

J A M A I C A

The island of Jamaica received its name from its first inhabitants, the Arawak Indians, whom Christopher Columbus and his men encountered when they landed on the island on the third of May, 1494. Xaymaca, the Arawak name, is supposed to imply a great abundance of rivers; and in time this has come to be rendered as the 'land of wood and water' or the 'land of woods and streams'. Whatever the correct interpretation of Xaymaca, the country is rich in rivers and much of it was thickly forested before men set to clearing the land, often in a most destructive manner. Thus, as a general description the Arawak name is as appropriate as it is beautiful.

But within fifty years of their encounter with Columbus and his men these first Jamaicans, the Arawaks, vanished completely from the Jamaican scene. Under Spanish occupation and the driving Spanish search for gold the Arawaks were turned into slave labour and the will to life left them. Some accounts say there were mass suicides and that women ceased to bear children.

The records suggest that these Arawaks were a gentle and peaceful people who were relatively free of some of the uglier features of tribal societies; indeed, the more one reads on the Arawak past, the more one explores such slight bits of evidence of their daily lives as revealed in their middens and their crude artifacts, the more strongly grows the impression of a people much too gentle and pacific to have the faintest hope of surviving a force very much less aggressive, very much less ruthless, than the ~~aggressive~~ European expansionism led by fifteenth century

Spain. And so the Arawaks died leaving us Jamaica's name and that great boon to men who go down to the sea in ships, the hammock.

Jamaica is the second smallest of the ^{four} islands of the Greater Antilles. Only Puerto Rico is smaller: against Puerto Rico's 3,423 square miles Jamaica has an area of 4,411 square miles. The other two, Cuba with an area of over 44,000 square miles, and Hispaniola with close on thirty thousand square miles are the giants of the Caribbean islands.

In terms of the British West Indies islands, Jamaica is by far the largest; but it is also the most removed, in distance, from the other British West Indies islands. The nearest of them, St. Kitts, is something like 800 miles away from Jamaica; and Trinidad is well over a thousand miles away. Cuba, on the other hand, is a mere 90 miles away, and Hispaniola 100 miles. The nearest point to continental America is Cape Gracias a Dios 310 miles south-west of the western end of the island. The island is 146 miles long: its greatest width is 51 miles, and its least width (between Kingston and Annotto Bay) is 22½ miles.

The island is extremely mountainous, a central chain running practically the length of ^{it,} ~~the island~~ from east to west, and attaining its highest point, 7,402.4 feet, at Blue Mountain Peak. And from this central mountain chain numerous rivers run north and south. And because there are, ^{generally speaking,} greater areas of plain between the mountains and the south coast than between the mountains and the north coast, the southern rivers are larger, slower and deeper than the ~~northern~~ ones. In order to appreciate the country's climatic variety it should be noted that in at least ten of the fourteen Parishes elevation ranges from sea

level to 3,000 feet above sea level; in four of the Parishes the land rises to 4,000 feet, and in three others to five thousand feet and upwards. And so it is that the temperature drops from an average of between 80 and 86 Degrees at sea-level to between 40 and 50 degrees up in the mountains: in the mountains the air is crisp, dry, bracing; and at sea-level it rarely goes above 90 degrees.

This was the land to which the Spaniards came and which they occupied for ^{more than} ~~one~~ ^{fifty} hundred and ~~sixty-six~~ years. They built one capital on the north coast, near the present St. Ann's Bay; but then they abandoned it and moved to the south coast and built another on the site of what is today Spanish Town. After they had destroyed the Arawaks in their search for gold they imported African slaves and cattle. They reared horses and they grew food to help transport and supply the Spanish forces engaged in the conquest of the South American mainland. Indeed, the moment it was clear that there was no gold to be had, Jamaica was relegated to the role of a rather minor link in the chain of island bases: in addition to the food and vegetables, it supplied fresh water to Spanish ships and it was a haven in times of storm. Beyond this, the Spaniards seemed to have dismissed it as of no real value and they made no effort to build up either its military defences or its population. The result was that when British forces under Penn and Venables captured the island in 1655 they did so with the greatest of ease and they found a total population, including slaves, of one thousand five hundred souls. It is a measure of how much of a myth the notion of a 'Spanish Jamaica' is that there is ~~except~~ nothing except a few place names like Ochos Rios and

Oracabessa.

There are, of course, the Maroons, the slaves that the Spaniards set free before they surrendered their possession of the island to the British. But the Maroons only briefly ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ played a central role in the story of Jamaica. When the Spaniards first freed them they sided with the Spaniards against the English and in the following five years of sporadic fighting they fought on the side of their former owners. But right at the very end of the Spanish fight to ~~xxxx~~ recapture Jamaica, in the very last and most decisive battle, the Maroons went over to the English side. It is highly doubtful that their switching of sides made any difference to the outcome. With the Spanish finally expelled from Jamaica the Maroons withdrew into the mountains. From there they periodically raided the farms and plantations of the plains, carrying off food and young slave women; periodically too they were joined by ~~at~~ runaway slaves. They lived thus for close on a hundred years. In time their plundering became a nuisance to the growing settled communities on the plains, and between 1728 and 1739 after a series of military skirmishes they entered into a treaty with the Governor of the day. This gave them the right to govern themselves possession of the lands they held; In their turn the Maroons undertook to return all runaway slaves and to render military support to the government whenever it was needed. The Maroons observed ^{the military aspect of} their side of the bargain faithfully and always fought on the government side during the later slave uprisings as well as during what became known as the Morant Bay Rebellion.

But basically the story of the Maroons is peripheral, not part of the mainstream of the Jamaican story. Their presence has not affected that story materially; had there been no Maroons the Jamaican story would not have been altered in any significant detail.

It is therefore fair to say that the Spaniards, like the gentle Arawaks before them, contributed practically nothing that went into the making of modern Jamaica. And so, although Jamaica was discovered by Spanish Christopher Columbus on the 3rd of May, 1494, the story of modern Jamaica began on the 10th of May, 1655 with the landing of a British force at Passage Fort.

Unlike the Spaniards, the English quickly saw the colonising possibilities of the island. And soon a steady trickle of settlers flowed into the island. They began the planting of chocolate, sugar-cane, indigo, ginger, tobacco and cotton and started the timber trade. They made use of the cattle, horses, wild hogs left by the ~~Spaniards~~ Spaniards, and soon laid the foundations of stable communities of colonists.

In the first two years after the English landing the island was government by Commissioners. In 1657 Colonel DOyley, the soldier who probably did more than anyone else to make life on the island supportable for the early soldier and settlers, governed by Court Martial. In 1661 he was made Governor, with the advice of an elected Council. In England Charles II spoke of the island as his 'Darling Plantation' and saw it as a profitable holding of the Crown. But the colonists, many of them former soldiers of Cromwell's army, thought of the island in terms far different

from those of Charles II. They saw the island, not as a profitable fief of the Crown, but a place where the settlers would exercise control over their own affairs. Among the leading early settlers who were leaders in the building up of this outlook were Daniel Blagrove and Thomas Wayte, both of whom had been signatories of the death warrant of ~~Charles~~ Charles the First. Families of other regicides had also taken up properties on the island, and so there was what almost amounted to a built-in hostility to the Crown among the settlers. One result of this was the long and continuous state of tension that existed just below the surface in the relations between the Jamaican planters on the one hand and the Board of Plantations (and later the Colonial Office) on the other. The planters resisted and obstructed all demands for taxes and at the same time pressed for a greater say in the affairs of the island. Their resistance and obstruction were only tempered by their awareness that they were dependent on the Crown for protection from being invaded by the Spaniards from the neighbouring islands, from being sacked and plundered by the buccaneers.

In 1663-4 the first elected House of Assembly met and parliamentary government formally came into being in Jamaica.

In 1671 Sir Thomas Lynch, then Lieutenant-Governor sent a dispatch to London on: "The present state of the Government of Jamaica, on the 20th of August, 1671. His Majesty is sovereign and proprietor, is styled King, &c. and Lord of Jamaica; and the Governor and Lieutenant-Governor are appointed during his pleasure. The present Lieutenant-Governor has a council of 14 of the best men in the island, viz., Major-General Jas. Banister,

Sir Jas. Modyford, Colonels Thos. Modyford, John Coape, Thos. Freeman, and Thos Ballard, Lieutenant-Colonels Wm. Ivy, Robert Bryndlos, Chas. Whitfield, and Thos. Fuller, Major Anthony Collyer, Capt. Hender Molesworth, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Freeman, Secretary, and John White, Chief Justice; they may be suspended for misdemeanour, but the Lords of the Council Foreign Plantations must judge if it is reasonable. There is an assembly numbering 18, viz. two from each of the districts of St. Catherine, Clarendon, St. Andrew, Port Royal, St. John, St. David, St. Elizabeth, St. Thomas and North Side: these are chosen indifferently by the people, and make laws which are of force for two years, and ever after with the Royal Assent. The people look on it as their Magna Charta, that they shall be governed by these municipal laws and those of England, and not having anything imposed on them but by their own consent as in Barbados and the Caribbees".

The population of Jamaica in 1670 is reported to have stood at 15,198. Sixteen years earlier, when the English first captured the island, they found a population of 1,500. So the Jamaican population had increased by over 13,000 in the brief span of 16 years, after it had remained at less than 2000 for a century and a half of Spanish occupation. And twenty years later the Jamaican population stood at slightly under 50,000.

All the evidence of this phase of Jamaica's history suggests that the early Jamaican English colonists saw themselves in much the same light as the American colonists ~~the~~ saw themselves. They conceived of Jamaica as a place of permanent settlement and they set about creating the conditions and institutions to make this as comfortable and as free as possible. And so, over the years,

fought they/~~for~~ for, and won, an ever widening measure autonomy. Soon after winning the right to parliamentary government they won the important principle that all money bills should originate with the Assembly. There was fierce opposition from the King's representative but the colonists held fast. In 1728 the British Crown ceded full legislative power to the colonists in return for an annual subsidy for the support of the civil government and subject to the proviso that no Act repugnant to the laws of England should be passed by the local Assembly, and that the Crown shall have the power of disallowance within a limited period.

About this time European mercantilism and the suppression of piracy conspired to create the age of the supremacy of sugar with its need for a massive slave labour force. A prospering Europe demanded all the sugar it could get; prices were attractive; carrying slaves between West Africa and the New World proved more lucrative and safe than piracy; and so everything and all ~~energies~~ energies were redirected to the need to produce more and more sugar. The rapidly of the rise of sugar was startling. In 1734 the value of Jamaican sugar exports stood at £40,000; in 1764 it had gone up to £1,076,155; in 1770 to £1,538,730.

Jamaica's population In 1764/had risen to 166,454 the bulk of whom were slaves brought in to work on the sugar ~~xxx~~ plantations. In an amazingly short space of time the number of sugar plantations on the island grew until there were reported to be over a thousand of these by 1786. A new pattern of ownership emerged and the Rev. Mr. W.H. Gardner who was a Congregational minister at Chapelton in Upper Clarendon, ~~and who lived through~~ ^{recalling} this amazing period of the rise

of sugar comments this in his History of Jamaica^{on}. The steps that were taken by which the island became for a long series of years the finest sugar country in the world.....: If sugar had not become the chief staple of this magnificent island it would in all probability have become the home of many thousands of Englishmen and men of English ancestry who, in farming occupations and the cultivation of what are now called minor products, would have founded a colony almost if not quite equal to those of the American continent. This glorious mountain district would gradually have been penetrated, and in such climates as that of the Pedros, the highlands of Manchester, Clarendon and the corresponding elevations of the north, English settlers would have found healthy and pleasant homes. With a few needful precautions and regular, temperate habits, an English Colony would have flourished.....Imperfect as the early years of our history are, enough remains to show that when the scum which had floated on the surface of the first tide of conquest and immigration had drifted away, a large body of colonists remained, whose ranks were continually augmented, who sought to bring with them all that was precious in the social life of the country from which they came, and who would in time have made Jamaica what their countrymen were making of the New States of America. This was not to be. Colonists gave place to sugar planters. Sugar planters required slaves, and gradually the island became a mighty aggregation of canefields, in which Negroes toiled and white men were the task masters."

And this was what Jamaica was and remained for a century and more: a mighty aggregation of canefields in which Negroes

toiled and white men were the task-masters.

The creation of this 'mighty aggregation of canefields' had some striking effects. First, it destroyed forever the possibility of Jamaica becoming a wholly or predominantly white settlement - a kind of scaled-down version of Australia set in the Caribbean Sea. Instead, it assured that the island would have a predominantly Negro population in the years ahead. Second, the riches derived from sugar led to many of the earlier settlers going back to Britain in relative affluence - often fantastically wealthy in fact - and to the emergence of a pattern of absentee ownership. The white men who remained, the 'task-masters', had no vested interest in either the land or the slaves and so, inevitably, they did not show the care and concern for land or slave that an owner would. Third, the 'task-masters' were, generally speaking, men without women and when the need arose they made use of the women on the plantations. The off-spring of such casual unions went into the making of the beginnings of the Jamaican coloured community. Today the Negroes constitute 78 per cent of the population, the Coloureds 18 per cent and the whites one per cent. East Indians and Chinese make up the other 3 per cent of the total population of 1.7 millions.

The period when the 'task-masters' held sway was the darkest in the history of Jamaica, a period of that has left visible and invisible scars on the historical face of Jamaica. So much so that even today the Jamaican sugar industry which has evolved into perhaps the most progressive employer in Jamaica, is still damned for the sins of the past. Many of the social and racial attitudes of today were born during that unhappy period. Between the early 1700s and 1807, when it became illegal to trade in slaves, more than a million slaves were brought into Jamaica.

Re-exports accounted for about 200,000. And yet, less than 30 years later, on emancipation, the slave population stood at 320,000. The average life ~~xxxxx~~ expectation of a slave born in Jamaica was 26 years. These facts are in passing and simply to remind the critics that the Jamaican tendency to blame much of the country's ill on slavery is not all that far-fetched. The scars are very deep and very real.

By 1827 the decline in sugar was well under way. Production fell and plantations went out of action. Jamaica had been transformed into a one-crop slave economy. First there was the decline of that crop, then, in 1838, there was the abolition of slavery. These two together, meant the total collapse of the Jamaican economy. And the years between 1838 and 1865 were years of economic chaos and ~~xxxxx~~ political confusion.

The freed slaves withdrew into the hills in large numbers, refusing to work for or have any other form of association with their former owners. Out of this, in time, came the self-supporting independent peasant economy of the hill folk. They built up a life up in the hills that was independent of life on the plains. They came down to the plains only to sell their surplus produce for the money they needed in order to buy the few things they could not make.

But not all the black people went up into the hills. Some remained on the plains. And they, and the Coloureds, began to take an active interest in the parliament and the political life of the country. The first Coloureds entered the Assembly in the early 1830s, in spite of the high property qualification required for voting. Soon the Assembly became divided into town

and country factions. The country faction reflected the views and the interests of the planters; the town faction the interests of the towns and Coloured and merchant interests. Early on Coloured spokesmen in the Assembly, men like Edward Jordon and George William Gordon, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ pressed for the interests of their black fellow citizens. Edward Jordon became Speaker of the House in 1861. And hard behind the Coloureds, the Negroes pressed hard to get into parliament and share in the affairs of their country.

It was this mounting pressure from the black Jamaicans, as much as the economic troubles and the Morant Bay 'Rebellion', that led finally to the Jamaican planter class surrendering the political self-government they had enjoyed for 200 years. The overt reason for the self-immolation of the Jamaican parliament was the Morant Bay 'Rebellion' which resulted in the hanging of Paul Bogle and George William Gordon. Today's Jamaican Parliament building is named Gordon House, and Paul Bogle is a hero in the island's history.

From 1866 till 1884 the island was governed as a straightforward Crown Colony. The island was most fortunate to have for the first eight years of its Crown Colony period Sir John Peter Grant as Governor. He came from India with the reputation of being an able administrator and a man concerned for the well-being of people. The fact that he went a long way towards healing the painful wounds that led up to the events of 1865 is confirmation of his high reputation. He cleaned^{up} the courts and the administration of law; he organised an island constabulary force; he disestablished the Anglican Church and used the money thus saved from paying the

clergy to provide elementary education for the children; he instituted a Government Savings Bank; he set up legal machinery for the forfeiture of abandoned estates in arrears for taxes, and he set up an Island Medical Department and a Government Medical service.

Gradually, under the influence of John Peter Grant distress was relieved and confidence reappeared. In 1884 the Colonial Office, following a petition from the inhabitants, changed the Constitution to allow for nine members of the Governor's Council to be elected by the people. In 1895 the Elected Members were increased to 14~~xxxx~~(one for each parish) and nominated members to ten. And there matters remained until 1938.

In 1938 the accumulated economic distress of the entire Caribbean region erupted in a series of strikes and riots that shook colonial administrations from Port of Spain to Bridgetown to Kingston and to every little island in the West Indies.

It is consistent with the pattern of Jamaica's history that here the riots should be sparked off by the building of a new sugar factory at Frome in Westmoreland. Sugar represents at one and the same time both the hope for work and the historical villain to be attacked when things go wrong. And it was among those who could not find work at Frome on the morning of the 25th of May, 1938 that frustration, poverty and the sense of helplessness spilled over into violence. It is perhaps important to remind ourselves that in 1838 the per capita national income stood at ~~£11~~ ~~£15~~ £15 and more workers were out of jobs than were in jobs. Today the per capita income is £137. And today, although unemployment is still a serious problem, at least 70 percent of the island's labour force

island's labour force/~~was~~^{is} gainfully employed.

The upshot of 1938 was the emergence of the trade union movement and the two-party system in Jamaica. Two men emerged ^{have} and stood out as the dominant personalities of the new era that began in 1938. These two ~~men~~ were Mr. (now Sir) William Alexander Bustamante who founded the island's first mass Trade union, and Mr. Norman Washington Manley who founded the island's first ~~mass~~ political party with a clearcut nationalist programme for independence. Since their emergence these two men have straddled the Jamaican political scene like twin giants, with first one in the ascendency, then the other.

Out of the riots came the new constitution of 1943 which have the country universal adult suffrage. In the first General Election under the new constitution Bustamante's Jamaica Labour Party won 22 seats and Manley's People's National Party won 5. Independents won the remaining 5. So Bustamante formed the first government in 1944. His government retained power with a reduced majority in 1949. The People's National Party won 13 seats and the strength of the independents was reduced to 2. The pattern of two party government was being firmly established. In the third Election there was a change of government. The People's National Party won 18 seats and the Jamaica Labour Party 14; and Manley formed his first Ministry. The transfer of power from one party to the other was peaceful and orderly and the democratic processes were strengthened by it. In the fourth Election of 1959 Manley's government retained power. The number of seats had been increased from 32 to 45 and in the enlarged House the P.N.P. held 29 seats and the J.L.P. 16.

Perhaps a word about the West Indies Federation is appropriate at this point. The Federation had come into being on January 3rd 1958. The two Jamaican leaders became, almost by a process of natural selection, the leaders of the two Federal parties. Mr. Manley became leader of the West Indies Federal Labour Party, Sir Alexander Bustamante became leader of the Democratic Labour Party of the West Indies. In the first Federal elections Mr. Manley's party won a majority of seats in the other units of the Federation, but lost in Jamaica to Sir Alexander's party. Up to this point both parties had been federalist, but then the Jamaica Labour Party decided, in conference, that it would no longer continue to support the Federation. This immediately made the question of Federation an internal party political issue in Jamaica. The Manley government decided to resolve the matter by referendum and on the 19th of September 1961 a majority of the Jamaican ~~voters~~ people voted in favour of secession from the Federation. Inevitably, the Opposition pressed for a General Election. They claimed the result of the referendum meant that the country had lost confidence in the People's National Party government. Mr. Manley gave in to the Opposition pressure and called the fifth General Election in April of 1962, roughly two years before his government's term of office was up. The Jamaica Labour Party won 26 seats, the People's National Party 19.

And on August 6, 1962, Jamaica celebrated its independence, with the two leaders, Bustamante and Manley side by side at the moment when the flag of Jamaica replaced the flag of Britain. Jamaica has many problems of which I regard her economic problems the most pressing; if she has not solved all her racial problems

she is nonetheless far ahead of the rest of the world in this regard and has much to teach the rest of the world. But to retain and extend what she has gained she must solve her economic problems or else these problems might undo all her achievements these past ^{three} hundred years. And not the least of these achievements in our day and age, is her strong tradition of parliamentary government, symbolised in the standing side by side of Alexander Bustamante, Prime Minister, and Norman Manley, Leader of the Opposition, at the moment Jamaica became a sovereign independent nation.