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Una Marson

The late Una Marson was an outstanding figure amongst the intellectuals of the generation whose abilities matured between the World Wars. The direct tradition of the pre-1914 intellectual life was represented by the late Clare McFarlane: Miss Marson was strikingly representative of a younger age-group who modified the tradition.

It is of course a myth to describe Mr. McFarlane and his group as remote from Jamaica and unrelated to its new intellectual and moral needs. They were often profoundly concerned about the problems of the late 'twenties and the 'thirties: but the people who were ten to fifteen years younger felt more poignantly the pressure of materialism and lack of opportunity. They looked out on the inter-war world and sought, here and abroad, new guiding principles, new stars to steer by.

Miss Marson's manysided activities between the wars embody this search for the basis of a new society, a new world-order and not simply a revamped Jamaica. She was identified in England with Dr. Harold Moody's efforts for coloured people in the U.K., and she was actually on the staff of the Ethiopian Legation in London when Haile Selassie sought to reach the conscience of the world. She was identified with feminist movements here and abroad. She edited a magazine intended to represent the new intellectual movement. Her play *Pocomania* broke new ground. She aroused the conscience of the country about its children and was to all intents and purposes the founder of the Jamaica Save The Children Fund. She was also a leading spirit in the Readers' and Writers' Club, an effort to mobilise the young intellectuals.

The great changes inaugurated by 1938 and World War II did not, however, place her in a position of new significance. This was partly due to her long absence in the United Kingdom as a result of the war, which put her out of touch with events in Jamaica, so that a younger group of intellectuals appeared with little contact with her. But it was due still more to the fact that this younger group, with no perspective, found her work as remote as *Beowulf* and just about as 'West Indian'.

A certain sadness, therefore, hung over her last years. Everywhere the great ideals of her generation triumphed at the cost of debasement. For Miss Marson personally this might be symbolized by the fact that Anthony Eden, the bright hope of the League of Nations in the 'thirties, became in the 'fifties the man of Suez. The debasement of ideals meant that roles were confused.

In Jamaica, this involved a change in the relationship of the educated classes to the ideals of the 'thirties. Before World War II, the concept of a national literature, the ideal of national solidarity, the aspiration towards justice for all races, were not popular, and anyone who stood by these principles had to expect a certain amount of trouble. After World War II, they became accepted: they were at one and the same time advanced to the position of guiding principles of the society and degraded to catchwords. Miss Marson found herself isolated; it was difficult for her to establish contact with the younger generation; and she was frequently obsessed by a sense of futility.

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