

THE GOLDEN LEAF

or

The Romance of the Golden Leaf

(The story of Tobacco in Jamaica)

In the fiscal year 1960/61 the Machado Tobacco Company of Jamaica contributed a total sum of £2,894,027: 19; 1d to the Revenue of the Government of Jamaica in the form of taxes, duties and other fees. The total Revenue from all sources of the Government of Jamaica amounted to £33,489,919 in 1960/61 and the share contributed by the Machado Tobacco Company came to 8.64% of this total. This, by any standards, is a striking and impressive contribution by any single Jamaican company to the economic wellbeing of the country. But the story behind this impressive contribution to the economic wealth of a nation is, if anything, more strikingly impressive and more charged with romance than a mere recital of ~~figures~~ facts and figures.

The story goes back to the latter half of the 19th century in Cuba, and to the Machados of Santa Clara. In those days Cuba was still a colony of Spain and the Machados of Santa Clara were among the rich landowners who encouraged the spirit of revolt against what has become known as the Spanish oppression. The Machados were involved in the Cuban revolt of 1968, and when the Spaniards regained the upper hand temporarily those members of the family who had been most active in the revolt had to flee for their lives. And so it was that Benito and Juan Machado, two cousins and both young men in their twenties, found themselves ^{among some 5,000} ~~refugees~~ ~~in~~ who had fled to Jamaica.

Both young men had spent time in the United States and so spoke English, which made life in Jamaica a great deal easier than it was for the refugees who did not speak English. Shortly after they fled

the Spaniards had confiscated all their property. But the two young men had brought some money with them and so life was not too bad. But much more important, they had brought with them from Cuba two sisters with whom they were in love, and each of the girls had a private fortune of £ \$2,000, which was a great deal of money in those days. The young men married their young women at Spanish Town and both set up house there for a short while. Benito Machado's wife, Juana, in time bore him nine children, eight boys and one girl. Juan's wife, Marcela, bore him two girls. The children of the two families grew up as Jamaican children, loving the land of their birth and learning in it. And to this day the descendants of those two Machados are respected Jamaican families.

Benito Machado had learnt something about the tobacco business from a man called Hernandez whom he had known in the United States, and the idea that they start a cigar business was probably his. Juan and the women approved and they started in a small way in 1874. To begin with all their employees were Cubans refugees who had found refuge in Jamaica. These men had been planters and cigar makers back in Cuba and they brought their skills and knowledge to their new homeland. The Machados also smuggled into Jamaica tobacco seed from the Vuelta Abajo area of Cuba. Experts then went out to find the most suitable land for growing and selected Temple Hall and Colbeck as being similar to the best tobacco land in Cuba. And so the Machados started in the tobacco business and a new industry was introduced to Jamaica.

Tobacco itself was of course not new in Jamaica. When Columbus landed he found tobacco growing in Jamaica but the native grown leaf was not, and is not, of the kind and quality from which cigars to please the palate of the connoisseur is made. Only with the

bringing
 /bring to Jamaica with of the seed of the Cuban type leaf by the
 Machados did a top quality cigar become possible. This Benito
 and Juan Machado set about producing in 1874.

The venture prospered from the outset. Marcela, the wife of
 Juan, ~~xxxx~~ sewed a money bag in which to carry their earnings home.
 At the end of the first week they found the bag too small for the
 job. This happy augury set the pattern for the entire history of
 the venture.

The following year, in 1875, the two cousins established the
 firm of B. & J.B. Machado and set up a cigar making factory on
 Harbour Street in downtown Kingston. It was a small affair, no
 larger than a reasonable sized drawing room, and employing only
 about twenty-five workers, all Cubans and skilled in the art of
 making fine cigars.

Meanwhile to grow the tobacco leaf, the Machados travelled
 about Jamaica encouraging farmers, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
 advising them on the best methods to use, and advancing them
 money on their expected crop. When the crop failed, or when for
 some other reason some farmers could not pay back what they owed,
 the Machados were patient and waited. There is no record of the
 Machados ever foreclosing or seizing a farmer's land because he
 owed money and could not pay. And so relations between the farmers
 and the company and its officials grew and flourished in an
 atmosphere of friendship, trust and co-operation. This pattern
 of harmonious relations which the founding Machados first established
 back in the 19th century has survived right up to this day. So too
 has the pattern of assistance to the modern-day tobacco farmer.

Within a few years the twenty-five workers grew to more than
 three hundred. The premises of the factory had to be expanded, and

the firm was ready to register its first Trade Mark, which, incidentally was also the very first Trade Mark ever registered in Jamaica. Trade Mark No. 1. for "Fantasia Habenera Cigarros Superiores" - which has now lapsed - and Trade Mark No. 2. for "La Tropical Label" were registered on June 21st, 1889. After this Trade Marks followed fast and furious so that by the time of the Grand Exhibition, held in Jamaica in 1891 there were Trade Marks No. 20 and No. 21 on the company's records. At that Exhibition "La Tropical" Cigars won a number of gold medals.

And after the pioneering of the Machados other investors, both local and foreign, began to enter the tobacco business. L. Chacon, a local cigar maker, registered the "L. Chacon La Amalia" Trade Mark in 1890. W. Duke & Sons, a foreign firm registered "Duke's Cameo" in 1889. The American Tobacco Company registered "Pinhead Label" in 1896. W.D. & H.O. Wills registered "Capstan Label", "Three Castles Label" and "Scissors Word" in 1898. And there were a large number of other registrations. In the end the Jamaican tobacco business looked like a many-sided business with an international flavour. But it had all started with the two cousins who came to Jamaica in search a place where they could live in freedom and without fear of political tyranny. They had pioneered the whole business, and to them belong the eternal credit and honour due to all pioneers.

In 1897 Benito Machado, the head of the firm died. His partner and fellow pioneer, Juan Machado, was by this time too ill to manage the business and so the active running of it passed into other hands. But it was still very much a family business and all the Machado boys took a hand in the business at one time or another.

By the turn of the century the firm of B. & J.B. Machado

had become an integral part of the life of Jamaica. The Cubans who had come as refugees had now become Jamaicans. Their children had gone to school with other Jamaican children. The tobacco seed they had brought from Cuba had become native to the Jamaican earth. The cigar makers who had come from Cuba had transmitted their knowledge and their skills in the fine art of making cigars to the Jamaicans among whom they lived and with whom they had inter-married: and in any case, they too had become citizens of Jamaica, giving her their first loyalty. And so, in place of employing only Cubans as at the start, the firm now employed mainly Jamaicans. Jamaicans grew the tobacco leaf on the Jamaican earth; they reaped it in due season; they stored it and cured it and watched over it until it became the golden leaf which went into the making of the high grade Jamaican cigar, which compares favourably with the best that the rest of the world has to offer. And the successes and the achievements of the firm of Machado became the successes and achievements of Jamaica and Jamaicans: and so too with the setbacks.

When the great earthquake of 1907 turned much of Kingston into a raging inferno the Machado factory and retail store on Harbour Street were completely destroyed. 144 of the company's employees perished in the great fire. All the company's books and records were destroyed. Vast quantities of stock perished. But at this point when everything looked black the unique pattern of trust and co-operation that the two pioneering Machados had created came into play. There were no records of debts owed to the company. But most of the company's debtors came forward and paid their debts. Farmers and retailers came in from the country areas to pay and many others offered money to help put the company back on its feet.

And so it was that Park Lodge, which was formerly a hotel, was given over to the company in settlement of a particularly large debt, and a new beginning was made with the proceeds from insurance as well as the money paid up by the honest debtors. Once again the company built itself up into a flourishing enterprise, giving work to a large number of Jamaicans, contributing to the revenue of the government, bringing pleasure to smokers everywhere and enjoying the affection of the Jamaican public.

In 1918 the company ceased to operate as a family business and was registered as a Limited Liability Company under the name "B. & J.B. Machado Limited" with the factory at Park Lodge and Offices and retail store at 12½ Kings Street. By this time the only serious competitor to have emerged in the tobacco business against Machado's was the Jamaica Tobacco Company, which also became a Limited Liability Company in 1919. In 1921 the Jamaica Tobacco Company had a serious fire which destroyed its factory and offices. Machado's came to the rescue by offering to manufacture their products at its Park Lodge factory. Out of this noble gesture came, in 1922, a merger of the two major tobacco companies into the present firm of "B. & J.B. Machado Tobacco Company Limited", which conducts all its operations from Park Lodge, 26 Victoria Avenue, Kingston.

During, and immediately after, the Second World War the company's export of Jamaican cigars to the United Kingdom market reached a very high level. This encouraged the company to invest a great deal of new capital on factory plant in the hope that the market will continue to hold good. But things did not work out as hoped. Britain increased her duties on tobacco. She also allowed Cuban cigars to re-enter the United Kingdom market. These two factors

The closing of the cigar factory meant the displacement of about 225 workers. But the company arranged with Temple Hall to absorb as many of them as possible and itself engaged a large number in its cigarette making undertaking. To the older workers who had given long service and were near the retiring age the company gave pensions. To the few who were young and could not be absorbed the company gave two weeks' pay in lieu of notice as well as generous leaving gratuities. Thus the result of the closing of the factory brought a minimum of hardship on a very small number of the displaced workers.

And so Machado's, which had shown an interest in the manufacture of cigarettes from quite early on in its history, went over to the production of cigarettes.

Today the Machado Tobacco Company manufactures cigarettes exclusively but it has not lost its interest in the making of good quality cigars. Indeed, some of the most important experiments and research efforts at improving the quality of the tobacco leaf and

rendering it resistant to diseases, are conducted by the company's own experts at the company, Colbeck estate. In addition these field experts of the company are continuously engaged in the business of growing tobacco, advising farmers on the best methods to use and supplying seed and other materials.

For ~~the~~ 1962 ~~year~~ these company expert had ~~taxen~~^{supervise} under supervision a total of 1,250 seedbeds, with each bed measuring about 3' x 30' and being covered with bamboo hoops and cheese cloth. The nursery period for these beds is from eight to ten weeks and throughout this period weeding and water and spraying are important. A large labour force of women are used with one woman tending ten beds as an average. Indeed, ninety-five percent of the labour force in the growing of tobacco are women.

For the 1962 crop 84 acres are under cultivation for cigar leaf and 300 acres for cigarette leaf, giving a total of 384 acres on which the company has subsidised farmers. There are eleven small farmer with between 4 and 8 acres under tobacco; there are 21 medium sized farmers with between 9 and 15 acres under tobacco; and there are three large farmers with between 16 and 25 acres under tobacco. These farmer employ a total labour force of roughly 600 workers.

The company advances to the farmer approximately £100 for every acre under tobacco: about £70 of this is in cash and £30 in materials. The average return to the farmer on an acre of cigarette tobacco is £160 gross; on an acre of cigar tobacco it is £170 gross. The average of the Virginia type cigarette tobacco is about 1,000lb to the acre; the yield for cigar tobacco is about 1,400lbs to the acre.

Very few good Jamaican farmers desert tobacco once they have

~~xxxxxxxx~~ learned the principles of taking good care of their leaf. For the painstaking and the hard-working farmer few other agricultural pursuits are as financially rewarding as the growing of tobacco. Of course in addition to the farmers who grow for the Machado company there are other tobacco growers too. In the main they sell their leaf to other tobacco companies. But Machado's are still the only firm that assists the farmer with financial advances as well as expert advice to ensure the growing of top quality leaf. Today the Jamaican cigar industry employs roughly 1,000 workers in the making of cigar and about 5,000 in cigar leaf growing. And it all began with the two Machado cousins.

At its modern cigarette factory at Park Lodge the Machado Tobacco Company today employs a total labour force of 263 people. There are ~~xxx~~ 206 factory workers of whom 117 are men and 89 are women. There is a total office, sales and Leaf Department staff of 50 and a managerial staff of 7.

Basic wages for factory workers range from \$5.10.0 a week to \$13. 3. 4. For office staff and factory foremen wages range from \$8 to \$30 a week.

The workers at Machado's enjoy what can fairly be described as among the very best working conditions in Jamaica. They have a five-day 40-hour working week and they are paid time and a half for overtime and double pay if they work on Sundays or public holidays. They get two weeks annual leave after the first year of service and three weeks after fifteen years. They get two weeks sick leave with pay and this can accumulate indefinitely. Each male worker is allowed 15 cigarettes a day, even when he is on holiday and each woman worker gets 6 cigarettes a day.

Three years ago the company started a contributory provident

fund for its workers. The worker contributes 5% of his or her basic pay and the company contributes 5%. And the beauty of this particular scheme is that it is retroactive to the date when the worker started with the company. Each worker gets three uniforms a year but drivers, sidemen and watchmen get four uniforms a year. The company also gives leave with pay and pays the fees in full for any workers who are chosen to go on industrial training courses. There is a sick bay with a qualified nurse in attendance and the workers' canteen at Park Lodge has the delightfully clean and cool and airy appearance of a charming club room.

For the office staff the company has a 5-day 35-hour working week with two weeks annual leave after the first year and three weeks after ten years. Sick leave is indefinite at the discretion of the management. There is a contributory pensions scheme with benefits again being retroactive to the date of employment. A full pension of 60% of the average salary over the past three years is paid to men after 43 years of service: in the case of women the pension is paid after 38 years of service. In the event of the death of a pensioner the benefits go to widows and children under eighteen.

The company also subsidises membership of the Blue Cross Medical and Hospital scheme to the extent of two-thirds of the contribution of any person who joins. Factory foremen and women members of staff are provided with uniforms, and there is an end of year bonus of from one to three weeks pay depending on how long the person has worked with the company. Factory foremen, mechanics, office personnell and sales staff have from time to time been afforded opportunities of studying abroad at the company's expense.

And so it is that the cigar and cigarette industry in Jamaica and Machado's are ~~xxxxxxxx~~ often regarded ^{as} /synonymous ~~xxxxxx~~ by the Jamaican public; and so it is that among workers Machado's is the symbol of progressive employment policies; and that among farmers Machado's represents a progressive and scientific and helpful outlook towards the farmer and his problems.

For cigarette smokers ^{in Jamaica} Machado's is 'Royal Blend' and 'Four Aces' and 'Albany King-size' and 'Zypher'. For cigar smokers in Britain and the United States it is "La Tropical De Luxe". It contributes to the revenue of the government; it brings work and a livelihood to people in town and country; it brings science to the service of agriculture. All these go into the making of Machado's. It is all this and more. It is a part of Jamaica and a memorial to its founders who came seeking a home where they could live in peace and freedom and in exchange for that great boon they gave Jamaica its modern tobacco industry.