SOME IMPRESSIONS OF JAMAICA AND BERMUDA.

By Major G. G. COLLET,
Royal Army Medical Corps.

THE Journal and News Gazette, arriving yesterday, showed me that new officers were due to come to both of these islands during the trooping season.

I thought of my own arrival in these islands, of the lack of information and false information which I had received before arrival, and the consequent difficulties and disappointments which might have been avoided. Although I expect much has appeared before in the Journal about these islands, I thought perhaps some up-to-date impressions might be of use to those officers and their wives who are shortly moving West.

I thought also that as few of us have the opportunity of being stationed in both islands, some impressions of them might lead to comparisons which I hope will not be odious.

(1) JAMAICA.

On receiving orders to sail in a "Banana Boat" across the Atlantic in January, visions of bad tossings and presentiments of great discomfort arose in my mind, but on reaching the East India Docks I found a fine boat with all the modern comforts and with plenty of deck space, and which proved her good seaworthiness during a somewhat trying voyage. After leaving the storm area behind we had a most comfortable journey, and to anyone contemplating a journey to Jamaica I can strongly recommend the "Direct Fruit Line."

Lounging on deck travelling to a new country we had visions of lagoons and palm trees, of surf bathing and dusky beauties, of sunshine and romance.

As days pass and the sun begins to warm you and the London fog and damp, cold English climate are left behind, the heartache at leaving the home country lessens; for a time one is an optimist.

Haiti is to be seen on the port horizon; I think of Hawaii or Honolulu and am not sure of the geography of any of the three. Again visions of lagoons and dusky beauties rise to my mind; but instead a bleak barren coast with scrubby mountains, sun-baked and ugly, disillusion me; and to-morrow we arrive at Jamaica.

6 a.m. and Jamaica on the starboard bow; up we tumble on deck in our pyjamas with glasses closely held; our new home is in view. There are some palm trees along the coast, plantations can be seen amongst the mountains, but it is the same scrubby mountainous country we had seen in Haiti; we looked at each other and then lowered our eyes.

Disillusioned, and it is entirely our own fault.
Our visions had been of our own making, and the illustrated pamphlets for tourists are as often as not misleading.

This is the true vision of Jamaica on arriving, and to those who are shortly going there, there is now no need for disillusionment. The south coast of Jamaica is not a land of palm trees and beauties, it is a low coast gradually rising to the foothills of the Blue Mountains, Jamaica's main mountain range; the plain from coast to foothills is the Liguanea Plain, with Kingston Harbour at its foot, and you are going to live on this Liguanea Plain, and at times you are going to be very hot and uncomfortable on it.

There are palm trees, blue lagoons and luscious beauty in Jamaica, but all these beauties are on the north side of the island, and a whole day's journey off.

We are now entering Kingston Harbour and passing Port Royal, once the wickedest city in the world, the home of pirates and cut-throats, so wicked that the gods sank it under the sea. The modern Port Royal, once a popular station with Gunners, is now the isolated home of 3 officers, 2 wives and 20 other ranks. Lying at the end of the Palisadoes, along which no road is yet built, it is completely isolated from the mainland, and the only communication is by an infrequent boat service across the harbour. No R.A.M.C. officer is stationed there now, the civilian port medical officer having taken over the work.

We steam slowly up the harbour and reach Kingston, and our voyage is over.

Kingston is a bad beginning, a hot, noisy, crowded town full of motors and trams; and the sight of negroes and negresses in full European kit, overdressed and full of swank and obviously very much your brothers and sisters, does not impress you.

One warning before it is forgotten. Do not swear at a Jamaica negro when you are motoring; he will make you want to swear and curse, he will break every rule of the road and make your hair stand on end; he is the worst motor driver in the world; but shut your mouth, for if you don't you will hear such a string of words that will drown your mild explosion and reduce you to impotent anger. Again, do not be disillusioned, the black and you are equal in Jamaica with odds on the black, and the best thing is to make up your mind to this at once, it will save you much distress in the future.

You have arrived, and the next question is where to live. There was no quarter for us in Up Park Camp, where the quarters question is always a difficult one. There are three R.A.M.C. officers in Jamaica and there are only two quarters available, one for the S.M.O. and one for the D.A.D.H. I was neither. There are hotels of all sorts in Kingston; we went to one of the best and stayed there one week; we had one small room with a bathroom with no hot water laid on and indifferent food, and my bill was £25 odd.
There are also boarding houses in Kingston, and this is my experience of one of them.

We were advised to go and live at a boarding house in the suburbs of Kingston, which had a good reputation.

I had heard from a distance, when living in the hotel, the howling of dogs and crowing of cocks, but their sounds from a distance had been comparatively melodious, although I had heard that in the city their concerts were of ill-repute.

Now I had got to a suburb where little villas lay thickly around, and each villa had one or two dogs and numerous cocks of the crowing variety. I cannot describe the pandemonium at night; each dog is sent out into the garden when the residents retire to bed; each dog begins to howl soon after; the cocks crow three times a night, at 12 o'clock, 2 a.m., and 4 a.m., so the Bible tells you; I found they crowed considerably more than “thrice.” Sleep was quite impossible, and nights became hideous.

The landlady was apologetic, but obstinate. “We must be light sleepers.” “Other people don’t mind it.”

I had to take more active steps, and did a frontal attack on the villas, where I interviewed owners of dogs and cocks; some were polite, others the opposite; from the last I was threatened with the police. I had already been to the police station, but was told that Jamaica had no “Law of Nuisances.” Coming to an impasse, and my nerves being shattered with sleeplessness and irritability, I retired from the unequal contest, and left the boarding house with two deaf old ladies to keep up its reputation.

I have heard since that this dog howling and cock crowing is world-renowned, and had filled the local lunatic asylum with “killers.” I can well imagine it; I was nearly a “killer” myself.

There is now a luxurious new hotel, “The Constant Spring Hotel,” five miles out of Kingston, which was not built when I arrived, and where luxury and comfort can be found. We lived there for six weeks before we left the island; it is expensive, but is well worth the expense, and if we ever returned to Jamaica we should go straight there.

Up Park Camp lies some two miles out of Kingston, on the Liguanea Plain. It is neither “Up” nor a “Park”; it is a small cantonment with no park-like propensities. It has three modern quarters, and one of these is the S.M.O.’s; the remainder of the quarters were put up after the earthquake, and sent out in bits from Boulton and Pauls (this is a fact). They have been put on concrete foundations, and some have concrete verandahs and balconies, and concrete is not good in the heat. They are all two-storied, and some people say they are earthquake proof; others differ. The earthquake shocks we experienced whilst living in them inclined us to the latter view, and I am certain that a good hurricane would blow them away in a cloud of dust.

A quarter was allotted to us soon after our arrival, as there was one married officer below strength in the station. It was not one of the best,
and some people said it was the worst; it was, I really believe, the true cause of our dislike of the Liguanea Plain and Up Park Camp, for if one is never comfortable how can one be contented?

Servants are cheap in Jamaica. You keep a cook at 12s. a week, a “butleress” at 12s. a week, a washer at 10s. a week, and a boy who looks after your garden and car at 12s. a week. The cooks we found distinctly trying, but taken all round they are not too bad.

A car must be bought at once, for without one you are powerless to do anything; it is far too hot to bicycle, and the distances are great. I bought a secondhand six-cylinder Buick Saloon, and had no trouble with it during the whole of my stay in Jamaica. It was, however, heavy on petrol, and clumsy and heavy on the bad mountain roads, and I believe if I went to Jamaica again, I should buy a Ford.

The climate of the Liguanea Plain is nearly always hot and trying—January, February and March are pleasant, but the remaining months are unpleasant; however, there is no great heat to contend with. The sea breeze in the hot weather arrives daily about 10 a.m., and by 11 a.m. or 12 noon, blows all before it, and in your quarters, where you must leave doors and windows open for the sake of coolness, papers, rugs, and even pictures race before it.

Mosquitoes, at any rate in our quarter, were the most wicked and persistent I have ever met; they bit us night and day, and nets, oils and unguenents were of little avail. Every officer in the garrison except two, and every wife except my wife, got dengue in the year.

However, let us turn to brighter things. Jamaica can give you plenty of varied recreation.

There is a small garrison club in Up Park Camp and a large civilian club, the Liguanea Club, within easy reach of camp.

My advice is to join the Liguanea Club at once, where the civilian element will broaden your outlook and enlarge your horizon and where the genial secretary will do all he can to introduce you to his friends. There are some very charming residents and I can say this, that most of the pleasure and happiness we had in Jamaica was due to the kindness and generosity of these residents, who were and are real good friends. You will get to know them gradually; some of them have lovely homes and you may be lucky to get to know some planters who will be only too delighted to put you up for week-ends and show you the real Jamaica life.

First class tennis can be had in Jamaica, there are good courts at the Officers’ Club and the Liguanea Club, and most of the big houses of the residents have good courts. The new Constant Spring Golf Course will, I understand, be one of the best courses in the West; it is certainly a most beautiful course and some of the views from it are delightful.

There is polo in Jamaica and it is cheap; but it seems on the downward grade. Once or twice a year there are tournaments in Kingston between the three or four clubs in the island and some of the planters are really
Some Impressions of Jamaica and Bermuda

good players. The Garrison Club still exists, but there are only four or five players and the standard of station polo was very poor indeed.

Bathing is, I think, the best form of recreation to indulge in, and although there is no bathing beach on the South coast which is safe from sharks, there are two first-class open baths within easy reach of the Camp, the Bournemouth baths and the Myrtle Bank bathing pool.

Bournemouth is a large open-air swimming bath lying a few miles east of Kingston and on the harbour shore; it is the finest open air bath I have ever seen; there you can swim in warm sea water, sun bathe, drink beer, dance and see many wondrous sights, for it is the mecca of all tourists in Kingston, and on Sunday the rendezvous of all the Kingston beauties, and a wondrous sight it is at times, with a good dancing floor upstairs it fulfils functions other than swimming. To take one's supper there on a warm moonlight night with a cheery party, and dance and swim, is an event to remember.

Myrtle Bank Hotel, the fashionable rendezvous of Kingston, has a new open-air bath at the end of its garden, a beautiful little bath with clear warm water from which most of the salt has been extracted and which is consequently pleasant to frolic in. It is more select than Bournemouth, the prices being higher, and here we went almost every Sunday morning and made up bathing parties, and perhaps these Myrtle Bank mornings are amongst the pleasantest recollections of Jamaica.

As yet we have only mentioned two cantonments, Up Park Camp and Port Royal; there is the Hill Station, Newcastle, also to discuss.

Newcastle lies twenty-five miles from Kingston and some 2,500 feet up the Blue Mountains; it is plainly seen from anywhere on the Liguanea Plain. It is reached by a fairly good road which requires care and skill to drive on; it is not unlike the road from Peshawar to Cherat, but not so well kept.

Before the West India Regiment was disbanded, the British troops were all stationed at Newcastle with the exception of a small detachment at Up Park Camp and the Gunners at Port Royal, now Newcastle is only used as a change-of-air station in the summer months. One medical officer is always on duty there from April until October, and it is usually arranged for medical officers to go up in rotation. It is essential for everyone to get a good change of air at Newcastle every summer. Life there is very similar to that in any small Indian hill station. There are beautiful views; the quarters are far better than those in Up Park Camp; you can laze, and the freedom from heat and mosquitoes enables you to read and think. There are a few charming walks, one tennis court and a swimming bath at Greenwich, within walking distance from Newcastle. You look down on the Liguanea Plain below and thank God for small comforts.

Do not think for one minute that Kingston and Up Park Camp are the real Jamaica.
Parts of Jamaica are beautiful and the views from Newcastle can be classed amongst them, but if you want to see the Jamaica that tourists come to see and rave about, you must go further afield; motor along the coast road to Morant Bay and on to Annotto Bay, take the road to Spanish Town and thence to Moneague, lying amongst hill scenery not unlike that at Ooty, then on to Shaw Park Hotel, lying just above the luscious tropical vegetation of Ocho Rios Bay. We found it hot and sticky and relaxing here in November, but the bathing in Dunn’s River just below the hotel is worth a visit. Then motor along the coast road from Ocho Rios to Montego Bay, and the beauty of this road will, I am sure, entrance you. Montego Bay is the Lido of Jamaica, and promises to be a society rendezvous in the near future, the bathing there approaching that found in Bermuda, and it is said to be safe from sharks.

On receiving orders to leave Jamaica and proceed to Bermuda we left few regrets behind us.

We were definitely glad to leave Up Park Camp and the Liguanea Plain, its unpleasant climate and its narrow monotonous existence; also the discomforts of our Army quarters had wearied us.

Some people like Jamaica as a station, but I fancy most of the good impressions of the country were made when there were more troops there and before the West India Regiment was disbanded. There is now half a battalion of Infantry, a few Gunners and a few of the auxiliary services, perhaps there are twenty officers and about fifteen officers’ wives. It is difficult for all of us in such a small station, and you will find the same conditions in Bermuda.
Some Impressions of Jamaica and Bermuda

(2) BERMUDA.

It is rather absurd to attempt to write an account of Bermuda after being only four months in the island, but if my impressions are to help those who are soon arriving, they must be written at once.

We travelled from Jamaica to Bermuda by the P.S.N. Co.'s "Orbita," one of the "O" boats which touch Bermuda once a month and occasionally call in at Kingston. They are good boats but they take fourteen days to reach home, as they call at ports in Spain and France. Recently a new boat, the "Reina Del Pacifico," has been added to the line, which will, I understand, do the homeward journey in ten days. The alternative home route is by New York.

The approach to Hamilton, the capital and port of Bermuda, is a difficult one. The "Orbita" steamed along the south coast and anchored off "Five Fathom Hole," which is the opening in the coral reef which surrounds Bermuda. A tug came out and took us off, and coasting along the north shore, landed us at Hamilton. What impressed me first was the beauty of the colouring of the sea, vermilion and cobalt, and the transparent depths, and the hundreds of little white houses that seemed to cover the islands. I also realized from the abundance of cedar trees and the absence of palms that here was a subtropical and not a tropical country. The climate was fresh and delightful, and the approach through the "narrrows" to Hamilton was really beautiful. Here was a very different country to Jamaica.

We had received a wireless the day before landing, asking us to stay
with an old friend who was acting Adjutant to the local Gunners and stationed at St. George's. He had come out to meet us on the launch, and when we anchored outside St. George's we had been within a stone-throw of his house; now we had a twelve mile drive to return there. We thus escaped all the difficulties and unpleasantness of having to double up or go into temporary quarters, which was great luck.

The first thing that impresses everyone on landing at Hamilton is the absence of motors; the sight of buggies and carts makes you feel that you have gone back a hundred years, which, in fact, you have done. It was a peculiar experience driving those twelve miles to St. George's as the clop clop of the horse along the road (now well nigh forgotten) and the familiar smell of harness and carriage recalled old memories of bygone days. It was so quiet and pleasant and so different to our arrival in Jamaica.

![Fig. 8.—St. David's Island, Bermuda.](image)

St. George's is the old capital of Bermuda and lies on a separate island connected by a long causeway to the main island; it used to be the home of a brigade of heavy Gunners who garrisoned the several forts there. These are now obsolete and falling to pieces; there are now only two officers and twelve men who are the nucleus of the local Militia; they have a civilian doctor to look after them.

My friend's house was situated almost at the end of the island and had a lovely view over St. George's Harbour, an inland sea on one side, and at the foot of his garden on the other side was the open sea. His home is completely isolated and is one and a half hours drive from Hamilton; he has been stationed there over four years, and yet he wished to stay one
extra year. Here was a family that enjoyed Bermuda and was happy there, but on inquiry I found that he took his full amount of leave every year!

Now notice a different tale. The day came far too quickly for me to start work, and I drove back to Prospect to take over my quarters there and also the hospital.

Prospect is the cantonment of Bermuda; it lies on a ridge above and to the north-east of Hamilton, the barracks being situated to the south and the hospital overlooking the North Shore. The bungalow I took over from my predecessor was next the hospital and had a lovely view over the North Shore, as had the hospital. All the troops now in Prospect are two companies of Infantry, and sufficient or more than sufficient ancillary services to look after them. There are three R.A.M.C. officers in Bermuda, an S.M.O., D.A.D.H., and one other. I was now the S.M.O. Soon after meeting the three M.O.'s I realized that their outlook on life in Bermuda was entirely different to that of my Gunner friend, they all three thoroughly disliked the place. I was told that little was good in the island, that the climate was trying, hot and enervating; that the expenses were very high, the domestic difficulties almost impossible; that there was little recreation and little work; that transport was difficult and that society was most limited. I had not then read a book called "The Lily of Bermuda," which described life in Bermuda immediately after the War. I have since read it, and I realize that the impressions of our M.O.'s were those described in this book. I must say at once that to a newcomer who had seen only the best parts of the local life, these views were a distinct damper. After four months in the island, although I cannot quite reconcile myself to their views, I can see the disadvantages of the station, but I can also see its advantages.

Within a week we were comfortably installed in our bungalow, and were charmed with it. After all in this best of possible worlds everything is by comparison, and the contrast of this bungalow to our Jamaica cowshed was striking; here was a little home in which we could live in comfort and take a pride, and after all, that is half the battle.

The servant question is undoubtedly a difficult problem in the island, but with two batmen provided, one to work indoors and one to look after the horse and carriage, a nucleus was there to start on. We heard of a negro cook who, in due course, arrived. She was huge and evil looking, and my wife was so frightened of her that she told her to go immediately. This to a Bermudian cook, who in her own estimation is a woman of great importance, was an unparalleled affront; she had brought her kit with her and meant to stay. When she got her congé she was speechless; I was delighted. We have got on extraordinarily well without her, with daily outside help. My advice to future arrivals is not to get into the hands of these native cooks if it can be avoided.

Transport I agree is very difficult, but the way out is a bicycle. The island is very small and to bicycle from one end to the other will only take
you two to three hours, but it is trying in the hot weather and the hills are troublesome.

Carriage travelling is slow and boring, but in this island time is no object. There have been two very serious carriage accidents this year, one proving fatal; it is most necessary to have a steady horse and a careful driver, and also to have thorough overhauls of harness. My horse is broken-winded and old, but rather than have an untamed horse I am hanging on to him. We always get there in the course of time.

A railway is now under construction in the island. There are two parties, a Pro-Railway and an Anti-Railway party; I, from a general survey of viaducts and bridges, am decidedly Anti.

As a new-comer and an inhabitant of the modern world, I cannot understand why Austin sevens with a speed limit, and broadened and asphalted roads, would not solve the whole transport question and save the necessity of this railway. You cannot permanently put back the clock. There are several motor lorries in the country, and I agree they throw up clouds of dust and go much too fast, but both these difficulties could be obviated.

Now as to climate. April, May and June produced the most delightful climate; when the south wind blew it became sticky, but when the wind was in the north it was cool and exhilarating. I agree that in mid-July it is at times sticky and enervating, but it has not been unpleasant yet and it cools down again in October. There can be no comparison between this climate and that of Jamaica.

I do not consider the expenses in Bermuda very high. The initial costs are high, as electric apparatus of all kinds, including an electric refrigerator, have to be purchased; but there is no car to buy. As to running expenses, food is dear, but stores are much the same as in Jamaica; vegetables if bought are expensive, but everyone grows their own. Washing is dear and wages are exorbitant, but apart from this, with the absence of a car and with free forage for your horse and a very small club bill, I have found that my monthly expenses are the same as, or lower than, those incurred in Jamaica.

If you are going to enjoy Bermuda, it is essential for you to enjoy bathing, boating, sailing and picnicking. The bathing is superb, Bermuda being able to produce the most beautiful bathing beaches imaginable; there are bathing beaches to be found all round the island, each producing a white soft sandy beach and clear crystal water. Here you can lie and laze all day, sun bathe, swim and picnic. One or two, including Elba and Coral Beaches, are the rendezvous of American tourists and full of wondrous sights and beauties, others are quiet, peaceful and deserted. Bermuda is indeed a gem of its kind; its coastal scenery would, I think, be hard to find paralleled anywhere. Little bays, each of which is a treasure, are tucked away in odd places.

Sailing also is good. I have been out many times and can appreciate what an enjoyable time I could have if I were an expert at the art, but I
am only of use as a deck hand. Motor boating and speed boating are amongst the other aquatic hobbies you can indulge in, but it is essential that you should know the geography and various passages amongst the islands first; it is tricky work until you do.

There is a tennis club in Prospect where five good courts are available, but I know of no civilian club to join.

Golf courses are numerous, several are first class, amongst them the Mid-Ocean which is, I believe, one of the best in the Western world. They are expensive.

There is no polo and no riding worth indulging in on the island, and although Bermuda can produce a Hunt Club whose activities are, I believe, at times, alarming, and where I hear pink coats and top hats are de rigueur, I propose to be a looker on. There is no shooting, but sea fishing is, I believe, good.

If you are a keen dancer you can dance every night of the week at a different hotel. Every hotel, and there are dozens, has a dance floor and orchestra, to which admittance is free, and in the season, the Hamilton, Princess, Bermudiana and Belmont Manor Hotels are well worth a visit even if you are, like me, only a looker on. Some amazing sights can be seen.

There is one point on which I am certainly in agreement with the three M.O’s. mentioned before, that is, that the society in Bermuda is limited. In a tiny cantonment such as Prospect it is essential to have outside friends, but the population is mostly made up of American tourists, many of whom only come for a short holiday.

I have so far failed to find out what the resident population consists of; this is a great disadvantage in comparison with Jamaica where, as I have stated before, such great hospitality and friendship was shown us by the local residents.

No change of environment is possible in such a tiny island as Bermuda; it is, I believe only twenty square miles in area. To be cooped up in such a small island for three years with a handful of troops and limited society is not an outlook to look forward to, however beautiful the island may be.

In both Jamaica and Bermuda life must not be taken seriously; in both islands life approaches at times the comic opera standard. Fifteen months in Jamaica were more than enough for me, and I quite expect the same time here will find me equally anxious for a move. At present I am content with small mercies and am still revelling in the beauty of the island and am living very much by and in myself and dispensing with other things, but I look forward to bigger places.