor, walked out to the gatekeeper – who was a black man – and asked him: ‘I say Johnson, has no one been asking for me?’

‘Yes sir, there was someone,’ the gatekeeper answered respectfully.

‘Well, where is he?’

‘I sent him away.’

My friend could hardly believe his ears.

‘You sent him away? You sent my visitor away?’

‘Yes sir, I did,’ said the gatekeeper with extreme courtesy.

‘But why on earth?’

‘Well . . . of course I have no instructions . . . But I have to look after these premises . . . And I don’t like letting black men in after nine.’

My friend – himself as black as the porter – was no longer angry; he was amused.

‘That’s a peculiar rule of yours, Johnson. But then why do you let *me* in?’

‘You sir?’

‘Yes, me. I am a black man, too.’

The gatekeeper smiled. He could see a joke when he heard one.

‘You are not a black man, sir,’ he smiled. ‘You are a professor.’

* * *

Having heard these two stories, I was even more puzzled. I had taken Jamaica to be the land where black women could dress with great elegance and where black men could rise to become university professors. Apparently, this was a mistake: as soon as a lady became elegant and a man became a professor, they ceased to be black. This is one way of solving the race problem. I had seen something similar in another racially mixed yet liberal country,

Brazil. Blackness there – as apparently in Jamaica, too – has nothing to do with colour; it is a question of economic status. You change your colour easily and quickly: you may become lighter or darker as you go up or down the economic ladder. A nice problem for philosophers, who have always been preoccupied with the question whether the *apparent is real*. Is what we see really true – or do we just think it is? In this case, the change of colour is *real but not apparent*. To outward appearance the man – even after his professorial appointment – remains black; but in fact he has become white. But if poverty is equated with blackness – as it essentially is both in Brazil and in Jamaica – then this fine distinction is meaningless: it makes little difference whether it is your blackness that condemns you to poverty or your poverty that condemns you to blackness.

But although the Jamaicans are not *much* nearer than the rest of us to perfect good sense about race (or anything else), they are a good bit nearer. In Jamaica I met Peter Abrahams, the South African novelist, a charming and



inspiring man. He has an English wife. Having left South Africa, they first settled in England and he was quite happy here but his English wife hated every minute of it. She had been brought up in the tropics and could not bear the English climate. So Peter undertook a long journey – almost a world-tour – to find the best place under the sun where a mixed couple could live happily. There were many places where a black man was not well received; many others where a white woman was not wanted; and still more places (because they overlap with the other two classes) where mixed couples were unwelcome. In the end, Peter chose Jamaica as his haven, and after more than ten years there he is still convinced that he chose wisely and well. He is a happy man.

* * *

My own views on this subject of race underwent some change while I was in Jamaica. I thought of it in one way when I arrived; differently after a few weeks; and differently again when I left. Even before I arrived, I realised that more rubbish had been spoken on the problem of race than on any other subject. I cannot go into this vast problem here, I can only mention some of my own pet aversions, as I saw them in my first phase, before my arrival. Some well-intentioned liberals proclaim that colour means nothing to them and claim they do not even notice a person's colour. That seemed surprising to me. Colour is, after all, pretty conspicuous. As you cannot fail to notice whether a woman has blonde hair or black, whether a man is clean-shaven or has a long red beard, you cannot fail to notice whether a person is black, white or yellow. Then there are the other liberals, for whom a black man is always right – the blacker the righter. Any backward tribe for them is ready for self-government and the Congo is an ideal democracy, if slightly handicapped

by Belgian intrigues. Many of these people declare that they *like* black people. But why should one like black people any more than dislike them? There is no particular merit in being black. These people – I think – are inverted racists, ashamed of their own uncivilised feelings, trying to reverse them but unable to get rid of them. No, I am not enamoured with these white liberals, but I dislike those American Negroes even more who make them out to be their main target. These black racists maintain that the well-intentioned liberals do more harm to their cause than their worst enemies. With their enemies, they say, they know at least where they are. Indeed, they know. The Ku-Klux-Klan shoot them, burn their houses and lynch them. It must be very comforting, while being lynched, to know precisely where the other fellow stands vis-à-vis yourself. It is much less disturbing, it seems, to meet a lynch-mob than those clumsy, silly but well-intentioned liberals, full of woolly goodwill towards you.

All this may be true but does not help you to understand the racial problems of Jamaica. After my first few weeks I knew more. Race is not a burning problem there. Black people can appear anywhere and everywhere – Jamaica is, after all, their country: more than ninety-eight per cent of the country's population is non-white; white people are not made to feel unwanted either – Jamaica is their country, too. One meets very little intolerance. Black people can rise to the highest rank: the Governor General is a black man. Almost all the members of the government are coloured. But not all: to the great credit of Jamaica, there are white men in the government, including one Syrian, who counts for white there. The civil service and the teaching staff at the university are almost all coloured, as is only natural. No black man could be kept out of a restaurant, club or hotel or denied a job because of his colour. Yet, in any expensive hotel or restaurant you will see that all the guests are white, the manager is brown,

the waiters and the dish-washer are black. Nothing to do with colour, you are told, it is simply an economic fact that black people cannot afford expensive restaurants. Heavens no, it is not their colour that keeps them out; but they are kept out, all the same. You know that at the bottom of the economic and social pyramid there are the black masses, without any hope of rising – unless with extreme good luck some of them succeed in becoming bus drivers in Birmingham.

During this middle-period I had to put a few questions to myself.

Why does a white skin still carry so much prestige? Why should a black professor's blackness be overlooked – indeed, forgiven? Why should an honorary whiteness be bestowed upon him as the highest honour? White men have behaved so despicably and foolishly in Jamaica and outside Jamaica, that their prestige seems hardly warranted. This prestige is, however, another heritage of slavery. There comes a point where the slave must acknowledge his master's superiority – not because this superiority is real; not because the master deserves much credit, but for the slave's own sake. He needs this recognition because if he serves a truly superior being, a man who deserves to be put on a pedestal and obeyed, then his humiliation is less tormenting, indeed, it is not really humiliation. A truly superior man has a just claim (or so many people feel) to be served and obeyed. The slave wants to be free; he wants to be rich; and he wants to be white. It seems to me that many black Jamaicans have failed to become rich and failed to become truly free; but quite a few have succeeded in becoming white, without changing their colour.

And the slave, of course, also wants to own slaves. The lesson for many is not that slavery is bad, so let us abolish it and all be free, but simply that it is incomparably better to own slaves than to be a slave. The lesson is not that

racialism is wicked and stupid but simply that it is better to persecute others than to be persecuted.

It is generally held that if a black man reaches a position of wealth and power, he is more impatient, more demanding, often more cruel toward his black employees than white men. He is a beginner; often greedy and determined to get rich quickly; and he is keen on proving to the world that he is as bad as the white man – which in his terms simply means that he is as good as the white man. As the white man nowadays actually leans over backwards to be decent to his black employees, many black people prefer a white boss to a black one. When a black man becomes really rich, he will go out of his way to employ some white men. White slaves are not available; so a simple white employee will do.

Nastiness and stupidity, in other words, are not the monopoly of the white race. Black people are human – not less and not more human than the rest of us – so they want to look down upon others, too. Contempt, alas, is a very important human sentiment. It boosts the ego; it confirms one's feelings of superiority – or alleviates one's feelings of inferiority, which comes to the same thing. Contempt makes our society tick. There is no more wonderful venue for looking down upon a large variety of people than a multi-coloured society.

(1) As there are as many shades of colour as there are people, everyone can look down upon everybody else who is darker than himself. No one is so dark that he cannot find somebody darker still. The darkest person is never the darkest.

(2) But, of course, with equal ease, you can look down upon everybody who is lighter than you. The black masses look down upon the coffee-coloured middle class more than the middle class looks down upon them. The brown people are, after all, the descendants of white overseers, slave-owners, officials and black mothers who betrayed

their own people and sided with the white man. They are racially impure while the black man regards himself as a pure African. Africa is an emotive word. They do not really care about Africa; but are always ready to get emotional, sensitive and angry about it.

In the heyday of slavery the brown people – as I have already mentioned – despised the ‘Guincaman’, the African-born slave. Today it is the black man’s turn to despise the impure browns. Nevertheless, quite a lot of wonderful raw-material for contempt got lost in this process. Where are the good old days with the really fine distinctions? The *mustefino* (legally, a white person with one black ancestor in sixteen) looked down upon the *octoroon* (one eighth black); the *octoroon* looked down upon the *quadroon* (one quarter black; the *quadroon* looked down upon the *mulatto* (half black) and the *mulatto* upon the black. While the game is in a way still played with great gusto, some of the old zest has gone out of it.

(3) There is a vast scope for the game of looking down upon others. You may pick out any group you can think of and look down upon them. For example, quite a large amount of anti-Chinese feeling exists in some circles. The Chinese are guilty of grave crimes: they are intelligent and hardworking – traits not easily forgiven to anyone, particularly to foreigners. To make it worse, they monopolise the grocery trade and now, as a result of this old monopoly, they have a large share in the growing super-market business. They – have we heard these charges before? – keep to themselves, much too much; they do not intermarry and the few Chinese Negroes (the offspring of Chinese and Negro unions) are rejected by the Chinese at least in the sense that they are not accepted as Chinese. In other words, in some communities the Chinese are the Jews, in others the Jews are the Chinese, in others again the Armenians, the Mexicans, the Negroes, the Tutsis are the Chinese *and* the Jews. If you don’t like yellow Jews.

you can pick on brown Jews and turn against the Indians. They, too, are successful in trade, keep to themselves, do not intermarry, etc. etc. *da capo sin al fine*.

(4) What about the Jews themselves? When the British took Jamaica over in 1655, all the Spaniards had to leave. The only white people permitted to stay were Spanish and Portuguese Jews, who had been persecuted by the Spaniards. They were not given full political rights – indeed, the coloureds gained political rights before the Jews – but the Jews enjoyed all the economic rights they needed. A few Jews owned slaves and as slaves always took their masters' family name, today one can meet black Christians in Jamaica, called Cohen, or Levy. This situation opens up new vistas in the race game: black Jamaicans (called Cohen or Finkelstein) can be anti-Semitic; and the Jews (often with beautiful Spanish names) can retaliate because, being white, they have a wonderful lever, too.

(5) Black people, of course, can also look down upon the whites. This feeling may take many forms. On the most primitive level there is a simple wish for revenge, a desire to get even. But this would be much too simple. So some black Jamaicans – mostly waiters and other employees of the tourist trade – look down upon white Jamaicans only, while they regard tourists as (a) all right or (b) beneath contempt. But as hotel employees, however black, they are looked down upon, in turn, by many other blacks. As we have seen, all blacks can, jointly, look down upon all the browns who, in turn, can look down upon all the blacks.

(6) Finally, when they have run out of all other possible subjects, black people can always despise one another. Self-contempt is an old and basic preoccupation of humanity and, in the final analysis, all contempt proves to be self-contempt. So do not be too surprised when during a quarrel between two black drivers you hear one shout



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'you black idiot' to which the other answers 'you nigger bastard'. Neither of them really hates Negroes or despises people born out of wedlock. Both mechanically repeat words they regard as swear-words, because they have heard them as swear-words all their lives. But the habit – the symptom – remains significant. Why should they abuse their own sons – and you can often hear angry mothers doing exactly that – as 'niggers', 'black idiots' and 'bastards'? Why does nobody ever use 'you bloody colonial governor' or 'you fool of an archbishop' as swear-words?

* * *

Before I left Jamaica my views entered upon a new phase. I said earlier that colour was too conspicuous and you could not fail to notice it. But of course you can, particularly if it is not constantly on your mind. At an art exhibition one day I asked the lady who was my guide throughout my tour to protect me from a gushing American woman I'd met the day before and who was also present. My guide looked around and asked: 'But where is she?'

'In the other room.'

She went off to have a look in the other room but came back to tell me that my American was not there. I assured her that I had seen her go in and, as there was no other exit from the room, she must still be there.

'Listen,' said she, 'I know you have no memory for faces, but you're not going to tell me that you confuse a white American with an American Negro – there's one in there – just because they talk the same way?'

That's precisely what I had done. I was pleased with my mistake because I realised that I had got somewhere. In the company of all those delightful, charming, cultured, intelligent people in Jamaica – whose skin was sometimes white, but much more often brown or black – I clearly

understood what I had long suspected: there is no more difference between a black, brown, yellow or white man than the colour of their skins. This sounds the flattest cliché of the century. I hope it will become exactly that. Sometimes it takes a long and circuitous mental journey before we arrive at the obvious and appreciate and savour a cliché in its full bloom. With many black and brown people I felt I had much more in common than I have with the white sheriffs of Alabama and, for that matter, with a lot of businessmen from Bradford, pretentious asses from high society or some rich estate speculators. Those Jamaicans are my brothers. The whole race-problem has become nothing but an irrelevant obscenity to me.

Of course my views had always been what is called liberal but I was, at least, prepared to discuss race seriously as a theoretical problem. (It still remains and will remain for a long time, a tremendous *practical* problem). Today I look upon it as one of mankind's stupendous idiocies. Humanity has always had a knack of fighting, killing, exterminating one another for the stupidest of reasons – just think of the religious, nationalistic and dynastical wars. Or take one single outstanding example: witches. They were seized, tried and burnt at the stake – many of them 'confessing' to their crimes – until mankind realised that there were no witches.

They will also realise one day that there is no race-problem either. It just doesn't exist. This non-existent problem may turn Africa against Europe, it may plunge the United States into civil war, it may cause massacres and revolutions – and all this without being real. It is a childish and silly invention, worthy of the other idiocies of humanity. It is being kept alive because witches may die out but witch-hunters always survive.

Those people who ask you: 'But how would you like your sister to marry a Negro?' still exist. Well, my sister is a doctor in Long Island, married to a white businessman,

and as far as I know has no plans either (1) to remarry or (2) to ask my permission for such a union, should she decide upon it. What about my daughter, aged seventeen? I doubt whether even she will ask my permission but should she, quite unexpectedly, do so – yes, I should agree to her marrying any man of any colour, provided I approved of him otherwise. Oh yes, comes the rejoinder, but what about yourself? Well, here again: I am married and my wife happens to be white. She is Hungarian, and most Hungarians are white. But if I were not married and contemplated taking a new bride, I should be delighted to marry a coloured girl. Such a union has one great advantage over an all-white marriage: it solves the serious problem of weeding out the worst fools among your friends. Those people who object to such a union keep away from you, do not ‘receive’ you and thus do you a great service. You do not need to bother to get rid of them; they get rid of themselves for you.

I am sorry to add that quite a few Jamaicans told me that nowhere in the world had they met racial prejudice in worse form than in Britain. Perhaps the American South is worse; but Jamaicans hardly ever go there, while they come to Britain in large numbers. Only in Britain have they found that would-be – or rather would-not-be – landladies slammed doors in their faces. How often have I heard similar complaints from students who return to Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and many other places with hatred in their hearts. The British Empire may have been won on the playing-fields of Eton; it was, at least partially, lost by the lower-middle-class landladies of London.

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Apart from the various undercurrents, I have mentioned, there is still more racial tolerance and sanity in Jamaica than anywhere else in the world where mixed races live to-

gether. Yet beneath it all, there is a tremendous amount of schizophrenia. I collected the nicest specimen of this in Morant Bay. In October 1865 there was a small riot in Morant Bay and the British, in retaliation, hanged two men – one of whom had nothing to do with the riots at all but who was deemed a good person to be got rid of. The statue of this man, George William Gordon, stands now in Morant Bay. I stood looking at the statue; next to me were two black workers, also contemplating it in silence. We looked at Gordon: a tall, black figure, brave and indomitable.

One of the black workers suddenly burst out angrily: 'You know, if he wasn't a black man, they wouldn't have made him so black.'



How to Decline

Pockets of resistance of white supremacy, colonial air and patronising superiority persist in Jamaica. A few people in some clubs still cling to the old British master-race attitude. They are rather pathetic and nobody outside their own small circle takes them seriously. These clubs and other meeting places remain almost exclusively white; not because they can afford to refuse membership to black politicians, intellectuals, civil servants or businessmen, should these wish to join, but simply because they do not wish to join. And all realise at the bottom of their hearts that there is a great difference between keeping a club white by excluding coloured people, and keeping it white because coloured people do not bother to join.

This new lot of antediluvian white supremacists try to be as arrogant as their predecessors used to be, but they cannot quite pull it off: they lack the old crowd's self-assurance. They haven't got their good manners; and they haven't got their bad manners either. The plantocracy has been replaced by climbing businessmen, second-rate scholars (who need the social reassurance of belonging to 'society') and ambitious professionals, angling for clients. I do not quite see why we should revere plantocrats more than manufacturers of plastic mugs, but the plantocrats, at least, acquired throughout the years a firm belief in their divinity. This new crowd is trying hard. They try the

cool courtesy approach, the vagueness of the British upper classes, the polite aloofness – but they fail: courtesy is not their line and they are too much interested and involved in the world around them to seem aloof. A man at a table on the terrace of a club where we were having drinks made desperate efforts to behave like, say, the third son of one of our sillier and more effeminate dukes. Then, somewhat unexpectedly, he declared that he was ‘in boilers’. This was terribly incongruous. Either he should have been less vague, less genteel, less pseudo-Oxonian, or else he should not have been in boilers. But he was deep in boilers. He was proud of being in boilers. He told a surgeon, sitting on his right that ‘most of your hospitals are likely to have our boilers’. ‘Are they?’ murmured the surgeon and I failed to detect true admiration in his voice. I had taken little part in the conversation but the man in boilers spotted my foreign accent and he must have decided – quite rightly – that I was a person of no importance. So, when taking his leave, he shook hands with everyone else but only bowed politely and coolly to me. Next morning, it so happened, an interview with me appeared in the paper, adorned with a photograph, whereupon the clubmen decided that I was an ‘interesting’ visitor. I fail to detect anything interesting in myself but their decision was final. The next time I met the group, the man in boilers greeted me with effusive warmth and a friendly grin. I shook hands with everyone else and bowed politely but coolly to him. I was courteous and aloof. Rather like the third son of a duke, with a touch of mid-Victorian thrown in.

* * *

At another meeting place of fossils, I found them so English that it just wasn't true. Their ‘Englishness’ only meant that they were a few degrees more reactionary and more snobbish than their simpler and less well-off brethren

at the other place. There were no people 'in boilers' here; if there were, they owned the whole boiler works. The atmosphere was that of frivolity and adolescent badinage. 'What legal opinion would you give in such a case?' someone asked one of the country's leading lawyers. 'It would depend on the fee I received,' he replied and his answer was greeted with delighted shrieks of laughter. A few minutes later a politician remarked: 'We are all allowed to speak absolutely freely so long as it's the party line.' Another roar of laughter. My neighbour – he had something to do with insurance – explained to me: 'That's what I like about this place. These fellows are integrity itself but you hear how they speak about themselves. They don't take themselves seriously. A sense of humour is God's greatest gift. It makes this place unique. There isn't a finer gathering of chaps anywhere in the world. There just isn't.'

The finest chaps in the world started discussing socialism. One man, the loudest and most vulgar of the lot – but being also the richest, a man treated with great reverence by the others who always roared with laughter at his dreariest remarks – declared there was absolutely no danger of socialism ever coming to Jamaica.

'There is no danger of that, I can tell you,' he pontificated. 'Luckily for us the state has no money to pay compensation. So they cannot nationalise anything. No compensation – no nationalisation. It is as simple as that.'

'Lenin overcame this difficulty,' said I. 'So did the post-war governments of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Chinese have managed it somehow, too.'

This remark branded me as a dangerous Communist. People threw a few questioning looks at my host but he rather enjoyed it.

After another bout of badinage (after all, the finest fellows in the world with that exquisite sense of humour had to live up to their reputation) some more serious con-

versation followed. Someone mentioned poverty in Jamaica and a man sitting opposite me – a banker – declared, while chewing at a huge pork-chop, that poverty ought to be taken seriously. They all looked grim and thoughtful – this was the moment when they took poverty seriously. Poverty should be cured, the banker added, and he knew what the cure was.

‘People should be literate.’

‘But literacy in Barbados is ninety-five per cent and the people are just as poor as here,’ my host objected. ‘If someone can read SECURITY LIFE INSURANCE CO. LTD. he is literate. But he is not better off. Literacy does not create jobs.’

The banker shook his head sadly and repeated that literacy was the cure for all ills.

I remarked that in some other countries education was often advocated because mass-education is – at best – a twenty-year job, and means that nothing is to be done right away. I was sure, however – I added – that this was not in *his* mind and that his motives were very different.

‘Of course,’ he nodded, appreciating my high opinion of him. ‘Education limits the size of families. That’s what we really want: smaller families.’

‘I see,’ said I. ‘But if you mean birth-control, why do you call it education?’

This question failed to increase my popularity and it was left unanswered.

Attention then turned to the small-scale riots – or rather noisy demonstrations – that had taken place a few days earlier. They were all unanimous in their condemnation of the police. The police had failed. The police had let them down. The crowd had got through. The police ought to have stopped them.

Someone asked me, a little provocatively, whether I agreed. I said I knew little about local conditions and of the actual facts. ‘Heavens, man, you know enough about

local conditions,' the richest of them shouted. 'You know too much, if you ask me. It's surely not too difficult to see that the police failed. They let them through, didn't they?'

'Perhaps the police *did* fail. But you see this is not entirely a police problem.

There was shocked silence for a second or two. This remark was my swan-song, it meant social death for me in that club. No one deigned to give me a reply; I was no longer worthy of reply.

Someone told a joke. Then someone else reverted to the subject of the riots and related how he himself had been attacked by the mob. They had thrown stones at his car. My host – a bit of a dangerous red himself, but a red who belonged – asked him with a disarming smile: 'What would *you* do if you were among that bunch and you saw a big, shiny car passing?'

'I'd throw a stone through the windscreen,' an insurance man replied.

The man who had run the gauntlet of the rioters saw the point and nodded thoughtfully: 'Yes. You are right. One should use an old, battered car on days when there are riots.'

They all agreed.

So at last they had managed to contribute an idea towards the solution of the problems caused by poverty. One should definitely use an old, battered car on days when there are riots.



My Imperial Heritage

Jamaica's second great experience – the first being slavery – was British rule, three hundred years of it. The legacy of British rule is not so favourable as the legacy of slavery. Slavery – as we have seen – turned the Jamaicans into a gentle, wise and free people and also into a grand-maternal society; the British heritage is more of a mixed bag.

American visitors regard Jamaica as being terribly British. How many times did I hear the wistful remark in the United States: 'It's fascinating . . . You see all those black faces over there and when they open their mouths they speak with such impeccable English accents.' This remark, when I first heard it, puzzled me a little. Why should people with black faces not speak with an English accent? Just because American Negroes – people with black faces whose speech the Americans are used to – speak with an impeccable – or more often, with a peccable – American accent? I personally would be more surprised if I heard Negro youths, born and bred in Alabama, talking in the strangulated tones of Oxford or in broad Cockney. Why shouldn't Jamaicans speak – more or less – after the fashion of the people from whom they learnt to speak?

More or less are the operative words. Jamaican speech, to be sure, is nearer to the language of London or Manchester than to the language of Chicago or Dallas, but it

is not as near as innocent American visitors to Jamaica imagine. Jamaican English has a lovely sing-song quality and their tendency to raise the last syllable of a word or a sentence, reminds one of a melodious French accent. Jamaican English has also developed a great many expressions of its own. My special favourites are *door-mouth* for doorway, *hang-pon-tail* for ready-made clothes, *puss-boots* for tennis shoes and, a real winner: *hurry-come-up* for nouveau riche.

Jamaican English is not to be mixed up with the *dialect*. The dialect is the true language of the countryside, partly English, partly bastardized English and partly African remnants (as *culu-culu* for plentiful, *kas-kas* for quarrel, *su-su* for gossip and *boogooyagga* for a dirty, unkempt person). English people cannot understand the dialect although they can pick up quite a few words. The dialect is the *Schwitzerdeutsch* of English: it stands in the same relation to the Queen's English (or even to the President's English) as Swiss German does to High German.

It is easy to see in Jamaica how American influence competes on a superficial level with English influence. The British were the old masters; the Americans are the new ones. The Jamaicans obtained their freedom from the British but quite a few of them seem to be anxious to sell the country into a new servitude to the Americans. The Americans are not eager to buy; but influence does not depend on eagerness, only on frequency of contact and on a desire to imitate. Jamaica used to be extremely loyal; even revolutionaries – before execution – expressed their loyalty to Britain. Queen Victoria is (wrongly) associated with the abolishment of slavery, so Queen Victoria is a popular heroine. Her faded portraits may be found in the most unlikely places: in overcrowded peasant huts up in the mountains or in village pubs in the interior. The Royal Family are much liked, too, and I found most Jamaicans more ardent royalists than myself. The most popular girls'



names are Elizabeth, Ann and Mary. You see many *Chemists* in Kingston but the *Drug Store*, too, is rearing its head. As the British left behind, among other things, a penchant for compromise, some vacillating souls, unable to make up their minds between *Chemist* and *Drug Store*, open a *Pharmacy*.

British traffic lights – four, at each corner – are firmly and prosaically rooted in the ground; the American traffic light – one single specimen of it – dangles overhead, high above everybody's head, at the centre of the crossing. In Jamaica you get British-type traffic lights fixed up in American fashion. You find British-type shops full of American goods; you see British-type uniforms everywhere but more and more American-type shopping centres – plazas – are being opened. You see a number of very British-looking boy-scouts and girl-guides but also more and more Bermuda shorts (to my mind the ugliest garment ever invented by human aberration).

Education used to be terribly British, too. You can find people who know everything about every battle in the

Wars of the Roses and nothing at all about the history of the West Indies; they can enumerate all the wives of Henry VIII but have no inkling whether the present Governor General of Jamaica is married or a bachelor. They will recite in one breath all the rivers in the North of England but fail to name any one of the eight rivers around Ocho Rios. (Nor will they know that, in spite of its name, Ocho Rios does not have eight rivers around it. Ocho Rios, amazing as it sounds, was not really named after eight rivers; its name was given it by that not unusual type of Englishman who thought he knew a foreign tongue but did not. This gentleman misheard the original Spanish name which was vaguely similar to Ocho Rios.)

Speaking of Spanish names, I was often discouraged in Jamaica in one respect. When abroad, I am a bit of an imperialist. I should like to bask in the glorious light of the setting imperial sun. I do not want to be a pukka sahib but should welcome the opportunity of declining to be one. I am a latecomer in the colonialist field; and I am also a modest man. But I am proud of my modesty; I wish I had some scope to exercise it. To show it off and fling it in other people's faces. Yet, imperialism, I was sorry to find out, fades much too quickly and does not seem to leave deep roots. Spanish influence has almost completely vanished. Jamaica's old capital is called Spanish Town; I have already mentioned Ocho Rios and Montego Bay; Kingston's airport is called Palisadoes but it is only in a few odd names like that that Spanish cultural influence survives. Otherwise it has been wiped out. Will American tourism similarly wipe out the remnants of the three British centuries and deal yet another mortal blow to my imperialist pride?

But perhaps one need not worry. I paid a visit to the House and listened to the Budget debate. It was Black Europe, Black Westminster all over again (with a fair sprinkling of white faces). The debate was as civilised as

a parliamentary debate can be; jokes – good and bad – were appreciated; tempers flared up occasionally but cooled down just as quickly. I could breathe the refreshing spirit of democracy: it was a relevant discussion between freely elected representatives of the people and I knew this was the house – indeed, the House – Britain had helped to build. Then I looked again at the Clerk, at the mace and other paraphernalia of bygone centuries, the dark-faced Speaker wearing a white wig and I realised: *that* had also been left behind by the British. Why do the British always turn life into a fancy-dress ball? Why can't they get it into their heads that medieval masquerades reflect a medieval spirit? It annoys me intensely. So much, in fact, that I have never accepted an invitation to become a Knight of the Garter. I refuse to wear ridiculous attire and comic headgear which turn all who wear them into clowns. The Order of the Garter is a medieval order; yet, the Mother of Parliaments claims to be not only old and venerable but also young and up-to-date. Why do we put a wig on the head of the Speaker and make the Lord Chancellor – even more preposterously clad – sit on a Woolsack? Why do we export this spirit to colonies and leave it behind after our enlightened and laudable departure? Why must the British heritage mean the noble spirit of democracy enacted in a medieval circus?

It was in Jamaica that I saw it all clearly: our rulers, Tories and Socialists alike, still move around, dressed in their own imagination like officers (or Drum Majors) of the Guards, in bearskins and high boots – complete with spurs – drawing their swords against the gnomes of Zurich and other enemies of Sterling and leading cavalry charges of various Light Brigades. There is no such thing as a British workman: there are in this country about twelve million Knights of the Garter, tightening bolts, hammering steel-plate, driving lorries and emptying huge and pretty medieval dustbins.

Repulsive Virtues

One of the most likeable characteristics in Jamaicans is their dislike of our repulsive virtues. Western civilisation – or rather capitalistic, post-Industrial-Revolution civilisation, based on early Christian misconceptions – reveres the wrong virtues and condemns the attractive vices. We all follow suit unthinkingly and believe that moderation, patience, asceticism, self-denial and modesty – to name but a few repulsive virtues – are truly admirable. Of course, deep down in our souls, we know better. That's why our outwardly virtuous society gambles like mad, reveres the clever crook, respects the successful speculator and shady operator as soon as he becomes a millionaire, and admires all eccentrics. That's why such fatuous ideas as the Playboy Clubs with their revoltingly ridiculous Bunnies succeed so phenomenally and that's why the Train Robbers have become national heroes while leaders of the Salvation Army have not.

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(1) PUNCTUALITY. Jamaicans do not think much of punctuality. I met quite a number of intelligent, broad-minded Englishmen who love the island and its inhabitants but who would declare with a deep sigh: 'Their lack of punctuality is really unbearable.'

Here I speak as a guilty party. I am a very punctual

person. I always arrive everywhere five minutes too early and spend some time waiting in my car – stop-watch in hand – for the moment when I can ring the bell. A German lady once told me : ‘The only time my father slapped my face was once when I was late and kept him waiting.’ She was obviously proud of her father and approved of his educational methods; she admired the man who had – I imagine – forgiven cruelty, arrogance, impertinence and lying but who slapped his daughter’s face for being a few minutes late. I think we ought to slap our children’s faces for being punctual; had I been better brought up I would not now be wasting all that precious time, arriving everywhere too early.

What is so beautiful and virtuous about being the slave of time? Allowing the clock to rule our lives? I detest myself for not being brave enough to revolt against this tyranny. Aren’t the Jamaicans the more intelligent, the more civilised for ignoring time? Not completely, of course. They are not half as good at liberating themselves from the tyranny of the clock as the Italians or the Greeks; three hundred years of British rule saw to that. If expected somewhere at 4.15 p.m. on Wednesday, they would not stroll unconcernedly in at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday as many of my Sicilian friends would; when invited to dinner at eight, they would not present themselves without a word of apology at 10.15 as any self-respecting Greek might. Oh no, the British maimed that instinct in them, and this is, in my eyes, one of the gravest crimes of colonisation. The clock always follows the flag. A conquered nation loses half of its freedom to the conqueror; the other half it gives up voluntarily to the clock. The Jamaicans lost the Battle of Time as a whole; but they won the skirmish of the Half-Hour, the rout of the Forty Minutes – and these minor victories make life more pleasant, less tense and less hectic than it is almost everywhere in Europe and in the United States.

'But surely,' quite a few people have objected when I expand my anti-punctuality theory to them, 'surely, modern life cannot be run on that basis. Modern life requires punctuality.'

Quite. That's why I say with so much firmness and conviction that something is extremely wrong with modern life.

(2) CLEANLINESS. Cleanliness is another Germanic god, worshipped for its own sake. A little dirt is in fact healthy and it also increases one's self-respect. The people who keep washing themselves are the ones who *feel* dirty; the ones who feel clean can afford to go around a little dirty – that's why extreme cleanliness reflects dirtiness while a little dirt – evenly and carefully distributed – reflects inner cleanliness.

In this respect, the English beat the Jamaicans hands down: the Jamaicans are much cleaner than the English – speaking now of bodily hygiene. Even the poorest of the poor in Jamaica is clean. He will have three or four baths a day – in other words more than millions of English people have in a week, and more than quite a few have in a month. The climate may have something to do with this: there is more sunshine at Montego Bay than at Eastbourne. But whatever the reasons, the English – not *all* the imperial glory is lost – may justly claim to be the dirtier of the two nations and thus they win on points.

(3) NOISE. I have often heard it said here in Britain that people dislike West Indians because they are too noisy. When this charge is repeated to the West Indians, they are genuinely astonished. They? Noisy? They never heard such nonsense in their lives.

We have created the loudest and noisiest society in history – with its deafening roar of traffic, motor-cycles, hooters, trains, trams, typewriters, blaring loud-speakers, transistor radios, police-car sirens, fire-engine bells, screeching brakes and ear-splitting jet-planes overhead, day and

night. We accept the shattering noise of the electric drill right under our windows but complain bitterly when our neighbours – particularly our coloured neighbours – laugh too loudly; party-political propaganda booming from mobile loud-speaker vans seems to be perfectly all right, but a few Calypsos sung by some happy people – admittedly occasionally at 2.30 in the morning – is an intolerable nuisance. Perhaps it is. Yet, we instinctively honour the stiff upper lip, the smug silence and constipation, while we reject laughter, ebullience and songs of joy.

We know only too well, of course, that only the grave is quiet and life must be a little noisy. The truth is simply that we prefer our own familiar noises to other people's pleasant but alien noises:

(4) EFFICIENCY is another repulsive virtue we idolise. Life would be disorganised without efficiency but that only makes efficiency a necessary evil, not a blessing.

Luckily, Britain is getting as inefficient as some of the newer African states. Post is late; special delivery letters handed in at 10 a.m. in one London borough arrive in a neighbouring borough with the next morning's post (at the price of three shillings instead of fourpence); public telephones are out of order and private ones as a rule need three or four diallings before connection is made; doors do not close; switches do not work; paint comes off newly acquired goods; brand new cars develop annoying faults; and even computers often make an unholy mess of your bills. This is all very well; these are steps in the right direction: away from efficiency. But this matter has a disturbing aspect: the British would *like* things to work, they strive after efficiency. So they take this newly acquired inefficiency as a sign of decline and refuse to cherish it as an achievement. In Jamaica, efficiency is treated coolly, with lofty disdain. Inefficiency is not disguised but patted on the back. A certain amount of attention is paid to things but if they go wrong, then, very well, they have gone



wrong. One day while I was in the House there was some disturbance in the galleries : a woman visitor shouted some slogan or other and insulted one of the ministers. The Speaker sternly ordered her to be expelled. She was led away ; five minutes later she gaily reappeared and sat down in another part of the gallery. No one paid the slightest attention to her. And she never opened her mouth again. Was this shameful inefficiency? Or the triumph of commonsense ?

* * *

At the bar of one big hotel I ordered a drink. I got it but the barman informed me he had no ice. Anywhere else in the world people would deny such a state of affairs, or try to explain it away, or put the blame on someone else. Here, the barman asked me with a broad grin : 'Now, what do you think of a bar that don't have ice?'

He asked this with so much charm that I could not pos-



sibly tell him what I thought of such a bar. To crown it all – and I thought this was carrying the virtue of inefficiency a little too far – as soon as I finished drinking the tepid liquid he had given me, he discovered that he had, after all, ice galore. Another grin. Wasn't that amusing?

This is something of a pattern in Jamaica. A few months later the Commonwealth Games were held there and, by the way, the organisation is reported to have worked very well. This is sad, but in Jamaica there are always certain redeeming features. The programmes – with details of events, contestants, record-holders, etc. – were not ready for the opening day. There was a wild search for them, everybody denied any knowledge of them and their absence caused great difficulty. Some time later they were found a few yards away from the spot where they ought to have been and where everybody had been looking for them.

While I was in Jamaica, there was a postal strike on, so inefficiency really became the order of the day. At first everybody was in despair. Letters were not delivered, com-

munication on the island broke down except for telephone or telegram – because telephones and telegrams, in American fashion, have nothing to do with the Post Office. But the telephone system and the telegram service became overburdened and, in any case, foreign telegrams seemed to have priority. So if someone wanted to send a message from Kingston to Port Antonio he was well advised to send a cable to Miami or even London, and to ask people there to convey his message – by another cable to Port Antonio. This was safer and quicker than trying to send a telegram direct. Everyone thought life would come to a standstill. Yet, the government did nothing – they seemed quite happy.

People soon discovered that they had a wise government. Life in an inefficient society is much pleasanter than in a well-oiled one. There was no need those days in Jamaica to pay bills – you were not supposed to receive, and in fact did not receive, them. It is true that *you* were not paid either but banks lent money freely to all and sundry : it was their duty, they felt, to help people who got into difficulties through no fault of their own. Messages, accounts, notices, orders, disclaimers, complaints, family letters never reached any addressee and life suddenly became pleasant, relaxed and carefree. Some people suspected the government itself to have organised the strike, just to keep the population happy, but others thought this a little far-fetched. Others again, realising that life was much happier without post, advocated the abolishment of all postal services for good.

This idea did not catch on. The strike, eventually, came to an end. The backlog was cleared in the subsequent six or eight months, and letters once again flowed in mild Jamaican fashion. Bills had to be attended to, money lent by the bank had to be paid back. People still talk nostalgically of the balmy days of the strike and postmen lost a great deal of their popularity. Not for striking, of course; but for going back to work.

Calypsos and Other Noises

If you think of Jamaica, sooner or later you will also think of Calypsos. Well, don't. I meant to make a special study of the Calypso in Jamaica but I found out soon enough that the island is the wrong place for such a study.

The home of the Calypso is Trinidad. Trinidadians are proud of that product of their island and Jamaicans do not seriously dispute their copyright. There are, it is true, a number of Calypso bands in Jamaica, but they are for tourist consumption only.

The Calypso is a biting, sarcastic, up-to-the-minute ditty on a subject of some public, or often just of local or even family, interest. It may deal with the downfall of the government, an economic crisis, or the fact that Miss Soandso, a well-known society figure, happened to wear the wrong dress on some important occasion. It is cheeky, irreverent, buoyant. It is sung to exciting and fiery rhythms. The performer wears a superior smile on his face and looks round after every verse with the radiant and self-satisfied grin of a man who has just said something devastatingly witty. In fact, he has done nothing of the sort. Calypsos, with very few exceptions, are flat, painfully pointless, forced and clumsily written. The secret of their success? Basil Boothroyd pointed out in a radio-talk on public speaking (with special reference to after-dinner speaking) that not even the greatest professional humorist, even at

his very best, stands the ghost of a chance if he is competing with the local wit. A revived and modernised Mark Twain or James Thurber may stand up, sparkle, scintillate and dazzle and may or may not provoke a few mild, perhaps even appreciative, smiles; but the local clown will get up, look round, grin and say: 'Joe' – and he brings the house down. The room will echo with uproarious, uncontrollable laughter, some will nearly choke, others will fall off their chairs. The remark 'Joe' may not be irresistibly witty or original; but it refers to some local joke, private anecdote, scandal or blunder and poor Messrs Twain and Thurber are hopelessly beaten before they start. This is the secret of the Calypso. It isn't often good; it isn't often funny; but it keeps saying 'Joe'.

Jamaica's effective answer to the Calypso is Miss Louise Bennett, a well-fed, happy and jovial lady, a local bard, who makes up her own rhymes and sings them on the radio and on various platforms. Her subject is the changing social scene; she is not very political, only superficially so; she sings in the dialect so she, also, remains in fact unfathomable for the visitor. She is a national institution who refuses to regard herself as a national institution.

Jamaica's less effective answer to the Calypso is the Mento. This is Jamaica's native lament: it is sad, slow and plaintive. Instead of flippant and momentary hilarity (like the Calypso) it reflects everlasting gloom. It has no words of any literary pretensions, the words of the Mento are never printed. It expresses dolefulness, despondency and dejection in a few repetitive words, set to tuneful melodies in a minor key.

These two types of song reflect two different reactions to life and to human suffering. The Trinidadian replies to his tormentor with a grimace and mocking laughter; the Jamaican with melancholy acceptance of the reality and hardship of life. Both as a humorist and as a man who grew up in Budapest, I should sympathise with Trinidad's

lighthearted and derisory response to life. The Trinidadian has, after all, chosen my own way out and makes life easier for himself by trying to laugh it off; but one should, of course, sympathise with the fellow who treads the tougher, not the easier, path.

I have mentioned Budapest because Budapest has its own Calypso: the joke. It is a prose version of the Calypso, worthy of attention and serious consideration. Whatever tragedy befalls Hungary, Budapest answers with a joke. When the 1956 Revolution was crushed, when the Russians came back to Budapest, their heavy guns and tanks wreaking havoc, yet proclaiming all the while that they were coming as friends, the joke went around: 'Good thing they're coming as friends. Just imagine how they'd behave if they were coming as enemies!' This is just one single example taken from one of Hungary's darkest hours. There were jokes in Budapest about the siege of 1945, about the Nazi occupation and about the extermination of the Jews – invented and repeated by the Jews themselves before the ovens swallowed them. So a joke is not always a joke: it is an urban folk-art; it is the folk-song of a modern city population; it is a *cri du coeur*, a funny yet agonising cry in the wilderness. The face is distorted by pain and torment but its owner pretends that he is just pulling a funny face to make you laugh. And he laughs with you. This is the essence of the Budapest joke; it is the essence of the Calypso; and it is the essence of humorous literature.

* * *

Another folk-art, rural rather than urban, yet worth a passing glance, is swearing. Swearing is a declining art in Britain and, indeed, in all English-speaking countries. Hungarian swearing is imaginative and forcefully expressive: a concierge, a taxi-driver or even a well-dressed

lady, when properly roused, will go for any offender using extremely colourful language of terrifying obscenity, giving him minute but probably somewhat unfair details about his ancestry, and advising him what to do with his mother, and how. A properly trained Hungarian sergeant could go on abusing a recruit for three or four minutes, pouring out obscenity after obscenity, without repeating himself once. Swearing, as I have said, is a folk-art: an expression of sadness and frustration, a kind of rebellion of the poor and oppressed who cannot do anything but must cry out in despair to relieve his soul of a burden. That is why swearing is not really a democratic art or an art of the well-to-do. German swearing is vastly superior to English and Hungarian is vastly superior to German. Yet, Hungarian swearing is puerile compared with Rumanian swearing which is, in turn, overshadowed by Russian swearing. The Arabs beat the Russians and the Indians – I am told – beat the Arabs. This last statement, however, has been hotly disputed by patriotic Arabs. They say that nothing can beat good Arab swearing at its vituperatively poetic best. They say it in no uncertain language.

* * *

Another expression of a people's mentality is their proverbs. Here are some Jamaican proverbs:

Never call an alligator long-mouth till you pass him.

Cuss-cuss never broke hole in skin. (Meaning: Hard words break no bones.)

Play with puppy, puppy lick your mouth.

Rockstone at river bottom never feel hot sun. (Those who do not know suffering, will not know how to sympathise with others.)

You nebber see pop-gun kill alligator. (Don't send a boy on a man's errand.)

Believe half what you see – nuttin' you hear.



Even dogs in the street know a poor man's trouble.
(Poor man has no privacy.)

Coconut tree tall no benta wid it. (Benta = venture.
Meaning: If you try to climb high, you may fall.)

Hungry-hungry and full-full no travel same pass. (The
poor and the rich go different ways.)

If you see an old lady run, don't a see: run.

These proverbs do not reflect a gay and reckless dare-devil philosophy. They reflect caution, timidity, scepticism and resignation to your lot, whatever it may be. They also reflect two-facedness. (Face to face you are courteous to the alligator; but you *will* call him long-mouth, once you have got past him.) It is not the hero who speaks through these proverbs but rather the man who, bitten once, is twice shy. No mocking laughter rings through these pearls of wisdom but your heart is warmed by their simplicity and gentle resignation. Yet, there is much more in the spirit of the Mento and in the spirit of these proverbs than echoes of placidity, submission and endurance. They warn the young not to climb coconut trees – but all the young climb them, daringly and skilfully. And they reach the top – the tops of coconut trees – in no time. Those who storm the heavens instead do not get, as rule, even as high as the tops of coconut trees.

* * *

The Jamaican will climb the tree – rapidly and carefully – and look down from the top with a gentle and apologetic smile.

The Trinidadian (and the humorist) will remain safely on the ground and will sing a Calypso (or write a book) about the prudent and unenterprising tree-climber who does not aspire any higher.

Not by Sun Alone

When I asked one of the leading ministers about the great poverty in Jamaica, he showed signs of irritation and annoyance.

‘Why don’t you write about our achievements instead?’

I told him that I would write about the achievements – and also about the beauties – of the island more than about the poverty; but poverty, alas, was also a fact of life. I did not tell him – as I ought to have done – that I was not giving him advice on how to run his ministry just as I did not need his advice on how to write my books; I failed to tell him, too, that I did not think much of a politician who, instead of answering an awkward question, instructs the interviewer to ask an easier one.

The minister’s retort, if slightly piqued and snappy, was at least understandable to anyone who knew something about politics in Jamaica. Political parties have rather misleading names in Jamaica. Sir William Alexander Bustamente’s governing party is called the Labour Party but is to all intents and purposes a Conservative Party; on the other hand, Norman Manley’s Opposition Party, far to the left of the government, is called the People’s National Party; but there is nothing nationalistic about it. Bustamente and Manley – another fine West Indian touch – are cousins. Mr Wilson and Mr Heath are not cousins – yet I often feel that there is a much wider gap between

the two parties in Jamaica than there is in Britain. Besides, I sometimes wonder whether our Labour Party is not similarly misnamed: it, too, is more Conservative than its name warrants. Be that as it may, today it is Manley's party which points an accusing finger at the government and keeps harping on the appalling poverty of the people. The government – politicians will be politicians – try to do two things at once: they do their best to alleviate this poverty while all the time denying its existence. In these circumstances, of course, the very mention of poverty has a political – an anti-governmental undertone. (By the way, it should be pointed out in all fairness that Jamaican poverty is by no means the doing of the present government. It existed under Mr Manley's government, too, and long before that. Whether the present government does enough to alleviate poverty is a question which Jamaican politicians can argue out among themselves.) Jamaican government also fear that constant talk of poverty might keep foreign investors away. The government is a little naïve in this respect: poverty brings the foreign investors in. They like nothing better than a cheap labour force.

There is a tendency – not only in political but also in industrial and financial circles – to sweep Jamaica's poverty under the carpet. This is an easy task which is performed with a great measure of success. After all, it is only a part of the population who live in poverty and – by definition – not the important part.

Travelling to West Kingston, one meets a dismaying sight: a repulsive shanty town which rivals the worst horrors of South America or Hong Kong. People live in tents and cardboard boxes, in corrugated iron huts, without sanitation, sunk in filth and degradation, overcrowded like sardines; the stench of human sweat, squalor and excrement hits you in the nose, even if you just drive past in a fast car. And yet, West Kingston is somewhat unreal,

something of a showpiece in a strange, perverted way. Foreign television teams and American magazines trying to portray life in Jamaica always rush to West Kingston to photograph its revolting slums. West Kingston is good copy; its destitution is extremely photogenic. In addition to true misery, failure and frustration, West Kingston is also a hotbed of crime, violence, dirt-cheap prostitution, incest and brutality. It is horrible but it is also picturesque. A page of colour-photographs of West Kingston's degraded misery, facing a full-page advertisement for an expensive bra or a cruise, is truly effective. The authorities used to accept this as part of the Jamaica story. Foreign newspapermen had to be 'fair' and show 'the other side of the picture' and West Kingston was the raw material for their fairness. But fairness can go too far and the authorities in the end grew tired of too much fairness and decided to clean up these slums. The inhabitants of West Kingston are being re-housed – which phrase, if it means anything, means that they will be housed for the first time in their lives. Some of them will be better off, others will be even more homeless than they were in their stinking and familiar cardboard huts.

Picturesque and sinful West Kingston was never the real problem. The real problem is the poor, silent and not in the least photogenic villages in the mountains and around them, with no water-supply, no sanitation and no electricity, where there is absolutely nothing to do but copulate.*

The real problem is the under-employed whose earn-

* I seriously contemplated the use of a four-letter word here. No book is regarded as respectable in this post-Chatterly age of ours without the use of at least one four-letter word. One word does not spoil the book even for the more squeamish and it clearly proves the progressive tendencies of the author; or – as it is put nowadays – that the author is with it. Well, I am not with it. Also I am prepared to forgo respectability once again, so I compromise on *copulate*.





ings are not enough to live on but too much to starve on. The Trade Unions – organised on a party-political basis – are powerful and influential, they look after their members effectively; but the unemployed, the half-employed and often the unskilled are not accepted as members. So all agreements on wage-increases – which, naturally, affect prices – are made at the expense of the very poor and the unprotected who have to foot the bill. As a result, the well-off become even better-off and the poor poorer still.

* * *

At the top of the pyramid of the Jamaican working community are the bauxite-workers. Their wages are phenomenal by Jamaican standards and very good by any standards. But these workers are few in number: bauxite is not turned into aluminium in Jamaica, it is simply shipped out, or is turned – some of it – into alumina, a stage between bauxite and aluminium. So there are only very few lucky men at the top, looking down at all the others from their lofty heights. At the bottom are the totally unemployed who receive no unemployment benefit whatsoever.

Yet, they do not starve. They return to their villages or roam the countryside. The sun is almost always shining – one needs hardly any clothing; one can sleep in the open; there are plenty of mangoes and papayas on the trees. (When a West Indian bowler is dead on wicket up goes the cry: *Mango! Mango!* – meaning that the bowler has acquired his astonishing accuracy by knocking mangoes off the trees, by throwing stones at them.) Mango and papaya, indeed, are virtually free. If a man picking mango or papaya is chased away by the owner he is bewildered and resentful. No one actually dies of hunger in Jamaica, as many do in India, so our conscience is clear.

In our modern, affluent world people should die first, if they want to be helped.

* * *

There is mango in the countryside and there is some dire poverty in the city, yet the big town – Kingston, first of all – is an irresistible magnet for many. It is better to starve in the city than to vegetate on mango in the countryside. The city has lights, entertainment, opportunity for crime and companionship. And its main attraction is that in the city *you can make it*. The broken men, the failures, those who end up in prison or in the cesspool of West Kingston, are forgotten; the successes – the men who become skilled workers, independent shopkeepers and café-owners – are remembered, admired and emulated.

* * *

Organised religion helps the poor, too, even if in an unexpected manner. An industrialist friend told me that he only employed Seventh-Day Adventists. As many as he could; unfortunately, he could not find enough of them – there are no more than 40,000 on the island, including children. I was surprised.

‘I thought you were a Catholic.’

‘Of course, I am,’ he replied.

‘Then why do you favour Seventh Day Adventists?’

‘I don’t favour them; I employ them.’

‘A fine point,’ I admitted, ‘but why?’

‘Because Seventh Day Adventists are not allowed to join Trade Unions.’

* * *

Well over half of the population live in respectable poverty. The tourists see little of this and middle-class Jamaicans

see hardly more of it. Yet, few people – however miserably off they may be – regard themselves as really poor and fewer still see anything respectable in poverty. I went to some of the most miserable villages where people did not have enough to eat, where nine or ten persons slept in one tiny room, where cane-cutters earned £3–4 per week, when they worked – and that was about five months a year – but they all denied that they were poor. They knew of some other villages nearby where people were poor. They knew some other people at other places who were not so lucky as they were. But they had no reason for complaining, thank God.

Yet, this ‘good luck’ of theirs – their poverty, in plainer words – is the reason why they come over to Britain and try to become bus-conductors in Birmingham. As *The Times* put it in an article sent from Kingston before the opening of the Commonwealth Games in 1966: ‘“Don’t forget” the bartender by the open-air pool said to me, “you may have found a climate you like in Jamaica but they [the immigrants from Jamaica] have found an economic climate that suits them. Man cannot live by sun alone”.’

Pocomania

Slaves love God. They have every reason for hating Him but they love Him. It is not just that they fear God; they definitely love Him. Not because they are particularly grateful for the fate the Almighty has found appropriate for them. Love is never the result of gratitude; gratitude does not breed love. Love is the result of an inner need. Everybody needs love: even archbishops, property tycoons, hereditary peers and pop-stars. Slaves need it more. And as there is hardly any human being they can love, they love Almighty God who created slavery.

As a result of the slaves' need for God, the tradition of Jamaican society is strongly religious. Anglicanism is the chief religion of Jamaica – more than 300,000 people belong to the Church. Anglicanism had to be adapted to the new status of independent Jamaica. This was not an easy task but churchmen have succeeded in solving graver problems. The Queen has no religious role in the Anglican church, which is the established church and is called the Church of Jamaica or the Jamaica Church. Anglicanism – it always seemed to me – is really Catholicism without the Pope; what Anglicanism is without the Queen, is not quite clear to me. I have heard explanations – some lengthy ones, from high Churchmen – yet, it is not quite clear.

Anglicanism used to be also the religion of the colonising

power, so it had good snob value. As people who belonged to the ruling upper stratum were Anglicans it was soon decided that this worked the other way round too: people who became Anglicans were deemed to belong to the ruling upper stratum. To belong to the established church was a step towards belonging to the establishment itself. Now the Church is making great efforts to get rid of this snobbish image. I am sure it is sincere in its endeavour; I am less sure that it is successful.

Europeans, when discussing the religious beliefs of Jamaicans, are unbearably patronising. The religious life of the Jamaicans – this is the fact on which European superiority is based – is full of magic, belief in the supernatural and contains a great many pagan elements. This is all true; but it is also true of Christianity (*and* Judaism *and* Islam), so why be so smug? A black farmer (H.P. Jacobs explains, writing on *Dialect, Magic and Religion*) may talk about a deep pool in which there is a mermaid. But a white farmer in Scotland may speak of the Loch Ness Monster and millions of other white farmers – and accountants and railwaymen, clerks and grocers – may talk about flying saucers. Those who believe in the monster and in the saucers will look down upon the poor, primitive fools who believe in the mermaid. As far as I am concerned, give me a mermaid any day and keep the monster with or without the saucers.

‘Anyone who visits a man dying of a wasting disease,’ Mr Jacobs goes on, ‘may hear his wife exclaim: “*Nigromancy!*” meaning that the illness is caused by the witchcraft of malicious neighbours.’ But millions of Europeans believe in the power of prayer: if prayer has power for good, it must necessarily have power for evil, too. It is true that few European wives will exclaim: ‘*Nigromancy!*’ but this is purely a question of phraseology, not of enlightenment. ‘Children volunteer stories about people who have had commerce with the dead.’ But



Christianity, too, teaches that the dead are not really dead because man's soul is immortal, so why should children – or adults, for that matter – not have commerce with the dead? In fact they do; but not enough. Perhaps if we had more commerce with the dead, our economic crises would be fewer and farther between. Our Spiritualists do their best and they should be thanked for the trouble they take. They talk to the dead regularly – and they are not ignorant Jamaican children. Conan Doyle was not even a black farmer but a white author whose stories are still read by millions.

A Jamaican builder – the article goes on – will recommend the killing of a cock so as to avert death. But Jews, too, kill chickens before the Day of Atonement and turn them round over their heads, murmuring words of magic power. Millions of people in Western Europe or in the United States refuse to walk under a ladder, they throw salt over their left shoulder (or is it the right?) and knock on wood. Killing a cock is a primitive, African jungle-habit when done by the Jamaicans, but an ordinary, accepted rite of a civilised religion when done by a Western Jew. Buying off a *duppy* with some small favour is a savage cult, but knocking on wood is a wise precaution. I know this myself: I always knock on wood and I am no savage. Or, at least, I would not readily admit it.

In addition to the Anglican Church, there are a number of other churches in Jamaica. The Official Handbook informs us that the Church of God 'is associated with the Church of God with General Offices in Anderson, Indiana, U.S., founded in 1907 by the Rev and Mrs G. W. Olson.' It seems from the Handbook that the Rev and Mrs G. W. Olson are the second most successful founders of religion in Jamaica, after Jesus Christ. Then there are the Congregational Union, the Disciples of Christ, the Baptists, the Quakers, the Methodists, the Moravian Church, the Presbyterians and the Roman Catholics. On top of it all,

since religion has become Big Business, there are countless missionaries coming mostly from the United States, representing, more often than not, cranky sects and supported by rich foundations at the expense of the American taxpayer. I do not know whether these people are paid per soul saved but whatever the system they are paid handsomely. The phrase 'saving savages' is never used nowadays. The savages, in any case, are rarely saved; the missionaries often are.

* * *

The most typical religion of Jamaica is pocomania. This is also the saddest story of all. Pocomania is the most famous of the revivalist cults. The dialect word for it is *puckamenna* and it is described as *dancing the puckoo*. Pocomania meetings develop into wild, frenzied dances and the participants fall into trances. This must have been the most popular cult of desperate, forlorn and oppressed slaves who wanted to escape from the world's sufferings. Besides, frenzied dancing and mass hysteria are the cheapest of all drugs: they are available for the poorest of the poor.

By today pocomania has been degraded; the worst of all fates has befallen it: it has become a tourist attraction. Participants fall into trances for a modest fee. Dentists from Iowa and vice-presidents from Nebraska can participate in a truly exciting African festival – with wild shrieks, howls and drum beats – very cheaply indeed, if you compare pocomania entrance-fees with cinema-prices in the U.S. (Taking colour photographs is extra.)

The Rastas

When you happen to run into your first Rastafarian in the streets of Kingston, you laugh. But your laughter is frightened and incredulous. You see a fierce-looking black man dressed – more often than not – in colourful rags. He has a long, tousled beard. But it is his hair-style which really creates the effect. His hair is plaited and it stands up, pointing towards heaven, making the man look like a tall, ferocious and completely humourless clown. To make the plaits stand up, they have to be stuck together with some gluey substance. The material used for this purpose is, occasionally, animal dung which does not make the man's appearance more attractive or his scent more enticing.

You give him a side glance : you still expect him to smile slyly at some practical joke he is just perpetrating; or you expect the apologetic smirk of the slightly demented. But no : there is no joke, there is no apology. You look away, gravely embarrassed. No, there is no doubt : the man is not demented and he is not joking. He is full of self-confidence, he is sure of God's approval. He has a creed that guides him. Yet, you find him undignified and a little subhuman with his fierce beard and up-standing, plaited hair with a touch of dung on it. You pity him; he pities you.

This man – and you see quite a lot of his line in Jamaica, particularly in Kingston – is a member of the



sect of Rastafarians, commonly known as Rastas. The chief tenet of their creed is that the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, is God Almighty, living on his earth. This creed is based on a quotation from the Bible. Lord Melbourne, the Victorian Prime Minister, was once asked an awkward question in the House of Commons. He replied that he had a good and convincing answer but had, unfortunately, lost his notes. The House accepted this as a perfectly good and reasonable reply – as, to my mind, indeed it was. I am asking the Reader to do the same. I have that quotation from the Bible which clearly proves that Haile Selassie is God; but I cannot find it. It has something to do with his being the Lion of Judah. In any case, as I have never come across any statement or declaration which could not be proved with a quotation from the Bible, the Reader may rest assured that this one is no exception either. When Haile Selassie was Prince Regent before becoming Emperor his name was Ras Tafari; hence the name of the movement.

The creed of the Rastafarians is not codified and it varies from group to group. Yet, to give sufficient unity to the movement all of them firmly believe in certain basic principles. Ras Daniel, a decent and sincere man, was probably as good a representative of the Sect as one can find.

‘We believe,’ he told me, ‘in His Divine Majesty, Haile Selassie, the Almighty God. His divinity is clearly established in the Bible. We do not believe in the secular government of Jamaica. We have nothing to do with it. We want to return to our homeland, to our proper home, which is Africa. Our return is also clearly foretold in the Bible. Repatriation is our cry: Africa yes, Jamaica no! The day of repatriation has not come yet but it is not far. Far or near, we are not interested in Jamaican society and have nothing to do with it.

‘It is not true,’ Ras Daniel continued, ‘that we are

racialists and the enemies of the white man. But we believe that all races should live apart. Europe for the white man; China for the Chinese; India for the Indians and so on. Africa is the black man's home.'

I asked him what should happen to the mixed races. Millions of people belong to two or three races. What about them? What about Jamaica's brown middle class?

'Only His Majesty Haile Selassie, the King of Kings, can decide that. I think if the brown man wishes to join us and return to Africa, he will be permitted to do so. If not, not. He acts at his own peril.'

I told Ras Daniel that I did not doubt *his* decency and sincerity but there were many violent people in the movement, even criminals. They smoke ganja (which is the local name for hashish or marihuana). Many people are supposed to join the movement only in order to obtain supplies of this drug. It has even been whispered that American Negroes are exploiting the movement cynically, they join it and obtain large quantities of ganja which they then sell at enormous profit on the U.S. market.

Ras Daniel did not lose his temper. He answered the question with deep feeling but with perfect courtesy.

'Our movement is not violent. The true Rasta-man is not violent. There are some unworthy men in our ranks but show me the movement which can guard against them. Some join because of our appearance. They want attention. They want sympathy. A few may be violent. Others may join us because they want to smoke ganja. But ganja-smoking is part of our worship. It does no harm. We chant and pray to God while smoking. Ganja does not create violence.'

I asked him about the organisation of his movement.

'We are fully organised. But we have no individual, local leader. I do not accept anyone who claims to be our leader in Jamaica. They are all false leaders. Ras Tafari needs no second leader - his own Divine Majesty is quite

enough. Each Rasta is representative of himself and he also represents the movement to the outside world.'

I told him that the Prime Minister, Sir Alexander Bustamente, said the Rastas were innocent children who must be protected and not allowed to return to Africa, where they would be trampled underfoot by elephants and eaten up by lions. Whatever the truth about elephants and lions, many parts of Africa were desperately poor with no opportunities for a flood of immigrants. Could Ras Daniel tell me where they would go and what they would do in Africa?

'All black men will return to Africa,' Ras Daniel explained in his mild and quiet way. 'It is written in the Bible, whatever Bustamente says. He is nothing to us. Some black men will go to Ghana and Nigeria, others to Sierra Leone. We, Rastafarians, will go to Ethiopia. Life may be hard there but we shall be happy and we shall do whatever His Imperial Majesty, Almighty God, orders us to do.'

It is easy to see what attracts people to this movement. This is the beatnik movement of Jamaica, but as Jamaicans are more religious, more serious-minded than most white people, their beatnik movement has a strong religious and moral – and of course, also racial – flavour. Modern man is in desperate search of identity and individuality, and the Rastafarian movement turns a member of the poor and wretched black masses into an individual with a



mission. The beatnik contracts out of society *as an individual*: the Rastas turn their backs to their society *as a crowd, as a movement*. They have nothing to do with the government in which they are disappointed: they look towards another faraway continent. They are conspicuous, they are identifiable, they enjoy people's looks whether admiring or hostile. They smoke ganja not as a furtive habit but as an act of worship. And like so many other Jamaicans, they want to emigrate; not to find riches; but to face even more dire poverty.

While I was in Jamaica a great – indeed, for the Rastas a world-shaking – event occurred. His Majesty, Haile Selassie arrived on a State visit. It was as though Jesus Christ had personally arrived on a state visit in London, to be received by the Queen at Victoria Station. The Emperor sent a clear and dignified message in advance, disclaiming his divinity, but it was of no avail. The Rastas were at the airport. It was their finest hour: their God was to descend from the sky. A small, picturesque but slightly ridiculous group otherwise; today the eyes of the whole Caribbean – well, the whole world – were on them. Many of them were carrying banners: 'HAIL THE LORD'S ANOINTED', or: 'SELASSIE IS CHRIST', or: 'WELCOME TO OUR GOD AND KING!'

The plane landed; the door opened. When the small figure of Haile Selassie became visible, chaos and pandemonium broke out. Selassie – this quiet and imper-turbable man – was taken aback and for a few minutes just stood there, watching his worshippers go wild. All official plans broke down, presentations and speeches had to be abandoned, the military parade cancelled and the Emperor himself could only be rescued from the airport with great difficulty and after a long delay. While this feat of rescuing the guest was being performed, one Rasta managed to forge ahead and shout at him, pleadingly:

'Please, sir, reserve a place for me in your heaven.'

After the chaotic scenes at the airport, the visit proceeded according to plan. The Emperor was seen and heard, inspecting troops, delivering speeches. The whole country watched him on television all the time. A section of the Rastas decided that the Emperor was a fake and not their true God. First of all, they found him too small, and indeed he is tiny. Then he was not black enough: he was a good-looking brown man, lacking Negroid features. He was also too formal and dignified and the Jamaicans – even the Rastas – wanted a more easy-going, chummy and informal Almighty God. Finally, he had arrived by plane. I could never quite fathom the deeper meaning of this objection but God – apparently – just does not travel by air. But these murmurs of discontent were silenced and overshadowed by the shrieks of delight and yells of rapture from the other Rastas. The status of the Rastas had suddenly changed.

After the scandalous scenes at the airport, the authorities decided that the Rastafarians should not be excluded and kept outside the iron railings, but should be invited to official functions and allowed to play their part. After all, it was *their* God who was visiting Jamaica. So a fair number of Rastas came along to the Governor General's reception, to a University ceremony and other occasions. Instead of being pushed aside by contemptuous officials, they were saluted, their invitation cards were checked and they were let in. The Rasta crowds outside watched the chosen few who got inside, but that was good enough. Before they realised what was happening, they became almost respectable – which was of course the most deadly threat they could face. They were asked to co-operate in maintaining order, whereupon they – who denied the legality of that order – co-operated splendidly. They were about to become a part of the establishment – the only true danger to revolutionaries.

The visit, however, was a brief interlude only, and the Emperor departed before the Rastas could become truly respectable. Yet, one could catch a glimpse of the tragedy of all revolutions and one could see, once again, why no revolution can ever succeed. Or, indeed, can only succeed if it fails. As long as a revolution is unsuccessful it may act – by its latent threat – as a moderating or else progressive force. However, as soon as it succeeds, it has to face cruel realities. It must please the masses, first of all its own followers. The revolutionaries have to prove that they are at least as competent to govern as the previous government, so orthodoxy and conventionality become virtues. The revolutionary, having failed to become a *new* figure of the *old* establishment, becomes a *new* figure in the *new* establishment, closely modelled on the old.

Is it this same desire to be respectable that lies deep in the heart of all revolutionaries? Is this longing for respectability the force that makes revolutionaries tick? Do they all wish to be accepted and to belong? If they are not accepted, they are ready to blow up and liquidate the whole system that rejects them. Is it this rejection which turns them into revolutionaries in the first place and – should they be accepted after all – into obsequious sycophants in the second place? My encounter with another Rasta leader, whom I shall call Jack Smith, strongly confirmed this suspicion.

Jack Smith received me in his own little house in the slums of West Kingston. The house and its courtyard were respectably clean. Over the entrance there were two handwritten boards: SUFFERERS' CENTRE and H.Q. OF THE RASTAFARIAN MOVEMENT. (This latter statement is disputed by all Rastas outside Mr Smith's immediate circle.) One had to bend down when entering the low door. Mr Smith was very polite at first, almost ceremoniously so. He instructed us in what order to sit down – first the lady who accompanied me, then myself, then our driver. He

had learnt all our names in advance and pronounced them properly.

'There is no solution other than bloodshed,' he informed me. 'I don't welcome it. I regret it. But there is no way out. It is inevitable. The white man has asked for it. He will have to pay with his life for the crimes he has committed.'

He went on talking of the coming massacre with obvious relish. Heads would roll and blood would flow. He was personally more than sorry about this but he could not help it. The white man would only get his deserts. Mr Smith expanded his other ideas: the independence of Jamaica was a sham and the Governor General was still the white man's slave. The brown middle class were traitors, no better than the white man.

Some of Mr Smith's minions suddenly appeared with a ganja-pipe which he smoked with an impressive sense of the theatrical, obviously enjoying the idea that we were shocked and embarrassed, which we were not in the least. He gave imperious orders to hangers-on, sent them away on errands and was rather curt with them. One of them had to bring him a clean shirt which he put on in the middle of our chat, paying scant attention to the lady whom he had shown so ceremoniously to her seat a short while before. Another had to run and get some newspaper cuttings and he was not thanked for his trouble, not even with a nod. Smith was a slave master; he could have been a white man.

Finally, Jack Smith demanded some money for the interview he had just given, and when he was dissatisfied with the sum I gave him he grew threatening for a short while. He was quick enough to realise that I was unimpressed, so he said he would give the sum back to me (actually he didn't) because he would soon take all the white man's money by force. The only trouble was that white men were trying to take out of the country all they could and were

in a great hurry about it. Nevertheless the hour of revenge was nigh; blood would flow and heads would roll.

I would have liked and respected Jack Smith had he been a genuine, bloodthirsty black Lenin. But he was a feeble imitation of a white slave-master, a pseudo-revolutionary and an actor playing his part rather badly. A sham and a ham.

And worse. He was also a snob and an upstart. In a letter to the newspaper (not *a* newspaper; *the* newspaper: Jamaica has only one paper, the *Daily Gleaner*) Smith denied that the threat of violence existed; he pleaded for social acceptance for the Rastas and protested the respectability of the Rastafarian movement. He even boasted that the movement's representative had received a Gold Medal after the Emperor's visit – a kind of good-conduct badge. Once again, here it was, the desperate striving of the revolutionary leader for social acceptance. If the establishment reject him, they are no good, they should be



destroyed and their heads should roll in the dust (their most heinous crime being, of course, the rejection of Jack Smith); but if he is accepted, then he is pleased as Punch with any morsel thrown at him, he picks it up from under the table in any form, even in the form of gold medals, a pretty obscure and silly form of recognition, one would have thought.

Jack Smith was a success on a certain level. He had his own court; he had his disciples even if he had to be his own court jester; he had his gold medal. Rich Jamaican businessmen came to see him in large numbers, they smoked ganja with him, talked to him and gave him money. It is fashionable in certain circles in Kingston nowadays to have your own Rasta. It is 'in' to mention casually: 'While I was having a ganja or two with Jack Smith today, he told me . . . Do I *know* him? . . . My dear, we are bosom friends.' They are. Smith's duty is to tell his business friends – in gruesome detail – how they will be strung up on trees, how they will be tortured and mutilated. They love listening to this, and shower money and gifts on Smith in exchange. All these good things have mellowed Smith to a great extent throughout the years; but he cannot afford to mellow. He must remain ferocious and bloodthirsty, otherwise the rich businessmen might drop him and pick a more ferocious and bloodthirsty pet Rasta. Competition is waiting round the corner. So he keeps it all up. But all his talk of revolutions and bloodshed became an act, long, long ago, just a source of income. This is the sad fate of many of the Jack Smiths of the world. It is bad enough to become a tourist attraction like the pocomaniacs; it is worse to become part of the establishment as the Rastas seemed to do during the Emperor's short visit. But the worst fate of a revolutionary is to be turned into a clown. To be paid by his enemies to play out, for their amusement, the very role he, once upon a time, hoped to play out to their horror.

Sweet and Sour

The Jamaicans are sweet and reasonable people, sweet and reasonable even in their angry, arrogant and argumentative moods. The manager of a large hotel at Montego Bay told me this story.

‘They always argue and you just cannot tell them off or order them about. That would be a fatal mistake, particularly if you are not only a white man but also a foreigner, like myself. I mean, not even English. No, they won’t be ordered about. But they are always ready to help. One morning at 8.30 I heard that we would have to give lunch to an extra two hundred people. Had I given orders—lunch for an extra two hundred, pandemonium would have broken out followed by a strike and, most probably, not even my ordinary guests would have had lunch let alone the extra two hundred. So I called my staff together, informed them of my difficulties, told them that I knew the thing was almost impossible but could they help me? They told me not to give the matter another thought. The lunch went off without a hitch. An old trick? Perhaps. But it works only with decent people. And I meant it decently, too. I regarded the thing as a favour and although I promised them nothing in advance, they were handsomely rewarded for their exertions.

‘Another day I saw one of our young waiters leaning on a pillar in the restaurant during the luncheon period.

He himself looked like a pillar of salt: he did not move once in at least forty-five minutes. It's true, the restaurant was not too busy and he had nothing to do. Nothing much, anyway. Yet, to see him contemptuously contemplating his surroundings and observing the guests, was a somewhat disconcerting spectacle. A family of five came in and found him in that statuesque pose. They had their lunch and left; my waiter had not moved in the meantime. After lunch I sent for him and asked him to come to my office.

' "I saw you leaning on that pillar, doing absolutely nothing," I told him.

' "Yes," he nodded sullenly.

' "You remained like that for three quarters of an hour."

' "About that time," he nodded again.

' "Why?"

' "I had nothing to do. I did not damage the pillar."

' "That is true," I agreed. "But what would *you* think if you were a guest in this hotel paying sixty dollars a day and saw a waiter lounging about like that?"

' He thought that over and declared: "Bad, sir. Very bad." And before I could add anything, he went on: "That would be three hundred dollars a day for the five of them."

' "Yes," I agreed.

' He repeated with deep conviction: "Bad, sir. Very, very bad."

' "Well, then don't do it again."

' He never did. Had I shouted at him and warned him that if he did it once more he would be fired, he would have argued, he would have been embittered for months and would probably have created bad feeling in others.'

The surprising truth is that you can reason with Jamaicans, whatever their mood. This is due to the sweetening effect of slavery; to the scorching sun which makes your blood boil; to the natural beauty of the island; and to



their own pleasant disposition.

Even Jamaican teddy boys – at their rowdiest and most troublesome – will listen to a decent argument and see that fair is fair. A bunch of them – about six – invaded the beach of an exclusive and terribly expensive hotel, molesting the guests, pushing them around, making disagreeable noises, upsetting tables and beach-parasols and behaving in that teddy-boy manner which has lately become only too well known all over the world under different names.

The manager – another intelligent foreigner who had his head screwed on the right way – asked them what they thought they were doing.

‘You are a white man and this is our country,’ came the surprising answer.

‘In this you are right,’ the manager told them. ‘I am here on your sufferance and as a citizens of Jamaica you can put pressure on your government to kick me out. But as long as I am here it is my duty to ask you to leave. Get out of here and get out quickly.’

One of them grew aggressive.

‘You can’t talk to us like that. You are white and this is our country.’

‘Listen,’ said the manager in a friendly and consultative tone, ‘I am white and this *is* your country. But what would you do if *you* were the white manager of this place and a bunch of ruffians behaved as you behave?’

The boy thought hard, then said: ‘I would kick us out.’

‘Very well, then kick yourselves out.’

They kicked themselves out.

Arctic Spell

The Rastas are the restless, identity-seeking bottom of Jamaican society; they are the very antipodes of what is left over from the snobbish plantocracy and their latter-day imitators.

One hot night I was taken up to a very elegant restaurant on the Blue Mountains. It was a place of splendour, all flowers, heavy silver and glistening crystal, excellent service, fabulous food and murderous prices. I started coughing and sneezing in the first five minutes. I felt that I was catching cold.

'Damn it,' said I.

'Damn what?' asked my companion.

'It,' I replied. 'It's all right being cool on a hot night, like this. But this place is not cool, it is cold. It is arctic.'

'But don't you understand?' she asked. 'That's the whole point.'

'What is?' I asked, not seeing the point at all. 'That I should catch a cold?'

'To some extent, yes. Look round you. This place *must* be cold. This is practically the only place in Jamaica cold enough for a woman to wear her mink. But for this place all the minks would be wasted.'



Part Two

ISLAND IN THE SUN

When and Why?

I ought, I suppose, to answer some of the conventional questions that interest the prospective tourist. When to go, where to go, why to go, etc. I shall try.

First of all: WHO SHOULD YOU BE? You should be an American, and for this there are several sound reasons. A glance at the map will convince anyone that the United States is considerably nearer to Jamaica than is, let us say, Finland or Poland. This readily explains why there are incomparably more Americans in Jamaica than Finns or Poles. Some residents in Florida are in the habit of flying over to a West Indian island for dinner (preferably, but not necessarily, in their own aircraft). Nassau, in the Bahamas, is their favourite spot for this purpose; Jamaica, if a little too far away for dinner, is quite near enough for other purposes. So the overwhelming majority of Jamaica's visitors are Americans: they dominate and dictate the Island's taste – if taste is the word for it. Conversely, rich Jamaicans like to do their shopping in Miami; indeed, shopping in Miami is one of the new status symbols in rich Jamaica.

To go to a place you need either a push or a pull. You may have both, but you need at least one. The pull is the attraction of the place, its magnetic quality; the push is the desire to leave a place, its repellent quality. If you feel the push, then a number of fortuitous circumstances will

define the spot you will actually go to. Jamaica, of course, has her own tremendous attractions: the pull is there all right. But the Americans – particularly those living in or near the South – are exposed to the push, too. They cannot go to Miami any more, they are pulled away from it. Not so long ago the very word *Miami* used to conjure up a lush and luxurious image, a world of expensive dreams as advertised in colour. But Miami has by now become a cheap, second-rate crowd-resort, a kind of American Southend. As one fat and bald Vice-President* told me: 'Gee, I can't go to Miami. Every typist goes to Miami.' This avalanche of typists would constitute a tremendous attraction for me. Young typists and secretaries are the salt of the earth and I prefer them to fat bald Vice-Presidents, even to Presidents (not quite fair as I have never met a President; but I have a hunch that I would prefer typists all the same). But I know that I belong to a minority, however considerable it may be. Most people flee from a place as soon as the first typist sets foot in it. So Miami is out; and for obvious geographical reasons, mentioned above, this means that the West Indies are in, with Jamaica high on the list (in second place after Puerto Rico, another version of Miami which is one of the American colonies, although it is not called a colony).

I used to believe that the West Indies would be a favourite holiday resort for American Negroes. They could, after all, disappear in the crowd and remain completely inconspicuous. But I discovered that in fact American Negro visitors are few and far between. One of the reasons for this is that they would, in fact, be very conspicuous indeed. Jamaica consists of two different societies on two different levels. The country itself is 98 per cent

* Every American businessman I meet is a Vice-President. For years I have met no one under that rank. Yet I still have to meet my first President. Why this should be so is one of the (for me) unsolved riddles of American life.



coloured; tourism is $99\frac{3}{4}$ per cent white.

Another reason why you ought to be an American is because Americans are rich. All Americans are rich, even the typists. And a visitor has to be pretty well-off in Jamaica because the place is not exactly cheap. It is a luxury resort, so why should it be cheap? If it were cheap, people would go to less attractive but more expensive places. Jamaica cannot afford to be cheap. Indeed, Jamaican holidays perform great services to socialism. They contribute most effectively to a more equitable distribution of wealth. Rich Americans arrive on holiday; by the time they leave, they are considerably poorer Americans.

Although being American is the ideal, you do not need to prove American citizenship in order to be let in. Other nationals are also acceptable, even welcome. More and more Germans, Scandinavians and French arrive. Even a few Italians, Greeks and Swiss crop up. The rich English either come here to stay in their holiday-villas to avoid income-tax or else come on a cruise, just for a few days, sometimes for a few hours. So it is not a must to be American; but it is advisable.

WHEN TO GO? An irrelevant question. Most people go when they ought not to if we are to take the word of the travel-guide writers. It is generally agreed that winter is the best time. What could be nicer than to escape the rigours of a London or New York January or February and swim in the warm Caribbean? But the warmth of the Caribbean, like everything else, is a relative notion. When I had my first dip, I was accompanied by a charming Jamaican lady. As I waded in, I thought: 'Well I like warm water, but this is overdoing it. It's like being in a hot bath . . .' My meditations were interrupted by a distressed shriek from my companion. I turned to see her running out of the water as fast as her legs could carry her. 'Much too chilly,' she shouted back at me as she disappeared.

Jamaica can be burning hot but all the good hotels are

air-conditioned and it is only the Europeans – unused to that device – who are likely to catch colds if careless. August is the hottest month, previously regarded by non-Jamaicans as an unbearable scorcher, but nowadays more tourists come in August than in any other month. The winter is reserved for the rich; August is the time for the poverty-stricken. ‘In August we have a vulgar crowd,’ a hotel-keeper informed me. I decided then and there to return in August. I wanted to see face to face those poor, miserable beggars who cannot afford more than fifty dollars a day. Rumour has it, by the way, that the first typists are already mingling with the crowd.

But *when* to go – to repeat the question – to avoid the rainy season? October is the rainy season and October, I was told, can really be pretty wet although even then it does not rain all day long. But even this is uncertain, my friends warned me. It seems that there is a general deterioration of moral standards all over the world and to day you cannot trust even the weather. It is not as trustworthy as it used to be in Victorian times, which is hardly surprising. Then October was rainy; today it is sometimes rainy, sometimes not. Nowadays it may even rain in November – an unheard-of infringement of the rules in force when Palmerston was Foreign Secretary. May is regarded as another rainy month. I was warned to avoid Jamaica in May but I paid no attention. Being a seasoned Londoner I was not too easily put off by the threat of rain. I have no regrets. It happened on one single occasion that I was caught by an hour-long deluge in West Jamaica but it turned out later to have been a local affair. Montego Bay had normal rain that day and Kingston remained dry. Normally, the rain fell every day or every other day for a few minutes, then everything dried up in another few minutes and the Caribbean sun shone again in all its splendour for the rest of the day. The rain only meant that the air grew a little cooler – a welcome development.



WPA

Ladies Shop

THE SPORTS
27

HIGH CLASS TAILORS MORINS GENTS OUTFITTER

THE Sports

Ladies Shop

Baba



All things considered, I am quite prepared to swop any wet Jamaican May for a dry English June.

HOW TO FIND KINGSTON? This is almost impossible. Jamaica is one of the loveliest countries but Kingston, its capital, is not only ugly but also a non-town. I personally grew rather fond of it but that is an aberration of mine. I liked its people, I suppose, and they are likeable enough. Kingston has no architectural beauty to speak of; it was the Spaniards, not the English, who left grace and splendour behind them and in Jamaica the Spaniards had only 161 years – not enough, it seems, to build. Kingston has no pattern, no town-plan, no shape. The English love to build a mess and they made an unruly labyrinth of Kingston: a conglomeration of long avenues, winding along like snakes, coming from nowhere, ending nowhere, in a charmingly hopeless nihilistic manner. It is a minor Los Angeles: a complex of suburbs without a centre. It has a down-town – as the business quarter is called in American fashion – but this reverts at night to being a poor, working-class area. In the afternoon, all the businessmen, shop-keepers, bankers and officials depart and Kingston's down-town turns into a dark Soho, without Soho's restaurants. Indeed, even without one single cinema.

Kingston has elegant parts with good hotels; it has miserable slums and also middle-class areas, a government quarter and the beautiful Blue Mountains are there, in the background. It has a large natural harbour as a redeeming feature and a few pleasant parks. When you look down on Kingston from the mountains, you get a magnificent view. But the city is built on an expanse too vast for its small population; it has no cohesion, no heart, no character. And – again like Los Angeles – it is practically impossible to get around without a car. To achieve this state of things is quite a feat: it is really quite a small town, and yet its distances are huge (the popula-

tion is well under half a million.) Kingston is an endless sentence without punctuation; or a bad abstract painting without conception: as though an artist had just smeared some houses, thoroughfares, roads, blocks of flats on to his canvas, in a haphazard way. You feel, deep down, that the result either must mean something – something truly profound – which entirely escapes you, or else you must be the victim of a practical joke.



Full Circle

For some centuries, it was explained to me, Jamaica had been a one-crop country: bananas and sugar. Why bananas and sugar are one crop and not two, as the uninitiated would suspect, has never been fully clarified. Both bananas and sugar are mean crops. Their production needs hard labour, sweat and brute force, but hardly any skill. Cutting sugar cane is one of the hardest, most humiliating and soulless jobs in the world: wading in marshes, bending down, crouching, carrying back-breaking, heavy loads. Yet, anyone can do it who is physically capable of it.

Recently two new, important crops have been discovered: bauxite and tourists. Bauxite is being turned into aluminium; tourists are being turned into gold.

Bauxite starts its career underground – in fact, on the ground – has to be dug out and is eventually shipped to various places in America; tourists have to be dug up at various places in America and shipped to Jamaica. They, in contrast to bauxite, *end* their careers underground.

As nothing much is done to bauxite in Jamaica (it is not turned into aluminium, only into the intermediary stage called alumina and even this is not in large quantities) it gives employment – exceptionally highly paid employment, as I said before – to comparatively few people. But a lot is being done to tourists, and tourism gives em-

ployment to many thousands.

A short while ago I spent some time in a Tyrolean village – let's call it Waldstein – which had grown affluent, indeed rich, on tourism. The tourists who go there are overwhelmingly Germans. Now, those Bavarians who come in large numbers to Waldstein are not as different from the Austrians as the Austrians fancy. They are of the same colour; speak the same language; drink the same beer; eat the same sausages. (Sausages are, of course, of decisive importance. People who eat the same sausages are kith and kin.) Nevertheless, the Tyroleans are as snooty and superior to the Bavarians as the Welsh are to their English summer-visitors. One woman of Waldstein – obviously more broad-minded than the rest – explained: 'I have nothing against these people – after all they bring us a lot of money – except that they come here.'

'I see,' said I. 'You would prefer them not to come, just send their money here by cheque or postal order?'

She was a woman of perception and realised that there was a flaw in this reasoning. So all she said in reply was a vague murmur of 'I don't know'. But of course she had put her finger on the real problem. The difficulty with tourists is that they do turn up at the places they visit. Tourism is called the invisible export. It is a great pity – verging on the unfair – that this invisible tourism has failed as yet to produce the invisible tourist.

I have written at some length* about the economic, cultural and political blessings of tourism and stand by what I said. The world's economic difficulties could all be solved simply by everyone travelling in all directions, all the time, spending all their money in each other's countries, making everybody rich in the process – although originally starting off all poor. To a great extent this is

* *Eureka! Rummaging in Greece*, André Deutsch, only 12/6. The reader should buy a copy (available at all better bookshops) and read it without delay.

already happening. Looking at the problem from this angle, one finds a choice of two basic difficulties with tourists :

(1) *They do not come.* It is their duty to come, yet they fail to do so. Or fail to do so in sufficient numbers. This happened in Jamaica before 1963, when the number of tourists fell alarmingly, at an annual rate of eight per cent, and a number of hotels went bankrupt. Then the government appointed an able and energetic new Director of Tourism who worked miracles. Within three months the decline was halted; within four months the number of tourists began to rise and rose by nearly 40 per cent during the next year. The Jamaican tourist industry has never looked back since. More and more people come and stay longer. All this means money, jobs and prosperity for an increasing number. How much for how many people? Instead of detailed statistics, I should like to quote this bit of information from an official paper :

‘A two-hundred-bed hotel on the North Coast creates a daily demand for 60 dozen eggs, 200 pounds of chicken, 100 pounds of meat, 50 pounds of fish, 70 quarts of milk and 50 pounds of butter.’

(2) The alternative difficulty – and this is Jamaica’s problem at the moment – is that *tourists do come.* A sudden and alarming influx could, of course, create problems but I am not talking of any such dangers. Hotels are being built rapidly and, in any case, bookings can always be kept under control; and the number of air-tickets sold can always be regulated. What I have in mind is a more deep-seated difficulty and a subtler problem.

In my other little essay on tourism* I described the relationship between natives and tourists in Greece (but this applies to many other places as well) as one of mutual contempt. Mutual contempt is a healthy and reliable foun-

* *Op. cit.* Do not forget to buy that book. Tie a knot in your handkerchief *now.*



LOVE MAN THEN
TRUST GOD

dation and you can build on it. It is solid and permanent like a rock. But in Jamaica this was replaced – at least in the early days of tourism – by a simple lack of understanding, and this could be dangerous. Jamaicans eyed the curious invaders with stupefied surprise and painful curiosity. In Italy, the tourist seems to be an annual crop, sent by God to reward all those good Catholics; in Switzerland, tourism is a mine, which has to be worked hard before it yields results; in Greece, it is a peculiar habit of Barbarians. Barbarians of old came and destroyed the East Roman Empire; neo-Barbarians – dressed in shorts and fancy shirts – came and helped to rebuild it. In Jamaica tourism started as something frightening: it used to be riches superimposed on dire poverty.

So it was not enough to sell Jamaica to the tourist; tourism as an industry had to be sold to the Jamaicans, too. The poor West Indian has to get it into his head that those weird and eccentric people splashing about happily in the Caribbean Sea and coming, obviously, from another planet, are as elephants are to Indians: very, very strange but extremely useful.

As for the intelligentsia and other politically conscious people, they also had to be persuaded. They resented the idea of their country's being sold simply as an island in the sun. For it is a country. A small country, a poor country, a developing country – but a *country*, and not a playground for vice-presidents. But take away the vice-presidents – or even the typists – and this country's development will slow down considerably.

The middle classes of Jamaica – on a different level again – also resented the tourist at first, hence the intelligent but somewhat naïve exhortation: *be a tourist in your own country*. Few Jamaicans can afford those American prices and consequently the feeling grows that Jamaica is not altogether *their* country: it is being sold to the foreigner. The northern shore – some people feel – has seceded from

the main body of the land and sold itself into slavery. Quite a pleasant slavery; a slavery of prosperity and sunshine – but there is vague feeling at the bottom of many hearts that it was here we came in, in the first place. The wheel has come a full circle.

The tourist will not be aware of these rumblings. He will be treated with impeccable courtesy and hospitality and the Caribbean sun will shine warmly on his fancy straw-hat. But simply by being there, by spending his money, by enjoying the tepid embrace of those elegant swimming pools, he is teaching the Jamaicans some useful facts of economic life. Just by being there he helps to convince people that his being there is a blessing. Curious and fascinating are the ways of life: even the silliest tourist, the most dogged souvenir-hunter, the most relentless snapper of colour slides, the most pompous of vice-presidents and the most ignorant of fools becomes an educator and a pedagogue, a servant of the idea of world-peace and – however objectionable he may personally be – an effective preacher of the grand virtue of tolerance.

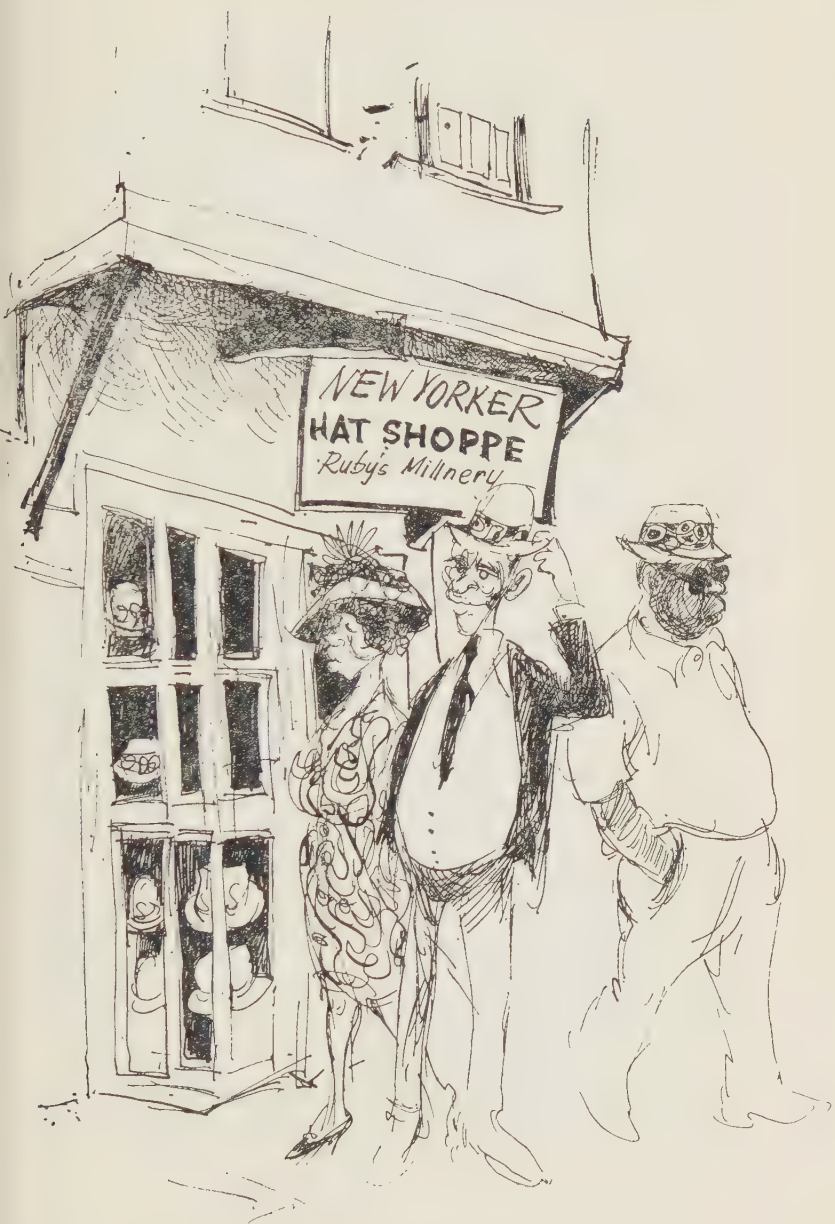


The Price of Bargains

Whatever the tourist gives to Jamaica, Jamaica gives the tourist everything he wants. What does the tourist want?

His requirements are on three levels. The first is obvious to everyone: he wants elegant rooms in pleasant hotels, good food, a good bar, good service, a swimming pool, sunshine, lovely scenery etc: all the lush and luxurious things connected with the idea of holiday. Jamaica has all these and a lot to spare.

His second requirement is a psychological one, connected with what we may call the Tourist Complex. The Tourist Complex has – genealogically – developed from *Wanderlust*, but poor, simple, innocent *Wanderlust* has about as much to do with the Tourist Complex as the Neanderthal caveman has with a modern vice-president. *Wanderlust* meant a strong desire to roam about, to go and visit places. If, in the old days, it stirred in your heart, off you went; if it did not, you stayed at home. But today you *have* to go whether you like it or not. Our era is becoming more and more the era of the Organisation Man, the era of conformity – much more in America than here, but Britain and Europe are catching up fast. Gone are the days when you could freely choose the manner in which you spend your leisure hours. Today you are expected to travel, and travel far, during your summer holidays. You may or may not be able to afford to go;



you certainly cannot afford not to go.

For most people this is no hardship, yet the majority of even those who like travelling tread warily at first. They feel unsafe and lonely in strange places. The Spirit of Adventure is always mingled with the Longing for the Womb. You hanker after thrilling experiences in strange lands and long for the warm security of home at one and the same time. This conflict is the Tourist Complex, and it is at this very point that Jamaica rises superbly to great heights.

Jamaica is a place of thrilling experiences, all right. It is a tropical country; a black country; its very name – derived from the Arawak – has an exotic flavour. Yet it is also the womb; its Hilton and Sheraton and Playboy hotels could easily be in Texas or Connecticut. You are in the tropics, in the land of sugar-cane, papaya, mango and nazeberry, but look around and see the faces at the bar of your hotel, look at the crew-cuts and frameless spectacles, the Bermuda shorts and the red shirts with yellow circles, listen to the conversation and the giggles and you realise that you might as well have stayed at home at Nadir Springs, Minnesota, or Totteridge Farm, West Virginia. The American tourist can – and does – travel thousands and thousands of miles without ever leaving the safety of Hilton-Sheraton territory. He can travel to the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, yet remain safely at home. The conflict between Adventure and the Womb has thus been gloriously resolved: his Adventures are Adventures *in the Womb*.

On the third level the tourist – like all human beings everywhere – needs reassurance. He wants to prove to others – but first of all to himself – what a splendid and brilliant fellow he is. Jamaica caters for his need. The tourist goes out and finds bargains all over the place. How many excited American ladies did I hear boasting of having picked up this or that magnificent piece for a trifling eight

dollars. It does not matter in the least that the thing was (a) made in the U.S.A. where (b) it costs only two fifty. The important thing is that the lady *thinks* she was not only devilishly clever but unbelievably lucky, too. Not only an able person but also a favourite of the gods.

In the art-shops and junk-shops one can pick up the most astonishing bargains – pictures, coins, wooden statues, gilded plates, candelabra, miniature jewellery. These finds are terribly important for the tourist: he feels superior to the primitive native who does not appreciate the treasure he holds and lets it go so foolishly. The tourist feels that he is a man of culture and perception; that he is clever; that he has re-couped a part of the money spent on his holiday. He does not need to know that, in fact, it is the primitive native who is taking him for a ride. He knows nothing of the fast-growing bargain-industry; he does not know that his finds are manufactured with great cunning and hidden by the shopkeeper with equal care for him to pick them up; he does not know that he is duped. And in fact he is *not* duped: what he is after is not the art-treasure, not the old coins and the battered candelabra, but the firm conviction that he is a splendid fellow, perceptive, knowledgeable and extremely cultured. Reality is nothing; his subjective feelings, his delight with himself are everything. And these crutches of self-appreciation, these proofs of his excellence are all included in the price. He has got his bargain all right. He can travel home, his ego restored and polished, his self-esteem propped up, de-carbonised and re-bored: the whole man is ready to face yet another year of the rigours of vice-presidency.

Frenchman's Cove

The name *Frenchman's Cove* is uttered with awe, usually in a whisper. It is a sign of distinction to know that it exists at all; to spend a holiday there is the final proof that you have arrived, that you have made it, that you have achieved something in life. Frenchman's Cove is the summit; the apotheosis; it is celestial bliss.

Frenchman's Cove is not only the most expensive hotel in the world but it is also the most expensive hotel in Jamaica which is quite something. One can hardly spend a few hours in Jamaica without learning the basic and awe-inspiring facts about this famous institution. I knew long before I got there that Frenchman's Cove would cost a couple \$1250 a week (or over £30 per day, per person) but – I was reassured – this was all-inclusive. 'All inclusive' means that if someone wants a gin and tonic or three large Scotches, this will be free of charge; if he has to ring up New York or London, he can do so without being presented with a bill for it; if he expresses a desire to fish for salmon or trout he is flown by air-taxi to the north-western coast and he can fish there for no extra charge whatsoever. Guests – I learnt, too – live in cottages; although some – obviously the paupers who cannot afford more than £25 per day per person – stay in the central hotel building itself. For the cottage-dwellers there is no menu card – a vulgar institution. They are visited every



morning by the chef and asked what they would like to eat. They can ask for anything they fancy. That most of them have neither imagination nor decent stomachs and as often as not ask for an omelette or a hamburger with fruit salad to follow, is not the fault of Frenchman's Cove. The name of the hotel, by the way, is derived from the little bay near Port Antonio, on the north-east coast, where it is situated. The cove used to be the hiding place of an infamous and much-dreaded pirate who was a Frenchman. The present owner of Frenchman's Cove is a Canadian.

A lady-official of the Tourist Board and I arrived – or rather thought we would arrive – at Frenchman's Cove in the grand style. We took an air-taxi at Montego Bay and my companion had telephoned the hotel twice to make sure that we would be met at the air-strip. When she rang for the second time, the reception office of Frenchman's Cove reassured her politely but a little haughtily that there was no need to worry: if they said a car was to be there, the car would be there. The car – as was pretty predictable after these famous last words – was not there.

Nor were there any officials, personnel, or indeed any living soul. Everything was open at the airport – or air-strip – building, we could walk freely in and out unquestioned by anyone – because there was no one there. The terminal looked like the headquarters of Jamaica's ghosts. At last, the caretaker, Mrs Brown, turned up and informed us that a driver had, in fact, been there but had left a few minutes before we arrived. Did Mrs Brown know why the driver had left? Yes, Mrs Brown knew. The driver had told her that as planes were not allowed to land in darkness there was no point in waiting so he left, an hour and a half before dusk to be on the safe side. This was a satisfactory explanation. Later I found out that being left stranded at ghost air terminals is also included in the price of \$1250 per couple. We wanted to ring up

Frenchman's Cove again but Mrs Brown informed us that there were no telephones at the air terminal. Or rather there were no ordinary telephones – only radio-telephones. Only the clerks knew how to use those, and the clerks had left at 5.30. Mrs Brown was a kind and helpful soul, however, and sent her son to the distant village to get a taxi. Eventually we reached the most expensive hotel in the world: hungry, thirsty, mosquito-bitten and a little bit frustrated for having been let down so all-inclusively.

In the hotel we were shown into our respective rooms. They were the first hotel rooms in Jamaica – and I had stayed in quite a few – which had no air-conditioning. More surprisingly, they had no hot water either – but this latter failing was temporary.

I have always despised people who try to impress head-waiters, doormen and valets by handing out large tips, but now I found – to my horror – I was not better than the most despicable of these people: I started distributing huge tips right and left. Everybody within reach received a large sum from me; I wanted to prove, I presume, that I was no poorer than the next millionaire. We were driven about the vast expanse of the hotel grounds on little electric carts, so I found plenty of people to tip. The tips were pocketed with lofty disdain and without gratitude.

We went down to the restaurant and had a fair dinner. It was not good but it was not bad either. The salt was moist and failed to come out of the shaker. The waiter apologised with exquisite grace and gave us another salt-shaker which also failed to function. The head-waiter apologised with even more exquisite grace and gave us a third salt-shaker which worked impeccably. We were handed a modest wine list and chose our wine. A few minutes later we were informed that that particular wine was not available. The wine-waiter apologised with exquisite grace. We ordered another wine instead, to be

informed soon afterwards that they had no bottles, would we mind having two halves instead. We told them that we would not mind anything any more; in fact we did not even care. The wine-waiter called the manager who apologised with such exquisite grace that he put both the head-waiter's and the wine-waiter's apologies to shame. Before going up to our rooms we were stopped and asked at what time we would like to have breakfast. It was a speciality of the place, we were told, that everybody was asked that question and then breakfast was served with unfailing punctuality. Next morning our breakfast failed to arrive and when, long after the appointed time, my companion rang up, the breakfast-waiter apologised with exquisite grace. Then he sent the breakfast along. They forgot the sugar this time, that was all.

After breakfast we were driven around in one of those little electric carts accompanied by an official of Frenchman's Cove. I asked him why was the place so devilishly expensive.

'Because we are exclusive,' the official replied. 'We are also unique. You know that our prices are all-inclusive. Service, too, is something very special here, unlike anywhere else in the world.'

'You mean salt always comes out of the shakers? Breakfast is never late? Sugar is never forgotten?'

'Yes. That's the sort of thing I had in mind.'

Another great achievement, he went on, was that tipping was absolutely forbidden and was indeed impossible. Any member of the staff caught accepting a tip would be dismissed on the spot. But such an act was, of course, unthinkable. Would he be surprised, I asked him, to learn that I had tipped about two dozen of his men and they did not even look around furtively before pocketing my money? I had a great reputation for humour, the young man replied – but certain things were not proper subjects for jokes. I apologised with exquisite grace. Did I know,



he asked me, that the price (\$1250 per week per couple) was all-inclusive? I reminded him that he had told me that himself a few minutes before. Yes, he agreed, but this meant that they did not charge even for international telephone calls. Surely, I said, there must be some people who abused such a system? Alas, he agreed, that was true; such people were to be found, even among the clients of Frenchman's Cove. What did they do, I enquired, if someone phoned London every day for a fortnight and spoke for an hour? In such a case, an extra bill would be submitted, but they did not like doing it; they liked to keep

prices as all-inclusive as possible. People could have caviar and champagne every day. And also lectures. If people wanted to listen to a lecture or two, the management invited first-class lecturers to talk about the Spanish Conquest of Jamaica or the Morant Bay Revolt or Bauxite. More of their clients wanted caviar and champagne than lectures, but I would be surprised to learn how many people did want lectures once they learnt that they, too, were free of charge.

We visited some of the cottages which I found very ordinary and unimaginative. Some of the rooms were small, some of the bathrooms miserable, the carpet at one of the entrances was torn to bits. They all had kitchens, the official pointed out with great pride, which would have surprised me the day before: who wants to come to the most expensive hotel in the world, pay for his food and do his own cooking? But by now I had lost my power to be surprised. Perhaps some guests preferred to cook for themselves and only send out for their daily caviar and champagne.

The beach is superb, one of the best and most beautiful in the whole island. On our way back in the little cart I noticed two tennis-courts, surfaced in black asphalt. I told the official that asphalt made the world's worst tennis-courts. He smiled politely and told me that their guests were mostly middle-aged people – at least in their fifties: younger people could hardly afford their prices. These people could not play tennis for hours on end. They just went on the courts to have a knock-up and then left after a few minutes. I assured him that the youngest tennis champion could hardly play much longer on such courts. He smiled and told me that he knew little about tennis; darts and mah-jong were his games. If I wanted to learn something about mah-jong he would be only too pleased to tell me.

I saw a few of the guests, exiled in their cottages, looking

pale and bored, deprived of all communal entertainment ('we have cabarets sometimes but our guests don't go in for this sort of thing, not really'), ordering ham omelettes from the chef, stuffing themselves with caviar and champagne and ringing up New York and Kansas City every day. They looked lost souls; they resembled Carthusian monks, but with faith only in money, snobbery and Frenchman's Cove.

But while to stay for any length of time in Frenchman's Cove must be a little testing, to *have stayed* there is one of the great rewards and achievements of life. To be able to drop the casual sentence: 'As I said to Millicent when we were being driven around the grounds of Frenchman's Cove in one of those little electric carts' . . . well, it must be worth a lot of suffering. It is like working for a degree or angling for a title. The work is hard, exhausting, trying and expensive. But a degree is a degree, after all; and a title is a title. I suggest that everybody who has spent a holiday at Frenchman's Cove should be entitled to affix the letters F.C. after his name. People have received decorations for less.



The Other Tourists

The B.O.A.C. plane which I boarded in Kingston for my flight home brought a whiff of England to the tropics. It had the quiet dignity, unlaboured elegance and gentle kindness which remain the best traits of this country whether or not Britain is otherwise the sick man of Europe. The V.C. 10s have no oak-panels; but they have that oak-panelled atmosphere which is this country's own.

The passengers were mostly American and English tourists, but with a fair sprinkling of Jamaicans: obviously immigrants, tourists to *our* shores. A few were self-conscious and nervous; others, like the nurse sitting next to me, doing this journey for the third time, were relaxed and seasoned travellers. All the Jamaicans were impeccably dressed, especially the unaccompanied children, flying to join their parents. The little girls wore lively colours, pink and green and orange, with frills and shiny shoes; the little boys looked more solemn in their dark suits, long trousers and inevitable felt hats. All the children were polite and trusting, expecting and receiving help and kindness from everyone. They may have come from very poor homes but were better mannered and better brought up than most of the children of our affluent, western society. These are the future bus-conductors of Birmingham – I thought – the future targets of landladies who prefer white thugs as tenants. The children were sweet and courteous today.



They would grow sullen and aggressive only as a response to the hospitality we would offer them.

Before landing at Montego Bay – our first stop after a hop – I noticed that a little Jamaican girl, about eight years old, all in light blue with a huge hat, seemed to be suffering agonies of pain and fright. The changing pressure as we descended hurt her ears and she did not know what had hit her. The stewardess rushed up to her, talked to her, soothed her, gave her sweets and – even more important – two large pieces of cotton wool to stick into her ears. The little girl did this clumsily: she left them about a foot long and these huge white tails flapped wildly for the rest of the journey, – she looked like a peculiar bunny – but the little girl was all smiles and happiness now. She was not alone, someone had cared for her.

Perhaps her reception would not be so unfriendly, after all. Perhaps there are these kind-hearted and generous stewardesses everywhere, to meet such nice well-behaved children. Perhaps there are kind people and mean people wherever one goes – and that's all there is to it.

Not a great discovery. Perhaps it was not worth while to make such a long journey just to be reminded of it. But considering that most people never learn this simple truth all their lives, perhaps – on second thoughts – it *was* worth while.

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