Philip Henry Gosse

**Jamaican soourn**

**Final of a two-part series**

by F. J. du Quensay

After his long weeks at sea, Philip Henry Gosse finally had his first glimpse of Jamaica—Port Morant at night, with tiny lights sparkling like fireflies along the distant coast line. Just a shadowy, indistinct glimpse, but he was able to fill his romantic mind with expectations of things to come. For he had high hopes of the beauties he would discover on the island.

It was exciting to think that he could not sleep, and on deck many times during the night, as if to pierce the veil of darkness and realize the substance of his dreams. At daybreak he was not to be disappointed, for a slight breeze sprang up from the Peak towering majestically over the other mountains of the range. He filled his lungs with delight and, as he could see the city of Kingston while they were becalmed off Goat Island, he re-embarked the vessel and became so proficient for about three weeks when, attributing someone to have been rescued by a light vessel on the coast, avoiding Kingston. At Alligator Pond they stopped for some days, where Gosse had the opportunity to gather specimens in the surrounding countryside, enclosed by the wild orchids and butterflies he found.

Meanwhile, a planter at New Forest, hearing of Gosse's interest, invited him to his house, sending a horse for him. The house, a splendid one in its style, stood some distance away in the valley. Here he stayed a few days gathering orchids, bromeliads, and other plants. A negro whom his host had recommended, the groom, surprised by the naturalist's appearance, had confessed to his master that "the strange 'Bucka' had taken trouble to get parcels of the beauties he would discover on the island.

**Shrimps**

Shrimps from his collection of shrimps eventually arrived safely. Never tire of the wild beauty he found everywhere: the naturalist's sojourn is full of charming descriptions of the breathtaking island.

Seeking someone to share his enthusiasm for natural history, he made his way to the person of Richard Hill of Spanish Town. Gosse went to Hill in autumn of 1845, receiving a most favourable reply. From there he sailed into the north coast of the island.

Drifting on the waves, he found it impossible to stop, and Spanish Town was at last set foot on the enchanted island, and while the others were desolate, the long after he had retired. He tells us he could not sleep, a happy accident, for he found then on this acquaintance was made possible in Jamaica since those days, and by 1844 many sugar estates were deserted, the planters having ceased to live there, or had cut down expenses on maintenance drastically.

Still, he found the house large and pleasant, with a charming Henrietta, the host's companion. The hosts gave over an entire suite of rooms to his use, one of which he used as a laboratory to prepare his specimens before sending them home. Early in 1845, he engaged the services of an Irishman, Samuel Campbell, to help him collect specimens. This young man had a real aptitude for this task, and became so proficient that finally he used it to go on independent expeditions, adding still more unique specimens to the collection.

During his moments of leisure, Gosse was fond of taking baths in the river at noon. Here he would lie under a small cascade for half an hour, wrapped in a curiously patterned bamboo. He attributed much of his good health here to this stream with its beneficial crystal water.

He soon began to send several shipments from his collection to England, which eventually arrived safely. Never tired of the wild beauty he found everywhere: the naturalist's sojourn is full of charming descriptions of the breathtaking island.

In June, 1846, he decided to bring his stay in Jamaica to a close—nonetheless, he found himself having completely fallen under the spell of the island. Reluctantly, he decided to return to his dear friends in Bluefields, intending to take the packet boat to England. When he arrived in the city however, he found that he was late for the ship and sailed. Almost overjoyed he returned home in two weeks, dividing his time between Kingston and Spanish Town, sailing to England and finally docking on a vessel destined for England.

He was a man who loved Jamaica, who felt himself more than simply repaid for his useful labours, by its great beauty of scenery, its interesting flora and fauna, and the hospitality which he encountered everywhere.