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Report of Trip to Montego Bay, Jamaica, B.W.I.

by

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Kingston, my port of landing, I found to be a city of some 70,000 inhabitants - a city vastly improved and greatly modernized since the earthquake of 1907.

Montego Bay is distant from Kingston about 113 miles. The railway journey was long and wearisome - by reason of the extreme heat in spite of much marvelous scenery en route. It took the train nine hours to cover the distance between the two places. Montego Bay has a population of some 7000 inhabitants, the vast proportion of the people here, as at Kingston and everywhere else, being colored, the shades varying from absolute blackness to a whiteness indistinguishable from the English or American type.

The Rev. E. E. Brown is pronouncedly black, which is somewhat of a handicap to him in his work, since those of his race who are fortunate enough to approach absolute whiteness are too proud "to sit under" any minister save "a white gentleman". He is fairly well educated, seems to be endowed with tact and great common sense, and is a speaker of considerable eloquence and force.

I think it is matter for regret that on his return to Jamaica from the Meadville Theological School Mr. Brown did not begin his work at Kingston, where his opportunity would have been ten times larger. But he has struck his root in Montego Bay, which is moreover his na-

tive place. Here he was born and brought up, and herethe greater part of his life has been spent. I am happy to report that after careful investigation, there is no blot or stain upon his record or character. Like other prophets, like our Master himself, he suffers from the fact that one's native place is none too eager to honor native talent; and that there are always those who will say, "Can any good thing come out of Montego Bay? Is he not so and so's son? And his brothers and sisters are they not with us, etc. etc.

From the American and British & Foreign Unitarian Associations Mr. Brown receives five hundred dollars per annum. He earns a like amount yearly, by serving in some clerical capacity in one of the principal commercial houses, under the control of some Jewish gentlemen, who have sympathy for him and for the Unitarian cause.

So far as the establishing of a Unitarian Church is concerned, Mr. Brown has not proceeded very far, nor is likely to under present conditions. The Sunday gatherings, and all other meetings, are held in his house, and number from 10 to 25 people. Mrs. Brown conducts a small Sunday School, furnishing five children of her own. As opportunity and means allow Mr. Brown gives "a lecture" on some week evening in the Town Hall, when he usually has a large audience.

On Sunday afternoon April 13th I preached in the Town Hall to about 60 people, and again in the evening to fully 300. On the following Monday and Tuesday evenings I spoke for an hour on each occasion to quite 300 people, and on each occasion another hour was spent in answering questions, which I had invited, from the floor. In every case the major part of the audience was composed of males, and the larger proportion of

them were young men. Some of the questions put to me were foolish enough from the Unitarian point of view, but on the other hand, many of them were eminently sensible and searching, indicating a remarkable degree of intelligence and up-to-dateness in recent lines of thought in science, philosophy, and religion.

I was introduced to some refined Hebrew gentlemen. One of them, who is an ardent Mason, informed me that "the craft" had a project under consideration for the purchase of a small hotel. The intention being to transmogrify the upper story into fitting quarters for the use of their fraternity, and that they would fit up the ground floor into a hall to seat about 50 people, with a small reception room, etc. which could be rented by Mr. Brown for the modest sum of ten dollars a month on a yearly lease. I strongly urged him to embrace this opportunity should the scheme go through, on the distinct understanding that the rental charge must be met locally, as evidence that the Unitarian cause at Montego Bay was worthy of continued sympathy and support.

I took it for granted that I was voicing the sentiment of the American and British & Foreign Unitarian Associations when I said to Mr. Brown and to Mr. Walker - in regard to whom something will be said further on - and to some other inquiring minds, with a great deal of positiveness, that no more Unitarian money would flow into Jamaica - other than what was now being sent - until the infant cause at Montego Bay was on a surer and stronger footing.

Mr. Brown and his friends succeeded in convincing me that the one thing necessary to their making good in the community was a modest place of worship. About eighteen hundred, or at most two thousand, dollars would provide a building of sufficient size for this purpose, over and

above the cost of a price of land; and for that I think there is a sum more than sufficient in the hands of the President of the Meadville Theological School.

Had the two Associations had any adequate knowledge of the social and religious conditions of Jamaica I think they might well have hesitated before commissioning Mr. Brown to plant our flag there. But to drop, or curtail the work there at the present time, would cause shame and confusion to Mr. Brown, and would make the Unitarian name a scoff and by-word in Jamaica.

If we want to do a bit of genuine humanitarian work for a quite intelligent class of distinctively colored people, seventy-five years removed from actual slavery, but still quite poorly paid in the matter of wage, with no thought of ever getting anything but love and respect in return, I urge that in some way, the cause there be given this further impetus to a more assured success.

This object once attained, and surely it might be accomplished if some one made it a special object- before the end of April, 1914, I should suggest that the united grant made by the two Associations should be lessened yearly for a period of three years, ceasing entirely at the close of the third year.

In regard to Mr. Walker I make no recommendation, not that he is not entirely worthy so far as I could discover, but from the simple fact that his lot is cast in a <sup>much</sup> smaller place than Montego Bay. Alexandria is 30 miles from the railway, and is one of a series of small villages in the Parish of St. Ann, which is one of the loveliest spots in a very picturesque and lovely island. Mr. Walker took the trouble to come to Montego Bay to attend our meetings there. He came evidently hoping that I could ordain him to the Unitarian ministry and promise him aid

towards the construction of a place of meeting. I told him it was not in my power to do either, and tried to make him see the facts as I saw them, and urged him to use his strength and abilities in efforts looking towards the social uplift of his race as well as in the spread of the Unitarian faith. I laid great emphasis on this phase of work in conversation with Mr. Brown, and I trust that the proper official will strongly impress upon him that he must make good along some line of social effort or uplift as well as in the matter of gathering a congregation of Unitarian believing souls.

In spite of the fact that Jamaica is celebrated for its rum, very little of which by the way stays on the Island, intoxication would not seem to be a very prevailing vice. So far as I could see the native population are a quite sober people. Sexual irregularities, nay sexual excesses and predial larceny are the great vices of the people.

That Mr. Walker took what I said in the right spirit is evidenced by the following sentences which I quote from a letter he sent me on his return to Alexandria. "I must acknowledge to you my deep appreciation of your advice to me. I am more encouraged than ever to go back to labor among my people. My heart's desire is to be of the greatest help to my race socially as well as spiritually. You have really been an angel of light to our shores if you don't ever realize it. Our people are thirsting for light, but they are not very willing to hear it from their own. That's the great trouble!"

If this report should come to the notice of any members of our household of faith, who are as much, or even more interested in social uplift effort than they are in our distinctively religious work,

I trust they may feel moved to send some contribution to me or to Mr. Foote to aid this fine spirited young man in his work.

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