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978-1-108-08343-0 - A New History of Jamaica: From the Earliest Accounts to the Taking of Porto Bello by Vice-Admiral Vernon

Charles Leslie

Excerpt

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A N E W
 H I S T O R Y
 O F
 J A M A I C A.

*In Thirteen Letters from a Gentleman in
 that Island to his Friend in London.*

L E T T E R I.

S I R,



GOOD Ship and easy Gales have at last brought me to this Part of the new World: New indeed in regard of ours, for here I find every thing altered; and, amidst all the Variety which crowds upon my Sight, scarce see a Face that resembles the gay Bloom of a *Briton*. The People seem all sickly, their Complexion is muddy, their Colour wan, and their Bodies meagre; they look like so many CorpSES, and their Dress resembles a Shroud; however, they are

B frank

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2 *A New* HISTORY Letter I.

frank and good-humour'd, and make the best of Life they can. If Death is more busy in this Place than in many others, his Approach is no-where received with a greater Unconcernedness: They live well, enjoy their Friend, drink heartily, make Money, and are quite careles of Futurity. But I'll take another Opportunity to draw their Character, when Time shall increase my Knowledge, and my Acquaintance with them becomes more general.

Our Voyage was pleasant; fair Weather and good Winds made every Hardship easy. The Captain is a Man of Sense; a certain Frankness appears in his Temper, which never fails to gain Esteem; he has none of those ill-natur'd furlly Airs, which are too oft the Foible of those of his Profession; the very Servants were easy under his Command, and scarce a Murmur appeared. When the Sailors used them amiss, they had Access to complain, and were sure of Redress; a better Man I never saw, an easy Friend, an agreeable Companion, of a lively Wit, and penetrating Genius, good without Ostentation, and just without Severity. And here likewise, I cannot forbear to do Justice to another Character; the Surgeon is a young Gentleman of excellent Parts, and great Goodnature, and has all along applied himself to the different Circumstances of the Sick with surprising Art and Patience, sympathized with
their

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their Pains, attended them closely, and used every proper Mean for their Recovery.

There were several Gentlemen Passengers, who understood Men and Manners perfectly well: With such I could not miss to be happy; the Hours slipt easily away, every Day was agreeable, and I did not mind a tedious Voyage.

We had Diversions besides Conversation, lived well, but not high, might command a Glas when we would, and use the same Freedom as if ashore. After a few Weeks sailing, we got into the warm Latitudes, and soon were diverted with many new and surprizing Sights in the watry World, Fishes flying, Dolphins playing, and the huge Grampus's rolling their unweildy Trunks, which could not miss to furnish out an agreeable Amusement. The Sailors prepared their small Harpoons, and soon killed a Dolphin. I was curious to view a Creature I had heard such Fables about: It measured full four Foot, was gross about the Middle, the Belly of a fine yellow Colour, the Back greenish, and, in other respects, not unlike a large Salmon, but distinguished by a Hollow or Sinking-in betwixt the Snout and Top of the Head. It is very delicious Eating when right-prepared, fat, and tastes much like the Turbot. The flying Fish has two long Fins, which serve instead of Wings; tis about the Bigness of a Herring, and of the same Shape. These Fishes keep

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together

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together in large Shoals, and fly in prodigious Numbers to avoid the Bonetta and Dolphin, which prey upon them; they keep no longer above Water than their Wings or Fins are wet, and for this Reason frequently fall on the Deck of Ships, and become an easy Prey to the Sailors, who either eat them, or use them as Bait to catch the Dolphin and Bonetta. The Bonetta I take to be a Species of the Cod; for I could perceive little Difference either in the Shape or Taste; its Skin is not indeed of such a clear silver Colour, nor is it of such a small Size, but in every thing else they are alike.

We had scarce got to the Latitude of thirty Degrees, when we were surpris'd with a Sight of that extraordinary Meteor often seen at Sea, very dangerous to Ships, and whatever happens in its way, called the *Water-spout*. The first Appearance of it is in Form of a deep Cloud, whose upper Part is white, the lower black; from the lower Part hangs, or rather falls, what is properly called the Spout, resembling a conical Tube, biggest above; under this Tube is always a great Boiling and Flying up of the Water, as in a Jet-d'Eau; for some Yards above the Surface of the Sea, the Water stands as a Column, from the Extremity whereof it spreads, and goes off as in a kind of Smoke; frequently the Cone descends so low as to touch the Middle of this Column, and continues for some time conti-
guous

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guous to it, tho' now and then it only points at some Distance, either downright or aslant.

It is often scarce distinguishable whether the Cone or Column appear first, tho' generally the Boiling or Flying up of the Water has the Priority; and this immediately precedes its being formed into a Column. For the most part, the Cone does not appear hollow till towards the End, when the Sea-water is thrown violently up the Middle of it, as Smoke up a Chimney. Soon after this Canal disappears, and the Boiling up of the Water continues some time afterwards, and even till the Spout forms itself, and appears anew, which it will do, on Occasions, several times in a Quarter of an Hour.

The real Cause of an Appearance so uncommon, and so dangerous to approach, is as yet but little known, tho' it is thought with a good Degree of Probability, that they are a Gyration or Whirling of Clouds, impelled by contrary Winds meeting in a Point or Centre, and falling down in a great Tube, somewhat like *Archimedes's* spiral Screw, where the greatest Condensation and Gravitation is by its working whirling Motion, absorbing and raising the Water with a prodigious Force.

The Dissolution of these Spouts may be ascribed to the Weight of the great Quantity of Water they generally take up, which impedes the Rapidity of their Motion, where-

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on their Force and even Existence depends. When they break, they overwhelm whatever is underneath. To prevent the ill Consequences of this, Seamen, when near, endeavour to disturb and break them by Noises, and the firing of great Guns, which puts the adjacent Air into a Tremor and Motion different to, and opposite in some sort to that whereby they are impelled.

I purposely omit the little Gaieties among the Sailors when we reached the Tropic, too trifling for Notice, and too coarse to be repeated; we judged ourselves at this time many hundred Leagues distant from any Shore, and yet were surrounded on all hands by a vast Multitude of Birds. I am told, they are always seen in this Latitude; but where they nest, what their Name, or whence they come, is yet (for aught I know) a Secret; they are pure white, have long Necks and Bills, and are about the Bigness of a Solon Goose.

Soon after we got the Trade Winds, which carried us with an easy Quickness, at the rate of two Leagues, or six Knots, an Hour. These Winds blow constantly between the Tropics from East to West, occasioned by the Sun's daily Progress round that Part of the Globe, and by his Heat rarefying one Part of the Air, while the cooler and heavier presses after. We had a double Advantage; for they not only served to make our Voyage the more pleasant and easy, but likewise to fan

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Letter 1. of JAMAICA. 7

fan us; for by this time the Heat was become almost insupportable. 'Tis impossible to represent the kind Effects of these friendly Gales, or how much they refreshed and relieved us; without this kind Contrivance of indulgent Nature, the warm sultry Regions would be nothing but one continued Defart.

And here it may not be improper to explain more at large the Reasons of this curious Phænomenon, which is of such vast Advantage to Mankind; and I can do it no better, than in the Words of the ingenious *Halley*.

Wind is defined to be the Stream or Current of the Air; and where such Current is perpetual and fixed in its Course, 'tis necessary, that it proceed from permanent unintermitting Causes: Wherefore some have been inclined to propose the diurnal Rotation of the Earth upon its Axis, by which, as the Globe turns Eastward, the loose and fluid Particles of the Air, being so exceeding light, are left behind; so that, in respect of the Earth's Surface, that moves Westward, and becomes a constant Easterly Wind. This Opinion seems confirm'd, because these Winds are found only near the Equinoctial, in those Parallels of Latitude where the diurnal Motion is swiftest; but the constant Calms in the *Atlantic Sea*, near the Equator, the Westerly Winds near the Coast of *Guiney*, and the periodical Westerly *Monsoons*, under the Equator in the

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Indian

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Indian Seas, seemingly declare the Insufficiency of this Hypothesis.

Besides, the Air being kept to the Earth by the Principle of Gravity, would, in time, acquire the same Degree of Velocity that the Earth's Surface moves with, as well in respect of the diurnal Rotation, as of the annual about the Sun, which is about thirty times swifter.

It remains therefore to substitute some other Cause, capable of producing a like constant Effect, not liable to the same Objections, but agreeable to the known Properties of the Elements of Air and Water, and the Laws of the Motion of fluid Bodies: Such a one is the Action of the Sun's Beams upon the Air and Water, as he passes every Day over the Oceans, considered together with the Nature of the Soil, and Situation of the adjoining Continents.

Therefore, according to the Laws of Statics, the Air which is less rarefied or expanded by Heat, and consequently more ponderous, must have a Motion round those Parts thereof which are more rarefied, and less ponderous, to bring it to an *Equilibrium*; also the Presence of the Sun continually shifting to the Westward, and consequently, the Tendency of the whole Body of the lower Air is that way.

Thus a general Easterly Wind is formed, which being impressed upon all the Air of a
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vaſt Ocean, the Parts impel one another, and ſo keep moving till the next Return of the Sun, whereby ſo much of the Motion as was loſt, is again reſtored, and thus the Eaſterly Wind is made perpetual.

From the ſame Principle it follows, that the Eaſterly Wind ſhould, on the North-ſide of the Equator, be to the Northwards of the Eaſt, and in South Latitudes, to the Southwards thereof; for near the Line, the Air is much more rarefied, than at a greater Diſtance from it, becauſe the Sun is twice in the Year vertical there, and at no time diſtant above twenty-three Degrees and one Half; at which Diſtance, the Heat being at the Sine of the Angle of Incidence, is but little ſhort of the perpendicular Ray: Whereas, under the Tropics, tho' the Sun ſtays long vertical, yet he is as long forty-seven Degrees off, which is a kind of Winter, wherein the Air ſo cools, as that the Summer Heat cannot warm it to the ſame Degree with that under the Equator; wherefore the Air towards the Northward and Southward being leſs rarefied than that in the Middle, it follows, that from both Sides it ought to tend towards the Equator. This Motion, compounded with the former Eaſterly Wind, answers all the Phænomena of the general Trade-Winds, which, if the whole Surface of the Globe were Sea, would undoubtedly blow all round the World, as they are found to do in the *Atlantic* and *Ethiopic*

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Ethiopic Oceans; but seeing that so great Continents interpose, and break the Continuity of the Oceans, Regard must be had to the Nature of the Soil, and the Position of the high Mountains, which are the two principal Causes of the several Variations of the Wind from the former general Rule; for, if a Country lying near the Sun, prove to be fiat, sandy and low Land, such as the Desarts of *Libya*, the Heat occasioned by Reflection of the Sun-beams, and the Retention thereof in the Sands, is incredible to those that have not felt it; whereby the Air being exceedingly rarefied, it is necessary, that this cooler and more dense Air should run thitherwards, to restore the *Equilibrium*. This is supposed to be the Cause, why, near the Coast of *Guiney*, the Wind always sets in upon the Land, blowing Westerly instead of Easterly, there being sufficient Reason to believe, that the inland Parts of *Africa* are prodigiously hot, since the Northern Borders thereof were so intemperate, as to give the Ancients Cause to conclude, That all beyond the Tropics was made uninhabitable by Excess of Heat.

From the same Cause it happens, there are so constant Calms in that Part of the Ocean, called the *Rains*; for this Tract being placed in the Middle, between the Westerly Winds blowing on the Coast of *Guiney*, and the Easterly Trade-Winds blowing to the