

Two Letters to the Editor of the Port-of-Spain Gazette, from Sarah Ann Onymous, 1907

Introductory Note

The great global cholera epidemic of 1853 had killed thousands in Trinidad, within living memory in 1907. Sanitation was of crucial importance, particularly in the densely populated urban areas. The letter writer is quite right to criticize a particular sanitation inspector whom the writer suspects of not checking properly because his mind is on romance rather than sanitation.

This second text clearly follows from the previous one by the same author. Now Sarah says that because of her reporting the lax inspector, he is taking revenge by reporting her for, apparently, an untaxed garden tap.

Note that *nigger* is used as a pejorative term for bad behavior, rather than only colour or race.

Port-of-Spain Gazette, June 11 1907, p. 3

To the Editor of the Port-of-Spain Gazette.

Sir — ¹“Now, I ain’t findin’ no fault wid de Sudgen Gen’ral bout’ dem d’rections fo’ killin’ rats to stop de Bucholera Plague.” ²Says Priscilla, after Bonaparte Napoleon don’ finish a-perusin’ de Gazette on Sunday. ³“But wat I figgers out is de question of how dos de rats excommunicate de disease?”

⁴“All dem long words ‘bout bein’ noticefied ‘pon de bes’ way to mortalise de rats—and ‘bout de knock-you-able, an’ oderwise communicatchable diseases, is very ‘pressionable—⁵Shore, whosomever ‘rote [in tans’] suttently a had a mity fine college edjication!”

⁶“But, as we ins’t all had de same ‘vantages, my idee wud be to ‘splain tings, so’s people kin understan.’ ⁷Spresify ‘pon dem in plane langwidge dat dey mus’ scrub dey house, and de bed clos,’ and deir pussons, with plenty a Carbolic soap—⁸Doan to tro’ saltfish water in de canal befo’ de do to ‘tract dey wi[?] scratch off on back sill-on-us’.

⁹“But shore, “ ‘sponds Bonaparte Napoleon, de toritees is suttinly doin’ deir bes’.” ¹⁰“I in’st a denying it,” ‘sclaims Maria Priscilla, “but some of dem spectors contents deirselfs, wid jeas a-putting’ deir noses roun’ de gates of de wussest barrak yads, and goin’ no fudder in de daytime. ¹¹Only yesterday mornin’ one of dem ogles in an Ginger Janes’ nex’ do’, an’ sez ‘e, “Well dear, every ting al rite?”

¹²“Yes, darlin’,” ‘sponds she, wid a Alligator smile. ¹³While de duck pon’ in de corner of de yard, dos tun me stomik wen ever she tro’s on de fresh water ‘pon a morning’.”

¹⁴“Coarse,” says Bonaparte Napoleon, ‘it mus’ be mity discomfortin’ to a man to hav’ to haul up to de Coart, a pusson as he’s ben a makin’ ship’s eyes to de night befo’.”

¹⁵“Well,” ansers Maria Priscilla, “My advice ‘pon de subjec’ wud be, fer sum great wut has no pussonal feelin’s to be conglomerated what de barrak yards is consarned, to tek a wak round’ while de sun is up—¹⁶Ef one kin be foun’ as will undertek de job! — ¹⁷Feurdermo’, he bes’ pervide hissself wid a good Cologne handkerchief.”

SARAH ANN ONYMOUS.

English Version

Sir — ¹“Now, I’m not finding fault with the Surgeon General about those directions for killing rats to stop the Bucholera Plague.” ²Said Priscilla, after Bonaparte Napoleon had finished perusing the Gazette on Sunday. ³“But what I [can’t] figure out is the question of how do the rats communicate the disease?”

⁴“All those long words about being noticefied on the best way to mortalise the rats—and about the inoculations, and otherwise communicatchable diseases, is very impressive — ⁵Sure, whosoever wrote [?] certainly had a might fine college education!”

⁶“But, as we haven’t all had the same advantages, my idea would be to explain things, so as

people can understand. ⁷Express to them in plain language that they must scrub their hosues and the bed clothes, and their persons, with plenty of Carbolic soap — ⁸Don't throw saltfish water in the ditch before the door to attract [?] scratch off on bacillus.

⁹"But surely," responds Bonaparte Napoleon, "the authorities are certainly doing their best."
¹⁰"I'm not denying it," exclaims Maria Priscilla, "but some of those inspectors content themselves with just putting their noses round the gates of the worst barrack yards, and going no further in the daytime. ¹¹Only yesterday morning one of them ogles in on Ginger Janes next door, and says he, "Well dear, everything all right?"

¹²"Yes, darling," responds she, with an alligator smile. ¹³While the duck pond in the corner of the yard, turns my stomach whenever she throws on the fresh water in the morning."

¹⁴"Course," says Bonaparte Napoleon, "it must be mighty discomfoting to a man to have to haul up to the Courts, a person that he's been making sheep's eyes to the night before."

¹⁵"Well," answers Maria Priscilla, "My advice upon the subject would be, for some [person] who has no personal feelings to be complicated where the barrack yards are concerned, to take a walk round while the sun is up — ¹⁶If one can be found as will undertake the job! — ¹⁷Furthermore, he had best provide himself with a good cologned handkerchief."

SARAH ANONYMOUS.

Port of Spain Gazette, 15 December 1907, p. 6

¹Dear Mr. Eddy Torr I has'nt 'rote sense axing yo' advice 'bout mixing de mecures [?] to swap up de flo'—while pon de subjec', I is'nt fine no mo' flees in de bed clos' after follering yo' d'rections. ²I wants now to consult you 'bout anudder matter.

³De man wat was use to be inspector at Ginger Jane's yad, is goin' to repo't me to pay £1 fo' a garden tap.

⁴Is true sa' I has me little c'lection o' bitters aloes, an serio, an sich like as we po' peeples dos use for remedys. ⁵Two yaller crotons grows each side de steps, an a han'sum ram horn be de gate. ⁶It wood breke me hart fer to 'bolish dem, but de tacks 'pon de house pervents me to set down an' res' in me old age. ⁷Dat nager man (me skin is black sa', but I aint no nigger!) is rampagi us 'cause I report de duck pon' at Ginger Jane, an' dey's put a daylight inspector 'pon de beat, so he don' get pay for his night visits no mo'.

⁸Pleese tell de pos'man to tek de anser to "Ramhorn Cottage." ⁹P'raps I will be 'bliged to altar de name soon.

SARAH ANN ONYMOUS.

P.S. — ¹⁰I jus' remembers I dos raise goats, so to save de expense I kind change de h, r, n, in ramhorn, to g, a, t, instid.

English Version

¹Dear Mr. Eddy Torr I haven't written since asking your advice about mixing the mecures [?] to sweep up the floor—while on the subject, I haven't found any more fleas in the bed clothes after following your directions. ²I want now to consult you about another matter.

³The man who used to be inspector at Ginger Jane's yard, is going to report me to pay £1 for a garden tap.

⁴It's true sir I have my little collection of bitter aloes, and serio, and such like as we poor people use for remedies. ⁵Two yellow crotons grow on each side of the steps, and a handsome ram's horn is the gate. ⁶It would break my heart to abolish them, but the tax on the house prevents me from sitting

down and resting in my old age. ⁷That nigger man (my skin is black sir, but I'm not a nigger!) is rampaging against us because I reported the duck pond at Ginger Jane's, and they put a daylight inspector on the beat, so he doesn't get paid for his night visits any more.

⁸Please tell the postman to take the answer to "Ramhorn Cottage." ⁹Perhaps I will be obliged to alter the name soon.

SARAH ANN ONYMOUS.

P.S. — ¹⁰I just remembered I don't raise goats, so to save the expense I can [?] change the h, r, n, in ramhorn, to g, a, t, instead [i.e. ramgate].