

Jamaican Journeyings

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World Book Encyclopedia described it thus: "Jamaica is the largest island in the British West Indies. It is a tropical paradise of high mountains, soft breezes, and colorful plants and flowers. Jamaica lies in the Caribbean Sea, ninety miles south of Cuba The island is about 148 miles long and 52 miles wide at its widest point. It is shaped like a turtle, with east-west mountain ridges forming the turtle's back. Nearly 95 percent of the Jamaicans are either of Negro or mixed Negro and white descent. Most of the people earn their living by farm labor. Living standards are low in Jamaica. Many of the people cannot read or write Most of the Jamaicans are Christians"

Prepared by this and similar descriptions, aided by views of many slides of the island, we set off with what we thought was a clear picture of the place we planned to visit for a week. Very soon we found that these limited segments of the total complex did not give to us the true picture that can be obtained only by actual involvement. One has to experience first-hand the hustle and bustle of the city life, the smells, the sights of extreme contrasts between wealth and poverty, the narrowness and roughness of the roads, the denseness and colorfulness of the tropical foliage, the panoramic views, the perils of travel, and the delightful winter weather.

But let's start at the beginning. The ease and swiftness of jet travel is almost unbelievable. Within a matter of a few hours, traveling almost 600 miles an hour, about seven miles in the atmosphere, we left zero weather in Michigan and were met with temperatures in the high eighties in Montego Bay. After a few hectic moments in a confusing noisy, traveler-crowded airport, we were checked out of customs and warmly welcomed by Rev. and Mrs. Lubbers. Soon we were on our way "home" and were trying to adjust ourselves to the fact that the driver's seat was on the right side of this sturdy, compact Ford Cortina and that we were riding on the left side of the road.

The preceding paragraphs were written after the brief trip we took in December of 1969. Our second and slightly longer visit in Jamaica was in April of this year, and this time our anticipations and expectations were more realistic. Our reactions and impressions were very similar, however. We saw a different part of the island and became acquainted with people of whom we heard much but most of whom we previously had not met.

Our activities were quite varied. Having relaxed on Saturday, we were plunged immediately on Sunday into the work of the missionary of the Gospel on the island. A long drive over the winding mountain roads brought us to the community called Cave, on the south side of the island of Jamaica. After a fifteen to thirty minute climb on a rocky foot-path, we reached the small frame structure where thirty-five men, women, and children had gathered to hear the Word preached. It was Easter Sunday, and the audience was responsive and attentive to the Easter sermon. The evening service was held at a place called Waterworks and began at 6 o'clock to enable us to reach home at Coral Gardens before 10 o'clock. The congregation here numbered about fifty. Some of them travelled a long distance on foot or on bicycle in order to attend the services. Our first Sunday night found us very tired physically but greatly refreshed spiritually.

On Tuesday a very important meeting of the Jamaican Trustees of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica was held at the missionary's home. The three ministers, Revs. Elliott, Frame, and Ruddock, as well as the elders, Spence and A. A. Wright, were present, and enacted many significant decisions. One decision concerned the church political structure of the

Protestant Reformed Churches in Jamaica. At the present the churches are more episcopal than presbyterian in structure, but the ministers and elders are becoming more aware of the need for change and are working in this direction. Another encouraging aspect of the meeting was the unanimous decision by the trustees that there should be an informed and educated ministry. The trustees decided that any person desiring the ministry must be trained in the theological school. This would strengthen the cause of the school in Lacovia where four students currently are instructed.

One of the highlights of our visit was the opportunity to visit and speak in this school in Lacovia. The church-school building is constructed of cement blocks. It is adequately furnished with benches, a table, and chairs that were made by one of the students, Trevor Nish, with the help of his brother. Besides Trevor, students Ken Brown, Len Williams, and Alvin Beckford attend classes at the school; Elmena Green, a girl of about 18 years, also attends the classes.

The devotion and dedication of the students impressed us. Each student in turn led devotions and related the Psalm he read with its versification in the Psalter. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, Old Testament History, Church History, and English were the subjects treated that day. We observed students who had progressed academically during the existence of the school. Their attitude and speech showed that they possessed by the Spirit of Christ. We were edified by their prayers and were gratified by the genuine concern they displayed for the welfare of their teacher, who was always mentioned in their prayers. Several visitors attended school besides ourselves that Wednesday. It was another long, busy, and enjoyable day. We felt deeply the strong bonds of Christian love and fellowship. It is our conviction that the most effective and necessary aspect of the work in Jamaica is this theological school in Lacovia. Here native, Jamaican young men, who have all the problems of other Jamaican young men, but are children of God and heirs of the promises, are trained to be witnesses to those who are willing to listen to the preaching of the Word. The future of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica lies exactly in the work done in this school, so that a trained ministry can take the place of those men who are working the churches which have no ministers and in those churches being considered as "mission stations." The fountain head of the Truth in every church is its theological school. This is true in Jamaica too.

After leaving the school on Wednesday afternoon, we stopped at the Fairview Baptist Bible College. This combined high school and college at Ramble is administered by an energetic Baptist missionary, Jim Wilson, a self-pronounced Calvinist. We visited and discussed many theological and practical problems with him and his wife. On Friday we visited the school while classes were in session and met some of the devoted, qualified, and hard-working members of the faculty. The students in the Bible College appear to be working at or about the same level as the students in our school in Lacovia are working, which is early high school level in our Christian school system. Throughout the entire Jamaican educational system, rote memorization is the pedagogical method. One of the faculty in the Bible College noted that most of the Jamaican students discuss and generalize with difficulty. The students in our theological school in Jamaica are being trained to do this, but any student can testify that it is difficult to proceed from the specific and factual to a correct generalization.

Another Sunday soon came, and this time we traveled to the church of Hope Hill, Westmoreland. A rocky, steep, but beautiful drive brought us into the mountains after a two-hour ride from Montego Bay. When we could go no further by car, we were escorted by a group of fellow worshippers, which became larger as we made the forty-five minute walk, single-file up and down the steep, rocky path. We were warmly greeted by an audience of approximately one

hundred. After services led by Rev. Lubbers, who was assisted by his able student, Len Williams, we were served a delicious steak dinner. A Bible discussion class was conducted in the afternoon. Many of the people who attended had remained at the church dinnerless. As we returned down the mountain road toward the seacoast, crowded eight in the small car, a torrential rain fell. Our four extra passengers did not accompany us very far, and the rain did not last long.

On Monday we traveled home convinced that God is using our churches in a marvelous way, but convinced also that we can and must do more.

Our impressions of Jamaica—the churches and work there in particular — were not much different after our second visit than they were after our first visit. Wherever we went, the neatness and cleanliness of the people stood out in sharp contrast to the primitiveness of the living conditions. We found also that the tie that binds the church universal is not hindered by any ethnic barrier. We still believe that many of our Caucasian mores and customs should not be imposed upon the Jamaican Christian; he should be permitted to express himself in his own way. Our task should be to give him the correct content for that expression. There are spiritual problems in Jamaica as well as in our own country, but the history of the church militant is a history of fighting problems and evils which the church triumphant will no longer have to battle.

Jamaica is a field that God has opened to us. We have worked it for almost a decade and have seen fruits. It must continue to be cultivated. We have no other foreign mission. We must evangelize all nations. There is no language barrier here, and the government has not yet shut the door to mission work as has already been done on other islands in the Caribbean. There is still an urgent need for continual instruction in the Truth. There are many labors, the time is short, the laborers are too few.

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