

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## QUEER THINGS ENCOUNTERED IN JAMAICA.

Kingston, Jamaica,  
October 9, 1898.

Whatever may be lacking in Jamaica, it is certainly not hotels, for this small island has more big caravansaries than any other place indebted to Sir Henry Blake for them, as well as for many other comforts. The energetic governor general determined to attract capital and immigration to this long-neglected corner of her majesty's domain.

With that end in view, he got up a colonial exhibition, about six years ago, for the purpose of advertising to the world the resources of the British West Indies and Jamaica in particular. He believed that principal reason why for many years the tides of winter travel had set strongly to ward some of the neighboring islands, leaving this one almost unnoticed, was due to the want of proper accommodations. So, just before the great fair, he caused an extraordinary number of large and costly hotels to be erected, equipped with every modern convenience. Financially, the exposition was not a success, as it involved a considerable deficit in running expenses, which subscribers to the guaranty fund were required to make good; but it was attended by upwards of 200,000 foreign visitors, and a "boom" in Jamaica products resulted, which has not yet died out. The big hotels served their purpose during the fair, but most of them have since become mere empty barracks. Among the dozen or so in Kingston which still manage to sustain a precarious existence, the one nearest the landing place is most generally patronized by visiting Americans. Another farther up town, makes a special claim to being "Northern" in style and cuisine. As for myself, I have not come so far to get a weak imitation of what may be had every day at home, always preferring when in Rome to do as the Romans. There is a quaint and unpretentious inn near the outskirts of the town, where in it is a pleasure to "put up"—and incidentally to put up with its superabundant grease and garling odors. Set in the midst of a tropical garden, surrounded by high walls, like a convent—which I believe it was in some past day—its cooking is Creole and its ways tropically Jamaican.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing you will meet in rambling around the streets of Kingston is the endless variety of curious headgear. A certain amount of license in regard to clothing, or rather the scarcity of it, is always allowed in tropical countries; but no clothing at all for the younger members of society, seems like carrying liberty a little too far. Each Jamaican is a law unto himself in the matter of style, and although he preambulates the earth in fewer garments than decency actually requires, his most original efforts are expended in fantastic head-covering. Hardly any two persons wear exactly the same fashion of hat, cap or turban, and anything, however atrocious, is quite "correct" here. The most picturesquely ugly in design and general appearance are the pith hats and helmets, sported by English colonial officials and their haughty or humble imitators among the blacks and creoles. For men whose business keeps them much in the sun, these pith hats are the best possible protection, being an inch thick, but literally "light as a cork." They are in all shapes and sizes—some like the ordinary police-man's helmet, but with an abnormal development of brim; others measure from 20 to 25 inches, fore and aft; others are circular discs, the depth of a dish pan, with a small,

flat crown; others huge pieces of pith, like an exaggerated clam-shell and no crown at all; and others resemble nothing under heaven but a big snow-shovel. They are usually covered with linen, white brown or green, twisted around the crown, festooned, or tied in true-lovers knots, according to the taste of the wearer, with long ends dangling down the back or flapping in the breeze. These nightmares of the hatter's imagination are never made to fit snugly, but are supplied with an inner frame-work, to allow a wide space all around the head for circulation of air. Thus a man who wears a number 7 Derby requires a number 11 pith-hat, in which his cranium looks as if caught in a trap, and gives him the appearance of an over-grown mushroom when seen from the rear. The swellest Jamaicans affect the big white sombrero, with a highly-colored silk scarf tied around, with floating ends. The West India Coolie men, lounging at the street corners, have their heads swathed in immense white turbans, while the coolie women wear several yards of white cloth, picturesquely draped over their shining blue-black hair and hanging down behind. The negroes envelop their bushy wool in bandana handkerchiefs of gaudiest hues, and on top of the turban perch any sort of old hat, male or female, straw, felt or pith, they can lay hands on. These vedore women content themselves a twist of straw, worn like a crown when at work; and when off duty they supplement it with half a gourd-shell, the size and shape of an inverted wash-basin. On Sundays and other fete days, the colored ladies of quality often appear in truly marvelous creations of millinery, but always as a secondary adornment to the bandana. Occasionally one meets a proud darkey under a tall silk hat of antique design, or an old and battered plug with long streamers of bright calico. The policemen wear little round peaked caps, as funny as those sported by circus clowns; and the prettiest of all is the zouave turban of red and white, with yellow tassel, which is so extremely becoming—to the black soldiers.

Another thing that fills you with amazement is the queer gibberish that is spoken in Jamaica. You naturally expect to hear the English language spoken in this old English colony; and they consider it English and would feel greatly insulted if you intimated that it is not of the best. The dialect of the upper classes is bad enough, with their "bobs" and "sang-witches" and "cawnts," et cetera, but never was the king's English so atrociously murdered as by the Jamaica negroes. All their sentences appear to be constructed on the "baby-talk" plan, and words wholly intelligible to the new-comer roll out of their thick lips in an oily stream. You will get a fair sample of it the minute you set foot on shore, among the crowd of darkies clamoring to carry your things. I singled out a coal-black fellow in a clean white suit, because he looked the most intelligent; and in reply to my question what he would charge to convey a trunk, two handbags and a camera to the custom house, he said, "Marm Lady! I dat quick-quickie fe quattle fe lil' tings an' tanner fe tunk." What on earth he meant I had no idea, until after several repetitions, each yelled louder than before as if by that means to arouse my dull understanding, an obliging bystander, familiar with what is known as "Quashie English," translated the porter's words to signify that he would do the job very quickly for "quattle,"

or one-quarter of an English six-pence (three cents in our money), for carrying each of the small pieces, and "tanner," a six-pence, for the trunk.

The poorest of these negroes are extremely polite to one another, as well as to strangers. It is amusing to hear a half-naked fellow, hatless and shoeless, bowing low to another in the same condition and saying with the air of a Chesterfield: "How do dis morn, sar? Hope um do be well, sar." The response invariably is, "Quite well, um, dis morn, sar; tank um, sar." The word "um" is not understood, but its use is constant in every sentence and "sar" or "marm-lady" are never omitted. Seeing women breaking stone on the roadside, coaling ships in the harbor, working in the fields and doing all the business of marketing, you wonder what the men do for a living. It is not true that the men are altogether idle, though the women perform most of the labor which calls for strength and endurance. The colored "lords of creation" in this part of the world are willing to be dressed up in the becoming uniform of soldiers and glory in the gorgeous tunic, scarlet jacket and blue zouave breeches of barbaric splendor.

They will even perform the light functions of the police force—although it is said to be generally necessary to thump a Jamaican policeman on the head to wake him up when a murder is being committed under his nose. One finds native men on the railroads, too, apparently enjoying the free rides as conductors and engineers; also as telegraph operators, glass-diamond bedecked clerks in shops and hotels and overseers of the so-called "weaker sex" who are breaking stone and digging ditches. To tell the truth, the Amazonians look better able to do hard work than the lankie, undersized men. The blackest and brawniest of them challenge admiration when met on the road, huge burdens balanced on their heads, loose garments tucked high around the hips, arms swinging, striding along with the graceful motion which freedom of body and limb alone can give. With vigorous arms they belabor the poor little donkeys, laden from ears to tail with Guinea grass for its own dinner and a variety of articles, animate and inanimate, either of purchase or of sale. The splendid roads, which are the pride and boast of the island, were originally built by convicts, and the work of keeping them in repair is not difficult. You soon cease to feel pity for the females who are doing it when you observe how contented, even hilarious, they are. Here and there along the roadside they set up four poles and thatch them with palm-leaves, to afford shelter from the sun; and under these primitive huts they sit, happy as any queen on her throne, making a frolic of pounding up the easily crumbled volcanic rock, laughing and gossiping all day long. On these rural roads you meet a great many more pedestrians than vehicles. Most of the latter are queer, three-wheeled carts, drawn by three bullocks abreast; or by three mules, or three horses; or maybe it is a badly mixed team of horse, ox and mule harnessed side by side.

Nowadays every Jamaica negro prides himself on descent or connection with the Maroons, who murdered the French and defied the English, in 1651, claiming the famous old Cadjoe as one of his progenitors and ignoring every other color in his blood but black or brown. Yet the truth is that the blood of almost every nation mingles in his veins. While the coconut head, crowned with stiffest wool predominates, every kink of the hair and color of the eyes may be found, with almost every shade of complexion, from ebony to good Jersey cream.

Among the most singular people in Jamaica are the colored Jews, who