



(Jamaica) Devaney, Maria Barnes, **Group of Three Letters written from Bath, Jamaica, to her mother, Mrs. Harrison, in Chester, England, 1826-1828**

Quarto, 3 letters, 11 manuscript pages, each letter has been cross-written, some wear, and slight loss to each letter which occurred when opening, but in the letters are in good, clean, legible condition.

Three letters written by Maria Barnes Devaney, newly arrived in Bath, Jamaica in 1826, to her mother, Mrs. Harrison, in Chester, England, 1826, 1828. The letters are very revealing about life and conditions in Jamaica from the viewpoint of a discontented, unhappy, frivolous English woman, with more than a streak of casual cruelty, and in them she reveals not only the prejudices of her class, but her own as well.

Devaney's letters are quite revealing about life and conditions in Bath, and the parish of St. Thomas East, where the baths for which the settlement was named, were established in 1699. She describes the social structure of the town, planters, "mulatto servants" and slaves. The bad roads and lack of bridges, and poor communications. (the first bridge in St. Thomas East where the hot springs baths were established in 1699, was built in 1826, so that the road to Kingston built in 1731 could be used year-round).

The first letter, written soon after her arrival in Jamaica, shows that Maria was disgruntled with virtually every aspect of life in her new home – the discomfort of her pregnancy, her absent lawyer husband (he was away in Kingston in the two other letters as well), the voracious mosquitoes that have

left her with suppurating sores, the incessant rains that have turned the streams into impassable torrents, the small houses, including the one in which they board and that which her husband owns and into which they will move, and, especially, the slaves, who are managed by the mulatto servants, as she cannot. She rants about the “pernicious” attempts by the British government to emancipate the slaves, these rants increase with the second letter of January 25, 1828 “nothing but continual flogging will keep them in the least order”, to her they are “thieves, liars, and Methodists.” Devaney wrote describing her anticipation of the horse races (with a £ 100 gold cup, and in which her husband’s horse Fitzwilliam would run) and her many house guests in attendance, despite the vigilance needed to keep all food stuffs locked up against theft by the Negro servants.

The third letter of June 17, 1828, describes the contents of a box that was sent to her from England by her mother, Devaney goes from an inventory of its contents mainly clothing and textiles, to casually boasting that she has had two servants put in the stocks on a neighboring estate, one returning “penitent” after a month in the stocks. She also thanks her mother for the oil cloth which covered the box which will protect goods being carried on a negro’s head, and for the smelling salts she sent that will help her withstand the stink of the negroes when she is in church. A long description of having been awakened by a centipede ending with her proudly revealing that she had sent for the overseer at the Baths to have her negligent servant flogged.

The 1826 almanac for the Parish of St. Catherine, which is west of Kingston, as St. Thomas Parish is East, shows a Catherine Devaney – perhaps the writer’s mother-in-law – owning a cottage, ten slaves, and one livestock. Establishing both a law practice and residence at Bath has put the writer and her husband in a socially advantageous position.

Sample Quotes:

“Bath, May 27th, 1826, St. Thos. East Jamaica, to Mrs. Harrison, No 6 Paradise, Chester, England

My ever Dear Mother,

I received your truly welcome letter most joyfully three days since and was exceedingly happy to find by it that your health continued good: - but I really shall be almost angry if after hearing of my safety you suffer your spirits to be depressed – that feeling is more in our own power than you are aware, you must exert yourself and strive against it, and think that everything is for the best. If I had given up I might have died many a time between suffering of mind and body – indeed I reproach myself dreadfully sometimes for having left you and think I deserve all I meet with for my ingratitude but you know I did it for the best. Remember the water works – if I thought that my absence was any advantage to you in pecuniary matters, and that you made the best of it and enjoyed yourself, I should be quite satisfied, otherwise every sigh that you uttered on my account would be as a dagger to me, and I have grievances enough without. Since I last wrote I have suffered very much from the wounds in my legs & thighs and arms occasioned by the mosquito bites. I have received the greatest kindness & attention from the young women with whom we lodge. For many days I could not stand for the world and I am certain it was only the quantity of matter the wounds discharged which kept me from having fever. I suffered so exceedingly from irritation and the fatigue of bathing and plastering these unfortunate limbs, some of the wounds have been open for six weeks with deep holes in them and regularly dressed every day, with the skin off the size of a Crown piece, and great scabs on my arms. I often used to think of Job and sigh – but that was only during the last week when I was drawing comparisons between 1826 & the year before. How did the races pass off? Were you in Paradise, did you see Salmon, do you know whether he has suffered by the Nantwich Bank. I am very glad to hear that my Uncle has escaped so fortunately. ... Devaney is gone again to Kingston and I am sorry to say on law business partly on his

own account and partly on that young girl the husband of the last Mrs D's niece claims some property in right of his wife which D's father gave Miss D and as he made no will I think my husband will stand a poor chance for the recovery unless the Duke or some great friends interfere, a certain person seems to have met with his match for once. I saw a letter from the opponent and it was couched in very high terms. The chief Justice the Hon. Mr. Scarlett has been staying in Bath some days for the benefit of the waters. He dined with us twice in company with other gents. He is a very nice man and is brother to the celebrated Mr. Scarlett the Barrister in England. The Physicians keep being a situation under government & I'm obliged to show civility to the Crown officers, the members of Assembly &c one of whom together with his wife & sister took breakfast with us not long since, they had come up from Kingston to visit some neighboring estates of which he is proprietor and D has the practice on them. Holding this situation must be an advantage to a medical man as it in[troduces?] him to the gentry who come here for the [benefit] of bathing – as there is a hot springs [their] efficacy in some disorders, and public ... to which people resort even from the most remote distance – We lately had a letter from Mr. Robert Towland saying that he had been lately much afflicted with Rheumatism and was coming to bathe and very politely hoped to derive much pleasure from the society of D's amiable wife for he had received a letter by the last packet from his sister who spoke most affectionately of her. I felt rather flattered, and hope by the time he arrives to be well enough to the amicable as I am already so much better of the lameness that I can walk about the house. D has an idea of removing into his own house on his return from Kingston as all his furniture is arrived. I have not been there yet although it is only a very short distance but hear that it is a hot miserable place – all the houses that I have yet been in contain but one story or floor; some have the good fortune to be built on brick arches which when closed in makes an excellent store room, but D's house is not so happy as it is placed humbly upon the ground – it would seem a strange thing to an English lady accustomed to several rooms to be sitting at the same time in parlor & garret, but such is the case for there is nothing over my head but boards & shingles and the roof goes up in an angle – the houses in this place are built of wood, the portions the same which divide the rooms of which there are not too many – this house containing one good room called the Hall into which the front door opens and in which you sit, and eat, two small bed rooms with the bed in a corner open from it and a back room or two where the meat alights after it is brought about 20 yards from the cooking shop, this description will also answer the physician's as well as Mr. Jarbutt's. Only the latter has a Piazza & a delightful sea breeze, advantages which the others have not. I often think of the song – a cobbler there was & he lived in a stall!!! Don't you think that I made a delightful exchange when I left Paradise – the West Indian ladies live very much after the manner of my Aunt at Box Hedge for they never go from home, a Mrs. Millar told me that she had not stirred even to church for the last 2 months. Indeed it has rained in this delightful district most of the time and then the roads which are at best bad are impassable. The rivers come down from the mountain in torrents bringing great trees & rocks ... & there is no such thing as a bridge any where – you have to ford all the rivers which are generally very low except in the rainy season – the wet season has set in with us. Three days last week we were to have had gents at dinner but none could cross the rivers intersect the country in all directions – you would never think any thing of raining in England if you were to see it in this country; it is truly awful. I am writing very badly but the baby is very troublesome and cant bear me to lean forward at all: I often think of Mrs. White complaining of the baby kicking so uncomfortably, but my landlady from whom I have received the greatest attention assure me it is a very good sign, for my own part I think it indicates that it is much older than my calculation or that there are two of them from the riot inside & size of my 'corporation' – it certainly quickened the 27th of March – I have not an article of baby linen made yet, but D is to bring with him some material from Kingston, and the servants in the country all sew and very nicely. D's servants are not come yet but we have 3 from the Baths, the girl I intend for the rooms is sewing for me continually, and I intend to keep Allan's sister entirely as my own maid. I have the command of 12 servants now, old & unyoung, my manner of living is quite antediluvian, I rise with the sun of ought to do and go to rest with it, however I hope after a while to be very comfortable

– these women promise to do a great deal for me, they sometimes say – although we are brown we will do more for you than your own color would. They have begun today about cleaning the house or rather watching the slaves do it. They can manage them when I could not – some of their own servants are very clever & by the bye I think the English people are mad going on as they do about the slaves in this country. The slaves in this country are infinitely better off than the poorest classes at home. I have not room or time or I could soon convince you of it. The “real truth” respecting them is as different from what wicked people represent in England as possible. Another ship will sail the middle of June and I will endeavor to write to Esther rather than wait by her, in the mean time I should be very glad if you could manage to write by the Liverpool Packet ships which come out every fortnight & at the same time not neglect the government Packet & try to cross your letters – I can make it out if you bungle ever so badly, Give my love to all whom you think value it, believe me to remain my dear ever dearly beloved Mama, your affectionate child, Maria Barnes Devaney”

“Bath, Jamaica, 25th Jany 1828, to Mrs. Harrison, No 6 Paradise, Chester, England

“My very dear Mother,

I felt quite disappointed when the packet letters came to Bath two days since at not receiving one from you – but my hopes rest on the chance of my letter having been left in Kingston as is sometimes the case when there is an express post during the week – I told you in my last that I should write by Carter – who expects to sail on Sunday. I have been very busy ever since I wrote preparing for the races – 2 Negro servants are such tiresome wretches to deal with, they have no more idea of cleaning a room than a pig, equally as dirty and as obstinate, whenever my room gets a cleaning I am obliged to sit on the bed the whole time or put myself into such passions that I am sure it injures my health, nothing but continual flogging will keep them in the least order – you don’t know what a slave a Jamaica wife or housekeeper is & Negroes are such dreadful thieves and liars notwithstanding they are all Methodists and most of them in the class – the parliament in England and the Methodists in Jamaica have entirely ruined them. I only wish some of the Negro friends (our worst enemies) had to deal with 6 such devils as I have – it would soon cure them of interfering with the Colonies. You’ll think me in a very ill humour but I have scarcely been in a good one since I came to Jamaica – but to return to the races, which commence in about ten days – some of our company come next week, there is expected a great number to attend but if one half comes that have been invited I don’t know where they will put themselves as there are only 12 decent houses in Bath and about six neighbouring estates – a beautiful Gold Cup with £ 100 is one of the stakes which comes out from London – it would look well on our sideboard but I’m sure Fitzwilliam will not win it – although he is very beautiful. Our new carriage comes from Kingston tomorrow - & is very handsome 4 in hand harness which I hope D means to use as I am very fond of 4 horses, as I have now got rid of my rheumatism I hope to enjoy myself although there is not much enjoyment for the housewife when several houseguests are in the house – for everything is obliged to be under lock and key even bread, butter, cheese & cold meat, potatoes (when we have them) and Negro provisions which is given out daily before a dinner party. I do nothing but walk about all day with the bag of keys giving out different things and Negro driving. Monday the 20th will be a very busy day here as the horses are to be entered that day & besides it is the Quarterly Board meeting of the Commissioners of the Bath held at our house. We expect about twenty gentlemen to second breakfast. My ball dress came from Kingston yesterday – it is very handsome – pink figured silk, trimmed at bottom with two rows of bobbin lace cut in diamonds, with 3 pipings of pink satin laid on & edges with white lace – 3 diamonds form the sleeve laid over a pull pink one, but I am grieved to say the materials and making came to £ 15.13.9 – there is 26 yards of lace edging on the trimming, now had you but gone to Chester for two days and given my letter to Miss Coker this sixteen pounds would have been saved for I look upon it as almost an useless expense for perhaps I shall not wear the dress again of 12 months if I live

that long - & by that time the color will be gone by laying by and the insects eaten the dress half up, for there is no keeping ants & cockroaches out of any trunk – if you have not yet sent the things I wrote for the ship which takes this and poor Carter will sail again from London in ten days & I know Capt Guthrie well he would take great care of anything for me, but I must send you the address – if you have sent it by a Liverpool ship I hope it is either by the Paragon or Jamaica as those are the only two which come to St Thomas East, and as there is no land carriage in this country, the box would have to come from Kingston by sea in a dirty open boat, three or four days on the passage and beating against the wind all the way – for the breeze always blows from the east, and when come to Port Morant it might be twelvemonths at the wharf before I should know anything about it. Devaney has bought Carter's horse – Snip – that I am so fond of riding, for £ 70.0.0 – he is exceedingly like a horse named Banker which used to run at Chester Races belonging to Mr. Wytton & used to lodge in Mrs. Poole's stables – do you remember W. Salmon as being the price for me? £ 60.0.0 You'll see Snip's name down in the racing card for last year. I am losing a kind friend in his master – my constant companion upon every little excursion & so obliging & attentive like a Mother – in manners and appearance very much like my cousin Tom Barnes & what was more than all I never showed in the least jealousy of him – which was a great mercy – as such is a great wonder, but I think I will have a greater loss than myself for he never could be happy without him. Mrs. Panton whom I often have mentioned to you for her kindness to me is his housekeeper what would be called in England Mistress – only the mistress in this country saves the money, in England she spends it. God help the poor white men among a parcel of Negro thieves if it were not for the Mulatto women. I have just been calculating some accounts of my own, that I can remember and would you believe that since April last I have expended forty pounds in dress &c including the moneys sent to England, besides what it will cost for the carriage and harness, and my new horse – all purchased on my account. I am writing in great haste – Carter says he will write Captain Guthrie's London address on the back of this letter – that if he does not and you wish to send anything by the Ship West Indian which sails again in ten days you must send a few lines immediately directed to Mr. Carter, care of B. Davenport Esq., in Dunston Court, Mincing Lane, London which will find him and he will take care to forward it – but I almost think best to write to Captain Nockells in London – give my love to all my friends and believe me as ever my very dear Mother yours most affectionately Maria B. Devaney. I shall write again by the packet which sails again in 3 weeks, God bless you my very dear mother.”

“Bath Jamaica June 17th 1828, to Mrs. Harrison, No 6 Paradise, Chester, England

My very dear Mother,

Only fancy my regret at having sent my packet letter two days before I received the box which arrived on the 13th quite safe – I did not think it worth putting you to the expense of another packet letter as Capt. Nockells expects to sail on the 20th and will kindly take charge of my letters as far as London – I am very much pleased with my dress indeed but have not had time to try it on yet but intend to do so before the next packet sails. The things were delightfully packed. I am now very glad that you did not send the rose colored slip, as I have a silk dress of that color which after a while will do to wear as a slip, the lilac was certainly not with making up – the light is so strong in this country that it shows every defect too plainly. However it shows me the fashion and will do for home dinner parties very well. I think you will find there has been some great mistake in packing – as neither the lace wedding cap nor the square black veil were in the box, and I looked the things over and over and was very glad not to find them for they would have broke my heart and the veil would not have been of the least use to me. I hope you forgot to send them to Miss Coker or else in the hurry it has been a mistake in the packing, which of course you were made acquainted with directly as I do not for a moment imagine it to be done intentionally. You did not mention in your catalog of contents the two yards of net, the three yards of bonnet ribbon, the worked capes or the beautiful French gauge handkerchief, which I sported on Sunday

together with my new boots which have the old complaint of being a mite too wide, however I can manage to wear them by cramming a false sole in and am very thankful for them to keep the mosquitoes away. They are a nice color for England but not so good for this country as the sea air turns everything that has green in it nearly red or pink according to the depth of color. Just as I was dressed on Sunday, looking so nice, Capt. Guthrie walked in accompanied me to church, he came to see if every thing came quite safe & c & c he is a very nice man and is an officer in the Navy. The box was very carefully packed and the oilskin or canvass which wrapped it will be of great use to me to cover my tin pram or portmanteau when I travel, as luggage is mostly carried on a Negroes head or a mules back and if it rains heaven help the finery unless there is a goat skin over it. Carter always lent me one. I really have a great loss of him. The smelling salts came quite safe, and I intend for Mrs. McK as she suffers so dreadfully from headache a complaint I often trouble with myself and I find the salts very useful. I did not bring Betsey Holt's smelling bottle to Jamaica which I regret very much for I am obliged to take a scent bottle to church or I would not sit there. The stink of the Negroes is so overpowering. I am very much obliged for the Liverpool Music Meeting Book, it will afford me great entertainment. You did not mention Dr. Rowland's death which I discovered to my very great sorrow in the Chester Courant and which is by far the best paper, but I am exceedingly grieved by the intelligence it communicated, I have his profile in my bedroom, of which I shall take very great care. By the same ship I have written to the Garstons & M. Page, I wish you would let them know as I am afraid I have forgotten the proper direction. Devaney is not returned yet but I have been expecting him every day, which is very hateful as you know. I am glad to hear that you are so comfortably fixed with your servants, I wish I could say the same of mine – only fancy my misery last night, I had just awoke from a delightful dream, when I felt something seize me on the thigh like two pins. I started up and by the light for I always burn a candle when alone, I had the horror of discovering a large centipede which directly hid itself among the bed clothes. I bawled as loud as possible – nobody in the house beside one Negro lad and a sick child. The servant woman had not come in. Charles who is a very good lad came to my assistance as quickly as possible and with a fork destroyed the reptile but it put an end to my sleep and happy dreams. However this morning I sent to the Bath overseer and Mrs. Margaret got a deuced good flogging for disobeying my orders and not coming to sleep in the house. She had staid away from her work for six days last week without my leave and the other house woman I have been obliged to keep in the stocks nearly a month but she is out now and very penitent – but they are all such hypocrites being Methodists, with the exception of the before mentioned Charles who is really a very good boy, the same whom I gave the Bible to some time since. I have another servant laid in the stocks on one of the estates for good behavior and have been as happy as possible since Devaney went away with only having so few servants. You will probably not receive this before the end of August and I am afraid will be uneasy about the fate of the box as you are too impatient for an answer. You should always allow a month. I daresay you will think that I wrote in a very desponding way about the box in my last letter but somebody told me that Capt. Guthrie had arrived in Kingston a week before, so I concluded there was no chance of my box by his ship. Send me all the news when you write and persuade those girls to write to me soon by the packet. I have been very careful you understand when there is any particular news you ought to write it down on a piece of paper and then you when you are writing to me refer to it, by which means you would not forget to tell me anything. I hope my Uncle is recovered before this. I am quite sorry when I think of his illness. I would have written to him before now but have been so engaged with one trouble or another... M. B. Devaney ..."

\$ 1,250.00