

The Golden Lure of West Indian Ambition

(Copyright, 1908, by E. B. Warner.)

WHILE he was riding through a West Indian village the other day an American tourist stopped to take a drink and have a chat with the natives. School was just being dismissed, and the boys, who are always eager to see and speak with a stranger from over the seas, crowded around him. The man asked a few of them what they were going to do when they grow up, and without an exception they replied:

"Going to America, sir, as soon as ever I can get enough money for the passage. That's the place where West Indians get on, for there's no room for them to go ahead here."

The tourist made further inquiries among all classes of people, white and black, and found the same story everywhere. Every family had a son or daughter in the States, or one saving up money with the idea of going there and making a fortune.

America is the magnet for all enterprising spirits throughout the West Indies. There are large British West Indian colonies in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Newport News, Baltimore and other cities along the Atlantic seaboard. These colonies never attract any attention, because they are composed of people who speak English properly, and do not differ, outwardly, from Americans, as most of the other immigrants do. But they are immigrant colonies none the less, with their own peculiarities and their own clannish sentiment.

They cling together, and make a point of hunting up new arrivals from the West Indies and helping them to find their footing among a strange people in a strange land. They retain a feeling of loyalty and affection toward their native country and the flag under which they were born. Rarely does a British, Danish, Dutch or French West Indian take out his naturalization papers and become an American citizen, however long he may dwell in this country. In that respect, they differ most markedly from other immigrants. And when they gather together, as they often do, on festive occasions, it is to celebrate one of their own national holidays and pay honor to their own flag and their own monarch. But, though they thus decline to be assimilated, they esteem American institutions and form an excellent element in any community in which they settle.

Usually they come to this country poor in everything save youth and spirit. They have no money, no knowledge of American business methods, no acquaintance with the ways of a big city. Many a young man arrives at Boston or New York from Jamaica—where there is the largest exodus—with \$5 or \$6 in his pocket and not the slightest notion of what he is going to do or where he is going to look for a job.

West Indian immigrants seldom have the \$30 required by law, but as they are always first-class passengers on the steamers the immigration inspectors do not trouble them. They are incredibly reckless. They will throw up a good job in Barbados, Jamaica, or Antigua, spend almost their last cent buying first-class steamship tickets, and land in America with a wife and family, but neither money nor prospects.

Yet, somehow or other, they always "make good," and often win positions of wealth and importance in the community.

"When I arrived here," said a Jamaican, who now holds a leading place in financial circles in Boston, "I was a youngster of 18, who had never seen a big town or city. I had just \$2 in my pocket, and my chum, who came with me, had \$4.

"Boston scared us at first—it was so large and so full of people—but some West Indian friends took us in hand, and we both got places as clerks in business offices the first day we looked for work. It was hard for the two of us to live on those \$6 until our first payday came around, but we managed it; and ever since then we have both gone ahead steadily.

"American business houses, as a rule, are glad to employ British West Indians. They are well educated, trained to responsibility from earliest youth, intent on making their way, and familiar, of course, with West Indian products and requirements. It is true, they don't know many of the things that every American clerk knows; but then they know many things that no American clerk knows, and that more than compensates, from the employer's point of view.

"I have followed the careers of hundreds of West Indians who have come over here," continued the Boston merchant, "and I have known very few of them to fail and go back home again. Those few have made the big mistake of getting remittances from home.

"I have known young West Indians who tramped the streets, workless and penniless and nearly starving, while their fathers owned big plantations and employed hundreds of negro and coolie laborers. A letter would have brought them all the money they wanted, but they were too proud to ask for help. They wrote home cheerfully, and never said a word about their struggles until they had 'made good.' Such fellows as those are bound to 'make good' in any American city."

Boston contains the largest West Indian colony in America. There are nearly 4,000

West Indians there, mostly Jamaicans. Many of them are engaged in the banana trade, of which Boston is the American headquarters and Jamaica the tropical center.

In New York there are probably 3,000 West Indians, and one street turning off the lower part of Ninth avenue is almost entirely inhabited by Jamaican negroes, who swarm together in one community by a natural instinct.

In Philadelphia, according to a prominent Barbadian who lives there, the West Indians number nearly 2,500, and occupy many leading positions in the world of commerce and industry.

"From all accounts," said this Barbadian, who is in a big way of business, "the exodus from the British West Indies is going to increase. Indeed, it is increasing all the time. The growing poverty of the islands is making it impossible to go ahead there, however shrewd one may be, and naturally all the bright, enterprising young men come here. The cost is much less than that of going to the mother country, and every West Indian is firmly convinced that there are plenty of dollars to be picked up here, while he is dubious about England.

"Look at this paper," he continued, picking up a recent copy of the Standard, a local newspaper of Antigua, B. W. I. "See what it says about the matter:

"The number of those who have left for, and those who contemplate going, to the United States, of the pick of the St. Kitts and Antigua young people of both sexes—some of them in the government service, too—is suggestive of rats leaving a sinking ship to escape peril.

"Really, the situation is becoming serious. If the emigration were confined to our never-do-wells, it might be thought a mercy that they should leave their country for their country's good, but unfortunately the majority of this class remain, and, as a consequence, the difficulty in procuring the services of competent, trustworthy young men to fill such places as clerks in the various lines of trade, and of workmen in the several crafts, is becoming acute. The dregs remain, from which little or no good can be any process of squeezing be extracted.

"We are made to understand that the bookings for first-class passengers for America by Korona and Fontabelle on their return voyages from this colony are enough to shut out all others. And still there are many more, only biding time, opportunity and the realizing of a few dollars, ere they, too, shake off tropical dust from their feet.

"There is no help for it, unfortunately. The States can find room for all, we opine, and it may be that by and by the West Indian element over there will be so strong, and so satisfied with republican rule, as to influence and render less difficult to be solved the problem of annexation."

The newspapers of the other islands say practically the same.

A small circle of West Indians in New York have formed a society which they call "The Carib Cannibals." They meet at one another's houses, talk over old times and common friends down south, and arrange to give a helping hand to other West Indians who have not yet "made good."

One evening they were talking about their own experiences—why they came here, how they came, and what happened to them.

"I was a government clerk down in Jamaica, earning \$500 a year," said the president of the club. "If I had waited another five years I would have got an increase of \$50 a year. As for promotion, there was no chance of it unless one of the old fogies at the top of the tree was obliging enough to die.

"Well, I jogged along contentedly until I fell in love with a planter's pretty daughter. We became engaged, but when I asked the planter for the parental blessing he told me not to be a fool, and asked me what I proposed keeping a wife on. Of course, I looked like an ass, but I told him I meant to have her all the same.

"Well, then, my lad," he said, looking at me rather more kindly, 'you shall have your chance. When I was your age I was in the same boat. But I didn't stick in the mud here on starvation pay. I went to the States, made money, came back and bought this plantation, and married Mary's mother. You go and do the same.'

"But I have no money to go there with," I ventured.

"And yet you propose to marry a wife," he retorted, adding: 'Well, here are \$50. Take them as a loan. Your passage will cost you \$42, and you'll have about \$8 to land with, provided you don't drink too many cocktails on the steamer. If you can't make a position for yourself and come back for Mary within a couple of years, you need never expect to get her.'

"I took the money and came here. It was rough sledging at first and many a time I was tempted to go back to the easy, if unprofitable, life in Jamaica. But the thought of Mary kept me steadfast and in less than the two years I was able to go back, pretty well fixed, and demand her from the old man. And what do you think his wedding present to me was? The same \$50 note which I had repaid him out of my first earnings.

"When you sent that, my boy," he said, 'I knew you were safe to come back for Mary, so I had it framed and kept it waiting for you.'

"When I came here," said another member of the club, turning to the president, "I had an even greater incentive than you. I was an overseer on a St. Kitts plantation, working for my board and \$5 a week. I didn't wait, as you did. I married her and we managed to get here by pawning the few bits of jewelry we possessed. We bluffed the immigration inspector—it was only two years ago—and landed with just over \$3 in our possession.

"That same afternoon I walked into the first newspaper office I saw and got a job as reporter at \$5 a week, though I knew nothing of the work. It was pretty tough work living on that small wage, but in a few weeks I was getting \$20 on a better paper, and now I'm making a livable salary."

"I know a West Indian," spoke up a third member of the club, "who is now head of the American organization of a big English bank. He came to Philadelphia for a holiday, soon after leaving school, liked the place, took a position as a junior clerk, and rose very quickly to the top of the tree."

"Do you know," remarked the old Jamaican, "that a great many West Indian

women come here and marry rich Americans? They are the daughters of the aristocratic old planting families who have lost their money through the ruin of the West Indian sugar industry. They come here by shoals to earn a living. I suppose there must be hundreds of them in Boston, to say nothing of Philadelphia and New York. Some of them become stenographers, but most of them do the best kind of fancy needlework. The West Indian woman of the higher classes is an adept at that kind of work, as you know.

"Sooner or later they meet their millionaire and marry him. Americans seem to find them irresistible, and that's not strange, for, of course, we all believe here that the Creole girl of the good old planting families is the best girl on earth."

Profitable Transfer

A Harvard fullback has married a girl worth \$5,000,000. Transferred the fullness from back to pocket, as it were.—Denver Post.

Numerous Attractions

It is astonishing how popular Baltimore can be, despite the fact that it is out of the oyster season.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.



REV. AND MRS. BANDY, PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARIES TO INDIA, AND THE BOY THEY ADOPTED—Photo by a Staff Artist.



"RAJAB," THE INDIAN BOY ADOPTED BY REV. AND MRS. BANDY, IN NATIVE COSTUME—Photo by a Staff Artist.