

The Free West Indies

II. A BASIS FOR CULTURE

Carnival In Trinidad

(By HAROLD STANNARD.)

For most inhabitants of the West Indies life means work for a white boss at the subsistence level, and has never meant anything else since the first Africans were brought over some 400 years ago. This is the aspect of the social problem to which members of the educated minority refer when they talk of eradicating the slave mentality from among their people. The phrase does not cover the whole of the ground in

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work if it extended its influence to the colonies.

On the material side Trinidad is loath to providing that the people, which any West Indian culture can come to full flower shall be such, will promote a decent class of quarters of urban lay-out have far received little attention. Gardens, St. John's, Antigua, for example, or Cuenca, St. Lucia, beautiful because of their situation and owe little to man. Bridgetown the capital of Barbados has a small of its own, like everything Spanish. Trafalgar Square, the space where the central street comes out to the harbour, is well contrasted with the statue of Nelson as the focal point and the Parliament building in the background. Only in Spain, however, is there a tradition of civic dignity, and there its assertion has been happily inspired. Marine Square, a large open space of which were my

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Much excellent work is being done in Jamaica in obedience to this conception. There has been some study of native dances, there are already

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Trinidad vividly illustrates a situation whose consequences will one day have to be faced. To meet our economic convenience we have introduced into these islands racial elements from all over the tropical world, without apparently taking thought for their reactions upon one another. The various communities with which this policy has been tried out seems as a shock, a revelation of the meaning of miscegenation. The various stocks seem to be sorting themselves out according to their capacities. In Jamaica, for instance, the village grocery store is sure to be kept by Chinese, whose community in the island is large enough to run its own little newspaper. General stores, again, are largely run by Indians and so on. In Trinidad, however, with one-third of the population Asiatic, the racial question may well become acute and we must expect to hear more of it when federation craves Indian nationalism to express itself more clearly.

...I saw a play, the work of a Jamaican lady, admirably performed by an amateur company, which dealt with the island's prevalent form of religious hysteria. There is also a company of amateur singers in Kingston whose members, almost all of them professional men and women and several of them teachers, render the native songs with perfect naturalness of intonation and movement. Their aim is to show the labourers who still sing these songs that they have in their daily lives something of real cultural value, of which they can be honourably proud.

"DE COLON MAN."

The island's folk-songs are not merely, perhaps not mainly, a tradition. They are a growing body of spontaneous comment upon life as seen through native eyes. In Jamaica the place of the War profiteer is taken by the native who had worked on the excavation of the Panama Canal and made such a lot of money that he came back with a watch and chain, though he had not learnt to tell the time.

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THEY DANCE & SING

Yet even in Trinidad the various elements that in the mainland were beaten of the carnival from the event which for two days each year sets the thoughts of young to music and dancing, plans of cultural development should start. The practice is for young people to form themselves into groups, equipped with fancy costumes, many of them quite expensive, and with musical instruments and to parade the streets singing songs specially composed for the occasion. The parallel with the Neapolitan *Piedigrotta* suggests a common Spanish origin for both festivals; it also suggests that the Trinidad celebration contains elements of potential musical value. At present no such elements can be distinguished. "Calypso" songs (as they are curiously called), to judge from examples perhaps too discreetly chosen are mere doggerel, and the music, if it does more than beat out the rhythm, is the most commonplace jazz. A proposal was made a few months ago that properly organized competitions should be held with a view to

AN' DE DRESS THEM THEY BECK THE
belly, boom, boom, boom.

The music of these songs is of unmistakable British origin. The typical tune is like one of The Beggar's Opera melodies that had tired of itself before it had completed its first phrase, and had let itself die away. Here and there minor cadences evoke Spain, but only very occasionally is there a trace of American jazz.

The smaller islands with the exception of Barbados, which has a marked individuality, have next to nothing to show, and Trinidad, the only island large enough to compete with Jamaica, lags far behind it. The reason is to be found in the mixed character of its population. From 1845 until 1917 indentured labourers were brought into Trinidad from India and these East Indians now constitute about a third of the inhabitants. They have brought their traditions with them, but have only partly maintained them, and, though

In all this work at cultural development Bellerose can help spiritually and materially and by helping one arrest the decline of her language in West Indian thought. The new few bridges to America, and America probably has a lion's share of the star. The Empire broadcasts from Laverny are, however, growing in popularity and more than once a year was expressed for an expansion of the Empire news bulletin. The new itself is excellent but does not convey anything of the British atmosphere. If the B.B.C. could take the principal London and provincial papers and add to the news bulletin every night extracts from the leading articles of two or three of them West Indian listeners would be grateful. Educated West Indians strain after England, try to appreciate her and find her inaccessible. An organization has been set up to improve British cultural relations with foreign countries; it would do a good day.