

Mrs. Manley Helps

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Through Edna Manley's story runs a theme of a people's aspiration. You can hear the music of a young nation's faith and progress in her telling of the past 35 years of West Indian development. "It has been a wonderful experience to see people emerge from uncertainty and insecurity into a sure faith in themselves.

"It meant a great deal to me to see the proof of the growth of the nationalist movement when in 1954 at a large pre-election rally thousands of Jamaicans of all classes, colors, and types stood side by side in a common cause; the businessman beside the domestic servant, the professional man beside the dock worker, united in the solid nationalist movement. Now this Jamaican movement (her husband's People's National Party) is affiliated with the wider West Indian ideal." (The Caribbean Federal Labour Party of which Mr. Manley is President.)

The wife of Jamaica's Chief Minister, Norman Washington Manley, is a vital, alert woman. Even when relaxed in an armchair in her gracious home, Mrs. Manley gives the impression of dynamic energy: she radiates lively interest in everything.

Federation Champion

Naturally one of her prime concerns is the West Indies, the young Federation of Caribbean islands of which her husband is one of the chief architects. If, as many predict, Mr. Manley becomes the first Prime Minister of the West Indies next year, his wife will be a prominent figure in this eager young nation on America's front porch.

"Federation," she says, "is a magnificent opportunity for us all to learn more. I have already learned much about our fellow men in the other islands, I want to visit all the islands for long periods and study our common problems. The federation idea has thrown up such remarkable leaders among us that it proves that although we may be short on quantity in the West Indies, we do have quality."

All through her husband's exciting political career, Mrs. Manley has been an inspiring partner and not only appears regularly beside him on public platforms but has spoken effectively

at many election meetings. She does her most forceful work in small "backyard" meetings where she talks to small groups and teaches people what sound government can be. She feels that the greatest job her husband and she have done is to give people faith in ideals, rather than in the immediate prospect of economic gains.

She carries her share of the onerous burden of official duties with no apparent effort and is known for her great personal charm which endears her to all sections of the Jamaican community.

Patron of Arts

But, even before Mr. Manley entered politics in 1938, Edna Manley was nurturing the tiny, vigorous shoots of self-expression among young West Indians. Herself an artist of international renown (her sculpture has been exhibited in London galleries, and examples of her work are in private collections in the United States) she began encouraging Jamaican poets, painters, sculptors and writers.

She was on the editorial staff of "Public Opinion," a weekly newspaper with strong political flavor but which nonetheless devoted a page regularly to the work of young writers many of whom had their poems, essays, and short stories printed there for the first time. Few indeed are the successful Jamaican writers of today whose work has not been benefited either directly from Edna Manley's advice or less directly from the stimulus she has been to all art in Jamaica.

During the past 20 years she has published three anthologies of Jamaican prose and poetry under the title "Focus."

Her influence has already been evidenced officially by her husband's government's policy of recognizing and encouraging the arts. The Ministry of Education in the Manley government openly and for the first time in West Indian history fosters the development of art.

In the '30's, stimulated by the French art groups, which in her student days were extolling the beauty and strength of African art forms, she formed and

taught art classes in Jamaica, the results of which, though they created a furore in the conservative artistic circles of the time and country, have had a profound effect on the intellectual life of Jamaica and the West Indies.

Indigenous Art

As she herself says, "I found Jamaicans who had hardly been abroad, painting decorative little water colors of English scenes—because virtually the only pictures they had seen were by English or at least European artists!

"When I assisted in judging art exhibits from 100 elementary schools in 1928, I was astonished to find that the peasant children had painted pictures of peasant men and women in native costume but with blue eyes, fair hair, and white faces because they had the fantastic inferiority complex that the Negro or black was ugly!"

Mrs. Manley's maternal grandmother was strictly speaking a colored woman, but her own Caucasian features, her gray eyes, and milk white skin proclaim her as white. She married Norman Manley, a brilliant young Negro lawyer early in his career.

Their two sons are both prominent in Jamaican life, one as a trade union leader and the other a lecturer at the University College of the West Indies. They are married to a Chinese and a Negro, respectively. Edna Manley's grandchildren evidence the mixture of races which West Indians accept naturally without self-consciousness.

'Wonderful Mixture'

"My family is a wonderful mixture of peoples and strains," Mrs. Manley says.

Asked what was her motivating precept, Mrs. Manley thought for a while and then said, "A passion for simple truth, I think. A hatred of injustice, too, but I like to get down to fundamental truth and simplicity—they are timeless." Then she smiled—"Simplicity and truth: they are what a woodcarver is always looking for."

Here then is a sketch of the interesting, radiant personality of Edna Manley of the West Indies. Her detractors, and there are many such especially in the political arena, say that she is inconsistent, insincere, and even opportunistic, to which

it may be replied with considerable force that what Edna Manley has done is already a valuable part of West Indian history and the West Indian heritage.

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