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Interview with Egbert Saunders.

4 7.7.48

Household.

Egbert Saunders. 54 years. Lives alone.

Egbert Saunders rents a room from Wintwood Elliott and lives in the same yard as Lascelles and Ivy Thompson. I had arranged to meet him this morning and he was waiting for me when I arrived. He wished to go to church this morning, so he said he would not be able to stay for too long.

He is a newcomer to Bull Savannah, and has lived here for only two years. He himself was born in Bermuda but was brought up in Jamaica. His mother had six children not all by the same father. "We were outside children, not married you know"

The six children. 1) Reginald Dissolis. The eldest
2) Egbert Sainders
3) Richards
4) Saunders
5) Miller
6) Richards.

He is at times very deaf and could not be made to hear that I wanted the Christian names.

His mother was left to look after all of them, and she had a very hard time to amnage to bring them up. To make a living she worked as a Laundress, in Manderville.

(It is worth while mentioning here that Mr Saunders considers himself widely travelled and educated and uses long phrases and ~~pedantive~~ pedantic words whenever possible. he has a strong American accent)

/Manderville

He went to the school in Manderville until he was fourteen. He then left Kingston/and came to Kingston where he got a job. This was in 1910. His memory for dates was most unusual. When he got to Kingston he worked as Houseman and valet for a Mr William Wilson. He got only 3/- a week at this job. He had to leave at the end of six months becuase of illness. Mr Wilson got him a another position. This was a Mr F.Charles Fisher who employed him in a dry good store. Here he worked for quite a bit, but he got tired of this, so he decided to get away. He had occasion to go down to the docks and deliver some goods from the shop to the Royal Mail Steamer S.S.Trent. He asked for a job, and on the next trip back to Jamaica there was a vacancy for him as a steward, and he took it. He worked on the sea for a few years. Then came 1914 and the Great War. They all became afraid of travelling on the seas, and the captain advised them all to become soldiers. He did not take

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his advice at once, but returned to Jamaica. here he found he could not get a job. he was told of the formation of a Jamaican Contingent, and Captain Peel was put in charge of the Jamaican Volunteers. He joined them, and on 6th October 1915 he sailed for Europe. He arrived in England, and was stationed in Seaforth. From there he was transferred to Egypt.

(Her follows a condensed version of his war experiences, because he went into very great detail, and would have continued for considerably longer if he had not been anxious to get to church. Owing to his deafness, I could only direct his conversation a little)

When in Egypt he started training at Max, near Alexandria. "Whilst we were there we indeed had a rigorous training. We had 8 parades a day, in squad drill and all branches of musketry. Here we stayed until August 1916. At the end we had a great parade when we were inspected by His Royal Highness the prince of Wales. He said that we were the best trained men in Kitchener's army. We then moved to the Suez Canal where we took over from the Manchester Regiment, and were later joined by the Australians. We had the stretch of the canal running from Ishmala (?) up to Kentara. We were put then into a French post at Devils Wood, this was ~~max~~ in the Sarapian Desert. We had to endure great trials with the heat, but we managed somehow. We had constant skirmishes with the Bedouin Arabs while we were there but they never managed to break through our lines. (He said this with great pride General Morrey, came and asked us to now volunteer as Artillery Servers in France. All volunteered and we sailed to Marseilles..... We were first sent into the lines at Freycourt Wood. Here the Artillery fire was frightful, but we ~~stuck~~ stuck it. It was here that Tear Gas was used on us for the first time. We had no masks at the start, but after a week we were wearing them. For the winter we were stationed in Boulogne."

He added that the French treated them magnificently, they asked them to their homes, and he had the opportunity of seeing many of their factories and their ways of doing things. He was always quick at learning, and he learnt things there that he has never forgotten. In England he was also ~~tr~~ treated well. he was very amused by the recollection of the surprise of the English at hearing them speak English. They all wanted to know where they had learnt such good English. The mayor of Plymouth had lived in India, and he thought they came not from the West Indies, but the West of India. Saunders considered this a great joke. He said that it was explained to the mayor that they came from the Western hemisphere, on the fringe of the great American Continent, on the brink of the Southern Cross. History was related to him, whereby he was made aware that ~~the~~ the forefathers of the West Indians had been brought as slaves from Africa to the New World. He Saunders, was not ashamed to admit this. Why should he be? It was also told to the English people that they remembered Queen Victoria, and the emancipation

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of their people by her.

He got wounded twice with shrapnel wounds in the head. Once he got blown up. This was at Arras. The division had been bombarding the Germans for ten days without ceasing, and they had had no rest during that time. At last they were removed to a Bill et behind the lines. This was an old Factory. Everybody dropped to sleep like stones. Suddenly he woke up to find himself in a dense cloud of smoke. They had been shelled by the Germans! (this was dramatically re-enacted for me) he could not see, only smell. He gave the alarm to his comrades but they were too tired to care. The next second another shot came and he found himself in the road. He got to a Scottish Division where he was treated. The next day he found out that 61 people had been killed in that factory. In the firing 1700 tons of ammunition had been blown up. He went to Hill 60..... He was sent to the hospital in Marseilles with Adonitis, having been again gassed in addition. He had two large bubbles of blood on his neck, and they could not do anything for him. In 1917 he was repatriated to Jamaica.

His treatment in Jamaica.

When he arrived back he was treated worse than a prisoner. Conditions were very bad. They were given £4 on their discharge, and a year later they got £15. He got little jobs here and there to keep up life. He worked with Wray and Nephews for one month. Then he returned to Mr Fisher who gave him a job as a watchman. When his £15 came through he decided he wanted to better himself, so he left for Cuba.

In Cuba. He started off there doing shipbuilding work in the docks. He stayed doing this for 15 months. He then got a slight attack of small pox, and returned to Kingston in 1924.

Jamaica again.

He worked as a ward master at the hospital Atlantic Fer campy. When he was in the Army he had been forced to spend a lot of time in Hospital, and had at first helped with things like cleaning the wards. However the doctor had noticed that he was good at taking temperatures and testing respiration, and the doctor held a sort of examination of the helpers. He wanted someone to am first aid ~~ward~~ post for him. Saunders passed the first out of this examination, and consequently learnt quite a lot about medical matters.

Cuba.

After this he returned to Cuba and worked in a cottage Hospital at a place called Emporillo. Here he stayed until 1929. "At the said time the government of Cuba decided that of the work, 75% should be for natives and 25% for foreigners." He therefore lost his job. He could have returned to his shipbuilding job, but he was not now so keen on it. He returned to Jamaica.

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He arrived with 280 dollars. He started to peddle dry goods from house to house, but there was a lot of competition and he became bankrupt and lost his little store. He owed money to many many people. There was £40 to Mr Seago, a Syrian, and £50 to Mr Hanna

He got in with an Indian, who used to sell him blankets at the wholesale price, and he would sell it to people at a higher rate and take the difference. A blanket would cost 4/8d each. He sold it at 9/-. In four or five months he had paid off all his debts. The Indian decided to give up business just as Saunders had made enough money, so Saunders was just lucky.

He obtained his next job owing to his fluent knowledge of Spanish. He saw a man one day who looked Spanish, and so he spoke to him in Spanish. The man was delighted to hear someone who could understand him, although he was actually not Spanish, but an Italian spy. His name was Victor Cassiano, and he started to employ Saunders as his agent. Saunders had managed to get him a lovely house in Kingston when Cassiano had been unable to find anywhere for himself. Out of gratitude he had given Saunders the position. He was a soap manufacturer, and he made all the soap himself and let it dry into slabs on the verandah. It was very popular with the local grocers and a real thriving business was set going. He did both retail and wholesale selling. The soap was called Sarasee Soap, and was good for scratches spots, and clearing the complexion generally.

He discovered he was a spy in the following way. It was in 1935, just before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. He discovered Cassiano reading an Italian paper. In it was reported a long speech of Signor Mussolini, talking to a vast crowd in Rome, that Italy must have an Empire, that she had a need for expansion, that Africa lay open to them. Saunders made a remark about this, and the fact that Cassiano was reading it at all. Cassiano was annoyed. "He got up in a vexed manner and stormed into the house, and from that day he never showed me another paper. I thus became aware that he was a spy." To add to his suspicions Cassiano sailed away shortly afterwards, and in a very short time the war against Ethiopia was declared. He saw that there was an Italian ~~gax~~ General called Cassiano, and he was a probably a relation of this man. He sailed so quickly that his affairs were not wound up. Saunders sent him the £5 in cash he owed him, and in return the man let him keep the £3 worth of stock that he had left.

He then had to exist from hand to hand. He got a little day work now and then in Kingston, but he eventually left for the country. He did odd jobs that he had learnt as a seaman in various parts of the world. He did French Polishing, frosting windows, he can do plumbing, and any odd jobs around the house. He got

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tired of doing this. He saw an advertisement in the paper for a Headman on the estate of Mr Gerald Lewis, who owned 1500 acres of land in Vere, Clarendon. There were 300 head of cattle involved. He obtained the job.
Duties.

Three times a week he drove the cattle in to be examined for their condition. They were also checked counted and generally inspected. He did quite a lot of some veterinary work in connection with the cattle. His knowledge of medicine came in useful here. He on one occasion cured a prize bull who had been worried by an open wound on the end of its tail for over a year. It was not able to heal over as the bull was always flicking it open again. He made an artificial tail of sisal, fixed it to the end of the bulls tail, and when he flicked his tail, the sisal protected the wound. Within a week the wound was cured. He learnt this trick abroad. He finally left because the people were wicked and the situation of the place dismal. The cows were not supposed to be milked at all, it was all meant for the calves. He found a man doing it three times in the night, and he reported it to the boss. The boss did not deal with him strictly enough in his opinion and he left. It was very lonely there, there was a mile to walk to the next house. There was nobody with whom he could converse, or of a congenial nature with himself. "So I quit the job"

He was again watching the papers, and saw another advertisement. This time it was for drug agents. It was for a Dr Febri, a South American gentleman. Saunders asked him if he would be willing to help him to buy a bicycle, and then he would be able to sell his goods a lot more efficiently for him. Febri agreed. Saunders put £2 down, and paid off the remainder at 10/- per month. Every three months Febri held a competition to see which all his agents had sold the most goods. Saunders won the prize three times. The first time he won a clock, the second time a watch, and the third time a suitcase. He pointed the watch out to me, in the room, and added that it no longer worked, but he still kept it.

His Profit.

For what Febri sells him for 18/- he sells at 30/- He will make £3 profit on £4 of goods. He will buy for £4 and sell for £7. Similarly he will expect to make £2 profit on £3 of goods.

He here explained that he had left out his travels to Canada in 1930. He had become a steward and a cook on a boat sailing along to Canada. He made four trips in all to Montreal. He became such a good cook that one passenger gave him 20 dollars for a plate of his tomato soup. He had learnt to cook in Cuba. His trip to Canada was well worth while, because he bought a lot of books there and learnt how to do a lot of handy things about mending and repairing, and such like. He was always anxious to enlarge his knowledge and has never lost an opportunity

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of picking up things in whatever country he has visited. It was in this way that he had learnt to make sausages, "Sos-est-sos" (Saucissons) he explained to me they were called by the French. Similarly while in Cuba he had made friends with a Spaniard. This man was an expert in wines and drinks. He made wine from peaches, Cyder Canapres, and oranges. Since he had come to Bull Savannah he had experimented with tomatoes and had produced some tomato wine that was very popular. It was so popular that he was now going to go in for it in a much bigger way, and reduce his drug selling business. He was now making some wine from pomegranates, but it had not fermented as yet, but he fancied that this time he was going to get an even better wine. It will be called King Solomon's wine. Last crop he made 12 quarts of the tomato wine. It had cost him 30/6 to produce each 3 galls. He had charged 8/- per bottle. The rest was profit. It was so good that he was not going to sell it wholesale, he could easily sell it retail in the surrounding neighbourhood. The wine takes 3 months to ferment.

Personal Details.

He lives by himself, and cooks for himself. He rents a room from Mr Wintwood Elliott.

His child.

He has one child called Gloria Saunders, who is now about 18 years old.

Her mother is Amy Mollings and they both live in Kingston.

He used to visit her when he came back from Cuba in 1924 although he never set up a joint household with ~~xxx~~ her. He has always supported the child but has never lived much with the mother.

He did not set up a proper household in those days because he had been largely brought up by his father's sisters, and they strongly disapproved of living with a woman without marrying her. In those days he would have done anything rather than offend them, or go against their wishes. He did not marry the girl because she turned out to be a bad woman. He thought about it, and decided that he would continue to support his child, but that he would leave woman alone. Since then he has always lived in a solitary fashion.

Here Mr Saunders burst into talk about politics and did not give any more information about himself.

"Wages are too small in Jamaica. Look at the small amounts he had earned when he was a boy in Jamaica. 3/- per week when he started, and the highest he ever earned before he sailed for England in 1910 was 8/- per week. When he returned he could have had the same job at the same rate, but that time he had seen how other people live, and experienced other types of wages, and it would not do him.

During the last main elections he was a henchman for Mrx

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Mr Coke who was ventually elected for St Elizabeth. He was a staunch upholder of Labour (B.I.F.U.) One had only to look at history to see the treatment that had been meted out to his people. Look at Jamaica Handbook. You could see everything about it there. "After the emancipation of the slaves their condition was worse than formerly. Governor Eyre, and Governor Blake were both villains. In that book one could read all about Joseph Bogle, and the rebellion in Holland Bay. He was the first man to try and improve the lot of his people. The people were in a state worse than brutes. It was then he had used the memorable phrase, "Colour for Colour, Blood for Blood!"

All the agricultural schemes have broken down. The peasant in Jamaica has no lands. There are nothing but the big properties belonging to the Big Men, on every side this can be seen. One man holds thousands of acres and yet people live like monkeys in a hut, and one can really see such huts in parts of the Island. He wants to see Justice for Justice. Governor Olivier was a really good governor, but from ~~xxxx~~ his day up to now, no man has done as much for Jamaica as Bustamente. It is all a matter of better wages here. If people were given better wages they would look after their children better. They would not have children scattered everywhere with no sense of responsibility towards them. They would dress better and live decent. Jamaica is worse than anywhere else in the world. He has travelled to England, France, Egypt, Italy, Canada, U.S.A. and Cuba, and no where has he found such utter degradation as exists in Jamaica. Look at Kingston, parts of it are a disgrace for any nation to have to own. "We don't fight for what we don't need. That's why the Labour Party fightd to raise the level of wages. There is a measure for every ~~xxx~~ man if it is fairly handed out."

"If it was not for Bustamente, I think ther would be a revolution in this country by now"

The police are one of the worst features of this country. They have always been extremely against the Labour Party, but now the Labour Party is the government they have to be more careful. They tried to make people strike against the Labour Government, and they fight the government, by refusing to take action against known criminals in the hope that it will embarass the government. He had been robbed himself some little time ago. A man had stolen a pair of his pants that were hanging on the back of the door. In the pocket was £24 in money. £8 had dropped out and was recovered. The thief had made off with the rest. It was moonlight and he had actually seen the thief and recognised him. When he went to the Police they refused to take any action. It was all part of a plan. Again during the strike it was well known that the United Fruit Company had bribed the police to fire on the strikers, and shoot people down. Sure, the Labour Government is the dead ~~xxxx~~ enemy of the Police.

When in five years time the Government may be dismissed the people will be in an awful condition. We may be worse than the days of slavery. (He said this was a small chuckle)

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The P.N.P.

- 1) They are no good. Why? Because if they were good they would not be against the lifting of wages. They have set themselves dead against any improvement of the ordinary labourer and that is bad.
- 2) Another thing that is bad about them is that they are not disciplined among themselves. They should set to train and teach their followers to be disciplined. Children in school are taught discipline by careful teaching, and it should be possible for them to do the same thing.
- 3) The third thing about them is that they are making no headway in their schemes. He had heard Mr Manley talk at a meeting, and what he said was good and true. But what had they done to further all these schemes for bigger Hospitals, schools, better homes for the people new industries to absorb the surplus population? They had done nothing. They were not in power, but they should act as Councilors and advisors to the Government. Instead they and the Labour Party were fighting like ~~knives~~ against a bone.

/two dogs

It was his personal opinion that the best thing that could happen to Jamaica was to turn out of office every single government official and put in their place Chinese and Syrians. They are the only people that keep trade and business going in this country. Where they all be if the Chinese and Syrians vanished overnight from the Island? They would have a government of good sense. Another solution to the trouble would be to call in Canadian and English officials for a period of six months and then some results might be obtained.

He now proceed to remark about our work. He began by saying that there had been many reports and Royal Commission about Jamaica. Mr Citrine had come out and his findings had caused a great stir in England where nothing seemed to be known about the shocking conditions of life out here. But Mr Citrine had not published all that he saw. He had gone around and examined houses rather as we were doing. He had seen the places where they kept the hogs, and the chickens, and compared it with the dwelling places of the inhabitants. He had gone into the kitchens and had lifted up the lids of the cooking pots with the food inside, and had seen the sort of diet that people existed on out here. What had he done about this? It had all been suppressed, and nothing in this line had found its way into the Royal Commission's final report. He had already surmised that we were doing a very similar sort of thing to this Commission, but we seemed to be doing it in a better way. We were not rushing through everything in a tearing hurry as the Commission had done. We were taking the bother to live for months amongst the ~~people~~ people and really find out things by living ~~through~~ through them ourselves. This seemed to be a better way than any he had yet come across.

He now wanted to leave for church, so he asked me to return when he would tell me ~~really~~ really about the

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conditions under which he had to live when he was small, and the struggle his mother had had to bring them all up.

Observations. His room was small but very neat, and not badly furnished. There were some books by his bed, and large stone jars in which he was going to manufacture sausages soon to sell around. His bicycle is in the room

He is on very good terms with Mrs Thompson. He offered to give me all the information he knew about the people in Bull Savannah, warning that as he had only been here two years, he only knew people by their Christian names. When I told him that I wished to hear about himself he was very surprised.

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Interview with Ebert Saunders.

I called to see Mr Saunders at his house, in Logwood. He was not there, as he had just left on his bicycle for Top Bull Savannah. I left a message to see him next day. However he called to see me, at my cottage in the afternoon. He said that he had heard of my visit, and to save me the trouble, had called to see me.

His Object

His main object in coming he said, was to tell me in detail the disgusting treatment that he had received from the hands of the Government, after his years of Service in the First World War. At first the Government had not wanted to give them anything, or keep to any of their promises. However they had staged a large demonstration. Nine hundred ex-service men had marched and paraded in Kingston, and the Government had got frightened, and given in to some of their demands, but they got out of doing as much as they could. They were all given the promised five acres in time, and they chose the worst land that it was possible to find in Jamaica. His land was stony and usef-less. In addition to this bad land, he could not even get his title deeds out of them, so that he could sell it for somet ing to help himself. His title deeds finally came through, and did I know when? In 1940. He had exchanged his original plot for another, and he had now sold the whole thing, so he was well clear of the whole affair. He was also due grat ity money owing to his long service. He had been given £4 on leaving, and £15 a year later. This was absolutely nothing of what was due to him. He was in Cuba when the papers had come through, and what had they done? they had muddled himx up with another Saunders, and as a result they were trying to do him out of his money. They did in fact succeed in doing this. He has never received his true amount.

Asked if he belonged to the Jamaican League of Ex-servicemen of Worl War 1, (capt. Platt) he became voluble. He will have nothing to do with them at all. They are nothing but a gang of crooks, who have been known to accept hush-hush money both from the Jamaican and the British Government, if they will stop the ex-servicemen from doing any further agitating for their rights. He knows too much about them. There was Berkely and Johnson, and others like them. What do they do to earn a living? I will tell you, they sit down very comfortably, and tell everybody else to organise themselves into groups, and to do this that and the other. They send out notices to all parts of the country, and only firm about the paying of the

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subscriptions. The subscriptions are a shilling, and it is not surprising that they are firm about this, as it forms their only means of livelihood.

"Let me say, that I have been in most parts of the world, but the worst place in the world for rascality is right here in Jamaica."

His early Life.

He had promised to give me some more details of his early life.

His mother had six children, and in the way the father's cleared off, and never he helped her one penny. He was not ashamed to admit this, why should he be? It was too well known, particularly to people like us to try and hide. The result of her poverty was that she was not able to get any of her children a trade. She had to go to white people and beg them to take her children as yard boys and so on, at practically no money, as long as they were fed. His brother was sent to a Bank Manager in Kingston, he was sent to another man in Kingston. She herself did some washing. She eventually got a job with a Mr Griffiths as a full time washerwoman but the work was extremely hard. His own father died when he was seven years old, and the two fathers of the other children never helped.

She eventually took a job as a housekeeper with the Roman Catholic priests in Kingston. She had so become used to hard work that it was with difficulty that they persuaded her to stop, and she was supported by her sons, up to the end. She died last year.

Egbert was adopted by an aunt, the sister of his father. She lived in Mandeville as well. She treated him very well, and gave him all the schooling he has ever had, and he has always been grateful to her.

One of his brothers had departed for Porto Barreas, and had never been heard of again. He suspected that he was killed in the riots in Colombia, when 600 Jamaicans were killed.

Conditions now in Jamaica.

Everybody knows how bad things are here. American tourists come and take snaps. They persuade the children playing in rags to take sixpence and have their photo taken. They take home these photos with them. Only in Jamaica can women be seen sitting on a heap of stones, breaking stones, in order to try and earn a living. This is a disgrace to any country that calls itself civilised, and brings people to the level of animals.

His Personal Difficulties.

He is a drug seller, and the

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police are always after him. They try to plague and apprehen him, whenever possible. The last time he was taken by a constable and a constable. He talked quite plainly to them, when they tried to imprison him. "I am an ex-serviceman of the First War. I am an invalid ex-serviceman" He explained to me that they had appeared to doubt this statement, so he had been compelled to say to them "Not only a half foot man or a half hand man is an invalid. I have been shell-shocked and wounded. This is my only way to make an honest living" They then left him alone. He then left Kingston, because the noise of the traffic made his deafness worse, and came here. Now for a year the police have not bothered him. The reason for this is that the police have been demanding new wages, and until they get them, they are carrying on a policy of not arresting anybody unless they have to. Before that they were wickered to peddlars. Many people were beaten, and locked up, put in prison for a week, and had their store of goods removed.

All these people were unlicensed. A licence costs £5, not many can afford it. It is said that Busta intends to reduce this to £1 but nothing has been done. They are trying to get the bill through for it.

Personal Expenses.

He pays 8/- per month to Mr Wintwood Elliott, for his room.

From the 1st March this year, he has had a contract for £20 worth of goods. He has already paid back £15 of this. Out of this £15 he is entitled to £7. Taking off the £5 he owes this leaves him £2 only to pay off all his debts. In all he reckons that he has made only £6 in pure profit since March, and all his hard work has come to just that. It is worked on a percentage basis. Some drugs carry a bigger profit than others. The percentages vary from 25% to 40%.

He has to be very careful of his clothes. He bought two new suits last year. "I nurse them like a baby" and they are still all right.

Food. "It is thrice worse than the Egyptian Desert here for food." Rice is practically impossible to get. He buys Quaker Oats, and condensed milk from Bromfield whenever he sees them, and if that shop doesn't have it then no where will. Vegetables are very difficult. People around are not willing to sell to him. They grow for their own immediate needs. "Things are difficult for one accustomed to town life" If it was not for his ability to do things for himself, such as preserving meat, he doesn't know how he would manage. It is a good thing he has been a soldier.

He has made £25 at his wine making, and with this bit

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of capital he intends to launch out next crop. His tomato wine won 3 first prizes at Santa Cruz, they "clamoured over it" He also makes Beer, ginger wine, and pomegranate wine. He gave me a recipe that had in it potash, cream of tartar, sugar. He said that guava wine was good but that pomegranates make the best. He also intends to bottle mangoes in syrup, and they are good as apricots.

He is arranging with two men who live and own land in the district, he would not give their names, to set up a business. He will make the wine, and they will provide the bulk tomatoes, the profits will be shared between them.

He added that this was all very confidential, but that he was quite sure that everything we were doing would be kept in the strictest confidence, (I had not told him this) and that he had no hesitation in letting me know his little plans. He wants to get a small shop, where he can store the barrels of wine.

This week he intends to start making Vienna sausages, and he will sell them in Mandeville. There was only one person in Mandeville that use to make them, and she is gone, a Mrs Howe. A sausage takes about 21 days to get properly pickled.