

Una Marson

INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA
WEST INDIAN REFERENCE LIBRARY

comes

home,

dies at 60

Gleaner Staff Reporter

A Jamaican who made her mark in many fields — among them, poetry, journalism, broadcasting, social-welfare work — died yesterday after a full, active life that took her outside the island to many parts of the world.

Una Marson, perhaps one of the best-known personalities in Jamaican literary life, died in St. Joseph's Hospital, Kingston, after a brief illness.

She returned home quietly just over three weeks ago — from Israel, where she had been visiting — for a brief rest before going to England to take up a British Council scholarship. She was 60.

Ill-health had been plaguing the dedicated Jamaican writer and social worker over the years, but lack of physical strength did not affect the dynamism of one who took a passionate interest in the cause of Jamaica and its people, particularly its children.

Up to early this year, she was busy at the task of running the Jamaica Save The Children Fund, a social welfare organization which she helped to start back in 1938, and with which she has been associated ever since.

She left Jamaica in March, after being awarded a grant of £150 by the British Council to assist her in research into the social development of Jamaica

over the past fifty years — her findings to be incorporated into a semi-autobiographical work which she planned to complete this summer.

This book will not now be written, but Una Marson has left behind her a rich legacy of other writings, including books of poems which established her, as far back as 1930, as one of the shining lights in the Jamaican literary sky.

As a journalist, she wrote prolifically for the Gleaner, contributing articles mainly of national and sociological content; her two principal preoccupations.

Her last published article here dealt with Jamaica's diplomatic representation in London — a typical Una Marson piece of journalism which looked searching into the operations of the office of the Jamaican High Commission in Britain, and more especially, its benefits to Jamaicans living in that country. It appeared in the Gleaner on March 6.

Broadcasting

Broadcasting was another field in which Miss Marson achieved recognition. While living in England during and after World War II, she made her name in radio as a staffer with the British Broadcasting Corporation, when she became the producer of the popular West Indian programme "London Calling".

This was a programme beamed by the BBC to the West Indies, and provided a link between West Indians at home and their compatriots who had gone to Britain to fight or to work in the munition factories.

Miss Marson worked with the BBC for six years until 1946, as a producer of West Indian programmes. The pattern which she set in this area is being followed today by the BBC.

Una Marson was born in Santa Cruz, St. Elizabeth. She was the youngest daughter of the late Rev. Solomon Marson, Baptist minister, and Ada (nee Mullings), his wife. After graduating from Hampton High School, she worked as a secretary for some time and also on the editorial staff of the "Gleaner".

She left Jamaica in the early 1930's for England and soon identified herself with the League of Coloured Peoples, founded by another notable Jamaican, the late Dr. Harold Moody. She served as secretary of the League between the period 1933-1935.

Collaborator

Moving into the international sphere, she was a delegate to the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1935. She served as a temporary collaborator with the League of Nations, in Geneva, in the same year.

Miss Marson joined the staff of the Ethiopian Legation in London during 1936, and accompanied His Majesty, The Emperor Haile Selassie, of Ethiopia, on his historic mission to the League of Nations in that year, when the "King of Kings" made his dramatic appeal to the League against the rape of Ethiopia by Italy.

Returning to Jamaica, Una Marson resumed her literary work. She founded the Readers and Writers Club in Kingston, and also launched the Kingston Dramatic Club.

After an absence from the island, Miss Marson returned in 1949, when she went to work with the Gleaner Company as organizing secretary and general editor of the Pioneer Press, a publishing house.

Poetry

Her poetic works include "Tropic Reveries" (1930), "Heights and Depths" (1931), "The Moth and the Star" (1937), "Towards The Stars" (1945). She also wrote and staged three plays: "At What A Price" (Ward Theatre, Kingston, 1932, and Scala Theatre, London, 1934); "London Calling" (1937), and "Pocomania" (1938), both produced in the Ward Theatre.

Before leaving Jamaica for the first time, she edited and published a monthly literary

magazine "The Cosmopolitan" in 1929-31. She worked as a lecturer in England during 1938-40, and was a script-writer with BBC Television in 1938-39.

She was awarded the Musgrave Silver Medal of the Institute of Jamaica in 1930, for her literary work.

Miss Marson is survived by a sister, Ethel, a civil servant, who is well known in musical circles, having been associated with the Diocesan Festival Choir for many years.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been finalized. An announcement on these will be made later this week.

A tribute to Miss Marson was sent to the Gleaner yesterday by the Jamaica Teachers Association. Said the message, signed by the secretary, Mr. W. B. C. Hawthorne:

"It is with profound regret that the Jamaica Teachers' Association learns of the death today of Miss Una Marson.

"The Association joins with the vast number of organizations and individuals both here and abroad in its deep appreciation and gratitude for the outstanding and immortal contribution Miss Marson has made to the social and cultural life of our own land and the spiritual impact she has made on the lives of those who had the good fortune to know her.

"To her bereaved relatives, the JTA extends its sincere condolence.

"May she rest in peace."