

CORRESPONDENCE.

RAMBLINGS IN AND AROUND KINGSTON.

Kingston, Jamaica, Oct. 6.—It would illustrate more forcibly than this the be hard to find another city which illustrates the oft-quoted phrase, "Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." Spread out on its sloping hill-side, in the far recesses of a shining lagoon, it is seen by the traveler on the deck of an incoming steamer for hours before the circuitous passage is traversed; and all the time the untroubled blue of sea and sky conspires with an impressive background of mountains wreathed in mists and clothed in changing colors, to transfigure the old town into surpassing loveliness. But once ashore, the visitor is speedily disenchanted. He finds an unpicturesque little city, dull and shabby to a degree, with few trees and none of the tropical vegetation which he has a right to expect in this latitude; ill-designed buildings, mostly of wood, in varying stages of dinginess and dilapidation, and narrow streets fouled by the slime of open drains. Kingston has been many times laid low by fires, hurricanes and earthquakes; and after each disaster has been rebuilt in the same ramshackle, inartistic fashion. Less than twenty years ago a great conflagration swept the business portion of the city, and since then three severe windstorms have wrought additional havoc. The debris of either has not been entirely removed; and today one sees everywhere new buildings of the most commonplace architecture set, hap-hazard, among ruins.

One wonders if the saying, "An empty house is better than a bad tenant," did not originate in Jamaica. At any rate, here are a surprising number of unoccupied houses—and the English law says that empty buildings are not taxed in any way, tenants paying the water-rate and all assessments. The streets of Kingston are poorly paved, if paved at all, dimly lighted at night by gas in infrequent lamps, and generally deep in dust notwithstanding an ineffectual attempt to sprinkle them. Although our English cousins have done badly by Jamaica in obliterating, so far as possible, its natural charm, and its capital does not compare in picturesque beauty with those of the French and Spanish, or even the Danish islands—at least they are entitled to credit for the best system of wharves in the West Indies. While in most of these Southern ports passengers are put to the danger, annoyance and expense of a long canoe ride between ship and shore, at Kingston they have nothing to do but walk over a gang-plank; and vessels, coming close up to the wharves that line the water front, may receive and discharge their cargoes as easily as at New York.

The instant a steamer approaches Kingston, a singular procession swarms down upon her. They are the far-famed female stevedores—hundreds of them in line—each with a great basket of coal on her woolly head. When filled, the baskets weigh each from 50 to 80 pounds; but the women swing them lightly to their crowns and march off erect as statues, laughing and shouting jokes at one another as if it were a merry frolic to "coal" a vessel on a blazing summer's day. Planks are thrown at a steep incline between the ship's deck and the coal yard. Up one plank and down the other they prance like young race horses, under their heavy burdens, keeping up the jolly clamor all day long, as if weariness were a thing unknown. Seven English shillings is the day's

wages for each of these willing beasts of burden and the captain says that the earnings of most of them will be spent by their lords and masters for rum. He did not say husbands—for although there is a superfluity of clergymen in this British island, the marriage institution does not greatly prevail among the lower classes. "Lords and masters" exactly expresses it, for each of these tractable, industrious ebony females is owned, body and soul, by some lazy darkey whom she practically supports, whether legally married to him or not; and to their credit be it said that, as a rule, the couples thus informally united remain faithful to each other through life. At first, judging by the numbers met in the streets, the traveler is inclined to think that there are a great many more women than men in Jamaica. But the census does not say so. The females are much more in evidence, because hereabouts they are by no means "the gentler sex," but do most of the work that requires strength and physical endurance. They make decidedly more noise, too, and are jollity and politeness personified and do not seem to have a care in the world.

The principal landing-place at Kingston leads into Victoria market, at the foot of King street, the main thoroughfare of the city. Directly in front is a handsome bronze statue of Admiral Rodney, who achieved the victory over De Grasse, in 1782, you remember. This market, built a quarter of a century ago, is the pride of the island. It is clean and well ventilated, with stone floors and stalls for meat and vegetables. Printed placards were posted all around, warning buyers against being cheated in weight. Among the heaps and cords of fruits and vegetables, the yams for which Jamaica is famous, are particularly noticeable, some of them being almost large enough for backlogs in an old-fashioned fire-place. The vendors are mostly women—fat, black and greasy, but topped with the gaudiest turbans under the sun, so that a bevy of them, squatted on the ground together, looks like a bed of brilliant posies. Occupants of stalls pay a certain fixed price per diem, proportioned to the quality of meat or vegetables sold, those dealing in the best qualities paying the highest rent—thereby, as it appears to the unsophisticated, putting a premium on inferior food-supplies.

Beyond the market-place, King street runs up the slope to the parade ground—a good-sized square, which Queen street crosses at right angles. Harbour street (spelled with an unnecessary u, because "so English," you know), runs parallel with Queen street, but nearer the water-front, and is the chief retail business section; while Port Royal street, farther up the hill, is the wholesale merchants' quarter. Not one of Kingston's public buildings is worth a visit, unless it be the small public library and miniature museum, on East street. The museum contains a fair collection of the animal and plant life of the island and a few relics and curiosities. Among the latter is the cracked bronze bell from the Port Royal's church tower, where its last dirge was rung by the swaying of the great earthquake which killed nearly all the inhabitants of that then flourishing city.

Another gruesome curio is an iron cage with cruel spikes in it, such as plantation overseers sometimes used in slavery times. Refractory human chattels had their hands and feet securely tied and were then suspended inside the

cage by a spike thrust under the ribs; the door was locked to prevent rescue, and the wretch left to die by slow torment, as a terrible warning to his fellows. The placard says that when this cage was found, there were three human skeletons in it.

Probably it is unnecessary to state that these and other historic horrors, which rivalled those of the same period in Demerara and Santo Domingo, occurred during the Spanish occupancy of Jamaica, and that their English successors soon abolished slavery.

For a city of more than 40,000 inhabitants, Kingston has remarkably few attractions. Though one of the largest centers of population in the British possessions in tropical America, it is the most down at the heels and forlorn-looking of Southern cities. Even shabby old Santiago de Cuba before the war was not so badly paved and lighted and its sanitary conditions more utterly neglected. The longer you remain in this island, which nature made so lovely, the more you are impressed with the fact that, so far as yet exemplified, Anglo-Saxon civilization is a failure in the tropics, compared with that of the Latin races.

Everything in Kingston is extremely English, or rather colonial, reminding you of Quebec—from the vice admiralty and chancery registrar's office to the big law-library, dedicated to H. R. H., the Prince of Wales, and the Victoria hospital, with its 300 beds. The best building, architecturally, is the court house, and that is ugly as a nightmare. In one of the colonial offices you may see a curious piece of tapestry, representing the royal and island arms, which used to be carried as a banner before the governors on state occasions. Following King street through the parade ground, you come to quaint English Episcopal church, the oldest on the island, erected in 1892. In the quiet God's-acre behind it is the grave of Admiral Benbow, who died nearly ten centuries ago. Another odd-looking tomb, like a Dutch bake-oven, bears the name of William Wall and the date 1699.

The streets of Kingston, especially those in the vicinity of the broad open space formed by the intersection of King and Queen streets, are swarming with negro soldiers, the First West India regiment, in brilliant zouave uniform, all with faces as black and shining as though freshly polished with "Bixbey's best." They are noticeably undersized men, as compared to the American army—not unlike the French Chasseurs d'Afrique in appearance, small but hardy and reputed to be savage fighters. The barracks, on the hills just outside the city, are spacious with extensive grounds. The white troops, a regiment of her majesty's royal Scots, are in Cantonment at New Castle, a picturesque nook far up in the mountains, inaccessible to wheeled vehicles and said to be so delightfully cool that blankets are needed up there every night in the year.

Certainly blankets are not required in the sweltering city, where the thinnest clothing seems a superfluity and people are longing to "sit in their bones." than 80 degrees in the shade at any time in the year, and today it stands at 90. Kingston's up-hill streets are as full of inequalities as were those of Chicago before the great, beneficial fire; therefore if you persist in sight-seeing, it is best to take a cab, or a "keb," as the common vehicle of transport is locally called. They are rather shaky-looking concerns, with rheumatic springs and melancholy looking horses; but they possess the merit of cheapness, the legal tariff being only an English shilling to any part of the city and a dollar an hour for country excursions. If time is not pressing, it might be well