

OLD York Castle - 1876-1906.

At the end of the buggy trail, which wound seven miles up and beyond Finger Post (long since known as Claremont) at an elevation of two thousand feet, lay 'the pile of buildings, which with a large area of tanks housed and served school-boys numbering at the peak one hundred and twenty. On the eminence a long white line (the "Long Stets") might be discerned from away's away, stretching from the buildings at the top down to an old Screw Pine tree, and to be terminated byway of a full stop or punctuation mark by another white building, the "new bath-house".

The main buildings descended in tiers, commencing with the "Piano Case" (of that shape), a two story building, on the lower floor of which was a small dormitory, much sought after, which flanked some of the quarters of the geological Students, whose frugal supper was insecurely protected from the bays by sash windows. On the upper floor of the Piano Case was a master's quarters.

A narrow bridge, which looked down on an old bath led to a lower level on which stool another two storied building, on the upper floor the "new dormitory" on the lower the main school-room. Thence the ground sloped slightly to the most ancient of the buildings, the "old dormitory", over which Dora, (dormitory matron) the kindliest and most indulgent of souls, presided. On the lower floor were the boys' dining room, kitchen &c., and far within, the quarters of the Governor's family, where also the masters were accommodated at meals.

In the basement was the famous "Corridor" which filled some recreational uses in rainy weather, the substantive uses being the first form school room and the storeroom, to which a half partition offered scant protection from the enterprising. There also was our post office. From the Corridor ran the famous long steps.

One left the eminence by a circuitous road, or more often by a down-hill short cut, to Little Bunto to Guava Pasture and the track which led to the distant playing fields. But across Bunto was another bath house served by the village tanks. Their extensive catchments served as excellent hard courts for tennis.

A narrow track led circuitously round a mountain to the extensive playing fields flanked by pimento trees and hidden from view by the fold of the hills. Thence and thereabouts and all about led tracks and untracked ways to woodland and caves and sink holes, the delight of exploring youngsters. The venturesome might squeeze their way into the underground "Barker's Cave", wondering if they might possibly get stuck there, some might collect the most exquisite land shells from the cliffs, or the famous "Blue Emperor" from the decayed Bastard Cedar, some secure iron wood to be smoothed and polished into walking sticks, some obtain lancewood for bow and arrow, others play military games over an extensive terrain, or scrounge for fruit on our ungenerous five hundred acres (ungenerous because so frequently skinned by previous marauders); ;,at always in the season forays to the adjoining orange groves at Rhoden Hall and Barrett's Grass Piece and to the avocado pear groves and huge guavas of Rhoden Hall.

Saturdays were a joy and a delight for we were entirely Free to roam over our five hundred acres; and so far as I knew only the "cow-boys" with their whips stood between us and Rhoden Hall and Barrett's Grass Piece. After breakfast until supper time on Saturdays and every Saturday we were as free as the air. And even after supper until bedtime there were the Saturday night games of "Prisoner and Constable" and opposing armies marching, maneuvering and charging; and every afternoon, of course the more orthodox games, the Friday football and the Saturday cricket match.

(It was York Castle that introduced football into Jamaica).

To return to the top of the hill. Off the New Dormitory on a slightly lower level were the extensive tanks, the playground with parallel and horizontal bars and the mammoth grant stride, from which the unwary small-boy, riding high on crossed rope might be hurled (more or less harmlessly to the hospitable sward in the garden below. Here we played between classes games, French and English, stilts, gigs, marbles, kites etc., or the rare ringed fight.

These and other nostalgic memories come to me as I look at some old school records dug up by an old school friend. (The eldest old boy must now be over eighty and the youngest over sixty.)

Here is the screed of the "memorial bearings of York Castle High School Jamaica "as put out by the Heraldic office. Excluding as far as possible heraldic jargon, we find on the shield a field of flight in black set on a background in gold; on the the field of flight three bees with outstretched wings flying in echelon (bees, signifying industry); at the left hand top corner of the shield an open book with the inscription "gloria deo" (tribute to the non-sectarian religious background of tee school); an the right the pyramid signifying ancient learning) ; beneath the field of flight the star of hope in blue, encircled by the laurel wreath of victory. Beneath 'the shield lay a scroll bearing the school's motto, "nil sine magno labore" (one of the few easily translatable school mottoes). Above the shield a Yorkist Coronet (with sun and roses encirclement) upon which are set a castle gateway, triple towered, with arch and raised portcullis, masoned and embattled. The school colours were appropriately black and gold.

The second York Castle Quarterly (Michaelmas 1889) reveals family names to be oft repeated in the school history, with reminiscent record of the famous Debating Society, and the modest prospectus (school fees £35 to £45 per annum according to age with discount for brothers (alas! far the finances of the school; for Y.C. parent-patrons were prolific). The 1898 prospectus bears the welcome news of the innovations of the daily bath and coffee at 6. a.m. The innovation of early morning coffee particularly perhaps avoided the pertinent question "quis rolat?" which used to be voiced when mysterious rumblings came from a neighboring empty belly at 8.30 a.m. class. The fees were now raised to £40 and £50, but the days of the un-endowed school were numbered.

We are reminded also that of the seventeen "Jamaican Scholars" up to the year 1898, eight had been York Castle boys, that Ebby (later Vincent) Lockett in the London Matriculation in 1887 had been placed "next to the first in honours in all England", and that in 1888 Ernest Murray had been placed "above the first in honours in all England", while York Castle took the Jamaica Scholarship in three successive years, 1891, 1892 and 1893.

Perhaps the hallmark of old Y.C. was freedom with discipline, an uncanny gift of those in authority in timing the placing of the blind eye to the telescope or the turning of the deaf ear to, venial transgression. Fortunate both in Masters and Boys, one might give or gather a love for literature and history and of the classics or (what was rare in these days) even an appreciation of geography and a flair for mathematics, moderation rather than excess, and somehow or other (without much sermonizing fundamental religion or philosophy and fundamental values. Ideas of integrity and service seemed to acquire a solid Bert of platform at old Y.C.

MORE REMINDERS OF YORK CASTLE COLLEGE.

This remarkable educational institution was established by the Wesleyans in Jamaica and opened in the year 1576, closing its doors in 1906. It functioned both as a high school and theological college.

I have recently come across some more interesting relics. After the York Castle Crest (Monthly Comments for November 1956) was adopted under headmaster James Smallpage in the early 1890s, the handsome York Castle prizes bound in calf were emblazoned in gold with the somewhat pretentious crest already described. For some year before, from the late eighties, the prizes (without a crest) were handsomely bound; and before that time a large bronze medal suitably inscribed declared the winner's "proficiency in - ". One of these medals was recently found in a field on one of the St. Ann properties. It has the traditional laurel wreath of victory.

Recently also there have come to light a water colour by a schoolboy of the day, David Reynolds, reproduced by Miss Lily Perkins, and a very remarkable lithograph done by the American Photo Litho Co. of New York from an etching by R. Tung. This lithographic reproduction measures about 18 by 16 inches. The drawings show consummate skill in draughtsman ship and much detail.

At the top is an imaginary heraldic shield with a cross in the upper left-hand quarter, the other quarters exhibiting only dots. At the top also are insets of a sailing ship and a small steamboat in harbour, a sugar estate and steam locomotive. Next come the interior view of the new schoolroom with bearded teachers presiding, pupils in session, and the doors entering into the well-remembered Fifth and Sixth Form rooms.

Above the schoolroom as insets on each side are the upper fronds of a banana sucker and the upper fronds and fruit of the coconut.

Lower down on the left is the school-band in operation and on the right tote boys doing a workout in the open-air gymnasium. Lower left is a remarkable product of the artist's imaginative skill. For to and behold, in a very large swimming pool are boys swimming, taking dives and happily disporting themselves. (In fact only secretly at night could a daring and inconsiderate boy so venture to pollute the drinking water supply). On the right is the cricket field also in action.

In the body and at the sides of the picture are shown the buildings and the w' whole lay-out of buildings fox the masters and theological students, the new schoolroom and dormitory (Osborn Hall), the bridge leading from "Piano Case" to Osborn Hall, the Sanatorium, the old Dormitory and Governor's quarters, the garden below, the sweep of the famous "long steps", the sloping hill flanking the pile of buildings, and other hills near and far, the long road up to the school passing Bonneville with a characteristic toiling pair of horses laboriously pulling a jitney carriage and a man behind carrying a trunk to relieve the weight for the horses. As at the top an interior view of the schoolroom in session, so below an interior view of a large dormitory with beds and all and the corridor between the two rows. Truly a remarkable picture.

MORE On York Castle School

Readers have been kindly calling my attention to the omission of some names from the old Montego Bay and York Castle records. Altogether I spent a restless night, with a procession of old York Castle Boys, whom I have never really forgotten, mixed up with Government files on the Maffesanti imbroglio, Miss Annie Scott's "Bell's Elocutionist", fragments of "Hush Joanna, we'll not quarrel, but oh, make that coffee strong" and "the Song of the Shirt". It seems that I must retrace my steps, as a sort of memory catharsis, and patch up the blank spaces. This will be easy; for, so stimulated, the memories come thick and fast like the Oysters, crowding after "the Walrus and the Carpenter".

Of course Melville Litteljohn and a Brother and also John Allwood were old York Castle Boys; but they were before my time, probably in the days of Rev. Butcher as Governor and Skinner as headmaster. Then in 1894, some of the old brigade turned up on the twentieth anniversary of the School for a cricket match, and with them the intransigent Brass who celebrated his arrival by thrusting the Black Haitian Francis, really a very nice boy, through a glass window, and organising the toeing of a small boy. (Toeing comprised slipping a string noose around the great toe and then giving the boy the works) With the old Brigade came the good cricketers, the surveyors Heming and March; and a couple of clever typical songs eventuated: "Pronounce your aitches, 'Emmings, do", was said by the Reverend you-know who" and "Four buggies large brought Pickwick up. From four large dishes did Pickwick sup". Pickwick, also known as Mr. P., was my close friend, although a senior; but more of him later.

There is really little excuse for omitting the names of many of the York Castle Boys, for at its peak, York Castle carried no more than one hundred and twenty boys at a time, so that during the seven years of my stay, the aggregate number was not large and contacts and knowledge of one another were close.

From all accounts, the first headmaster Skinner did not justify his Dickensian name; nor was caning of frequent occurrence at any time. Once only did I observe a somewhat intemperate infliction, and on a boy of great integrity and deportment Percy Duff. I never enquired into the cause of the indignity or the somewhat brutal public caning, which Smallpage inflicted. As the cane fell, Percy grunted his simulated nonchalance, and Smallpage redoubled his vicious blows. It was a revolting exhibition. After that Smallpage fell in my esteem. He played cricket, a dogged batsman, who kept the wicket going and he delivered a slow ball with a somewhat cramped delivery. I do not remember him on the football field.

The Parish of St. Ann naturally contributed many Boys to the School, many from Brown's Town. There were three Covers and two or three Arscotts, and Levys, and two exotic half Japanese, Clarks. Edward, the eider, was quick at figures. He solved the "Stocks" so quickly, that Mitchell asked him how he did it. "Gollys, Sir, I guessed it", was the reply. Mitchell never frustrated the talent of the short cut More than one other teacher has done so. Simms of J.C. (a man of prodigious learning) was a stickler for lengthy, orthodox methods, for the development of faculty or character, I imagine. Jamaica College in those days was strong in Classics; and Arscott came to us from J.C. extraordinarily well-grounded In Latin by Cowper. When Harrison reached Potsdam (later Munro College by reason of the 1914 anti-German War) finding Pearman doing Classics, he shifted, as he told me, to mathematics, and made Potsdam pre-eminently a mathematical school. I lost sight of David Arscott for over forty years, then I received some anonymous doggerel on Seymour's (Pardy Sol's) vivid reminiscences published by the Gleaner. Later, we kept up an animated correspondence until his death a couple of years ago. He often quoted in his letters the great Greek botanist Theophrastus, so I adopted that pen name for my botanical articles. Of the Covers, Charlie was a master in my time, teaching the Classics and English. I remember his beautiful translation into English poetry of the Fons Bandusiae. Percy was a colourful character, first as Boy, then as Music Master, going on, when Y.C. closed, to teach at Wolmers, writing anonymously for the Jamaica Times weekly under the editorship of Tom Redcam. Visiting him at his little cottage at the corner of the Hope Roads, we often discussed the moral maxims he had written up for the week on his blackboard, while with a chuckle he read to me bits from my own "Comments" which had struck his fancy. Percy's Brother Septimus, known as John Bull, was a muscular good-natured fellow; not too fond of books. In later years, he was to illustrate one of Jamaica's social paradoxes. He was a bookkeeper at Rose Hall Estate. As long as he remained a conventional bachelor he was readily accepted at the Mess. When however he "married the girl" he lost his job. A former Theological Student, later a Parson, apparently had a narrow escape. "It was only an ecclesiastical offence", he explained. "Furthermore I married the girl". Many years later, the egregious Beresford Boyd complained that his rivals in the Insurance business had taken away his Secretary. "Why", asked by friend and partner, "didn't you marry her and keep her as your secretary?" "Me", Sir"? was the reply. "She was a coloured girl!" I don't know how many remember Beresford and his complexion. (The "colour question" which has always plagued Jamaican society, although, as far back as the nineties, Baggett Gray explained that It was never discussed in polite society).

From St. Mary came the Goffes. I heard tell of the eldest "Samson" Goffe; and I knew at York Castle as Master, Ferdinand Charles McTavish ("Quashie Gilbert") and as Boy Roly-Poly, who knew the name and history of every English Prime Minister, wore on Sundays a morning coat, and later qualified as Barrister in England. C. H. Clemetson Goffe was a well-known solicitor of Port Maria, and Freddie a famous Banana Agent, who when imprisoned unlawfully in America for imaginary complicity with the Italian black-hand, threatened to have a British gun-boat thundering at Boston Harbour. >From Stewart Town were the Kennedy's and Milliner, the latter a great producer of Corn, a Sugar Manufacturer and a regular contributor to the *Gleaner* in the form of letters signed "Old Fossil", very conservative. He had many lovely and vivid daughters and, I think, one son. Of the Kennedy's, the younger was at School with me. He was strong in mathematics, careless on other subjects. He infuriated the Governor of the School by a reckless speech on a compulsory education debate, parodying: "If you gently touch a nettle, it will sting you for your pains. Grasp it like a man of mettle, and it soft as silk remains. So it is with brutes and niggers; treat them kindly, they'll rebel. Treat them like a pack of diggers, and the brutes will work like hell". Dr. Murray preached at him in and out of Church over the weekend. The older Kennedy who was there before my Mine, as the younger was to be, was in the banana business as agent of the United Fruit Company. He later became a large Kingston Merchant in association with Grace. He had great commercial ability. Honey and Aguilar were £ from the Western Parishes, and very agreeable chaps. Two unfortunates were Totensau, alleged illegitimate son of a very wealthy man, and "Goadie"--from Falmouth, who seemed to be unwanted at home, and spent at least one vacation at the School. He was a bit of a bruiser, and it was inevitable that Pardy Sols, an inveterate fighter with older and stronger boys, should have got entangled with Goadie in a set ring fight. David Aarons and Hogg were devoted cricketers. Aarons (along with John Duff) meticulously well dressed, knew all the cricket scores. He ran a Machado cigar shop on King Street for many years. There was Charlie Johnstone's younger brother, noted for his remarkable dreams, Boor, the son of Pilot Boor, and Wood, whose sister married Rum Merchant Solomon. Tomlinson ("Puss Dandy") was a remarkable lightweight athlete, very light on his feet, and most agile on stilts; and Repole (Father of the Builder and Contractor) a very fast runner. The two Myer's sons of the Port Royal Myers, once Mayor of Kingston. The elder (employed to the Water Commission) was a somewhat remarkable football player. Playing centre forward, he somewhat selfishly but very adroitly kept the ball to himself, dribbling it the whole remaining length of the field to the opposing goal, shrugging off all comers with amazing footwork and body movement. The younger brother qualified in Medicine and long practised in Mandeville, marrying a relative of Fraser, another York Castle Boy, Father of the famous Pablo of Santo Domingo or Cuba. Donat Delgado, Alty Curphey, Noel Cross-well and Frith of Turks Island were among the most ardent in their love of the old School. Donat was a cousin of the distinguished David de Souza; and full of the sentiment and affection of his Father Alfred Delgado. I wonder what has happened to the latter's collection

of ancient Jamaican Newspapers. I once took an unforgettable trip with my Father and Alfred to New York. There was a suggestion that we might go on to London, but it did not materialise. Neither my Father nor Alfred wasted money on hotels, or expensive restaurants. We boarded with perhaps a Taxi-driver's wife, and ate out. Their choice of eating-places was nondescript and haphazard. We struck when we found ourselves in company with a large number of coal-heavers, and were offered lunch at 25 cents. There was the gentle Greenough, brought up by a Grandmother at Sheckles Pen in Clarendon. He qualified as dentist; and when, in our first year of practice, my old school friend and Partner, Victor Manton and I were commissioned to prepare articles of co-partnership for Greenough, we wondered if we should ever reach his large income of £500 per annum this was in 1902 or 1903. Greenough and I refused to join the gang of boys who lined up just before class to get the readymade "Latin vocabulary" prepared by the indulgent Nixon (later Dr. Nixon of Highgate). Later Stanley Allwood was to come to me for my "vocabularies". "But Stanley, what will you do when I leave?" "Time enough", he replied as he chewed the Y.C. fresh bread, his special delight. He won the Jamaican scholarship the next year. Mitchell expressed surprise at two of my prize selections: "Farrar's Life of Christ" (He little knew that I had long been a seeker after truth or a student of comparative religion) and "The Life of Cromwell" (thinking me conservative, when all my life I have been a radical or at least dissident). Of the Murray boys, Arthur was neat and a sound mathematician, Percy did not appear fond of books, but became a very sound agriculturist, Reggie was always brilliant, headmaster I think, at Wolmers, but certainly at Jamaica College, a bit of a Poet and a devoted mountain climber and an authority and frequenter of the Fort Royal Mountains. As I write, hosts of boys of old York Castle and memories of them come to mind. All in all they were a fine lot. The undesirable might be numbered on the fingers of one hand. I think that the Methodist ethic left its mark on the Boy, as also the fine character and example of Governor and Masters, and also the association with their fine school comrades. While there were quite a few boys from abroad, Haiti, San Domingo, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bogotá, only two of them struck me as distinctly foreign psychologically: Dottin, from San Domingo and Berard from Bogota. They were both somewhat tough, muscularly and psychologically, Dottin being the more artful and puzzling. One could observe him marking down some boy, probably of superior talent or character, to dominate or humiliate. In the case of Jim Hart, he merely tired of the game; in the case of John Duff, it was clear that he withdrew when he came up against the physically strong and spiritually courageous brother Percy. Dottin simply dropped the form of insidious attack and sheered off when he saw the showdown approaching. Dottin was a poseur. A black boy, he claimed, perhaps truthfully, to be the son of an Englishman. When he returned to San Domingo, he wrote out for a BA. Gown. He was starting a school. Sarthou, a White Boy from Haiti, was very pleasant. When he first came, he was somewhat weedy. Leonard Lockett took him in hand, and in two terms, chiefly by workout at the parallel and horizontal bars, he had made an athlete out of him. Devieux was a large and Francis a smaller black Haitian, both delightful boys. The

two Ingrams (coloured) and Krause and Wells (White) were nice boys from Nicaragua. Big Ingram knew his "Euclid" by heart, but if the order of the letters was changed he was entirely lost. We had two chaps who were apparently mild kleptomaniacs. Both became most respectable citizens, and one of them a pillar of social and commercial life. Gordon, a Black Boy, son of a Dissenting Parson from St. James was, like his Father, a perfect gentleman of excellent demeanour and character. There was no colour (pigmentary) sense or sensitiveness whatever at York Castle. McFarlane, a Black Boy, the son of a Policeman from Sandy Bay, was a very desirable companion, and David Norman (father of Dr. Norman), "Sally", one of the most charming and popular boys, of out-standing integrity.