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THE YEARS OF REVOLT
Trinidad 1881-1888

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THE YEARS OF REVOLT
Trinidad 1881-1888

by

Fr. Anthony de Verteuil C.S.Sp.



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Gérard A. Besson
November, 1984



Sir Henry Irving - late Governor of Trinidad.

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Preface



This book is about the revolt of the blacks — the Carnival riots of 1881; the revolt of the Indians — the Hosay riots of 1884; the 'revolt' of the whites — the Reform movement of 1887.

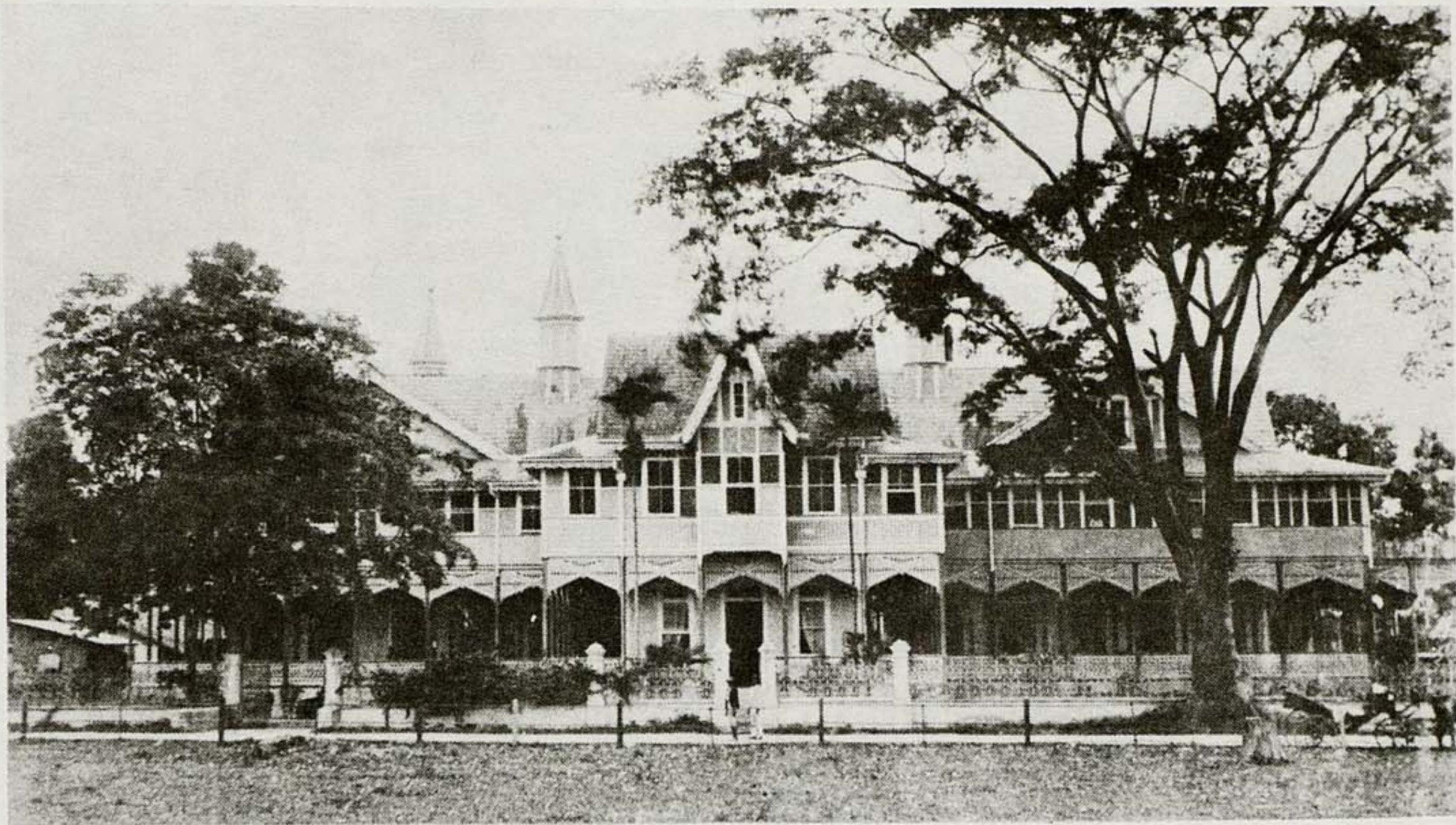
That I have been able to complete this work in spite of extremely adverse conditions is due entirely to three persons to whom I am most deeply indebted and to whom I offer my sincerest thanks:— Fr Vincent Leahy O.P. who guided me through the British Record Office at Kew Gardens, London and who photo-copied and tape-recorded a vast amount of material for me. Miss Maureen de Verteuil, my sister, whose translation of the Massé diaries — twelve copy-books of almost illegible French dating from 1879 — proved an invaluable source of information; and who faultlessly typed the manuscript of this book.

Dr. Bridget Brereton, who introduced me to numerous sources at the University of the West Indies, who kindly read the final manuscript, and whose published researches provided the indispensable background to the period.

The newspapers of the time were extensively consulted but because of their frequent bias only a limited use has been made of them. Nevertheless, I wish to thank the Librarians at the Government Archives and the Belmont Library who made them available, as also the Librarian of the House of Representatives.

The period 1880 — 1888, is an important and formative era in the History of Trinidad and should repay deeper study. It is also perhaps the most interesting decade in the annals of our country. In interpreting it however, one must be careful for it was an era which in spite of many resemblances was very different in mentality to the present. Moreover the meaning of words has changed. *Coolie* then signified a native labourer of India or China — a technical term and not a term of contempt. A *creole* as used by British officialdom signified a negro born in Trinidad, but to the French creoles of Trinidad at that time, a creole meant anyone born in the island, negro or white. And Trinidad was then a colony in the British Empire over which the sun never set, ruled over by the glorious Queen Victoria, and to be British connoted a world of greatness which it does not do at present. So, to revolt against British institutions, and British officialdom and British decree,

was a far greater thing in those years than it would be today. There was then, a daring and a verve in many of those Trinidadians of the 1880's which we can admire and imitate even now.



Queen's Park Hotel

CHAPTER ONE

The Environment

Their naked bodies shining like burnished bronze in the morning sun, they walked slowly up the gently sloping strand at Erin. Thirty of them, men and women, some with babies at the breast. All wore belts — and nothing more. They brought ashore with them hammocks, parrots, goats and pigs. From the forest and grasslands of Venezuela and the swamps of the Orinoco, they had crossed over from the Main in their 'corial', — a great canoe, fifty feet and more in length and fifteen feet wide, a trunk of a huge tree forming the bottom, the sides built of boards attached to each other with benches, the small spaces between caulked with grasses. It was the 23rd February 1879. The Guaraoon Indians had come to trade in Trinidad for fish hooks, tobacco, mirrors, salt; they had returned to the island from which their ancestors had fled through fear of the Spaniards, aeons ago.¹

They came back to their ancient country, year after year, decade after decade, century after century,² landing at Erin and at Icacos, following the very same paths (it was said) that their ancestors had trod, marching exactly in their footsteps, penetrating often as far as San Fernando, strolling in uninhibited and naked splendour along the streets; and then with a knowledge passed down generation after generation, sometimes surely and silently they followed the secret trail through the forest even to their sacred Mountain Tamana, by climbing which, their ancient genesis myth had it, a man and a woman had escaped the universal deluge and had miraculously created a new human race from the fruits of the Mauritius palm.³ Eventually, they returned to their corials and the sea, paddling off into the sunset. A cycle to be repeated, by this tribe — a nation of unchanging tradition, almost untouched by the trickling sands of time.

Not so however the people to whose country they came. Drastic change in the very structure of society had been forced on Trinidad with the emancipation of the slaves in 1838 and a clear, though very slow, transformation had taken place since then, both in those who had long lived in the island and in those who had emigrated to the country more recently. Now at the beginning of the 1880's, the time was ripe for a more sudden and dramatic transmogrification. Events were speeding up, attitudes were hardening rapidly and men were, (although all unknowing to themselves) ready to revolt.

Trinidad in the 1880's was still a largely undeveloped country. Large areas of the South East and South were still under forest as also all its mountains in the centre and North. Over three-quarters of a million acres of it consisted of untouched Crown

lands.⁴ Sugar was concentrated in the area between Port of Spain and San Fernando, in the Naparimas, and in the St. Joseph-Arima district. Arima marked the Eastern limits of sugar. Coconuts were grown along the Manzanilla-Mayaro stretch. Cocoa was cultivated more and more in the valleys of the Northern Range, in the North-East near Sangre Grande, and in the Montserrat area in central Trinidad; but grown as it was with the Immortelle shade trees, the cocoa plantations appeared scarcely different from the original forest. About one quarter of the people of the island lived in the chief towns of Port of Spain and San Fernando, and the rest dwelt mainly in very small villages, though Arima was somewhat developed as a cocoa-collecting centre.

Communications were appalling. It took twelve days to get from Moruga in the extreme south, to Port of Spain, overland, during the rainy season. Blanchisseuse was 'the remotest, loneliest and unhealthiest spot in Her Majesty's tropical dominions'. Captain Baker, Chief of Police, once took ten days to go from Arouca to Blanchisseuse to Toco to Arima via the north coast. Unbridged streams crossing the main roads were often impassable or highly dangerous for days at a time during the rainy season. Mayaro was virtually a foreign country, though by 1872 a path had been cleared to it. In 1882 returning from there to civilisation, the parish priest was lost for two days in the forest. Railways however, provided a dramatic improvement in land travel. The Port of Spain/Arima line was opened in 1876, the line to San Fernando in 1882, and the Princes Town extension in 1884. The railway placed Trinidad among the most progressive of the British West Indian Colonies. Travel by sea was, however, still the preferred way to many places. A steamer went twice

a week from Port of Spain to San Fernando, and on to La Brea and Cedros. Coming off the steamer in the two latter places, one embarked on a pirogue for a ten minute row to land, and had then to be carried ashore through the waves on the backs of the boatmen. Travel by pirogue propelled by two oarsmen, was quite usual from Cedros to La Brea, or La Brea to San Fernando. This was uncomfortable rather than dangerous, though it had its compensations. Father Armand Massé, a Roman Catholic French priest, resident in Trinidad from 1879 to 1888 describes a trip in his diary.

I left La Brea at 4 a.m. rowed by two boatmen. We followed the coast for the four or five leagues which would bring us to San Fernando. When dawn came, I saw a sunrise the like of which I had never seen before. The East, behind the forested San Fernando hill was resplendant with colours of the most beautiful and varied shades — the delicacy of outline of the softly shaded clouds with their tints slowly changing from one to another in almost imperceptible fashion. While this transformation took place in the East, to the West the mountain mass of Venezuela gradually broke through the morning mist with its multitude of airy shapes and appeared in the far distance almost like a marvellous mirage. For many minutes this picture held me enraptured, the beauty of the scene recalling to me the greatness and the power of the living God.

Although the natural beauty of the island was remarkable, it did not make up for the harshness of life. Many of the people were poor and a few lacked even the necessities of life. We hear surprisingly of one estate owner at Oropouche who was forced to use packing cases and barrels as seats, and whose wife did all the housekeeping and cooking without assistance. And life could be made even more miserable by a succession of diseases.

There were yellow fever epidemics every eleven or twelve years (once immunity had worn off) in 1869, 1881, 1894.⁵ Malaria was however the chief cause of death in Trinidad. In 1880 the miasmatic theory (that the disease was due to the bad air of the swamps) was rejected and the mosquito incriminated. The disease was treated fairly successfully with quinine, the powder of Peruvian bark, named after the Countess of Chinchon who had been cured in Lima in 1638. Pulmonary tuberculosis was endemic, hookworm prevalent among the Indians, yaws very common, and syphilis and cancer almost as bad as they are now. And the remedies of the time were primitive. Severe purgatives or the use of leeches to suck out bad blood, were employed to cure almost everything. Amputations were done at the drop of a hat and especially on the Indian immigrants. 'Never did I see so many one-legged and one-armed people before', wrote one visitor to Trinidad.⁶ Yet Trinidad was advancing constantly along the road of civilisation. Education had made its impact on comparatively large numbers of the people. It was only the large block of East Indians who were almost entirely outside of the system. In 1880 there were 52 government primary schools and 39 assisted schools, run by the various Christian denominations; and two primary 'model' schools.⁷ Only three secondary schools operated, and all in Port of Spain — the Royal College run by the Government with 80 boys, English creoles and government officials' sons in attendance; the College of the Immaculate Conception (St. Mary's) with 110 pupils — about one third coloured and the rest French creoles—run by the Holy Ghost Fathers for Roman Catholic boys; and the Convent, managed by



Marine Square

the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny for Roman Catholic girls. Fees at these schools were high (since the latter two received practically no aid from government) so that only the children of the well-to-do could attend unless they won one of the four scholarships then available. Taking into account the small private schools that existed for the upper-class children, over 9,000 children were on the school rolls, though in most cases attendance was irregular averaging only 50 per cent. Nevertheless, the English language was being efficiently propagated through the schools so that the vast majority of the young people in the island were able to speak English, and literacy was becoming widespread; in many relatively humble homes in the country a newspaper might be found, and thus the spread of education played some part in arousing people from a spirit of indifference.

In addition to the Royal Gazette, five weekly newspapers were published in Trinidad in 1881: the Port of Spain Gazette, the San Fernando Gazette, New Era, Palladium, and Fair Play, with one bi-weekly paper, the Chronicle.⁸ These papers were very expensive by modern standards, and their circulation was very small, at most some three or four hundred copies. In addition, all these papers showed a very definite sectional bias, and their policy could also change overnight depending on the relations of the editor with the owner. For example, *New Era* was consistently liberal, protestant and partial to the coloured, reflecting the views of its editor and owner Joseph Lewis. The *Port of Spain Gazette* owned by a conservative (Irish) French creole, Laughlin, could be quite liberal on occasion depending on whether the editor Rostant had his way. The first really 'popular'

newspaper with a fairly low price was the *Public Opinion*, first published in December 1884. Because of the narrow sectionalism of the newspapers of the time and their small circulation they did not usually give impartial views or represent a broad spectrum of public opinion, in spite of the fact that some claimed, like the *Port of Spain Gazette* (the paper of the planter class) of April 10th, 1875 that 'we take our stand upon the vantage ground of entire freedom from sympathy with any party or clique'.

Economically, at the start of the 1880's, Trinidad on the whole was quite well off. The production of muscovado sugar had become unprofitable when in 1874 the preferential duties in favour of muscovado entering Britain (as compared with higher grade sugars manufactured by the vacuum-pan and centrifugal processes) were abolished.⁹ A number of small muscovado factories had gone under, but by amalgamation of estates and the establishment of Usine Ste. Madeleine in 1873 embodying the new processes, sugar production in Trinidad remained profitable. Then in 1884 the United Kingdom market was flooded with cheap European beet sugar and there were anguished cries for help from the Trinidadian planters. They were far from ruined, but the climate in the 1880's was one of protest. Planters and labourers had become accustomed to certain standards of living and working, and both were prepared to rebel against any lowering of these.

Sugar was the crop chiefly of the British creoles and the English expatriate owners. The French creoles, most of whom had been ruined by the sugar crisis of the 1830's and 1840's, had turned to cocoa, planted in the valleys of the northern and central

ranges. The great cocoa boom came in the 1870's. By 1880 exports of cocoa from Trinidad crossed the ten million pounds per annum mark. The cocoa crop provided a comfortable living for many French creoles and a relatively comfortable livelihood to thousands of peons and coloured cultivators. This newly found economic status gave the French creoles and the coloured population more economic and political clout and provided the economic background for the attempted 'revolt' directed by the middle class at the Crown Colony form of Government.

In the 1870's and 1880's too, life in Trinidad was beginning to be changed for the better by modern scientific discoveries. In 1870 the first telegraph message was sent in the Colony from St. Joseph to Port of Spain.¹⁰ The following year the *S.S. Dacie* brought the telegraph cable to Macqueripe Bay and thus linked Trinidad for the first time with the rest of the world. Telephones were introduced in a very limited way in the 1880's. In 1878 Port of Spain streets were supplied with kerosene lamps, lit regularly each night, and three years later Trinity Cathedral installed a private gas-lighting plant. Ice was readily obtainable at the Ice House in downtown Port of Spain, and the steamers from England (some of which still had sails 'just in case') took only two weeks to arrive. Numerous cabs drawn by rather decrepit horses were for hire in the city, but since the horses did not wear diapers, the cleaning of the streets was quite a problem. 'Modern' ideas were becoming current, faint foreshadowings of the emancipation of women and controversy over evolu-

tion. Darwin had published *Origin of the Species* in 1859 and the following year there was the famous confrontation between T.H. Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford. In 1871 appeared Darwin's *Descent of Man*, and Huxley became more and more militant in his anti-Christian campaign. "The monkey damnification of mankind" was well underway.

But in spite of these recent changes, attitudes throughout the world and especially in Trinidad were far from modern. It was only in 1871 that the American newspaper correspondent Stanley had made his famous expedition to Africa to search for the long lost missionary Livingstone, that was climaxed by the immortal gaffe 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume'.¹¹ Very sensitive and egocentric, ever after, Stanley shuddered with embarrassment and mortification when this was mentioned or when he might hear the jest in a London drawing room 'Mr. Stanley, I presume'. This, it was said, was what drove him back to Africa, to become in 1877 the first white man to cross the continent, marching through the jungle from the east coast of Africa near Dar-es-Salaam to the mouth of the Congo on the west coast in 999 days. This was regarded, and was in truth, a tremendous triumph over difficulties and unknown dangers; for it was still believed, for instance, by sensible people that gorillas hung from trees waiting for men to pass underneath and strangle them with their bare feet. They were also supposed to abduct women for sexual purposes. With knowledge at such a low level with regard to Africa, it is not surprising that well-known British intellectuals voiced serious doubt about the intellectual capacity of the African native,

especially as the new evolutionary doctrine seemed to imply that the negro was nearer to the monkey than was the white man. Similarly, India was, though to a lesser extent, still clouded in an air of mystery. The Indian Mutiny had taken place barely a score of years before our period, and Trinidad newspaper correspondents without a blush could refer to the Indian immigrants as "children of the desert," and "fanatics of an effete superstition".

The impact of the Franco-Prussian war was another example of world events that affected attitudes in Trinidad. The French creoles (along with most Frenchmen of the time) acquired a terrible inferiority complex as a result of the humiliating defeat of the French by the German war machine, the capture of Paris (in 1870), and the flight of Gambetta from the city by balloon. For years after, there was a terrible touchiness about French honour. Perhaps indirectly, this disaster helped the French creoles to finally separate themselves from France and regard themselves as Trinidadians. In nearby Venezuela, the Callao gold mine had been opened in 1870 with 1000 peso shares which rapidly sunk to 100 pesos and less.¹² when, an extraordinarily rich lode of gold was discovered, there was a tremendous gold rush and fortunes were made within a few months. That year, the 1000 peso shares yielded a dividend of 72,000 pesos. Large numbers of Trinidadians flocked to the mines. At least one was chewed up by an alligator in the river, but many more were the prey of human predators. During the '80's the gold fields of Venezuela continued to hold a fascination for Trinidadians, and in general, contacts between the Main and the island were far more than today. A

regular steamer plied between Port of Spain and Ciudad Bolivar (Angostura), and the Venezuelan influence remained strong in Trinidad up to the end of the century.

The decorous tone of English Victorian society also affected Trinidad. Poverty was linked with vice and wealth with virtue. Hard work was the virtue *par excellence*, "demon drink" and sex the greatest vices. "Social work" or at least fund-raising for the needy was part of the accepted duty of upper-class ladies. Conservative in custom and limited in outlook, apart from reading good books and writing long letters, the Victorian lady devoted much of her time and talent to dressing. A person's class could be told clearly by her dress, and a lady in her long full costume was at a loss without her fan and gloves. One of the fashions of the time was feathered hats for the ladies and Trinidad became a supplier for this market.¹³ The Pigmy Owl or 'Jumbie Bird', was a bird of ill omen for the superstitious Trinidadian, since the uncanny 'come, come, come' of the bird of night was regarded as the call of death. The Trinidadian bird-butcher who helped supply the hat market was an adept at hooting like this owl. He knew that the humming birds and other small birds with generations of grievances against the midnight murderer would mob him in numbers during the day if they could find him out. So the clever man used to sit under a tree and hoot in dismal fashion freezing the marrow in the bones of superstitious old women and bringing a premature end to the life of many a feathered beauty. Slavery had been abolished in 1838, forty-two years before our period. For many years after emancipation the recollections of slavery seemed

to have acted as a sort of incubus on the faculties of those who had been freed so that they were altogether unwilling to undertake agricultural and particularly plantation labour. But there was a gradual improvement in this respect, so that by 1880 the marked reluctance had almost disappeared. Moreover, the population of Trinidad was relatively young, only one person in five being over forty, so that those with a first-hand knowledge of slavery were relatively few. Tales of slavery were old people's tales. And like most old people's tales, outstanding incidents were stressed to colour the general account. There were horrifying stories circulating as to how the masters ill-treated the slaves and in almost every instance the person telling the story had stood up with the greatest heroism to the abominable punishment.¹⁴ One old man related dramatically to a Roman Catholic priest in 1881 how "in a war with another tribe (in Central Africa) he was badly wounded with two bullets, captured and taken to Dahomey three or four days journey from there; locked up in a tiny hut for four months, a witness to numerous cannibalistic feasts; and working as a slave near the coast he was captured by pirates and sold to the Portuguese". One gets the impression though, that the old people had difficulty getting the young to listen to these stories; but occasionally vivid reminders of slavery surfaced. In 1881, in La Brea a maroon or runaway slave turned up. Supposedly he did not know till then that slavery had ended. Possibly he had simply preferred his lonely life in the forest to mixing with society. On the whole, then, recollections of slavery had little practical impact on life. Just as nowadays we excuse ourselves from blame and attribute many character

weaknesses to the influence of Colonialism, so then, any defect was ascribed to slavery, with certainly, much more credibility than is the case with our modern excuses. With the golden-jubilee of emancipation in 1888 there was however a revival of interest in the past, especially among a small group of vocal middle-class coloured.

The native born population of Trinidad in 1881 was 82,500.¹⁵ Twelve thousand were born in Trinidad of East Indian parents, and on an estimate (for the census did not include racial types) some fifty thousand would have been negroes, ten thousand coloured and some two or three thousand whites, about two thirds of whom would have been classified as French creoles (including descendants of Corsicans, Germans, Irish, Spanish) and the others as English creoles.

But Trinidad in 1881 was basically a land of immigrants. Out of the total population of 153,000, 70,000 or 46% of them were born outside of Trinidad. The largest group of immigrants were the East Indians, nearly 45,000 in number. They kept to a large extent their own religion — Muslim or Hindu — and almost completely their own language, culture, dress and social customs. Since they differed racially also from other Trinidadians, this also served to keep them apart as virtually a separate community. The other very large group of immigrants, possibly about 20,000 in number, were the migrant labourers from the eastern Caribbean, mainly Barbados. Almost all of them spoke English and most of them culturally showed little difference from the native Trinidadian negroes except in language, so that they were very easily assimilated. What culture they had was largely English-based so it fitted in with the dominant acultu-

ration pattern; although in the Carnival disturbances of 1883 we find them most antagonistic towards the lower-class patois-speaking Trinidadians.

Another immigrant group was the Portuguese. Some came as immigrant labourers from Madeira and the Azores as early as 1834. In 1846, a terrible famine in Madeira forced many of the inhabitants to seek a fresh life in the New World. Many of these turned to market gardening or petty commerce in Trinidad, and the first of many Portuguese shops in the Colony opened in 1848. Most of the 1,500 Portuguese were Catholics, but a considerable number were Presbyterians. In 1875, the *Associação Portuguesa* was founded as a social club with the intention of being restricted to Portuguese immigrants.¹⁶ Every year, too, the Portuguese Catholics observed their own particular feast of *Nossa Senhora de Monte* at *Notre Dame de Laventille*. The feast ended with fireworks, music and the playing of the Portuguese national anthem — and all this in a British Colony. But the fact was, that the Trinidadians being generally only first or second generation natives themselves were extremely tolerant of the culture of new national groups. It was taken for granted for instance, that the more recent small group of German immigrants should have their own 'Germania' club; in just the same way that the Chinese (at this time only about 500 in number) distinguished from the other immigrants by language, race and religion, should group together and for years remain unassimilated, though indeed a large number did marry creoles.

The Venezuelans —over two thousand of them who were driven out of their country by the oppression and revolts during the regime of Guzman Blanco,

settled mainly in Port of Spain and founded their own schools and newspaper and followed their own customs. The Radas of Belmont, a group of immigrants from Africa from the 1850's, kept their old religious worship and customs — but they were not looked on benignly by the educated Trinidadians on the whole, who regarded their behaviour as savagery. Tolerance after all had its limits!

Even the hotels of the time catered for a more or less restricted clientele. The Hotel de France, where French was spoken and the cuisine was French, catered chiefly for French visitors or local French creoles. Hotel Venezuelano was the meeting place of Venezuelan immigrants, and the other hotels were visited by a definite group or nationality or class. In fact when the Standard Hotel opened in Port of Spain in 1899, interestingly enough with a Portuguese, Ribeiro, as owner, one of the noteworthy facts about it was that it openly welcomed all comers, as Syl Devenish sung of it in patios:

Everyone in Trinidad came to see,
 One thing, believe it or not:
 'Standard Ribeiro', an open house,
 For black, for Indian and for white;
 For everyone there is a good word,
 English, French, Spanish, patois.

The streets of Port of Spain could then on occasion sound like the Tower of Babel, and this heterogeneity was taken for granted as part of the wealth of the Trinidad scene. Charles Kingsley in his book *At Last* commented with delight on the variety of costumes — Indian, Chinese and European — which he saw in the country. Along with this hodge-podge of nationality and culture, within the chief groups there was an extremely rigid class structure

which it is very difficult for a modern Trinidadian to grasp. Class was a greater differentiating factor than colour. While modern historians who stress the importance of race in structuring society of that time, twist and turn to give the Portuguese a place, and end by saying that they were not 'sociologically white', to the people of the 1880's the matter was very simple — the Portuguese were lower (or lower-middle class) and not upper-class. Brereton describes the situation with great clarity:

It is clear that class — regardless of the added dimension of race and colour — pervaded the society. This was a time where everyone had his place and was expected to stay in it. Nothing irritated the upper groups so much as lower-class persons aspiring to things 'above their station in life'.¹⁸

Within French creole society for example, there might be white domestics in a number of homes, 'poor whites' from St. Vincent or Barbados. Then there were those of slightly higher grade, artisans from France, or valets, perhaps from among the numerous escapees from Cayenne and Devil's Island. The merchant (a non-noble profession in pre-revolutionary France) and the overseer theoretically might be a different class from the estate owners, but most of the time it did not work that way unless the former were uneducated or unmannerly. Again, theoretically, there might have been a distinction made between those who were the descendants of the 'petit noblesse' and the 'grand noblesse', but since the only two families descended from the latter in Trinidad were the Pantins de la Guerre and the de Montrichards, such a stratification was impossible. What Borde wrote of the French creole families before the conquest in 1797 was basically true also

(except in the lower levels) in 1880: 'There was no line of demarcation among the white families; the closest bonds united them all; they were always at one another's homes.'²⁰ It was extremely difficult to break out of this rigid class pattern. Charles le Cadre, who had been living for twenty-three years with a coloured woman and was urged by his parish priest to marry her, said that such a thing was impossible because his sister was married to a de Verteuil and such a marriage as the priest recommended would bring disgrace on them.²¹ De la Sauvagère absolutely scandalised creole society because he "dressed like his servant in public including his type of coiffure and then made his domestic take his place in his carriage. He would introduce his domestic, — his valet, a Cayennais named Valentin, to the best drawing rooms with clothes in rags and shoes full of mud". But disgrace did not spare the de Verteuil family. Back in their ancestral home in the Vendée, in 1864, the Chevalier de Verteuil's eldest brother, a medical doctor, then aged 78, got married (horror of horrors!) to an English governess and she was only 25. We do not know if she was an Anglican — which would have made matters worse if that were possible. After the marriage, all his family in Trinidad ceased to have any relations with him (this was largely symbolic as they probably only wrote to him once a year anyway), even though it meant that after the death of the Doctor all the family papers which were in his possession would be lost. (In fact they were lost to the family for thirty years, till one day in France, Adrien de Verteuil on holiday met at a hotel, by chance, the daughter of the Doctor's wife by another marriage into which

she had entered after his death.) It is hard to understand now, how this rigid class structure was accepted and indeed 'baptised', as the Christian approach; but the English creoles were nearly as bad as the French.

The English creoles consorted with the English officials since they were even at this time cut off from the French creoles by language as well as religion. Their society was less stratified than the French, but they too had their strict social conventions, based partly on wealth and partly on whom one knew. It is difficult to say where the line was drawn, but it was all the same. When in typical English fashion, the ladies withdrew after dinner to leave the men drinking and smoking and the zinc-lined box was brought out for urinary contributions, — not everyone could be invited to the intimacy of such a circle.²² Thus some British officials and merchants were simply not welcome in the best society and particularly not at Government House.

Coloured people were not invited to white parties. In these staid Victorian times, class and colour were probably greater barriers than they had been forty years before. It is a mistake to feel that there has been, or will be, a steady progress in this respect. Coloured society, was divided according to education and wealth into upper and lower class, but there was among them considerable colour discrimination as regards the blacks, who themselves were also stratified in class. And so it was that after Confirmation one year in San Fernando: 'There was a great banquet. Father Violette had brought together around Monseigneur Gonin (the Roman Catholic Archbishop) the three aristocracies of the town, white, coloured and black'.²³

This then, was the type of rigid, structured society in which economic and political life in Trinidad had to operate. In such a world (as in modern Trinidad) 'who you know' was far more important than 'what you know'; and 'who you were' far more important than 'what you did'. And to compound the confusion there were the very deep religious differences which cut across the society as a whole.

Religion was a very serious matter in those days. Huxley and Darwin had made a popular impact in England, but the *Descent of Man* and militant atheism had not yet penetrated to Trinidad. Leaving aside the Indians who were altogether outside of the main stream of religious life, Trinidad's population was divided from the religious viewpoint into Catholic, around 70,000, and Anglicans, 45,000. Even the largest non-Conformist sect, the Weslyans, numbered less than 7,000. Though most of the Catholics and Anglicans knew very little about their religion, generally they knew enough to worship God in their fashion and to despise other religions. Only a very small group in the upper-class adopted what we might call today a secular approach to religion — religion is a private affair, and if you are an Anglican or a Catholic — well, so what!

Most French creoles were Catholics, but there were a few and some of them prominent, like André or de Boissiere, who were Huguenots by descent. Most English creoles or English officials were Anglican, and the Scottish, Presbyterians but one or two could be Catholics, and a few Catholic 'French creoles' (Government men) like Gomez or Garcia, joined the English group socially. The score or so of German

families, originally Protestant, had by the 1880's almost all married into Catholic French creole families. The Portuguese were split religiously into Catholic and Presbyterian. The black and coloureds who spoke Spanish or French patois were nearly all Catholics. The immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean who spoke English were nearly all Anglicans. A number of Roman Catholic priests of the time identified French culture with Catholicism. One wrote in 1883: 'When the French clergy will have disappeared from Trinidad, when the French language will no longer be spoken here, Trinidad will have made a giant step towards Protestantism and Catholicism will have to think of taking itself elsewhere.'²⁴ But within the Catholic Church in Trinidad there was a struggle between the English and the French element. At St. Mary's College, for example, there were arguments as to whether the French or the Irish priests were more popular with the people. At this period Monseigneur O'Carroll was the English coadjutor to Archbishop Gonin with the right of succession, and there were also two or three English priests in the diocese. Gonin himself often preached in English because well over half the Catholic population (and practically all the younger people) spoke that language, and in a few parishes there was Spanish. Thus in Trinidad one could not make a simple equation of English equals Anglican, French equals Catholic.

Nevertheless prejudices still ran deep, and in general white French creoles had little time for English Protestants and especially Ministers. "The French creoles when they find an opportunity do not hesitate to ridicule Protestant ministers. Paul

Lange (known as Lange du diable) once sprayed a drunk Minister (with a certain liquid) from a horse syringe. When he recovered from this, the Minister challenged him to a duel, where without the intervention of friends, the Minister would have made marmalade of him".²⁵ The Catholic priests in their turn had a hard time from the English Protestants. One told the following joke to a Catholic priest in public in order to ridicule him: "One day in the streets of Barbados, the Catholic Bishop and the Anglican Bishop were walking arm in arm and chatting like two good friends. The Protestant Bishop said to the Catholic Bishop: 'My dear man, if the devil comes here which of the two of us would he take?' And answering his own question — 'It would certainly be me'. 'And why sooner you than me?' replied the Catholic Bishop. 'Because', answered the Protestant Bishop, 'he has you already'. The priest to whom the story was told got so angry he thought of retorting strongly, but he said to himself: 'That joke is the ultimate stupidity and it has been told by an Englishman: double reason to answer by silence of the most profound contempt'."

Among the lower class, religious antagonism seems to have been less. Though the middle class coloureds and blacks were the chief supporters of both religions, there are few if any records of any religious clashes between them. Thus, unlike the period before 1870, religious convictions and nationalistic (French and English) feelings did not normally cause much friction in society. However when any incident occurred which might be interpreted in a narrow religious or nationalistic sense, people at once took up extreme entrenched positions.

It is then a serious mistake to think that in 1880 Trinidadians were so conscious of their unity that 'national' and religious differences were made secondary to the country's interests.

Trinidadians in 1880 were ruled over by a British Governor appointed by the Colonial Office for a period normally of five years, and were subject to a Crown Colony system of Government. This entailed firstly, an Executive Council, — a purely advisory body to the Governor, composed of the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General and the Commander of the Forces (British soldiers during this period being continuously quartered at St. James Barracks just outside of Port of Spain). Secondly, a Legislative Council, which proposed and discussed, and passed or rejected legislation and the budget, and which was composed of officials and nominated unofficials. In practice the Governor or Government party always obtaining the necessary majority to pass whatever laws they wished; (of this more in a later chapter).

The Governor was invested with extensive powers and had the uncontrolled appointment of all officers who were not on the fixed establishment. He also had the control of the public funds, though by Royal instructions he was not authorised — except in urgent cases — to order the payment of any sum of money above £ 200 without special authority from the Secretary of State for the Colonies and previous sanction by the Legislative Council. Thus in theory the Governor had ample powers. In practice his power was greatly limited by the knowledge that he was ultimately responsible to the Colonial Office in London to which he owed his appointment (and in

Trinidad this was a fairly lucrative one). He was supposed to be impartial, but his whole social life in Trinidad was spent with the English officials and English creoles, and if he paid no deference to their wishes, life became hardly worth living. Thus a strong-minded Governor could dictate policy in the Colony to a large extent and manipulate the officials in whatever way he wished; but when it is remembered that the Governor came as an inexperienced stranger into a new and very complicated setting where there were more or less permanent officials who had already some experience of the island, it will be realised that a weak Governor could easily be influenced if not in the initiation of new policy, at least in the acceptance of the *status quo*.

At the local level, there were two Borough Councils, those of Port of Spain and San Fernando, with elected Councillors, and presided over by their Mayors.²⁶ The country as a whole was divided into forty-one wards each administered by a salaried official known as a warden. Many of the wardens were Englishmen. The Immigration Department which dealt with all matters concerning the large Indian population was also staffed in the higher echelons to some extent by English expatriates; and likewise for the large centralised administration — the Auditing Department, Registrar General's Department, the Public Works, and the Customs.

The Judicial Department of Trinidad was, in theory, completely separated from the Legislative and the Executive, except that the Chief Judge was an *ex officio* member of the Legislative Council, and could be called on to give there his opinion on a matter which would afterwards have to be decided by

the Bench. The Court of Appeal, both in criminal and in civil cases, was presided over by the Chief Justice of the Colony assisted by the two puisne judges. All indictable cases, serious criminal or civil cases, were tried by the Supreme Court, that is by one of the judges with an empanelled jury. The costs and the delays in the Supreme Court were notorious, and in general it favoured the rich merchants and planters against those less well off. However, with the arrival of Sir John Gorrie as Chief Justice in 1885, with his ability to browbeat a jury and his determination to give justice to the poor at any cost, as well as the known prejudice of juries in favour of their peers (middle class coloured), justice in Trinidad at that level became a rather dicey business.

Apart from the Petty Civil Court, which dealt with actions where the debt or damage claimed did not exceed £10 sterling, justice was administered throughout the island, in the country and in the towns, by the stipendiary justices or magistrates, who also performed the duties of coroner. The powers of imprisonment of the magistrates were limited to six months, with or without hard labour. Court procedure tended to be tedious as there were many foreigners in Trinidad and interpreters might have to be called in for Spanish, French, patois, Portuguese, Hindustani, or Chinese. Muslims swore on the 'Book' (the Koran) and Hindus on water, that is, ordinary water symbolising the sacred water from the Ganges. Christians took the oath on the Bible. Perjury at all levels was however common, with the Indian immigrants having the worst name for it. The magistrates of the time were generally Englishmen. Apart from their lack of knowledge

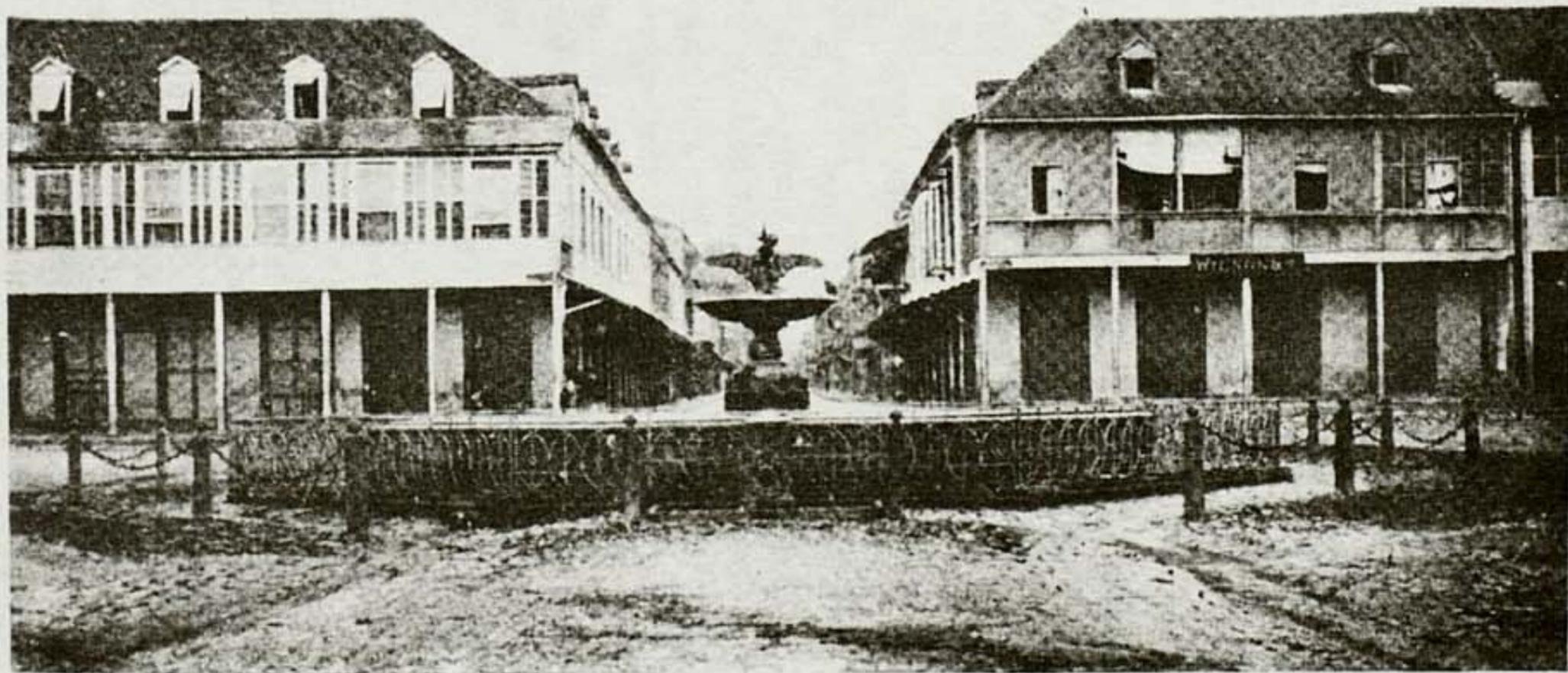
of local customs and conditions, a number of them had succumbed to drink, one notorious member of the magistracy being so well known that the Magistrates Court in San Fernando was called the Beer Garden; and even Justice Cook, a puisne judge, was eventually dismissed for unfitness for duty caused by his drinking habits. A number of magistrates showed strong prejudice against the Indians and Blacks and strong prejudice in favour of the upper or middle class, especially the whites, and in the opinion of the French creoles, especially towards the English or the white English creoles. To give two typical instances of this:

A black artisan from Belmont wrote to *New Era* in 1873 to complain of discrimination against him in the courts. He had been shot and wounded by three 'young gentlemen' whose Sunday Pastime it was to shoot at passers-by to frighten them. One of them had told his victim, 'Go along with you, that is nothing for a negro, it is only small shot.' The Magistrate dismissed the case against the offenders on the grounds that 'it would be a pity' to send the young men to jail. The writer complained that just before, two men of his own race had been sentenced to three months' hard labour for merely discharging a gun on the road over four miles from town. They of course were not 'of the privileged few'. The editor commented that the incident was 'another sad illustration of the anomalies of justice in Trinidad, which today is rather between class and class than between man and man'.²⁷

The *Trinidad Review* wrote on August 23rd 1883:

The judgements of Mr. Mayne (the Magistrate of Port of Spain) are disgraceful perversions of known law.

This outburst was due to a frightful bite given by a furious, unmuzzled (English) dog to a poor Frenchman. Fogarty, the defendant, had the case dismissed by Mayne (though previous bites by 'French' dogs



Old Frederick Street

had been to their owners' disadvantage).

Thus, at best, justice tended to be rather rough and ready, and at worst it discriminated strongly against the poor and defenceless and led to a serious under-current of dissatisfaction and disaffection among the poorer blacks and the Indians. In the words of one negro labourer of the time, which Massé cites as typical of the feelings of his class: 'In Trinidad, there is law but there is no justice'. And even when there was no official breach of justice there was often a 'gentleman's agreement', that is, collusion, between the magistrate, the police (through the influence of the white non-commissioned officers), the warden and other 'gentlemen', which defeated the spirit if not the letter of the law. For example:

Mr. Lett, the magistrate of Cedros, had a donkey which passed from life to death. What had caused the death of the poor beast, nobody knows. But knowing that Parisians eat horse meat, he considered that the negroes, his neighbours, were not too important people, and had teeth strong enough to chew the flesh of an animal with long ears (and close relative of the horse). However, since asses' flesh was not considered a delicacy in Trinidad, Mr. Lett concealed his designs by making it known throughout the district that he had killed a calf, and that the meat was at the disposition of those who wanted some. So many people came to buy that meat that there was not enough for all. Two days later, somehow or other, the rumour got out that it was not veal but donkey meat that had been eaten. The murmuring came to the ears of the Warden. He had to institute an inquiry. However, when he went to look for the magistrate, the latter welcomed him, paid him off with some good drinks and an excellent dinner, and gave him a present of a beautiful grey hat; and the ceremony was sealed with a good (gentlemanly) hand-shake. No more was ever said about the incident.²⁸

It is indeed very difficult for us even for those

who live in the present heterogenous Trinidadian society, to grasp all the complexities of life and attitudes in Trinidad one hundred years ago. For one thing, the decorum of those ages is sadly missing today. For instance, at a fashionable wedding in 1901 of the five young girls who were bridesmaids, three wore the usual white elaborate dresses, but one was in blue because she was vowed to the Blessed Virgin, and one wore purple because she was in mourning for Queen Victoria!²⁹ Above all, it was a small society, in which all the educated people of a particular group, French or English, black or coloured or white, knew everybody else and acted accordingly. In such a claustrophobic world, social pressure could be absolutely devastating. As the *Trinidad Review* wrote on 2nd August 1883 of Trinidad society: 'The almost universal prevalence of evil-speaking and defamation is a striking and most disgusting fact. It is mainly due to the absence of (other) interesting and instructive topics.' Politics and economics revolved round personalities and not principles. Apart from religious beliefs which were far more rigid than today, personal connections were the chief determinant of almost everything. If you were upper-class, as we have seen, you could hardly do wrong. A lower-class person was presumed guilty unless proved to be innocent. One Attorney General of the time wrote: "In this colony the probability of a criminal in any position approaching to respectability escaping punishment if he steals public money is very considerable;" for he recognised also that the Government was then regarded as a source of revenue for all, but also the source of all the countrys' ills (and yet a foreign body whose objectivity was to be

preferred, by far, to local prejudices).³⁰ A better practical grasp of these tortuous inter-relations of class, religion and race might be had if we examine in some detail the reactions to a murder and trial which took place shortly before our period, in 1870.

Abbé Jouin was a Canon of Roseau (Dominica) and on coming to Trinidad had been put in charge of the Mayaro parish on the remote east coast by Archbishop Gonin.³¹ He made a collection in his parish to repair the church and for safe keeping deposited these funds with one of his parishioners. When the work on the church had been completed and the tradesmen and workers claimed their pay, Abbé Jouin went to his parishioner to collect the money. The parishioner claimed that he had not received any money from the priest and that the priest was trying to pull a 'fast one'. The workers thereupon were instigated to riot. The magistrate and the police were nearly murdered along with the priest and they only escaped with the greatest difficulty. Abbé Jouin however was not one to give up easily, and some time later in the parish church he publicly denounced the parishioner, who in his turn determined to have his revenge on the priest. It became impossible for the priest to stay in the parish and the Archbishop named him parish priest of Diego Martin, in the opposite corner of the island.

In this new parish there was a very wealthy estate owner, a coloured man, named Brunton. He was well known for his hospitality and in fact, the annual Diego Martin horse races were held in his estate pasture. He had a very charming and religious wife. The parish priest became very friendly with the family, and was often at the house visiting and

for meals. He was asked to be the godfather of one of Brunton's children and, rather unusually for the time, accepted. Everything was ideal in this family friendship. But one day Madame Brunton went to the parish priest to complain that her husband had brought into the house another woman with whom he frequently had extra-marital relations. Except for the effrontery with which this was done, it might have been overlooked, but unfortunately also Brunton's paramour had a husband. At the request of Madame, the parish priest, thinking that his friendly relations gave him an extra right to bring back Monsieur to the right path, dared one day to talk to him about the matter. Brunton seemed to take this well; but appearances can sometimes be deceiving. Some time after this, Brunton came round to the presbytery and in a friendly fashion questioned the priest about his going out late at night in the area, asked him what routes he usually followed, and warned him that these nightly excursions might be dangerous. It appears that Brunton suspected that he was not alone in having a paramour; that his wife had a secret lover, and that lover was the priest.³² A man in his position was entitled to have a 'deputy' but his honour was certainly besmirched if his wife was mistress to a priest! According to one anti-Catholic account, this provided him with a motive for murder.

Following another story of the affair:

About a week later at midnight there is a knock at the door of the priest's house. He asks who is there. The men outside reply that they have come to fetch him to see Mrs. Brunton who has suddenly been taken very seriously ill. The Abbé goes out into the darkness with the four men, two negroes and two Indians from Brunton's estate. He has his horse

saddled and follows them. Further on he meets Brunton, and they enter the cocoa estate. There Brunton's men stop the priest's horse. Brunton addresses him with violent reproaches about having mixed himself up with what goes on in his house. At this moment there appears on the scene the parishioner from Mayaro who had stolen the money for the church. He also abuses the unfortunate Abbé. They throw him off his horse and a coolie gives him several chops with his cutlass. The priest falls bleeding to the ground, recommending his soul to God. The men go off into the darkness'.³³

Early next morning, a passerby noticed the corpse of the priest, his black cassock covered with blood from nineteen wounds. By afternoon, some four thousand people had arrived on the scene from Port of Spain. It was thought then, that the murderer was a negro with whom Abbé Jouin had had a quarrel a few days before. But one day, one of Brunton's Indian labourers who was drunk, told a friend that Brunton, who had promised him \$500 and a horse if he killed the priest, had not kept his promise. The cat was out of the bag.

After further investigation, Brunton and two accomplices were arrested and accused of the murder. A full account of the trial was given by all of the newspapers. One even promised its readers a special supplement on the affair. Appearing for the Crown as prosecutors were the Attorney General and G.L. Garcia (both white) and for the defense Frederick Warner, A. Fitzjames and M.M. Philip, but it was the latter, a brilliant coloured lawyer who bore the brunt.³⁴ The battle was won in the selection of the jury. The defence challenged numerous jurors including a number of white Catholics (who were only too willing to disqualify themselves), so that the final composition of the jury was mainly coloured, Protestant and 'English'. Their names were: Rochford,

Smith, Lange, Gray, Houllier, Waldropt, Rodolpho, Waite, Armorer, Bugros, Donatien, Connor. Then the defence lawyers challenged the swearing in of the Indian witnesses on ordinary water and not water from the Ganges, the implication being that they were all the more likely to tell lies (and especially as \$200 reward had been offered for information about the murder). Each day a howling crowd followed Brunton as he was brought to the packed court room. After the trial had lasted for seven days, Philip summed up for the defence, and realising that the prosecution had put forward no motive for the murder he based his case on the 'intrinsic impossibility' that a man such as Brunton would kill a priest. "It has currently been thought that Mr. Brunton, a man who has risen in the world from a comparatively obscure and humble position was capable of murdering in the most fiendish manner the clergyman of his own parish . . . a person with whom he had dined the previous Sunday . . . Whether a respectable father of a family . . . would have concerted with one inferior to him in social position, . . . would have contrived with his servant, the awful deed which Janhoo and Radeean described, is for you to say".

Philip held the spectators and jury absolutely spellbound for one hour and three quarters, and sat down amidst loud cheers — a real *tour de force* for the brilliant coloured lawyer who knew his Trinidadians only too well. The Chief Justice then summed up at length showing that 'the attempt to prove an alibi had signally failed'. He 'contrasted the evidence for the defence with the clear and positive testimony of so many witnesses for the prosecution (two of whom claimed to be eyewitnesses of the murder

and had described it in graphic and convincing detail even under cross questioning); and it appeared to him impossible to think that the former outweighed the latter, if the scales of strict justice were held with a steady hand, and no feelings of race or friendship were allowed to warp the judgement or diminish the strictest impartiality.'

The jury left the courtroom and were closeted for a few hours. When they came back to the court it was to return a verdict of 'Not guilty'. The consequent uproar may be left to the imagination. In the eyes of the practically all Trinidadians, Brunton was a murderer.³⁵ Some few Protestants could claim that though all the evidence was against him, one could never trust Indians to tell the truth. And the coloured jury men saw in Brunton a figure of a coloured man like themselves but eminently successful in life, and it was surely incredible that such a man should murder a priest. Some good Catholics went so far as to see in the acquittal an attack by the Government on the Catholic priesthood. The 'French' put it down to the perfidy of the 'English'. Massé in his diary, relates an observation that had been made to him: "Brunton had money with which he found the means to buy their conscience. If for one shilling of gain, an Englishman is prepared to sell his country, he would think himself very foolish not to profit from the occasion to sell his conscience for several thousand dollars profit". So surprising was the acquittal that the common people of the town attributed it to the efficient obeah of the notorious Djab Papa, who during the trial stood outside the courthouse looking up at the sun. In the words of Le Blanc, a well-known calypsonian of the time:—

The sun, the trees, all nature cried,
The day when Abbé Jouin died,
Ah! What a brutal death.
In a thousand years we'll never forget.
It was Djab Papa, the villain, who saved the murderer.³⁶

Brunton was acquitted by the jury and saved from death, but his life was no longer worth living.³⁷ To all society he was dead. He left prison, but with the sign of Cain on his forehead. Nobody wanted to have the least thing to do with him. The general reprobation followed his whole family. One day his wife went to church; immediately those who were there passed insulting remarks about her. They refused to take her girl into St. Joseph's Convent. It was said that one day Brunton was travelling on the gulf steamer and made the mistake of sitting down on a deck chair belonging to a (white) medical man. When the doctor came to claim his chair he found it occupied by Brunton. He ordered him out of it. He then put on a glove on his right hand, seized the chair in his gloved hand and threw it into the sea. Then he pulled off his glove and sent it to join the chair. "Why have you done that?" an unsuspecting passenger asked. "On no account", the doctor replied, "do I want to own a chair once used by an assassin".

Brunton emigrated to Martinique (though eventually he returned to Trinidad some years later). It is impossible to understand, at this distance in time, the terrible furor that the case caused. A pamphlet of some size was written on it and circulated widely. By 1888 it was already very rare, and today no copy seems to be in existence. The reason, of course, that so much was made of the murder and the trial was that in the Trinidad of that time, even the most

straight-forward incident contained the potential for political, cultural, racial, religious, social and economic entanglements (many of which never appeared openly in official documents, or even in newspapers, but must be sought today in innuendos or in private correspondence.) This then was the complex setting in which the unsuspecting British administrators, Governors and officials found themselves. The *Echo* of 10th September 1870 put the position of the Governor very sympathetically in a long editorial, showing that due to the intricate situation in Trinidad and to the composition of the Executive Council, — the Officer Commanding the Troops (who naturally knew little of the wants of the Colony), the Colonial Secretary and the Attorney General — “the result is that a new Governor is forced to do one of two things: to act upon the advice of these two (latter) gentlemen, or take upon himself the responsibility of judging for himself”. It is amazing indeed that some of the officials functioned as well as they did in such a setting; but others were overpowered by it all, and instead of directing, matters were carried along in the current. Not so, however, Baker, the Chief of Police. Arthur Wybrow Baker was a man’s man.³⁹ At this period he was over forty, but still a fine figure of a man, over six feet tall and broad in proportion, with dark black hair and moustache and striking eyes. He was a ‘broth-of-a-boy’ as the Irish say, with a loving wife and kids. Keen on athletic sports, and well-mannered on top of that, he was the clean type of man that everyone in that Victorian age could look up to. Even the French creoles who hated the English officials admired him; “With the exception of Captain Baker”, one wrote, “there is not a single

one (of the English officials) that any man with the slightest pretension to respectability would care to introduce to his family or his club".⁴⁰ As a *macho* man he appealed to the lower-class blacks who could measure his worth even on the purely physical level.

As Inspector Commandant — Chief of Police — Baker had been an immediate success. A man of integrity and energy, of coolness in action and firmness in decision, possessing a close sense of identification with most of his men, he won their respect and the respect of all. Even "the very rowdies whom he kept down with a strong hand, admired him for his courage and fearlessness in tackling them". As head of the Voluntary Fire Brigade, he graced their social functions, with his wife and was in the forefront to put out the frequent fires. When the Carter's races (on the 1st August, Emancipation Day) fell into decline, Captain Baker instituted athletic sports which afforded lots of sport to the Police, soldiers and the general public for many years.

He described the Police Force that he commanded in 1884 as follows:

There are 435 men of all ranks in the police at Trinidad, including thirty additional this year. The staff consists of two inspectors, Englishmen, each having charge of one of the two divisions, Northern and Southern, one resides at Port of Spain, the other at San Fernando; one is away on leave; one sergeant-major from the Irish Constabulary, for each division; five sergeants superintendents, one a black man, the others old soldiers and Irish Constabulary men; twenty-one sergeants, partly white and partly coloured; twenty-six corporals of mixed races; three grades of constables, full strength 350, some of whom are also white, the others chiefly Barbadians, and two or three natives of Trinidad in the whole Force, who are usually worthless from stupidity. Besides this stupidity, there is a great dislike to enter the Force amongst the natives, and this dislike has existed for years. A good number of the men have long service'.⁴¹

Before his arrival in Trinidad, he had spent three years in the 66th Regiment in India, and was in command of the Houssars on the West Coast of Africa; and by 1884 had been in command of the Police in Trinidad for eight years. After he had been some years in Trinidad, he relaxed the reins a little and let his subordinate officers have more of a free hand. This was regrettable, as some of them at the very least, lacked sound judgment, and gave the Police and Baker a bad name. As a man with Colonial experience, he fitted in well with the circle of British officials in Trinidad and particularly with the Commander of Troops at the St. James Barracks. And so —

“He was a man, take him for all in all”

— but marred, fatally marred by the stamp of one defect. As a typical British official of the time, he looked down on all non-English mortals, and this in an age of growing Trinidadian ‘nationalism’. In three years in India he had not acquired a word of Hindustani, and he regarded lower class Trinidadians as stupid savages; the whites he considered were not fit to manage their own country, and so he bravely bore alone “the white man’s burden” to the end, for better — or perhaps for worse. A strong man, in more ways than one, his impact on Trinidad went beyond the police to politics.

Sir Sanford Freeling, Governor of Trinidad from 1880 to 1884, was a ladies’ man, soft, polite, mild-mannered. Lady Brassey, an English visitor to Trinidad in 1883, waxed enthusiastic about his kindness to her. Originally a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Grenada in 1871, and Governor of the



The Red House

Gold Coast in 1876.⁴² He retired from there in 1878 and received the customary knighthood and an appointment to the well paid post in Trinidad.

His arrival in Trinidad in November 1880 with his wife and children was greeted with pleasant expectations, owing (in the words of *New Era*) "to the peculiar circumstances which preceded him in the seat he now occupies . . . villainy of mal-administration, if not positive crime, at least many variations of official immorality thinly separated from it . . . mal-administration of law in the inferior courts of the Colony . . . Queen's House (the Governor's residence) degraded to the centre of a band of débaucheuses — heads of departments unrestrained by the sweet influence of virtue exercised by wife or daughter — whose reunions were the manifestations of orgies — (whose) official acts trampled on the liberty of the subject and outraged even common decency".⁴³

Freeling got off to a good start by making concessions to the people at his first Carnival (just three months after his arrival in Trinidad.) But after that he seems to have dissatisfied everyone. The Colonial Office considered him timid and not firm enough. One or two people thought him clever but others found he spoke and acted like an ass. Bodu, a prominent French creole, had many critical comments to make about him, about his passivity, his lack of backbone and his weakness of mind. Freeling had later to retire from the Colonial Civil Service on account of 'softening of the brain' and the Trinidadian cruelly hints that the disease had already begun to affect him before he left Trinidad. "He could be talked over to do or say anything", Bodu wrote, and continued in the same antagonistic strain:

We allude to Sir Sanford Freeling whose name, even after this lapse of time, cannot be mentioned without evoking manifestations of merriment. Sir Sanford Freeling was certainly not a man to have initiated a policy disastrous to the colony, but unfortunately although on his first appearance before the Legislative Council he declared himself to be a 'man of deeds, not of words' he had not the strength of mind to lift the Government policy of the Colony out of the vicious groove into which it has fallen. A few years previously, Sir Sanford Freeling had, when administering the affairs of the Windward Islands given proof of a certain vigor, which seems to have taken wings entirely in Trinidad.⁴⁴

Some partial excuse could be found for Freeling's failure, governing as he did in such difficult times and in such a complex milieu, but nevertheless, his character or the lack of it was certainly a contributing factor to the growth of a spirit of revolt in the Trinidad of his time.

The *Port of Spain Gazette* tried to sum up the man and governorship on his departure. It considered that his decision about Carnival in 1881 had turned the whole official world against him, but that eventually he became an unwilling tool in their hands, the hands of the "enemies of the country, that is certain high and large salaried officers". The newspaper continued:

On the whole then, the administration of Sir Sanford Freeling has been a failure. Unlike Sir Henry Turner Irving (his predecessor) he takes with him on leaving our shores, the good wishes and pity of everyone. All believe in his uprightness and his desire to do good, but the impression is general, that the task he had to perform was above his strength. He has failed, not because he lacked intelligence to understand the nature of the abuses which surrounded him, or the proper remedy, but he had not the moral courage to do what was right, irrespective of persons. Of him it may be truly said 'he saw and approved of what was good, but nevertheless followed the wrong course!⁴⁵

Freeling's successor as Governor was Sir F.F. Barlee, but he only lasted two months before succumbing to an attack of asthma, and he was buried in the cemetery in the Botanic Gardens. Sir A.V. Havelock succeeded him in 1885, but he did not see the new year in Trinidad as he was shifted as Governor to Natal. His successor, Governor of Trinidad from 1885 to 1891, Sir William Robinson, was a strong character. He was an experienced administrator having been acting Governor General of the Windward Islands, a man of decision and who was sincerely interested in the good of the Colony, (though some considered he had played 'fast and loose' in the Windwards). With considerable breadth of vision, he was not a man to allow himself to be fitted into a narrow mould. He tried to open up Trinidad to the growing and export of crops other than sugar and cocoa, enabled the asphalt industry to get off to a satisfactory start, and had plans for revamping the education system. He was however not altogether successful in what he undertook, was not as much a supporter of reform as he appeared to be and was still very much one with the English officials and English creoles, though there as a ruler and not as an equal. His daughter married Aucher Warner of the well-known Warner family of Trinidad and significantly the two set up their home in England.⁴⁷ Neither did the need for economy in the island's budget include in Robinson's view, a cut in the Governor's salary. On the whole though he was certainly one of Trinidad's better governors and played an important role in encouraging the Reform movement in the Colony. Most people found him "courteous and accessible". The Colonial Secretary

as we have seen could exercise a crucial role in advising the Governor and so influencing policy. English creole, John Scott Bushe was Colonial Secretary from 1861 – 1887 and on a number of occasions when the Governor was absent, acted as Administrator of the Colony; but because of his character he seems to have made little impact on events in Trinidad.⁴⁸ He was the son of an English planter who had settled in Trinidad in the early years of the century. Born in the island in 1825, he was educated in Europe, and at the University of Trinity College, Dublin. When he returned to Trinidad, he married a daughter of Archdeacon Cummins and so became brother-in-law of Lord Harris, the then Governor. His only sister married James Lushington Wildmon who was private secretary to Lord Harris in 1846. It was not surprising then on Wildmon's departure, that Bushe was made private secretary to the Governor in 1849, and from then on his rise was meteoric – family connections were far more important than ability in the Civil Service of that time. As Colonial Secretary, from 1861 on, he was said to be experienced, zealous, tactful and popular, but a commentator remarked caustically "he provided comfortably in the Government Service for such of his connections as needed it".⁴⁹ However in the view of one Governor whom he served Bushe was "better suited to a second than a first place" lacking firmness and being too timid to assume responsibility.⁵⁰ Nevertheless his intimate knowledge of the Trinidad scene enabled him to avoid, during his periods as Administrator, the usual pitfalls into which the English Governors stumbled. His advice was undoubtedly useful to the Governors over a

long period, although he had not the strong personality needed to combat the stirrings of unrest in the country in the 1880's.

Henry Ludlow was Attorney General in Trinidad for most of this period; arriving in Trinidad on the 20th July 1874. He was a short man, of unprepossessing appearance and with a brusque manner, though a talented lawyer and an undeniably honest man. He had a legalistic mind and could focus on the smallest details. It is difficult to decide what influence he exercised apart from his efficient drawing up of the required legislation. His successor, Stephen Herbert Gatty, was an excellent musician and at first in perfect harmony with the upper class Trinidadians of his time. He was however perhaps unduly influenced by Froude, the English author who visited Trinidad in 1887. After that time Gatty became strongly anti-reformist in opinion and eventually swung the British Colonial officials behind him. At that stage he was lumped together in the minds of the people of Trinidad with the other expatriate officials, for example, the Director of Public Works, the Chief Accountant, the Treasurer, as high paid officials seeking their own good first, and after that the good of the Colony. Generally they were a colourless bunch and now almost nameless except for one striking exception, Sir John Gorrie, the Chief Justice; but of him, more later.

This then was the setting and these the men, the chief actors on an intricately changing scene. Was it the combination of the two, one may ask, that fostered revolt? Weakness combined with growing dissatisfaction that eventually equalled uprising? It is difficult to know.

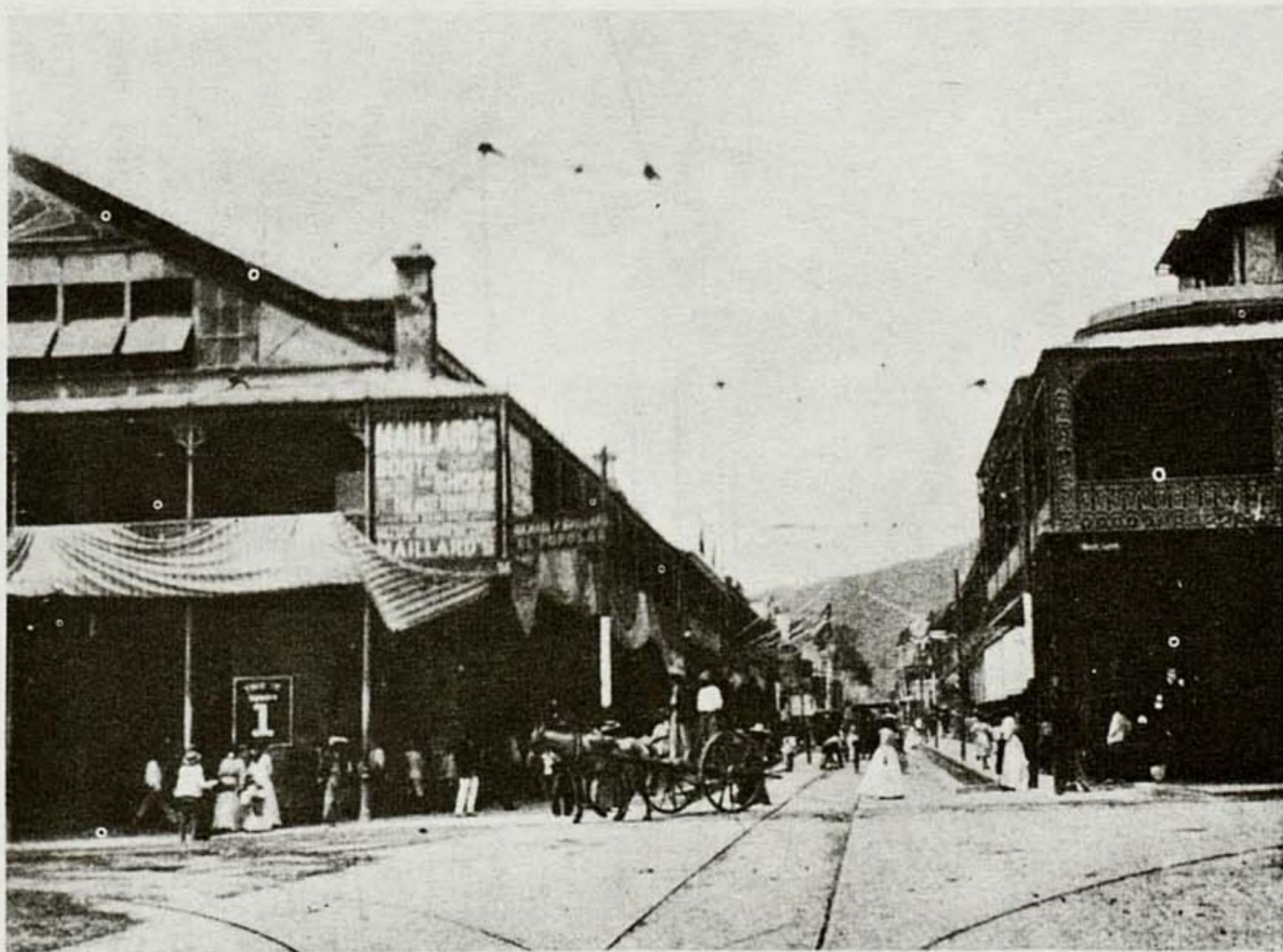
Historians have traditionally taken different

attitudes in analysing rebellion or revolution. Phillips in the late 19th century claimed "that revolutions are not made: they come". Others, like De Maistre, stressed the play of the impersonal forces: "Ce ne sont point les hommes qui mènent la révolution, c'est la révolution qui emploie les hommes. Elle va toute seule". (It is not men who lead revolutions; it is the revolution which uses men; it goes all by itself). And this is echoed in Burke's "an inevitable process". Modern historians stress the importance of economic forces and class conflicts: Aristotle in his *Politics* takes an over-logical approach, leaving no place for mob psychology. "Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind which creates revolutions". And again: "Revolutions break out when opposite parties are equally balanced and there is little or nothing between them, for if either party were manifestly superior, the other would not risk an attack on them". However if men are so badly off that they have nothing to lose there is a temptation to revolt — "poverty is the parent of revolution".

English historians usually stress the importance of leadership; that it is the people at the helm who make or mar revolutions, who inspire and guide them. But leaders must have material to work on — "the fickle and inconstant mob". The role of ideas in fomenting revolution is problematical though Marxism is often cited as a paramount example of this. One historian attempts a synthesis by claiming that "political and social revolt is prompted both by grievances and a system of ideal aims". For even to crave for happiness in this world is, in a sense, to be possessed by a spirit of revolt, since what strict right have we to happiness?

This book is an attempt to analyse the three 'revolts' that occurred in Trinidad in the 1880's:— the Carnival riots — the revolt of the blacks in 1881; the Hosay riots, — the revolt of the Indians in 1884; the Reform movement, — the 'revolt' of the whites in 1887. Was there a common factor in all three? Was there a spirit of change permeating the time and stimulating a spirit of universal unrest in the island? What, if any, was the link between these three revolts? Are these the revolts of immigrant groups who have found themselves for the first time to be part of a country that is now truly theirs and the destiny of which they now feel they have a chance to control? These are questions the reader must answer for himself, for the psychology of revolution is subtle and each one is entitled, within bounds, to his own interpretation.

But when all is said and done, and the causes of the revolts are neatly packaged and analysed, the question still remains to be answered, as to whether the revolution was really worth it; or deeper yet, whether indeed any grievance is a fit object of redress by mob law.



New Frederick Street

The Blacks

In Trinidad in 1881, out of a total population of 153,128, nearly 100,000 were classified as black or coloured, officially known as 'creoles'. This population was heterogeneous to an extent. It included the coloured and black middle class, the black rural masses and the urban labouring population and was divided also on the grounds of language (patois French, Spanish, and English) and religion (Roman Catholic, Anglican and Non-Conformist). Practically the whole of this group however, in the 1880's, shared in a new mentality, a growing pride in their race, a sense of dignity, a consciousness of the fact that there had been a giant step from slavery to freedom, and the knowledge that they had the



La Belle Creole

right to stand on the same level as all other men. Most however still measured their progress in terms of European culture and few turned to Africa for inspiration.

Father Massé, a Roman Catholic priest, mentions in his diary a number of times that "it must never be forgotten that everybody here must be called Monsieur or Madame"; "the most ragged negro wants to be called Mister".¹ A black ditch digger speaking to a white warden's clerk at Oropouche, shows him his black skin and says: "I am not white but I am honest. When I give my word, I never fail". But only too often black pride involved some jealousy or hatred of the whites: "All you white people trick the negro too much"; "these white people, they despise too much people who are not of the same colour"; "If only this (white) pig could roast". In his report about the Carnival riots, Hamilton commented that blacks and coloureds were less civil to whites than formerly. So notorious was this fact that J.J. Thomas, the famous black author of the *Creole Grammar*, and *Froudacity*, found it necessary to write that "the black and coloured West Indians should stop harping on their grievances at the hands of the whites."² For it was notorious that "the most fatal instances of skin prejudice have *not* their source among the whites." In the West Indies "colour prejudice is a ladder with almost numberless rungs. It is a system of social aggression and retaliation". This was referring in particular to the ambiguous attitude of the coloured, which Father Massé describes as follows:

In the best families of colour, the parents do not consider themselves dishonoured on seeing their daughter live in concubinage with a white man. They consider them more disgraced if they marry a black man. In the same way, for the

coloured men, when they live a life of disorder with mulattoes or even with blacks: they will blame them, but they will all the same be received everywhere. If they marry their concubines thus regularising their position in the eyes of God and of society, because these women are not white they will forever be rejected by their family. Again, many find themselves in the position of Mr. Guemesen's father, the clerk of the Warden of Erin. This man is white. He married a negress, but he has warned his son that he will be disinherited if he marries a negress.

Hannibal, a coloured calypsonian of that time sang on the same theme also:

I ain't black, I ain't white,
If it comes to blows or fight,
I'll kill the black to save the white.³

Nevertheless, in spite of this uncertainty of attitude among not a few coloured, the 1880's were undoubtedly a time of spiritual resurgence for the blacks who could look proudly on the progress of their own — of such men as Michel Cazabon, the painter; J.J. Thomas, the man of letters; Masson, the merchant; Phillip, the lawyer and later Solicitor General. Racial pride was encouraged and aspirations aroused. It was because he recognised this fact of black pride, that Abbé Kums, the Parish Priest of Oropouche, painted the statue of the Virgin black, to offer for the veneration of the blacks a Virgin of their colour.⁴

The black and coloured middle class consisted of two distinct groups, one of which were the descendants of the free French coloured who had emigrated to Trinidad from the French West Indies from 1780 onwards and who were originally estate owners — families such as Beaubrun, Phillip, Saturnin, Maresse. It is fashionable among modern historians to imply

that these families looked down on the blacks for racial reasons, but very probably class played a larger element in this than race. They shared the same European culture as the whites and were far closer to them than to the uneducated blacks. The second and larger group was made up of black and coloured people who had achieved their status mainly through education and ability and most of whom were English speaking, — men such as Brown, a coloured immigrant from St. Vincent and a merchant, H.B. Phillips, a coloured native of Barbados, Joseph Lewis and Samuel Carter who ran printing establishments, and a host of teachers and civil servants, and some doctors and lawyers. It was men from this group who, not sharing in the 'gentility' of the coloured French creoles, began to rouse their fellow blacks to a consciousness of their rights. Whether through newspapers, like Lewis, the editor of the *New Era*, or through books, like J.J. Thomas, or through direct appeal to the masses, they created a certain ferment in the lower middle class, but nevertheless were concerned first of all with their own advancement. Louis de Verteuil wrote of them in 1884:

The descendants of the emancipated, and young men of colour in general, manifest a strong desire to gain public estimation, and look anxiously to social advancement. They are ambitious of success, and have proved that they can attain it. Not a few occupy respectable positions in the public service. They are particularly anxious to become enlisted in the liberal professions; and the white Creoles should look to them as not unworthy antagonists in the field of competition.⁵

It is undoubtedly this middle class (though we do not know the persons concerned) which provided the leadership and helped to instigate the Carnival riots, the so-called 'revolt' of the lower class blacks.

The black rural masses lived in small settlements or isolated homesteads in the newly opened up interior. The vast majority were engaged in agriculture — subsistence farming or cocoa growing; some were fishermen, hunters or wage labourers. They were mainly the descendants of Trinidad slaves or free men, but also included large numbers of West Indian immigrants and Venezuelan settlers or 'peons' as they were known. Many of them owned an acre or two of land, many were squatters. Up to this period, before the drop in wages and the increase in unemployment and the general depression, most simply accepted their harsh conditions of life as part of the eternal order of things, and not having many (artificially aroused) expectations, they were probably far more content than poor people today. Generally inert, they looked forward to their occasional enjoyments, — a christening, a wake, the completion of a house, a carnival party and even a race day, for races at that time were held in Cedros, Diego Martin and other places.

Most of the population of San Fernando (7,000) and particularly that of Port of Spain (32,000) fell under the label 'urban labouring population', though indeed many of them were unemployed and others laboured only occasionally. In both towns somewhat under one third of the blacks were immigrants from the smaller islands, mainly Barbados. Speaking English, they differed in language from the mainly patois-speaking Trinidad creoles. The Barbadian immigrants were supposed to be more industrious and ambitious than the Trinidadians but also more prone to vice. They were also more literate and were Anglicans as opposed to the Roman Catholic



Black Rural Family

Trinidadians. But since most of their habits and values were similar to those of the natives they were soon absorbed into the creole masses. A second-generation Barbadian in Trinidad would be disgusted at being called a Barbadian.

The great majority of the working class lived in misery. Brereton thus describes their situation: The great majority of the urban working class lived in the notorious barrack ranges. They were situated behind the frontage of each city street, with its respectable stores and houses, and hidden from the passer-by. The barrack range consisted of a long shed built against a back wall, facing a strip of yard, often with a similar shed on the other side. The shed was divided into six, eight, ten, or more rooms of ten or twelve feet square. The divisions were wooden partitions which usually did not reach the roof. Each room had one door, which was closed by a wooden shutter. There was one water tap for each range, and the closet accommodation consisted of one cess-pit surmounted by a wooden hut divided into two compartments. Usually this hut was dilapidated and the doors were often useless. The only provision for bathing was the single public tap. Washing of clothes was carried on in the yard, with the water and soap-suds sinking into the already water-logged soil. Sometimes six or seven persons were crowded into unventilated rooms of as little as eight or ten feet square. They were shut up there for seven or eight hours every night. 'Only those who have penetrated into the yards of the barracks or ranges wherein the labouring class are huddled together', wrote one editor, 'can imagine the fetid stenches which are continually assailing them.' Another paper informed its readers 'there are yards reeking with filth of every conceivable description'.⁶

The population of Port of Spain increased rapidly in the 1870's and 1880's, while little new housing for low-income people was built. The overcrowding became worse and worse. Vagrancy and prostitution increased and with it the class of unemployed men and women, more and more became organised in

'bands', loose associations formed for drinking, gambling (especially whé-whé) and fighting. These bands from different yards combined at Carnival time to form bigger bands. The Attorney General described the bands in 1879 as consisting of "persons without any settled occupation, subsisting by theft or by the favour of the prostitutes whose wages they share. They have no charitable, political or other definite object, but are called into operation only for the purpose of fighting with other bands". There were a half dozen or so of these bands in San Fernando but they were far more numerous in Port of Spain. The *Echo* called the bands "notorious conservers of crime and violence". There was in fact in Port of Spain a large semi-criminal class. The eastern section of the city was inhabited by "a lawless and reckless population, a sort of sanctuary for escaped convicts, runaway sailors and criminals of every class". The police hardly ventured into this district. By the early 1880's things were almost at the crisis point. *New Era* thought that "the violent disposition of the *canaille* about town seems to gather strength almost every day". Urban unrest, lawlessness and crime were preparing the way for a conflict on a larger scale.

What made matters worse was that imprisonment was no deterrent to the criminals. As the Inspector of Prisons wrote in 1877: "There is no shame here attached to the fact of having been an inmate of a criminal prison . . . In the goal he is well lodged and fed at the public expense . . . He has medical attendance when ill and he can sleep from 6 p.m. till 5 a.m. next morning". Generally when a prisoner belonging to one of the bands was discharged he

would be met at the gate by friends both male and female and taken home to enjoy a 'picnic'. "Are they not", Louis de Verteuil asked in his book *Trinidad* concerning the gaol population, "in the majority of cases, members of "bands" notoriously formed for immoral purposes and there practically taught to scorn all that society respects and appreciates and to indulge in unbridled licentiousness?"

The mass of the labouring class blacks whether in the town or in the country were submerged in a way of life and thought that is hardly imaginable today. When modern political writers talk of the benefits of universal suffrage and imply that this would have been an ideal one hundred years ago, they fail to realise the enormous impact that education has had on the masses during the past century. When modern sociologists refer to 'the African sub-cultures' of the slums, they are using polite jargon to glorify a way of life that no African tribe would dare identify with their culture. Almost totally uprooted from their African heritage, European culture was still but a veneer on most of the emancipated slaves and their children, and even grand-children. Their superstitions, which nowadays we glorify with the name of folklore, were to them grim realities of life, fearful spectres of a vague supernatural world. Even school teachers in the 1880's were to be found believing in soucouyants, zombies or 'la diablesse'. The following is an account of these beliefs given to Father Massé, a Roman Catholic priest, by a teen-aged girl, who ended her account by telling him: 'Father, you do not believe that. However it is very true.' Zombies are the spirits of the people who are dead — if they

were vexed with someone and died without being reconciled with them, after death they come to annoy their enemies. To get rid of them one must make the sign of the cross with the clenched hand, the fist.

La diablesse — the she devil — a spirit which when it takes a visible form always shows itself as a woman. When at death it had left the body in which it was living, this spirit was so bad that not only God but even the devil did not want it. Her only idea is to do ill. La diablesse however cannot cross water.

Soucouyans — these are bad-living people who have made a pact with the devil and with his help they can take any form they wish. They go into the cemeteries to dig up the dead to take their liver with which they make oil to rub their body, which allows them to get rid of their skin as they wish, so they are not recognised. They put their skin in the hollowed out trunk of a tree which is used in the houses to parch the coffee. They set fire to houses, cuff their enemies very hard etc. etc. If anyone sits on the trunk with the soucouyan skin, the trunk begins to move. If the skin is covered with salt and the soucouyan then puts it back on, it will suffer horribly and be discovered.

Belief in obeah was common. People frequented both negro men or women renowned for their skill, or even indian sorcerers. No one in Trinidad died a natural death — they were either victims of poison or of an obeah man. Father Labourière, the Roman Catholic priest of Santa Cruz, preached often and strongly against obeah. When in 1893 he was drowned at Cyril Bay on the North Coast of Trinidad, it was popularly believed that an obeah woman had turned herself into a shark and eaten him. Father Massé in his diary tells of one obeah session: A woman was ill. They went to consult a coolie sorcerer, who to begin with exacted forty dollars, a white fowl and a black pig. He bled the pig on the side and threw in the wound some whiskey of which he had demanded two bottles. He made unbelievable grimaces and contortions of all sorts, ordered the woman to remove all her clothes, put some rice

on her stomach and put the white fowl there to eat the rice. The woman was not cured and the police were notified and had the coolie sorcerer put behind bars for six months. Louis de Verteuil had this to say of obeah:

Notwithstanding the surrounding influences of civilisation, the belief in sorcery is generally and strongly entertained among the more ignorant classes of the population, either Asiatics or Africans. This is a fact which is deplorable indeed. Obeahism, or witchcraft, is still practised by many unprincipled individuals of both sexes who know that they will acquire influence and derive undue advantage by inspiring the poor, the ignorant, and the credulous with a dread of their practices however disgusting or foolish. To seduce the affections of a female, to effect a separation between husband and wife, to possess with a devil, to afflict with sickness, to procure ruin or the death of an enemy — such are the objects of Obeahism in Trinidad. There are, unfortunately many who actually believe in the efficacy of the incantations performed. Such efficacy, as we must suppose, results from natural, but most nefarious, practices. Posion — in most instances vegetable — is administered to the party whom they wish to get rid of. The health is destroyed, and death may ensue. If the object is the ruin of an enemy, poison is given to his fowls, to his cow, or donkey. Of course, the poor man becomes nervous and discouraged at his loss, and abandons his holding, or sells it at a loss. It is only natural that practices of Obeah should inspire the most ignorant people with dread; and such dread will always act as an obstacle to discovering and bringing to punishment the imposters. And yet, though thus dreaded, they are held in contempt, and shunned by the people generally. Some pretend to cure diseases; they invariably declare that such diseases are produced by wicked practices, and of course can be cured only by the administrations of medicines aided by incantations; and such incantations are accordingly performed, with the accompaniment of cabalistic words and signs. The medicines are prepared beforehand, and administered in secret — sometimes in a dark room — when the poor deluded victim will be made to cast up centipedes, scorpions, spiders, pins etc. to the great amazement of those present, and the entire satisfaction of the poor dupe. Some of those quack doctors

and Obeah practisers have a wide reputation, and practice extensively; they are generally negroes from Africa.

The least that I can say of such people is this: they are imposters of the worst kind, having mainly one object in view — obtaining money under false pretences. Some even will not recoil from administering poisons to satisfy their hatred, or with the view of proving their power. I contend that, in general, the magistracy makes too light of Obeahism.⁸

Even though no shadow of proof exists, one wonders whether obeah — poison — was not used against the chief of police at this particular period, when he became unexpectedly ill.

Married life among the lower classes was virtually nonexistent. The most that could be said was, that generally speaking, a man lived with only one woman at a time, in accordance with the patois proverb then current: 'a dog cannot chase two bitches at the same time'. Wife or woman beating was the accepted thing. "The women in the country are a people who resign themselves to receive blows from their men if from time to time they give them objects of toilette".⁹ They only complain if they are beaten 'without reason'. Child beaters were however frequently hauled up by the police. People considered that they lived 'good lives' if they had not stolen or committed murder. Most of the lower class including even young women were very frequently drunk. One of their few 'recreations' was indulgence at wakes. When a person died, friends and relatives gathered round the corpse that night and passed from prayers to hymns, to drinking, to ribald songs, to dancing, to obscene behaviour. By next day, most would be in an unfit state to attend the church funeral. In one case of the death of a young girl at Siparia, they salted her body to preserve it, and so were able to carry on the wake

for seven days and seven nights.

The level of 'decent' behaviour was appallingly low. The following is the description of the wedding of a leper girl in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Port of Spain:

28th May 1883. The Catholic Church of Port of Spain was invaded today by the riff-raff of the town. Some negroes got right up on the altar and broke the chandeliers. All this was caused by the marriage of a leper girl. Such a thing had never taken place before. Two hours before the marriage the Cathedral and environs were filled with a filthy crowd such as is only found in this country. When the bride arrived in a carriage, she was greeted by savage shouts. The policemen had a lot of trouble to make a passage for her, but could not stop her dress being torn to bits before she got to the altar. The priest not having arrived yet, the crowd climbed on to the altar and abandoned itself to all sorts of disorder. The wedding took place in the midst of a tumult which the priest was unable to control. The exit was even more noisy. Bits of the dress and the bride's veil remained in the hands of the negroes and those of the street women who in full liberty fill the streets of Port of Spain. When having got safely into the carriage the leprous bride gave the crowd a contemptuous and mocking salute, the coachman had to urge on the horses to prevent the crowd laying violent hands on the bride.¹⁰

Violence was never far off in the lives of the lower class — victimisation by the police (who were absolutely loathed and hated by the people), or attacks from their own exasperated fellows. When one realises the appalling conditions of life, it is really amazing that a number of the poor managed to lift themselves out of this morass to social and spiritual levels that even now to us seem astonishing. But those who did so were only the very few. Most lived and continued to live in physical and spiritual squalor; and in this poverty revolt was always a possibility if only because there was so little to lose

by it; and yet when an uprising did occur, it was not to gain something new but to preserve the one single treasure they all shared. For in this borderline existence between the animal and the human, the tumultuous lower classes of Port of Spain had but one common cultural claim, and this they prized beyond measure. It was not much, but it was theirs. And not indeed theirs only, for it belonged to all who called themselves Trinidadians. It was Carnival.

Carnival by the 1880's had indeed become a national festival, as the *San Fernando Gazette* of 11th December 1881 put it: Carnival is "the only national festival to which they (the people) lay claim". Carnival had its origins in France and came to Trinidad with the French settlers and their slaves after the Cedula of 1783. Up to the period of Emancipation (1838) Carnival was kept up with much spirit by the upper classes. Masked parties were held at the homes of the wealthy, Sir Ralph Woodford in particular, (Governor from 1813 — 1828), gave elaborate masked balls at the Governor's residence at St. Anns, and on the days of Carnival, the leading members of society used to drive through the streets of Port of Spain masked, and in the evenings go from house to house — which were all thrown open for the occasion. Inevitably, the free coloured began to take part in the festival in their own way, and though theoretically, the slaves except as onlookers or by special favour, were not allowed to take part, they did in fact join in the celebrations. Carnival seems to have taken to the streets of Port of Spain with large crowds very early on, and in the early 1830's it was accepted as the celebration of the whole community. A merchant's clerk of this period

in Port of Spain, Friedrich Urich, relates in his diary of 1831:

Sunday 13th Feb. After dinner we went to see the negroes dance. Monday 14th Feb. I went to call on the Bocks but he told us that she was getting ready to attend the disguised ball. Entrance fee \$8.00. We follow various masked bands. The dances are usually African dances, and the enthusiasm of the negroes and negresses amuse us very much, for these dances are stupendous. We play smart and look on at the ball for a short time from the street, and then return home and go to bed. Tuesday 15th Feb. I feel very weary after running around so much. The noise of the masked bands however, banishes this feeling and gives me the wish to go out, but my boots are wet and I cannot get them on, so I have to be lazy and stay at home.

1832. Monday March 5th. I went to see the masks, There are fewer than last year. There was a ball at Mrs. Bruce's. Lady Smith was there. Tuesday March 6th. I went to see the masks. Nearly all were coloured people and a crowd of our acquaintances and our negroes (slaves) had organised a funeral procession to mark the end of the carnival.

After emancipation the masked balls continued unabated in the homes of the wealthy. Amelia Gomez, the second wife of Antonio Gomez, 2nd Puisne Judge of Trinidad (1833-43) in her diary writes as follows:

11th February 1842: My modiste was taken ill and unable to finish my dress (she was playing a character A. . Countess of Leicester). Lady C's maid Casey came and made my Elizabethan ruff for me. I was on the sofa till 9 o'clock in the evening, dressed and in full style for the ball. Very much amused but obliged (because of illness) to sit alone all the evening — Lady C. personated Ceres. The dresses were admirable — the best fancy ball I have seen. Retired immediately after supper. Did not go to the table.

It is difficult to agree with Andrew Pearse when he writes that over the years (emancipation to the 1880's) "it is true that on a few occasions brilliant fancy dress balls were held, but the connection of

those with the traditional Carnival became remote".¹². It is true that after emancipation there must have been a more general participation by the newly freed and as a consequence Carnival, as played in the streets, degenerated into a noisy and disorderly amusement for the lower class, while the upper class confined their celebrations chiefly to their homes. Nevertheless, this had always been part of the 'traditional Carnival' and even as late as 1886 one observer stated that the upper class Spaniards would dress in fantastic costumes and ride or drive visiting friends and showering them with sweets; and of course the upper class always remained as spectators of the street celebrations if only from the balconies of their town houses.

Over the years, Carnival undoubtedly had its ups and downs. In times of economic distress or sickness (like the cholera outbreak of 1854) it would decline. At times it was very much out of favour with the authorities, as the historian Fraser (a former chief of police relates:

'In 1857 the Carnival was dying out but at the commencement of 1858 the then Governor, Mr. Keete, deemed it advisable to put an end to the masquerading. The troops were ordered into town from St. James and the immediate results were numerous arrests, some broken heads and a great deal of disorder.

There was however another and far more serious consequence which had not been foreseen. Many people who had noticed with much satisfaction the gradual decline of the Carnival thought it a very high-handed act to endeavour to put down by armed force that which however abused and objectionable could scarcely be called illegal which had the sanction of immemorial custom.

The result was that new life and vigour were given to the almost defunct Carnival and in 1859 preparations were made

for carrying it out on a more extended scale than had been the case for years. The government unwilling to go back from the position it had taken again ordered the troops into the town. At that time I was Fort Adjutant so that I had a full opportunity for knowing all that occurred.

A serious disturbance took place in the morning of Shrove Tuesday and Major Bligh of the 41st sent a body of men *unarmed* to the assistance of the police. When they reached the Western End of Lower Prince Street they were assailed by a volley of stones and bottles which compelled them to retire, some of the men being severely wounded. The mob, satisfied with this victory, dispersed fully convinced that they had beaten both Police and military. From that time until 1868 the Carnival went on much as before'.¹³

Around 1868 however, a marked change began to be noticeable in Carnival. Up to then, masquerading was pretty well confined to innocent fun and the representation of characters in masks and disguises such as pirates, soldiers, red indians, pierrots, death, Punch etc., the only disturbing element was that the friends and sympathisers of gaol birds took advantage of the opportunity to make a considerable noise and demonstration on the first night of Carnival outside the gaol for the edification and amusement of their friends within; but even this was comparatively harmless. However with the formation of 'bands', the 'Jamet' (or urban lower) class began to give Carnival their own stamp, (though undoubtedly there remained always members of the middle class coloured who participated.) It became known as 'the jamet Carnival,' because of the wide currency at that time of the word (*diamètre* or *diamète*) which was applied to what amounted to a sub-class in the community, the people below the *diameter* of respectability, or the 'underworld.'

Brereton describes the Jamet Carnival as follows:

Around the 1860's Carnival came to have a distinct character: the Jamet Carnival of the diametre class. The festival was almost entirely taken over by the jamets, who had created in the backyards of Port of Spain their own sub-culture. Here the urban lower class lived in long barrack ranges situated behind the city blocks, centering on a yard which formed a common living space. At about this time, yard 'bands' were formed: groups of men and women, boys and girls, who went around together for singing, fighting, and dancing. Such bands existed all the year round, but were especially active in the weeks before Carnival, when they rehearsed their songs, dances, and stick-fighting. The yard 'chantwelle' or singer, insulted rival yards and yard stickmen sought out rivals for single combats. The big Carnival bands were a combination of several yard bands. The jamets, who were the band members, were the singers, drummers, dancers, stickmen, prostitutes, pimps, and 'bad johns' in general. They boasted their skill and bravery, verbal wit, talent in song, dance and drumming, their indifference to the law, their sexual prowess, their familiarity with jail, and sometimes their contempt for the Church.

Probably the most objectionable feature of the diametre Carnival was its obscenity. Bands of prostitutes roamed the streets making indecent gestures and singing 'lewd' songs. There were also traditional masks, with explicit sexual themes. The most notorious was the Pissenlit — 'wet the bed', usually translated as 'stinker.' It was played by masked men dressed as women in long transparent nightgowns; some carried 'menstrual cloths' stained with 'blood.' Their dance was a rapid shifting of the pelvis from side to side and back and forward, and they sang obscene songs. There was a lot of sexual horseplay, including a poui stick held between the legs. The jamet bands featured both men and women. The women would be prostitutes or ex-prostitutes in the traditional Martinique dress, always masked. At some times and in some places they exposed their breasts. The male jamets wore trousers, silk shirts, jewellery and chains, Panama hats, and fancy waistcoats. They danced and strutted through the streets speaking to bystanders in sexy tones and propositioning women.

Only a degree less objectionable than the obscenity was the organised conflict between bands. The weapons were stones, bits of macadam, bottles, and staves. Serious injury was rare, but there were always broken heads or slashed faces. In the early 1870's the number of bands greatly increased. Bands from Belmont, East Dry River, and the tenements in the center of the city, used the days of Carnival to pay off old grudges or to increase their prestige at the expense of other bands. L.O. Innis' memory of Carnival in the 1870's was 'bands of intoxicated people went through the streets carrying torches and armed with Gasperee sticks, shouting ribald songs and dancing to the sound of big drums, and shack shacks and spoiling for an encounter with a rival band.'

In 1871 the names of some of the rival bands were: True Blues, Danois, Maribones, Black Bull, Golden City, Alice, D'jamettres. The Maribones (wasps) were still going strong in 1877, when their carnival outfit consisted of a black hat, obtained from gentlemen friends, red shirts, white trousers with a blue waistband — their colours were red, white and blue — with a silk foulah band round each knee, in the nègre jardin style. The women were in trousers reaching the knee, a short red jacket over a blouse, an apron in front, and a sailor hat of white with a blue ribbon. The band leader, the Roi, was on horseback. Each woman carried a wooden hatchet, painted to resemble iron. The Maribones had their own musical ensemble, consisting of a clarinet, two drums, a fiddle, a beke-nègre (a fair skinned negro) with a small drum, a line of tom-toms (keg drums with a goatskin top), and a triangle. The players kept to the centre of the band for protection.

According to an obviously well-informed editorial in 1877 there were perhaps twelve large bands in the city, formed on a neighbourhood basis . . . In 1882 Port of Spain was said to be divided into two zones, one belonging to the 'English Band', the other to the 'French Band', alias the Bakers. In one incident three Bakers drove in a cab over the boundary into hostile territory and were stoned by members of the 'English Band.'

These bands existed the whole year round, but were most

active during the Carnival, the great opportunity to challenge rivals and show off prowess in song, dance and stickfighting. Their aggressiveness during the Carnival was heightened by liquor, and the result was street fights, often of considerable proportions. Bands would roam about seeking a rival to fight. It seems that firearms or knives were virtually never used; the intention was not to wound seriously, but to establish prestige by skilful use of the stick, though bottles and stones were also used as weapons. Such affrays were, of course, illegal and numerous arrests were made each Carnival. Yet the street fights continued until the early 1880's.¹⁴

One notable feature of the Jamet Carnival was the Canboulay. This was a procession of men usually masked, carrying lighted torches and staves, it started on midnight on Sunday (Dimanche Gras) and continued till the Monday morning. This custom was flourishing by 1850 but its origins are obscure. Canboulay is a contraction of *Cannes Brulées* or 'burnt canes'. Its origin according to some authors is this: after Emancipation the ex-slaves commemorated the 1st August (Emancipation Day) each year by a torchlight procession which looked back to the days of slavery when the slaves had to turn out to fight cane fires on the estate. Carnival was originally held on the Sunday too; this was prohibited about 1843 and so it began at midnight Sunday. It is conjectured (on no available evidence) that for some reason the torchlight procession supposedly held on the 1st August perhaps for only a few years after 1838 was revived as the opening event of Carnival. On the other hand, it seems far more likely to me that the Canboulay came about as an imitation by the lower classes during their traditional carnival Sunday night revels of a particular type of 'negre jardin' band, once a favourite of the upper classes. This is described as

follows in the *Port of Spain Gazette* of the twenty-sixth March 1881 by a correspondent 'X': The elite of our society took an active part in the Carnival. The favourite costumes of our mothers and grandmothers was the graceful and costly one of the 'mulatresse' of the time; whilst gentlemen adopted that of the 'nègres de jardin', or in creole 'nègre jardin' or field labourer. In that costume, the gentlemen often figured in the 'bamboola', in the 'giouba' and the 'calinda.' These pretended nègres de jardin were wont to unite in bands, representing the camps of various estates, and with torches and drums to represent what actually did take place on the estates when a fire occurred in a plantation. In such cases, the gang of the neighbouring estates proceed alternately accompanied with torches at night to the estate which had suffered to assist in the grinding of the burnt canes before they became sour.

In the 1880's Canboulay was celebrated in many towns and villages in Trinidad — certainly at San Fernando, Erin, Carenage, Couva, Princes Town, Montserrat; but Port of Spain was the main centre. Father Massé, the Roman Catholic priest, gives a description of Canboulay in his diary as it was celebrated in La Brea.

28th February 1881. Since a long time carnival has begun. Last night they made an infernal noise. It was cries, singing, visits to the sound of the drum, the violin, the conch shell — something really savage. A lot of masked people. The women have no more scruples about masking themselves than the men.

20th February 1882. At midnight I was woken up by the sound of several horns and numerous cries coming from all sections of La Brea. It was the beginning of Carnival. On Sunday everything is quiet. Carnival starts by what they call the 'Cannes Brulées.' From the time of slavery fire was often started in the fields of cane by the slaves who had complaints against their masters or the overseers. It is a fact of this kind which they want to recall. Some negroes place themselves at a certain distance one from the other at different entrances

to the area. These are the ones who have the horns with which they sound the alarm. Shouts answer them from within the village. From all sides negroes appear, some armed with sticks, others carrying on their heads what they are known to have most precious (utensils). All run towards a central point where there are other negroes who have lighted torches and who simulate a field of cane on fire. Then sticks, rags, anything that comes to hand serves to put out the fire. It is impossible to get an idea of the disorder which takes place at that time. A certain number receive severe blows. More than once blood has been spilled because what begins as a farce nearly always finishes in a tragic fashion because of the drunkenness of the participants. They are nearly all masked or have some sort of disguise for this sport of *cannes brûlées*. The kind of frenzy which takes possession of them, the abominable dances to which they give themselves up, the cries of the beasts of prey which they utter, the hideous masks which they have on their faces, the clash of the batons, the noise of the knives which many carry in their belt, sometimes the cries of distress of the unfortunates gravely wounded, all that in the light of the torches carried by more than half of these negroes, produces a spectacle both frightening and truly diabolic. On Monday and Tuesday the roads are full of people masked or disguised. Nearly always they divide in many bands which provoke each other and come to battle in which usually blood flows.

In 1868, legislation had been introduced in an attempt to control Carnival, and the carrying of lighted torches was made an offence if done to the obstruction, annoyance or danger of any resident or passenger in any street, but this was not systematically enforced and throughout the 1870's the attitude of the Executive towards the *Jamet Carnival* was vacillating, chiefly due to the weakness of the Inspector-Commandant of Police, the historian L.M. Fraser.¹⁵ Normally, the practice of the police was to interfere very little with the maskers during Carnival but to keep a close watch on them. Once it was over,

the maskers observed to have committed offences were picked up one by one and charged.

In 1877, Captain Baker became Inspector Commandant. He was a militant man by nature and decisive in his actions. He made it his chief object to control and if possible, destroy the organised bands. The carnivals of 1878 and 1879 were strictly controlled and stick fighting was made almost impossible by guarding four or five of the chief meeting places of the bands. The Police also arrested trouble makers on the spot. In the carnival of 1880, Baker decided to suppress the Canboulay making use of the 1868 Ordinance for this purpose. He called on the participants to surrender their torches, sticks and drums, and taken by surprise, for Baker's intention had not been announced, they did so without any resistance. The Carnival passed off quietly and Baker must have thought that his problems with the festival had been satisfactorily solved.

For these four years, 1877, 1878, 1879, and 1880, the newspapers all backed up Baker's actions very strongly. Their comments make interesting reading, both as to the nature of the Carnival and as to the feeling of the middle and upper class public towards its suppression.

From *New Era*. 19th February, 1877.

The Carnival this season has passed off without much of that disorder and license which distinguished it during the last ten years, and which many felt to be a source of a great danger to the moral and social state of the Colony. This amendment is probably owing to the anticipation that, under the new regime inaugurated under Captain Baker, strong measures would have been taken to repress disorders, and to have the law respected. This indicates to the authorities a very effectual means of stamping out this nuisance.

From *Fair Play*. 15th February, 1877.

The occasion has passed away with nothing to distinguish it from its ordinary features except that there was more activity and greater discipline shown by the Police in watching the movements of the various bands and guarding against a conflict.

From *The Port-of-Spain Gazette*. 17th February, 1877.

We refer again to the Carnival to record our protest against the repetition of the outrage in future years. When the time comes for it, we shall not fail to advocate our views on the subject. Meantime we take the present as a fitting opportunity for preparing the way while the horrible scenes which met the eye in every Street of this Town on Monday and Tuesday last are still fresh in people's mind. To everybody who has not taken leave of his senses, the reasons for putting a stop to this outrageous practice are self-evident; while, on the other side, we are not aware of any ground on which its continuance can be defended the suppression by force, if necessary, of our beastly Carnival, would contribute much more towards the refinement of vulgar tastes than all the learning and labour of our primary schools put together for a year The thing should not be allowed to go further. It were better to deny recreation to outlawed ruffians than to have pollution and obscenity exhibited naked before the eyes of our wives and daughters. We dismiss it as unworthy of a thought that any sane person would be found to construe a forcible suppression of the scandal as an invasion of the rights and privileges of the lower classes of the Community The admirable conduct of the Police, whenever they chanced to be present, proved a substantial check against Riot and disorder. . .

From *Fair Play* 5th March 1878.

Yesterday and today witnessed the celebration of the Carnival which was extremely characteristic of this season of moral abandon and disorder. . . . It is much to be regretted that, as usual, numerous brutal fights took place between the well-known hostile bands, and that in consequence a good number of arrests had to be effected.

From *New Era*: 11th March 1878.

The Carnival came off on Monday and Tuesday last. It does not appear to have mended much in its general character as affording an opening to the roughs and the several disorderly

bands for "kicking up a row", for we hear that several convictions on this head were the results of the Police Courts sitting which lasted up to an exceptionally late hour on both days. Offenders being tried as they came in.

From the *Port-of-Spain Gazette*. 9th March 1878.

Up to now it has always been recognised as a maxim of street ruffians and of the ringleaders of our mobs to prepare their notes during the year, but to postpone the execution of their designs until Shrovetide. The two days of the Carnival have, by the common if tacit consent of the "Maribones" and "Bakers" been consecrated to the purpose of mutual slaughter. It is on these two days that all outstanding accounts during the year are settled. Now the Police of former days were so helpless that their rule of conduct was to observe a benevolent neutrality in all street frays, and their absurd policy was to trust to the morrow for the detection of offenders whose every inch of body was wrapped in disguises. If Captain Baker could claim no other improvement in the small force under his command but a departure from this insane practice, he could claim enough, so far as the suppression of riots is concerned, to warrant a most favourable comparison with his predecessor as well as the distinction that he has done something to justify his appointment.

The joint energy and vigilance of the Chief of Police and Sergeant-Major Concannon were all that were needed on Monday and Tuesday last to tame the ferocious bands, which, in the prophetic language of a late correspondent, so truthfully echoed by the "West Indian in London", are destined to chase away all capital from the country.

From *Fair Play*. 27th February 1879.

Thanks to the energy and good arrangements of Captain Baker, backed by Inspector Owen and the other officers and men of the Police, the disorder pre-meditated by Roughts was effectively checked. There was a little fighting, but no serious casualty.

From *Chronicle*. 26th February 1879.

One freer from disorder than has been known for years, due to the determination, activity, excellent disposition and personal bravery of the head of the Police, Captain Baker.

From *Port-of-Spain Gazette*. 1st March 1879.

It may fairly be claimed as one of the happy results of Captain Baker's short administration of the Police Force, that fighting in the Streets on a large and dangerous scale during the Masquerade time has been rendered almost impossible. This hearty reaction has been brought about by the departure from the insane policy of former years, of turning out whole detachments of Police to witness as passive spectators the affrays and riots which we were told it was impossible to put down. Captain Baker, with the assistance of a couple of mounted Officers of Police, has managed to impress upon the savage and ferocious hordes which would have swallowed up the whole Police Force of former times, that there is now a living authority to enforce a strict observance of the Peace on these two days.

From *New Era*. 3rd March 1879.

To sum up faithfully the result of last Monday's and Tuesday's saturnalia, the Carnival; it must be confessed that the respectable public are heartily sick of it. That this would be so, surprises no one. It is incontestable that the thing has outlived every indication of its being a healthy outburst of the popular spirit, and that the amusements it was thought to have yielded is now replaced by disgust at dissolute and obscene displays which appear unencumbered on the days allotted to this Carnival. It is true that owing to the happy disposition and disciplined action of Capt. Baker, fewer riots and disorders disfigured this year's license, yet it was a characteristic of the impersonations that the majority were highly offensive to all ideas of decency and morality.

It is now the means of re-union of vagabondry and the fete of the lawless, and we fear one of the opportunities of educating and training the young fry which always fringe the skirt of crime. It is time we believe for the government seriously to consider the advisability of staying this tendency of the lower orders, and to thwart the ends thus openly avowed by the Carnival. We are certain that it would be zealously supported by the orderly and respectable portion of the population, and that unlike the past efforts of the Executive in this direction, its efforts now, in the present temper of the better sort of society, would be fraught with

success, and the happiest results.

From *Fair Play*.

6th March 1879.

We are glad to see the unanimity of opinion that prevails with regard to the necessity of putting down the brutal rowdyism and gross indecency which for a long time past have made an abomination of our annual Carnival season What is required in dealing with the Carnival holiday is the decided and stern repression of all connected with it that is opposed to public decency, morality and order. It would be impolitic for the Government to attempt to interfere in the matter beyond these limits.

From the *Port-of-Spain Gazette*. 11th February 1880.

The Carnival of 1880, as of the past few years, unlike the Saturnalia of former times, brings back with it the agreeable duty of congratulating the Police upon the gradual success with which their efforts are being attended each year towards the entire extinction of all that is most objectionable and shocking in our Shrovetide orgies. A serious inroad has this year been made into the enemy's stronghold by the deathblow which has been so judiciously dealt to the institution popularly known by the name of Can-boule. Of the two most objectionable features of Masquerade here, blood-shed and obscenity, the chances of the former have happily been reduced to a minimum. The savage hordes who used to do most of the fighting, have capitulated to Captain Baker's terms, the most important stipulation of which was that they should surrender their sticks, drums, and flambeaux. It nevertheless required the activity and bravery of the Inspector-Commandant, assisted by Acting Inspector Concannon and Sergeant-Major Brierly, on horseback throughout the two days, to prevent disorderly conduct and rioting on a small scale wherever and whenever a fray was expected by the eager multitude, which throngs each corner of the streets to the East of the Town as stand-points of observation on these two days. Thither and then, with mathematical precision, would Captain Baker or one of his assistants, ride up in time to disappoint the combatants. These tactics were repeated with the punctuality of a previous rendez-vous; and with the exception of harmless skirmishing here and there, the wishes of those who expected hard fighting were not gratified.

From *Fair Play*.

12th February, 1880.

This Year's Carnival has come and gone much more satisfactorily, we are glad to see and hear, than similar festivals for many years past. . . . Much praise is due, however, to Capt. Baker for this satisfactory result, as great preparations had been made by various bands for their usual fights, which would without doubt have taken place but for the steady and determined opposition of Capt. Baker and the Police. Capt. Baker was we understand constantly on horseback from Sunday night to Tuesday night, preventing encounters between hostile bands, and on Monday and Tuesday some of them were accompanied by the Police wherever they went, to prevent an affray. The Police patrolled the Town in force to preserve the Peace in every direction.

From *New Era*.

16th February, 1880.

Thanks to the activity and firmness displayed by the Police under the direction of Capt. Baker, the Carnival this year was a marked improvement over the orgies of the late past. What order and decorum were really possible under the characteristic of a saturnalia, having so large an element of not as the *Cannaille* as a necessary component, Capt. Baker maintained, at the expense of much personal exertion, attended, we are quite sure, with much inconvenience to himself, to say nothing of the risk incurred. We learn that the initiation gatherings on Sunday night, popularly known as the *Cannes-Brulées*, were promptly suppressed on this occasion; thus, in a great measure, securing the slumbers of the town from those clamorous disturbances which it was hitherto the custom to begin Masquerade with. This alone entitles Captain Baker to the grateful consideration of decent folks which doubtlessly they entertain for him as the head of our Constabulary. And the one unquestionably who has raised its tone.¹⁶

We may then well ask what was to make the difference between these years and 1881, so that the passive acceptance of police action in the previous years changed to active hostilities between people and police in 1881? Brereton (in 'Savacou') claims of the events of 1881 that 'in a way it was a class action:

the population or rather the lower class, united against the attempts of the Executive to interfere with the festival'. Brierley sees it as a classic case of mob manipulation by a few leaders. It is difficult to decide which element predominated but certainly both worked together; as Albert Soboul expressed it (with regard to the French Revolution) "les masses populaires urbaines ont fourni à la bourgeoisie révolutionnaire la force indispensable pour abattre le Gouvernement".

After the Christmas holidays in Trinidad, in early 1881, Carnival was in the air. The upper class began their round of masked parties and dinners. The lower class sang their kaiso, practised their stick fighting, dreamed their dreams and perhaps a few gave a thought to their costumes. Memories of last year's carnival returned, and particularly how Baker had stopped the bands and taken away their torches at Canboulay. Speculation was rife as to what action would be taken this Carnival. There was also a lot of what in modern Trinidad parlance would be classified as 'gun talk'. Moreover, according to Justice Wilson of Port of Spain, a deliberate attempt had been made to stir up trouble:

'During the last year . . . an amount of rascality has been exposed or partially exposed which to an outsider would be quite incredible. This consisted in a system of levying blackmail and fraudulent swindling carried on, as is believed by those who have the best opportunity of knowing, by a certain number of individuals intimately connected with and having command of one or two of the local papers, by means of which they exercise the sort of terrorism over a certain portion of the public and by which they would by working on the susceptibilities of the people by raising false issues of colour etc. they have been able hitherto to mislead a large portion

of the public. It is to the malicious action of these parties purposely misleading both the roughs and the ignorant that unrest was due'.¹⁷

For example in December 1880 the *New Era* edited by a coloured man, Lewis, said that "an urgent inquiry is needed into the demoralisation of the Police Force" and attacked "the gallant Captain" Baker, because "a (coloured) policeman was left so long in the stocks (by Sergeant Brierly) he had to be sent to the hospital".

Hamilton, who was later to investigate the riots, was quite explicit on the matter:

Prosecutions had recently been instituted by the Colonial Government against two individuals, both civil servants, the one for forgery, the other for obtaining money under false pretences. Sergeant Brierly, one of the Irish officers of the police force took an active part in getting up the evidence for the prosecutions and consequently excited the bitter hatred of those persons who were discharged from their offices and they or their friends retaliated by writing or inspiring such violent articles reflecting upon his conduct in the local papers that an action for libel resulted in which judgement was given to the plaintiff. This irritated very much the persons concerned who endeavoured to create popular sympathy by raising a cry that the liberties of the press were being tampered with. But this proving a failure, they hit upon a more effective way of venging themselves upon the police. Taking advantage of the approaching Carnival they instilled into the minds of the ignorant people that they were the objects of police tyranny and the fact that Captain Baker had at the Carnival of 1880 extinguished the torches of the masquerades was represented to them as a wilful wanton interference with their time-honoured customs and amusements to preserve which in future a determined resistance on their part would be necessary.¹⁸

And so the impression got around and was deliberately fostered among the lower classes, that

the Chief of Police was 'out for them' and that an attempt was to be made to stop Carnival altogether; the very prospect of this arousing the 'cannaille' to fury. One could perhaps draw a parallel with the Carnival riots of 1859 when the resistance to the suppression of Carnival came not only from the lower class but also from the middle class, who felt in some measure, that Governor Keate was attempting to suppress Carnival, not only because it was disorderly, but much more because it was not English and was associated with the Roman Catholic religion. The lower middle class in 1881, especially the coloured tradesmen, felt that carnival was an essential part of their tradition and culture. Among the upper class at this time it was fashionable to condemn Carnival, but they too in their hearts felt that it should not, and in fact, could not be stopped.

Captain Baker was attending one of their dinner parties at this time and they spoke to him "of the impossibility of stopping the carnival bands" at Canboulay.¹⁹ Whether or not the Captain had taken a drink too many, or whether it was sheer bravado or a decision based on principle, will never be known, but the brave Captain (playing into the hands of his enemies) thereupon "made a wager to put an end to this nocturnal sortie". Like lightning the news of this spread through the servants to the nether regions, and through the gentle ladies gossiping behind their fluttering fans to the eager ears of other ladies. And in moments of weakness, the ladies sometimes told their husbands too. At least, John Scott Bushe, the Colonial Secretary, heard the news and he took it very seriously indeed. He approached the Governor, Sir Sanford Freeling, shortly before Carnival and told

him that "at the last Carnival the practice of carrying torches was, for the first time, stopped by the police without resistance" (but only because the people were taken by surprise) "and that now he had heard a rumour that Captain Baker had expressed his determination to put it down altogether this year".²⁰ On receiving this information, the Governor instructed Bushe to see Captain Baker and inform him that the Governor did not wish the custom stopped without his authority. However, at the time, Captain Baker was, surprisingly, ill; and so Bushe did not inform him immediately of the Governor's wish.

Subsequently, Bushe understood from what he considered good authority (and which in fact was correct) that no orders had been issued on the subject, and that (and what was in fact incorrect) the people were not going to carry torches. On Friday, the 26th February, two days before the Canboulay, Captain Baker, now somewhat recovered had an interview with the Governor and told him that the police would only watch the people and not interfere with them unless a disturbance occurred. Freeling gave him no instructions with regard to stopping the torches as he imagined that his orders had been already conveyed to Baker by the Colonial Secretary. But in fact the law forbidding the carrying of torches was there on the Statue Books since 1868 and had of course been enforced the year before. Apparently Baker, who felt the cat was out of the bag, in no way relaxed his determination to stop the carrying of the torches, but deliberately made no statement about it. Sometimes however, rumour can wreak more havoc than real news and this was to be the case here, as also in the 1884 pre-Hosay situation.

The whole of the week before Carnival was a time of rumours and counter-rumours in Port of Spain. Some of them spread in the usual way, at the market, in the barrack yards, through the marchands — itinerant venders of sweets, fish, oysters, vegetables, — among the domestics in the houses of the rich; the wife of A. Bernard, an official of the Colonial Company, learned from her servants that the street lamps in the town would be smashed; R. Wilson, J.B. Payne and E.H. Manoll, merchants of Port of Spain got it on the grapevine that an attack would be made by the people on the police.²¹ But along with this rumour-mongering there seems to have been a deliberate attempt by a number of middle class coloured, 'the respectable class' and their agents, to stir up trouble, to convince the 'cannaille' that the very existence of Carnival was being threatened; that not alone would the carrying of torches be stopped but all masking and carnival itself would be destroyed. This agitation was not confined to Port of Spain. Very definite approaches were made to some of the roughest from outside the city and they were invited to come into town for the Canboulay. It is even very probable that an organisation was formed to resist any police interference with carnival, and particularly by ensuring that the bands acted in concert.

Sergeant Brierley (writing in 1912) stated: For reasons which it is better not to divulge, in 1881 the viler passions of the lower class having in the interval been aroused against Baker his efforts met ... with organised opposition.²²

Be that as it may, in the clamour of the market place and the squalor of the barracks all the talk was about the coming confrontation. The news spread

like wildfire that the Government sawmills had just turned out upwards of one hundred and forty balata sticks, three feet six inches in length for use by the police at Carnival for the avowed purpose of enabling them to fight the maskers.²³ Beautifully balanced and tough as steel as these sticks were, a blow from one of them could easily split a man's skull. But if the police were to be well armed, the mob also were taking their precautions. The leaders of the Maribones, the Diamaitres, the Bakers and other bands apparently met and decided that this year there would be no fighting among the bands but all would unite together against the police. Good serviceable poui sticks were prepared for the fray, and in a number of houses in Duke, Park, Charlotte, George, Duncan, Prince and Queen Streets, bottles and stones were collected and piled up for the coming battle. And stones were in plentiful supply as Brierley claimed:

Year by year just before the Carnival — particularly the Carnival of 1881 — broken stones were spread out on what were, and I believe still are, called 'the French streets', that is, all the streets lying east of Henry Street. The police of those days were wicked enough to say this was done for the purpose of affording the various bands who made these streets their 'happy hunting ground' ready material for assaulting them.²⁴

And as the stores of stones and other ammunition became larger, in the barrack yards excitement grew to fever heat.

On Friday (or possibly Saturday) night an anonymous placard in manuscript was posted prominently throughout the town. It read:

NEWS TO THE TRINIDADIAN

Captain Baker demanded from our just and noble Governor, Sir Sanford Freeling, his authority to prevent the rite of Can Boulay, but Our Excellency refused.²⁵

This poster was apparently intended to justify any resistance to the police and the reasoning behind it was (as it was later expressed by the City Council) that "the people conceived they had a right to carry torches, that the proclamation allowing the carnival had not expressly forbidden the carrying of lights and that the torches had been invariable accompaniments of the Cannes Brulées, and that the lights were not more unlawful than the carnival itself and that the permission to hold the one during the two days of the 28th February and the 1st March carried the use of the other; that at any rate the people thought so." And the people felt that if their traditional right to play was thwarted then they had a right to fight against the alien authorities.

By Saturday night, rumours had reached the ears of Captain Baker that willy-nilly all the bands would be carrying lighted torches.²⁶ By Sunday, all over the city it was known that resistance to police action was planned. That afternoon, men returning to their homes at Woodbrook and elsewhere in the city, told their women folk that there would be a riot in the town and to make sure and stay home and avoid the streets. This of course merely encouraged the Trini women to sneak out later to view the bacchanal. By seven o'clock, with nightfall, the town was quiet. The heat of the day gave way to the cool of the evening. In the clear night sky the stars shone bright over the city and all seemed to be at peace.

At 11.30 p.m. the police, one hundred and fifty strong were paraded by Captain Baker for duty. Parties were told off for the different streets of the city and the usual orders were given. They were all

to carry their usual balata riot sticks which had been ordered on the 17th February and which the Government sawmills had delivered in good time — one hundred of them; the senior officers were as usual to be mounted and armed with swords. And then, Baker, at this late stage, gave the police the first official notice that lighted torches would not be allowed to be carried. Baker was determined to end Canboulay once and for all, at least as far as the lighted torches went. He and Sergeant-Major Concannon, both these big men in a grim mood, proceeded to their stations with a large posse of men; Baker taking up his position at the corner of Duke and George Streets.

But if the Commandant of Police was determined to stop the carrying of torches, the people were equally or even more determined that they would carry them; and the newly amalgamated bands were even now gathering in numbers for the expected clash with the police. From early on in the night, the backyards and barracks of George Street, Duncan Street especially 'Homer Yard' a block between Duke Street and Park Street, were a hive of activity, the men and women dressing in coloured cloth and old clothes, something like the 'ole mas' of today. Pants were worn on the wrong side and tied across the waist with coloured cloth. Bands of coloured cloth passed over one shoulder and across the chest ending in a large bow. There was a coloured kerchief round the neck and some wore beaver hats. Many though tied a 'cattar' — a utensil — on their heads attached by strings under the throat, helmet-strap fashion, to protect their heads from balata-stick blows; a few had knives at their belts. All were barefoot and many

armed with 'poui'. The men were encouraged by the prostitutes and jamets living in the area, the most notorious being Lucretia, Sarah, Peg Top, Bullinder — a tall he-woman, Sarah Jamaica, all famed stick fighters.

As the midnight bell pealed in the Royal Gaol, the Nègres-Jardins who had been sitting in groups at all points of the Eastern section of the town waiting for the hour — struck their drums, sounded their horns and lit their torches, broke out into Kalinda songs and began their march through the town. They danced and revelled as usual, but for the first time anticipating eagerly a great clash with the police. A very large Nègres-Jardins band came up St. Vincent Street, then turned east up Park Street towards the Dry River, growing every moment in numbers and in frenzy.

Meanwhile, Captain Baker sat as cool and solid as a marble statue on his horse. He then took his sword in one hand and his bridle in the other, and moved his mount to the centre of the street; he was supported by a score of policemen on either side, but hidden round the corner of Duke and George Street. Soon the noise of the band coming down Duke Street was deafeningly close; a huge band, it was stretching a near half-mile from the present Globe Cinema to the Dry River.

Quite possibly the Nègres-Jardins were singing as road march a very popular song which was sung at Canboulay for nearly twenty years (from 1870-1890) and the tune of which surfaced some time ago in the calypso *Ram Goat Baptism*.²⁷ In its simplicity and obscenity it was typical of the time and of the maskers. The 'jacket man' mentioned in it would be a middle class follower of the bands, for class in those days was still shown by dress. Piti Belle was supposed

to be a real person, a prostitute who was assaulted one Canboulay night by Congo Jack who threw some inflammable liquid on her dress and attempted to set her ablaze. And so, this calypso or kaiso as it was then called went as follows: (in patois as one would have expected at that time, though English was growing in usage:)

<i>Piti Belle Lily</i>	<i>Piti Belle Lily</i>
Piti Belle Lily	Piti Belle Lily
Piti Belle Lily	Piti Belle Lily
Lom kamisol	Jacket man
Lom sê kamisal	Man without jacket
Tut mun kasé bambirol	All are making free with her
Piti Belle Lily jen fi du	Piti Belle Lily sweet young girl
Piti Belle Lily sé yô fu	Piti Belle Lily she's crazy
Piti Belle Lily maliwé	Piti Belle Lily she's unfortunate
Su la jâm-li me té difé	They put fire on her legs.

And as the band danced, swayed and sung its way onward, a woman who was gyrating in front of the Nègres-Jardins dancers suddenly spied the Captain at the corner. She ran back to the band, screaming out to them: "Messieurs, Cap'n Baker au coin a la rue avec tous l'hommes" (Captain Baker and all his men at the corner). The band stopped, replenished with oil and lit their flambeaux. They raised their sticks, they shouted a song and marched down Duke Street. The excitement and the panic grew. People rushed out on to the overlooking galleries to see the fray. Others who had been on the pavements burst into the yards to escape the crowd and the fight.

The maskers were right on the police, and it was a brave policeman who seized and extinguished the first torch. Then pandemonium broke loose. Poui and balata sticks rose and fell. Bottles and stones were flung. A terrible blow cracked down on Baker's

horse. His mount reared up in the air, and Baker, sword in hand and controlling his horse with bridle, shouted out to the batoniers: "You cowards, don't strike my horse, strike me"; and he gave orders to his men to charge, shouting, "get the torches". The police charged, but the crowd did not run; it opened up and swallowed the police, and crowds of reveller-fighters poured in from all parts. It was a terrible sight. Captain Baker, tall on his horse, face handsome in the dark, lit up by the torches, mustache black, eyes bright, shouting orders to his men.

The fight was hot. The stones and bottles rattled like musket shots against the fences, making a sort of harmony with the shouting and the sound of thwacking sticks. The Nègres-Jardins were beating hell out of the policemen and the crowd was mad with rage and excitement. Everybody was enjoying the fighting. Bottles and stones rained on the police from houses. Several police were overwhelmed with blows and thrown on the pavement. The maskers themselves received some awful blows, but when one was downed there were others to replace him. All the street lamps in the area were smashed. The bystanders on the pavements, some of them from the 'respectable class' joined in the fray against the police. One man received a sword thrust. Sergeant-Major Concannon was cornered, received several blows from sticks and stones, and reeling in the saddle was nearly unhorsed; he used his sword to defend himself and no man was brave enough to come within reach of it. The running battle spread over all the area, Duke, Park, Charlotte, George, Duncan, Upper Prince, Queen and neighbouring streets. But it was Baker's blood that the people wanted.²⁸ At one time he was

completely isolated in a large band away from his men. Profiting from this circumstance a huge muscular negro attacked him man to man and launched a blow with a long 'poui' against him. Forceful and well-aimed, the blow was a killer, but Baker successfully warded it off. Urged on by Baker, the Police then succeeded in arresting some fourteen people, but could not hold them for long as the crowd soon came to their assistance and rescued them. Gradually however, the forces of law and order did get the upper hand. The fights became scattered. The maskers fled down the streets or into the yards. As the police pursued them, bottles and stones were flung from the houses and yards, and the police in anger sometimes, turned to attack the bystanders and householders. Twenty-one of the mob were arrested and charged with 'affray' and committed for trial at the next criminal sessions.

The excitement of the battle was captured in a *Lay of Canboulay*, a parody of Macaulay's 'Horatius' (with Baker of the Bobbies' taking the place of the heroic Roman) and published in the *Chronicle* shortly after the riot.²⁹ Three of the (thirteen) stanzas went as follows:

Ho! flambeaux flash the war-note,
 Ho! 'bobbies' clear the way!
 The leaders ride in all their pride
 Along the streets today.
 Tonight the lamps and windows
 Will suffer in the fall
 From top to bottom of each street
 And e'en from wall to wall.

Then down at once the flambeaux went,
 And staves and sticks they drew,

And in and out and all about
The stones and bottles flew;
Hotter and hotter the battle raged
Till near the break of day;
Full many a head and many a lamp
Were cracked in the affray.

From night till morn the battle raged,
The streets with blood were red.
From many a cut and many a wound
And many a broken head.
The 'bobbies' were victorious
And back to barracks went;
The furious crowd, all up and down,
Cried, 'tomorrow night we'll burn the town,
Our anger's not yet spent.'

Within an hour or two it was all over and total victory belonged to the uniformed men—but only for the moment and at a heavy cost. When eventually the streets were all clear at 3 a.m. and the police returned to their barracks, it was with a tremendous pride in their victory, as Sergeant Brierley put it: "It would have been impossible for any body of men to behave better or act more bravely than did the police of all ranks on that night" — there were eighty men of whom only four were mounted — against thousands.³⁰ But the very courage of the police led to the injury of many, and when they returned to barracks, it was not to celebrate the victory but to lick their wounds and to ensure that their injured were taken to hospital. The tally as it was officially given later by some of the City Fathers with sorrow but also with a certain amount of pride in the maskers' fighting ability was: forty to fifty civilians wounded by the police, but "at least thirty policemen out of a force of one hundred and seventy

had been put hors-de-combat on that one night". Quiet descended on the battleground and on the town. As the day dawned, the light revealed streets full of old tippets, old shoes, stones and broken bottles — the relics of the great fight.

The battle was indeed over but the war had barely begun. That morning a group of two or three men went through the whole town systematically smashing the shades of all the pitch oil lamps with which the town was lighted, and rumours were assiduously spread that the bands intended to raise a riot. Baker himself took no time out for rest but went immediately to the Governor's residence, Queen's House, and made a report to Sir Sanford Freeling. According to Freeling (in his letter to the Earl of Kimberly, the Secretary of State for the Colonies) Captain Baker reported "that on the previous night a torch of the masqueraders had been extinguished by the police and that immediately this was done the police had been assailed on all sides with bottles and stones held in preparation in houses, and many of the force — 38 out of a total of 150 — had been hurt, eight seriously, including Sergeant-Major, Concannon, an Irishman, and Sergeant Cunningham, a negro; some fourteen arrests had been made but that the first batch of persons arrested during the collision with the mob had been rescued".³¹ He added that the police had been able to hold their ground for the night but that in the event of there being any further determined opposition on the part of the people, the police, reduced in numbers as they were, would be unable to cope with it, and he suggested that the troops should be brought down to the police barracks. According to Baker however,

he had not apprehended "a very great calamity on account of the commotion and excitement of the people" but as "a precautionary measure made the suggestion" of military backing.³² Whatever Baker did or did not say, the Governor took alarm. He immediately summoned a meeting of the Executive Council consisting of the Colonial Secretary, John Scott Bushe, and the Attorney General, Ludlow; Ogilby in command of the troops being unable to attend.³³ A letter was read from the Commandant of the Volunteer Force (established in 1879) offering their services in the emergency. The Council's opinion was that the Volunteers should not be asked to act as a military force, to which the Governor agreed, and acting also with their advice applied for a detachment of fifty men who were all that could be spared from the Company of the 4th Regiment in garrison to be placed in reserve in the police barracks at St. Vincent Street (newly completed in 1876 of limestone from Laventille and standing four square round its parade ground with spacious galleries around), and to be called on in case of emergency.

He authorised the Stipendiary Magistrates of Port of Spain to swear in Special Constables and issued the instructions for the guidance of the magistrates (on whose written order alone the troops were to act; whatever little confidence Freeling had in Baker it had now evaporated). He likewise saw the Magistrates, Messrs. Mayne and Wilson, and gave them verbal instructions.

During the course of the day the following two notices were posted up in the town:

Government Notice

A serious and disgraceful disturbance having occurred last night in the Town of Port of Spain, and in view of a possible renewal of the same, all well-disposed persons are invited to attend at the Police Barracks in Port of Spain to be sworn in as Special Constables. The Stipendiary Justices will attend at the Court for this purpose today and on such other days as may be found necessary.

By Command,
Scott Bushe, Colonial Secretary. 28-2-1881

Proclamation

A serious disturbance having occurred last night, an attack having been made on the Police Force and considerable damage having been done to the property of the Borough Council, the Governor wishes it to be understood that such scenes of lawlessness must be repressed.

The Governor has no wish to interfere with the amusements and enjoyments of the people, but the carrying of torches being contrary to law and dangerous to life and property cannot be allowed.

The Governor feels convinced that this will be understood and he will not appeal in vain to the customary good feelings and loyalty of the people in this matter. By Command,

Scott Bushe, Colonial Secretary. 28-2-1881³⁴

Throughout the day Baker rode through the town on horseback patrolling. He was happy to observe that all appearances of excitement had totally disappeared and in fact during his experience in the Colony he had never seen the town in an apparently quieter state, nothing occurring during the day except on one occasion when a few stones were thrown at the police in George Street, the headquarters of one of the most notorious bands in the town. The troops, meanwhile had marched down from the Army Barracks at St. James to the Police Barracks in the town, where their officers allowed them to take their ease. Not being confined to any part of the

Barracks, many of them relaxed in the cloisters or wide galleries of the building, either through curiosity to see the masqueraders or because of the coolness offered by that portion of the building. Those passersby who saw the troops, then spread the news around, and according to some accounts this served to infuriate the people further and fuelled their anger against the authorities. By afternoon forty-three citizens had been enrolled as Special Constables.

The breaking of all the City Council's new lamps and the rumours assiduously spread of further impending riots were having the intended effects. Most of the City Councillors remembered well the riots of 1859 and especially during the dry season they were afraid of the mob setting fire to the town. The Mayor, having been beseiged by a number of anxious burghesses, in particular by a general contractor and a minor civil servant influential with the lower class, hurriedly called a meeting of the Council, and it was decided that a deputation of eleven members and the Town Clerk, Mr. Rat, would go to meet the Governor.³⁵ Their names were: Joseph Emanuel Cipriani, Mayor; G.L. Garcia, Arnold Lamy, Louis Lenegan, Albert Lak, Henry Huerne, Charles Leotaud, John Joseph, Eugene Lange, Joseph Perko, Ignatio Bodu. They arrived at Queen's House at three o'clock. The Mayor later gave the following account of their meeting: After the usual introductions, the Mayor began addressing Your Excellency and in the course of discussion all the more important members of the Council expressed their views which were more or less in the following effect: that Your Excellency was no doubt aware of the serious collision which had occurred between the police and a portion of the people of the town; that the population was in consequence in a great state of commotion and excitement and that a very great

calamity was to be apprehended; that His Worship the Mayor had received appeals from all quarters that morning to do something to save the community from the consequences of the struggle which seemed impending between the police authorities and the people; and that he had deemed it his duty to call a special meeting of the Borough Council to discuss the means and ways of averting the threatening catastrophe, that members had responded to His Worship's call and had met and deliberated about the matter and had resolved to form a committee for the purpose of laying before the Governor what they considered was the true state of things and of urging on him the necessity of allaying the irritation which prevailed, that Your Excellency was no doubt ignorant of the fact that the conduct of the Police was alleged to have been the cause of the immediate disturbance of the previous night, by their unduly interfering with the carnival which had been permitted by Proclamation; that no doubt preparations had been made on both sides for a fight, but that the people were under the impression that they were preparing to defend their undoubted rights; that somehow or other it had got abroad that the Police would interfere to prevent the Cannes Brulées — a procession with lighted torches with which the Carnival always begins, — and that in support of that it was stated and the statement proved to be true, that upwards of one hundred and forty Balata sticks three feet and six inches in length had been turned out of the Government Saw Mills a few days previously and had been distributed among the Police for the avowed purpose as it was alleged of enabling them to fight the maskers; that the police were alleged to have been the first to begin the disturbance, that they were said to have charged the bands of maskers having at their heads the Chiefs of Police who were said to have drawn their swords and brandished them; and that they all used their sticks relentlessly; that bystanders were also attacked and wounded, and that one of them called Estancan had received a sword and was lying at his house dangerously ill; that if the attack on the people was sought to be justified by the fact that the police were only doing their duty in preventing the unlawful carrying of lighted torches the deputation thought it was a surprise on the people who conceived they had a right to carry

torches, that the Proclamation allowing the Carnival had not expressly forbidden the carrying of lights, and that the torches had been invariable accompaniments of the Cannes Brulées, and that the lights were not more unlawful than the Carnival itself and that the permission to hold the one during the two days of the 28th February and the 1st of March carried the use of the other; that at any rate the people thought so and they had got no warning that the Police did not so consider it until the last moment when the charges were made on them; and that as to the alleged danger of carrying lights at midnight the deputation thought there was little or no danger at all; and that the practice had prevailed for upwards of half-a-century without a single accident occurring; that the coolies were allowed to carry torches at night all over the island in the vicinity of sugar cane estates on occasion of their festival, and that the police then looked on with complacency though the practice was more fraught with danger than the practice of the maskers at the Cannes Brulées; that at any rate the deputation could not help condemning an attempt to put down either the Carnival or any part of it without the people having been previously fully warned; and without adequate means being adopted to secure success and without also the men of property in the island who were after all the only responsible parties having been first consulted; that the police were quite unable to cope with the people and that had been proved to be so over and over again in the history of this country; that on this occasion although some 40 to 50 civilians had been hurt and wounded by the police, at least 30 policemen out of a force of 170 had been put hors-de-combat on that one night and that the police had so thoroughly lost control of the town that all the Borough Lamps had one by one been deliberately smashed, not by the masker bands but by individuals who thought they were wreaking vengeance on the Government by so doing; that notwithstanding all that had happened, the deputation thought the calling out of the troops was a thing to be deplored, that the view of the troops who were kept in readiness under the open gallery of the Police Barracks from which they could be seen from the street not only infuriated the people but created a bad impression among persons of a higher grade in society; that the military might

possibly put down any further disturbance but that the deputation feared that the force might not be strong enough to succeed and then that the very worst consequences would ensue, that, in any event, the whole of the reasoning portion of the community would deplore bloodshed. That the property and family of the Burgesses had evidently been put in a great peril by some irresponsible persons; that not only a disturbance but also fire and rapine were to be feared, but that it was not too late by making an appeal to the people, and withdrawing for a time the cause of irritation to prevent a great calamity; and that the Governor might at any rate try that means before resorting to force; and that the members of the deputation who would not separate themselves from the supreme authority, were willing to accompany any public officer, even Captain Baker himself, on a mission of peace, and that without guaranteeing the absolute certainty of the results they could hold out the best hopes that the population would listen to the voice of reason and would prove to be as loyal and quiet as it has always been known to be.

Your Excellency then asked whether the deputation meant that the troops should be at once withdrawn, and it was said that the troops having been once brought down to the Police Barracks should be left there for fear of creating a false impression; but that the soldiers might be put out of sight.

Thereupon, after a moment's reflection, Your Excellency said you would go and speak to the people yourself if we thought you could do any good, and the reply was that your presence would be worth 10,000 soldiers. Arrangements were then made to meet Your Excellency at the Eastern Market where you were to address the people.³⁶

There was not much time left before nightfall, so the Governor had to act quickly. His Aide-de-Camp wrote and despatched a letter to Captain Baker asking him to keep the police out of sight and saying that His Excellency would come to the Barracks to see him later. Upon receipt of this letter, Captain Baker ordered the police into Barracks, (a procedure he had intended to follow in large measure in any case since

he felt he had got the mob under control and needed to rest and regroup his men). It was now five o'clock, and the Governor, accompanied by his Aide-de-Camp and his secretary went on foot through the mob to the Eastern Market where a platform had been prepared for him, and from there addressed the people collected in the street and square who had turned out in a force of some thousand. The *New Era* later gave the following as the exact text of his speech:

My Friends, I have come down this afternoon to have a little talk with you. (Cheers). I wish to tell you that it is entirely a misconception on your part, to think that there is any desire on the part of the Government to stop your amusement. (Cheers). I know everybody at times likes to amuse himself — I have no objection to amuse myself whenever I have an opportunity. I had no idea what your masquerade was like. If I had known, you should have had no cause for dissatisfaction. There has been entirely a misconception on all sides, for the only interference was the fear of fire — I thought that the carrying of torches (a voice: that's the question) at this time might be attended with danger, and I was anxious to guard against it. That was the only objection: it was the fear of fire and nothing more. The Government had no other objection (no fire! Cheers). I did not know you attached so much importance to your masquerade. I also wish to tell you how proud I am to be Governor of your island; I had a desire to come here and know you, that I could write and tell the Queen that no more loyal and peaceful subjects inhabit the other colonies than Trinidad. (Cheers). I am come down this afternoon for I felt I could have confidence in your loyalty. I have trusted myself among you, and I would not hesitate to bring my wife and my children on such an occasion — I feel they would be safe, if your decision be to carry out your masquerade in a peaceful manner. I am willing to allow you every indulgence. (Cheers). You can enjoy yourself for these two days and I will take care the Police do not molest you. I will give you the town for your masquerade, if you promise me not to make any disturbance, or break the law. (Cheers —

and we promise). I shall give orders that the Police shall not molest or interfere with you, if you keep within the law. I trust that you will continue to enjoy yourselves without any disturbance. There shall be no interference with your masquerade.³⁷

At the end of his speech the Governor met with a tremendous ovation both from the people on both sides of the streets and from the balconies. However when he called on Captain Baker and asked him to withdraw the Police Force altogether, His Excellency was coldly informed that this had already been done. (It was only on the morning of the 2nd March, Ash Wednesday, that instructions were issued for their returning to duty). About six p.m. the Mayor, Cipriani, drove through the town and found "quiet and peace everywhere prevailing."³⁸ Hostile bands met one another and instead of fighting shook hands saying that they had promised the Governor to keep the peace"; (and no doubt, congratulated one another on their victory over the police.) They had lost the battle but won the war; they were eventually however to lose the peace. But at the moment, the Carnival crowd was jubilant. Apart from the breaking of a few more lamps, and the stoning of some private houses, no damage to property was done. However, all that night and into the early morning, bands paraded the streets with lighted torches celebrating their victory and completely ignoring the printed proclamation forbidding torches. Just before midnight the people clustered in their hundreds with their torches outside the Police Barracks, jeering at the Police, daring and defying them to come out and interfere.³⁹ The frustrated police, restrained by Baker's orders could only grind their teeth and curse the Governor. The crowd,

headed by the already mentioned minor civil servant, also took special delight in holding a mock funeral of Captain Baker and burning him in effigy. At six a.m. when the streets were finally clear of maskers, just as dawn was breaking, the contingent of military marched back (one is tempted to say 'sneaked back') to their Barracks at St. James. That day, Tuesday, was unmarred by any incidents. One newspaper later reported:

But for the mismanagement and highly aggressive tone of the Police on Monday, the Carnival in the city which ended on Tuesday may have been regarded as the quietest witnessed in this Colony for some years past.⁴⁰

Tuesday, however, had not been quiet at Couva, a small village in Central Trinidad.⁴¹ The incidents which occurred there had no connection with those in Port of Spain but they did give an indication of the growing disorder between bands which was suspended for this year in the Capital (due to the union of the bands against the police) but which was to recur in more violent form in subsequent years. Couva had always been known as a trouble spot, and six policemen had been sent from San Fernando for the carnival. At midnight on Carnival Sunday, two bands: Couva Savanna and Exchange bands — hostile to one another — met in front of the police station, and bottles, sticks and stones were used in the ensuing conflict. The police got between the bands and separated them. However, the Sergeant and his horse were struck and the latter died. The bands were severely cautioned to keep apart. Nevertheless on Tuesday, the 1st March, no doubt under the influence of the Carnival spirit, they again clashed at roughly the same place. The battle lasted for twenty minutes. The Couva Savanna Band

retreated, hotly pursued by the Exchange Band with the usual sticks, bottles and stones. The police got into the act, and were successful in arresting fourteen of the pursuers, who were all charged with riot. One of those arrested was very seriously injured and was sent to the Port of Spain hospital. A telegram was sent by Sergeant Giblan, the Officer in Charge, to Captain Baker, and on the 3rd March, Fitzsimmons, the Inspector of Police for the Southern Division, sent him a full account by letter.

By this time, however, Baker had his hands full with the aftermath of the city carnival riot. On the Carnival Tuesday, after the mocking of the police, fifty-eight of them had resigned. Brierley relates the story in full.

There was another important event which the public never knew and it was well they did not. The whole of the Police Force at Port of Spain, except the officers and a few of the higher non-commissioned officers, laid down their truncheons, took off their uniforms, folded them nicely, laid them on their cots, wrote and signed a paper tendering their resignation, marched downstairs in a body to the Police barrack-yard, handed in their resignation to the Sergeant-Major and boldly declared that they would not serve under such a Governor. It took a very considerable amount of persuasion and reasoning from an influential high-classed non-commissioned officer to induce them to withdraw this resignation and put on their uniforms; eventually this was done and done quietly. It had, of course, to be reported to the Governor who became frightened when informed of it. He wanted to come to the barracks to address the men, but was advised to let well enough alone, and he wisely took the advice. Imagine what would have been the result of this strike — mutiny — call it what you will — had it become known to the mob while they were careering through the town, with liberty to do 'just as you please'.⁴²

Baker promptly went to see Freeling and

represented to him in the strongest, though most respectful manner, that his "action in withdrawing the police would be liable to misinterpretation, as meaning to express dissatisfaction with the Force, and that the effect would be that the people would not have the same respect for the authority of the police as heretofore; and he was authorised by the Governor to publish his great appreciation of their services."⁴³ Nevertheless, when the police returned to duty they were often jeered at and pelted with stones, and for some time had to patrol parts of the town in pairs. Undoubtedly, the authority of the police had been undermined and the worst elements of society became very truculent.

The Governor had, very early on, asked Baker to give him a detailed report on the riot, but this the Inspector Commandant had not done — he seems to have suffered from an illness of convenience. On the 9th March, however, just before the departure of the mail steamer, Baker delivered the following letter to the Colonial Secretary, which was then transmitted with all the other documentation on the riots to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

9th March 1881

Sir,

I most respectfully beg on behalf of the Force I have the honour to command that His Excellency the Governor may see fit to appoint a commission to inquire into the circumstances and origin of the late disturbances and of the attack upon the police on the morning of the 26th ultimo and the 1st instant.

My non-commissioned officers and men are daily subjected to the pelting of stones and to the jeers and insults of the lower public and false reports are circulated as to my

personal behaviour during the late disturbance of which I have had no opportunity of refuting.

My wife and children are even insulted whenever they show their faces in the streets.

I have etc.

A.W. Baker

Captain.⁴⁴

The reaction of the Colonial Office officials to the documentation sent to them was interesting. Blame was apportioned variously to the Governor, the Colonial Secretary and to Captain Baker. One thought that the appointment of a Commission was to make a mountain out of a molehill; another that the authority of the police would be seriously weakened. Sir R. Herbert, the Permanent Under-Secretary, very sensibly remarked:

It is tragic that their officials should be so ignorant as not to know that the Carnival nuisance has to be suffered at Rome, Nice, Paris etc. etc. notwithstanding some incidental danger and much annoyance to sober citizens — and that the police might as well try to prohibit Londoners from going to the Derby. They must be reprimanded when we hear the full reports.⁴⁵

On the 9th March the Governor also received notice of questions to be put at the next meeting of the Trinidad Legislative Council on April 1st, by Marryat, an unofficial member of the Council.

One of the questions was about a commission of inquiry.⁴⁴ According to the Governor's covering note to Baker's letter, on the second day after the disturbances, "he (Freeling) had discussed with the Colonial Secretary, Bushe, the feasibility of a Commission of Inquiry composed of local gentlemen", but Bushe had concurred with Freeling 'that

it would be impossible to select a commission properly representing the different opinions obtaining in the Colony which would be able to send in a report in which the members severally concurred.' The fact was, that the Carnival riots had become (if indeed they were not initiated with that end in view) political fodder. A strong political group, the 'English' party which was also the 'law and order' party, and which had been in power for long years under the leadership of Charles William Warner and up to the arrival of Governor Gordon in 1866, was using the riots (it seems) to swing the newly arrived Governor away from the more liberal camp back to theirs. On March 28th *New Era* stated in an editorial:

There is sufficient evidence to prove that this mode (Baker's discrediting of the populace) was adopted in motives of malice towards the people in order to compromise them with constituted authority and to influence the Governor who is a stranger here against them, in order to induce him to play into the hands of a clique — a continuance of the game which is an eternal disgrace to Governor Irving .

Basically the same accusation was to be made after the Hosay riots, by the *San Fernando Gazette* which alleged "that the two festivals provided a political grouping 'the Baker clique' with the occasions on which to embarrass the Government via suppression of both Carnival and Hosay".⁴⁷ Eventually, after a series of telegrams between the Governor and the Colonial Office suggesting initially Chief Justice Hancock of the Leeward Islands as the Commissioner, the appointment was arranged of Mr. Robert G.C. Hamilton to constitute in himself the whole Commission. He was however to arrive in Trinidad only months later.



Creole Lady

Meanwhile, at the meeting of the Legislative Council on the 1st April, sparks flew.⁴⁸ The Mayor and City Council, nearly all French creoles, had written in superlatives to Freeling to thank him for his action, being careful however not to blame the people; 'you averted the greatest calamity which ever threatened Trinidad under British Rule . . . to prevent the peaceable population from being irritated and driven into disobedience of the law'; but certain members of the Legislative Council were of a different mind. Marryat, a personal friend of Baker's, and obviously in collusion with him, asked a number of questions carefully designed to throw a better light on the actions of the Inspector Commandant, and he did his best to champion Baker through his difficulties.⁴⁹ Ludlow, the Attorney General and also a member of the same group, stood up for the forces of law and order and the use of the military in stopping a riot. The Governor, who realised more and more that he was in a delicate position, took the chance to give the Council an official report justifying his actions. He had previously written to the Secretary of State for the Colonies refuting the account given in the *Trinidad Chronicle* of the proceedings — he had *not* been lifted on the shoulders of the crowd and did *not* subsequently give refreshment to the maskers at Queen's House.⁵⁰ Clearly the eyes of all were on the coming Commission with the hope that it would justify their actions or point of view. Obviously also, whatever conclusions the Commissioner arrived at he would be unpopular with many people.

When Robert Hamilton arrived in Trinidad, he refused the Governor's proffered hospitality, because it might be considered that this would prejudice him

in Freeling's favour. Instead he took up his lodgings at the Union Club considered the best of its kind in the West Indies, and very conveniently situated down town. This however, was a bad mistake, for the Union Club "counted among its members 'nearly all the influential citizens', exclusively whites and predominantly British or English creoles"; and it therefore led to his identification with the Baker bunch.⁵¹ He remained only one week in the island, interviewing both officials and private persons who came to him; and certainly in the hours when he was not working, absorbed the point of view of the habitués to the Union Club.⁵²

In his report he attempted to summarize and analyse the incidents which had occurred. He found that the riots were caused by the people's belief that the police were going to stop the whole Carnival, based on the police action in 1880 and fomented by certain people who excited the maskers against the police. In view of the unruly nature of the Carnival he did not consider it strange 'that an energetic and zealous Officer as Captain Baker is admitted on all sides to be, should have considered it his duty, as head of the police, to take serious steps to put down this nuisance and scandal to the town and prevent the night from being made hideous by fighting, yelling and obscene songs and filthy language'. He found that there was a prejudice against the police from the early days of British rule when the office of Alguazils was confined to the free people of colour, nor was any white man suffered to degrade himself by accepting the office. This class prejudice raised against the police meant that few Trinidadians joined the Force, and since it then

perforce consisted of people from the other islands, the local feeling against it continued. He considered that blacks and coloureds were less civil to whites than formerly and that "the evidence of quite disinterested witnesses abundantly proves that there was an organized resistance on the part of the people to the police", putting this down (as we have seen) to the influence of two (coloured) civil servants accused of criminal offences. He stated that though the Governor's speech had been received with enthusiasm, the prohibition against the carrying of torches was broken with the greatest effrontery.

His recommendations did not include the abolition of Carnival but that it be strictly regulated. To avoid the risk of fire in a wooden town, all torchlight parades should be held in places such as the Savannah. Reliable citizens should be sworn in as Special Constables in future Carnivals and they should impress on the people the need for order and decency. He suggested "the presence in the harbour of a man-of-war during the next Carnival". "The Police must be fully supported in their execution of their duties", but their very bad relations with the public would need to be improved. Some subordinate officers who were very unpopular should be removed, but Baker whom the report cleared of charges of provocative conduct, should be retained in his post. And in the last paragraph of his report he recommended with regard to the Indian immigrants that "their festivals should be carefully regulated".

The report was badly received by the local press. Colour prejudice was indirectly attributed to Hamilton and only the supporters of Baker were pleased by the report. According to *Fair Play* on November 23rd,

Freeling wrote telling 'Captain Baker that their relative positions had become incompatible with his remaining in office under him, and advising him to apply for leave of absence with a view of getting a removal to some other place'. Whether or not this was true, Baker did nothing of the sort; and after studying the report, the Colonial Office censured Governor Freeling and commended Captain Baker's action.

On the 4th November a fire broke out in the new Police Headquarters in St. Vincent Street. It originated in the lamproom under a wooden staircase where a lighted lamp was overturned, and before it could be extinguished, had taken such a hold that the building was completely gutted.⁵³ The whole town converged on the place of the disaster. The hatred of Baker by the lower class was evident from the remarks made, ridiculing him and wishing 'if only this pig could roast'! In fact the Captain lost all his furniture and personal belongings, but his personal popularity was still so great that a public subscription list was opened to make good the loss.

Freeling not being a man of very decisive views, the longer he stayed in the Colony, the more he tended to gravitate in policy towards the group with which he had every day social relations — the British expatriates and the English creoles, that is, the 'Baker Group'. In early 1882 he joined one of the Freemason lodges, apparently in the hope that "this would raise him in the 'public' esteem". Freemasonry was a long established activity in Trinidad for the oldest lodge in the island dated back to 1795. At this time there were several lodges in existence. On their rolls were mainly English creoles and expatriates — white

businessmen — though some French creole names figured. But because according to church law a practising Roman Catholic could not be a Freemason, the pressure exerted by the Lodges would have been mainly in one direction. It is difficult to know what influence the Freemason Lodges had on either the business or politics of the time. They were hardly associations existing merely to provide their members with lavish banquets — though this they certainly did. By the end of 1882 Freeling's views were almost identifiable with those of the English group.

After the events of 1881, the Carnival of 1882 was the cause of much anxiety. Brereton describes events as follows:

A Proclamation issued in November 1881 authorised the Canboulay for the next year by allowing the carrying of lighted torches in any street between mid-night Sunday and 5.00 a.m. Monday. This was clearly a defeat for Baker. On the other hand, the Executive took elaborate precautions for the Carnival. Two men-of-war were stationed in the harbour; troops and Volunteers were on full alert; the Fire Brigade was ready; the Government steam launch was kept under steam and plans for the evacuation of the Governor had been concerted; Special Magistrates were forbidden to leave their posts; Government officials armed themselves; and Surgeons were ready at the Police Station to cope with the wounded.

It was all quite unnecessary. For the maskers had determined among themselves that there would be no disorder. A deputation of maskers called at the Port of Spain Gazette office asking the paper to use its influence for order and peace at the Carnival. And a broad-sheet entitled 'Advice for the Coming Carnival' was circulated, obviously the work of band-leaders, calling on maskers to play peacefully and not to betray the Governor's confidence. Canboulay passed off quietly, though celebrated on a larger scale than usual. No fights took place, there were no clashes with the Police, and no fires. One band, seeing the approach of a rival, agreed to

drop their sticks and refused to 'take on' the rival's insults. The other band did the same, and they shook hands fraternally. The bigger bands were led by prominent citizens who had influence with the maskers and who used their prestige to see that order prevailed.⁵⁴

In spite of the quiet Carnival though, the law and order party of Baker, Ludlow and their associates had partially won over Freeling to their side. On the 1st March 1882 the celebrated Musical Ordinance was laid before the Legislative Council.⁵⁵ It provided condign punishment for playing the drum and chac chac in places adjoining the public road and even for playing the piano after 10 p.m. without police permission, and provided the police with power to enter any dwelling houses and arrest persons infringing the law. No one was found to second the Ordinance and consequently it was still-born. Great indignation was aroused. On the 1st July 1882 was passed in the Legislative Council, an Ordinance to control the Festivals of Immigrants. On the 11th December 1882, the Colonial Office agreed to Freeling's request for an increase in the Police Force by fifty men.⁵¹ A decision had been made to tighten the reins. The opportune moment was all that was lacking.

However, the Executive was not yet prepared to act with regard to the Canboulay and Carnival of 1883, and so these were held as usual. Several papers commented that the standard of masking was higher than in previous years, and again some of the bands were led by prominent citizens. But the bands were quite as disorderly as before the riots. Some found the Carnival the worst for years from the point of view of the violence.⁵⁷ *New Era*

was more specific. The bands did not give more trouble to the police than usual but the Carnival was "one of more turbulent character from the number of individual encounters". In particular, what roused the Executive to action were the attacks on decent citizens. No longer was the action confined to lower class bands. Private houses were broken open and stoned. Shops were invaded and had to be closed to avoid being wrecked and pillaged. One prominent (middle class) band leader of 150 'Venezuelan Soldiers' named Guzman, was severely beaten and put 'hors-de-combat' without any provocation whatsoever on his part. It was one thing to stand by and look at the lower class battering one another, but things were different when they came closer home.

In addition, and most importantly, most of the violence was by non-Trinidadians, — the scum, as it was said, of the other West Indian islands who now banded together to destroy the old established Trinidad bands. It was the 'Newgates' who did the damage. From the Eastern Caribbean and of course Barbados, they were a newly formed band from the slums of Port of Spain; dockers, labourers, idlers, they were in serious trouble shortly before Carnival having been twice brought up before magistrate Mayne for riots in Belmont and the East Dry River area, and during Carnival they were only allowed at large on their own bail. Their whole aim was to beat all the French-speaking masqueraders whom they met. They were not masked and perhaps only a little over thirty in number but they did terrible execution. During the Canboulay and all through Monday they beat up individuals and bands alike, in the most

unprovoked manner and with such violence that "the riot was quite beyond the ordinary powers of the police to control". They attacked and beat up the Maribones, the Bakers, and the Daglions and put them to ignominious flight.

On Tuesday, the French-speaking bands came together with the avowed intention of revenging themselves on the Newgates. But the latter, showing good sense (and perhaps collusion with the Barbadian police) hid behind the police, who then took good care to stop any fights that started. On one occasion, when the Newgates were hotly pursued by overwhelming numbers they fled for refuge into a police station. On Tuesday, Captain Baker when he saw the various bands despondent at the ill-treatment they had received from the Newgates (and which the police seemed unwilling or unable to do anything about) allegedly advised them to go out and beat up and arrest the Newgates wherever they found them. He was accused by some of fomenting further disorder. Others claimed it was only his manly fighting spirit coming out.

In San Fernando, the dancing and stickfighting at Canboulay were carried on till daylight to the satisfaction of the maskers and the sightseers, but rural bands from the surrounding villages coming into the town were involved in fights.⁵⁸ In particular bands from Victoria and Ste. Madeleine villages playing (what had become at the time very popular) Hosay mask, had a very serious clash; so much so, that the *San Fernando Gazette* commented later "a stop should be put to this class of masqueraders". There was also band fighting at Arima and Arouca, as well as the usual "immorality and indecent dancing

and singing in the streets" in all the villages and towns.

The violence of Carnival in 1883 caused a revulsion of feeling among the middle class supporters of the festival who had supported the lower classes for the past two years. Now that it was clearly a question of control and not of abolition, and especially control of immigrants to prevent damage to middle class persons and property, the attitude of the newspapers appeared to be quite contrary to what it had been up till then. Though there were all sorts of criticisms and wild accusations levelled against Baker (including one theory that the police had incited and encouraged the Newgates in order to discredit the maskers and avenge the reversals of 1881 and 1882), there was a call for the type of strict enforcement of the law which only he could give. *Fair Play's* cry for control was typical:

This sort of thing should no longer be tolerated. The people can claim a prescriptive right to enjoy the gay and peaceful amusements of the masquerade season, but male and female brutes lost to all sense of shame, and ruffians whose only instinct is disorder and bloodshed can claim no prescription for immorality, indecency and the brutal breaking of the public peace. It is high time the Government took up the subject decidedly. We for one will give them all the moral support in our power when they move in the matter.⁵⁹

At the Legislative Council meeting held on the 1st March a message from his Excellency the Governor was read, intimating that there would be legislation to regulate Carnival.⁶⁰ Possibly the matter had already been decided some time before by the Executive and the decision was announced at what was clearly a favourable time. Possibly it was the disorder of the 1883 Carnival which strengthened the hand of the 'law and order' faction in the Government and finally

brought Freeling round to the view that Canboulay had to be stopped and the bands broken up. His message was as follows:

Gentlemen of the Legislative Council, I regret to have to inform you that it has been reported to me that the carnival of this year was more disorderly than any known for many years except that of 1881.

Fighting, throwing stones and bottles, and obscenities prevailed more or less, and bands of disorderly persons unmasked and armed with long sticks marched through the town to the alarm and danger of the inhabitants.

I am induced and I am glad to believe that no large number of Trinidadians belong to these bands, but they are principally composed of bad characters from the neighbouring islands.

I had hoped that the good order which characterized the Carnival last year would have prevailed at this, but such not having been the case, it has become imperative that steps should be taken as will effectually for the future, quell any disorder by ensuring the immediate apprehension and severe punishment of offenders.

In framing measures for this purpose, I shall endeavour not to deprive the community during the day time of the amusement they apparently find in masquerading so long as such privilege is not abused; and I am convinced that if Legislation is required for the ends I have in view, I shall receive your cordial cooperation and support.

By the start of the new year — 1884 — the police barracks had been completely rebuilt in commodious fashion, especially necessary since the increase in numbers of the force. Carnival was once more in the air, and at a meeting of the Legislative Council on Monday, 21st January, His Excellency read a message declaring his intention to stop Canboulay and referring to his message of 1st March of the previous year.⁶¹ An Ordinance had been prepared and was now read and amended. Standing Orders

were set aside to allow for its second and third readings at this session and so it passed into law with virtually no debate. The next day Captain Baker received information that there was to be a large meeting of bands at Belmont and that in defiance of the law they intended to have their drum dance etc. (and possibly discuss measures against the banning of the Canboulay). He went with Sergeant Brierly and one hundred police surreptitiously, by cabs, to the corner of Belmont Circular Road, to catch the bands by surprise, but they saw the police in time and scattered, pelting stones to cover their retreat. It seemed that the Executive really meant business this year. Two days later a Proclamation was posted up in the town. It read:

PROCLAMATION

Whereas owing to the disturbance that occurred at the Carnival last year, it has now become necessary for the preservation of the public peace and order, that the time of the Carnival should be restricted and that other provisions should be made for enforcing law and order during the continuance thereof:—

Now therefore, I, Sanford Freeling, Governor as aforesaid, do hereby proclaim and make known as follows:—

1. The Carnival of the year 1884 shall not commence until 6 o'clock in the morning of the 25th day of February and shall end at 12 o'clock midnight of Tuesday the 26th day of that month, during which time persons will be permitted to appear masked or otherwise disguised.
2. The procession generally known as the Cannes Brulées or Canboulay shall not be allowed to take place and further regulations for giving effect to this provision will shortly be promulgated.
3. Measures will be taken for the rigid enforcement of the law and all persons are warned and cautioned accordingly.

On the 25th January a special meeting of the Legislative Council was called. Certain gentlemen

had passed on some suggestions to the Governor about the new legislation and after consultation with the Attorney General it was decided to throw out the recently passed bill and introduce a new one. Once more it was passed at one sitting, with all the unofficials supporting it except Louis de Verteuil who apparently did not like the haste with which the measure was pushed through, to end something which, whatever its bad points, was an old Trinidadian custom. He said he had not intended to put any obstacle in the way of the Government, but he declined to vote.

This Ordinance gave the Governor power to prohibit by proclamation, public torch processions, drum beating, any dance or procession, and any disorderly assembly of ten or more persons armed with sticks or other weapons. The maximum penalty for any offences under this Ordinance, on summary conviction, was a fine of £20 or six months in prison. This of course gave the Government authority to abolish Canboulay and the large bands. The first proclamation as we have seen, did abolish Canboulay and the second prohibited assemblies of ten or more persons carrying sticks, and the playing of any musical instruments except between Monday at 6 a.m. and Tuesday midnight.

The attention of the public was however completely taken off these new Carnival regulations when on January 27th the Union Club caught fire just before midnight.⁶² Though the Brigade under Captain Baker arrived promptly, there was practically no water in the hydrants and it took very long to get the flames under control. A young Englishman, who had that morning arrived from Demerara, was burned

to death in the Club. A jeweller's shop and Crichlow's store underneath the premises were destroyed. Eventually insurance claims amounting to more than £41,000 were settled. The Ice House, Miss Archibald's Hotel, Pineca's Barber Shop, Brown's Grocery and the New Era Printing Office were the principal buildings affected. Arson was strongly suspected and so enquiries into the affair were followed with great interest.

Indeed the inquest into the death in the fire and matters of immigrant labour occupied the newspapers right up to Carnival, but the people became more and more apprehensive the closer the celebration came. All sorts of rumours circulated.⁶³ It was believed that the Government intended to forbid all masking at the eleventh hour. The maskers were said to be rebellious. Someone claimed to have overheard a conversation to the effect that they were planning to retaliate for the prohibition of Canboulay by poisoning the Port of Spain reservoir, pulling down the telephone wires, destroying street lamps, and by burning down the Powder Magazine. There was virtually a state of panic. Hundreds of citizens were enrolled as Special Constables and armed with long staves.⁶⁴ The calling out and encampment of the volunteers and military was an even more welcome precaution. The Police were to carry firearms and the Marines on board the H.M.S. Dido were on call in the harbour. Detailed plans were made for the protection of the city and the inhabitants. In every part of the town a squad of men was to be located and with each one a local magistrate (in case, for instance, the Riot Act had to be read). Scouts were to provide constant communication between the groups.

Apparently the 'roughs' in Port of Spain realised that the preparations made would effectually prevent any designs they had of breaking the law and so Canboulay night in the city was just as quiet as any other night of the year. On Monday and Tuesday, the masqueraders came out as usual and there were no incidents involving the police, although between Sunday night and Monday, seventeen lamps in the town were smashed. On the other hand, the news from the country districts was deplorable. Emmisaries from Port of Spain had been at work and possibly some of the worst 'roughs' from there were actively involved, so that everywhere excesses were committed, even at villages like Montserrat and Oropouche. At Couva the Riot Act had to be read. It was at San Fernando and Princes Town however, that the most serious clashes occurred.⁶⁵ In the former, at 2 a.m. on Monday morning, one hundred 'roughs' assembled in Coffee Street, carrying broken bottles, sticks and stones and lighted torches. As the police and special constables advanced within two hundred feet of them, bottles and stones were thrown for about fifteen minutes and some of the special constables were badly hurt. The captain of the special constables then bravely gave the order to attack, which they did in eager fashion and arrested three ring leaders. The police followed up behind them and used their staves vigorously, right and left to disperse the crowd.

At Princes Town, matters were much more serious. About eight p.m. on Sunday, horns were blown outside Princes Town near Bromage Estate and in the Coonoks as a signal for the masqueraders to assemble. The telegraph lines were cut about one

a.m. and a little later, a band of about five hundred people came down the main street of the village drumming and dancing, and carrying lighted torches, and armed with sticks, stones, bottles filled with molasses, and even a few guns. Six police constables and one sergeant were drawn up across the road, and behind them stood forty special constables with staves. The maskers stopped within some few hundred feet of the police, no doubt to examine the strength of their group and then returned to the maskers. Petit Louis, the leader, sang out: "Captain Baker has sent the Police but see what we will now give them". The band advanced to the attack with bottles and stones. Hobson, the Stipendiary Magistrate, tried to pacify them in vain and was struck by a stone. The Riot Act was read and the police fired a volley over the heads of the crowd. This did not deter them; they rushed forward in a new attack against the police and drove them and the special constables into the police station. The attack continued unabated and for some ten minutes it was touch and go, until finally the police fired once more, this time into the crowd. Two people were killed and five injured and the crowd scattered.

When next day the news got through to Port of Spain, Freeling immediately despatched fifteen of the Royal Scots to Princes Town and twenty-five Marines from H.M.S. Dido were landed to replace the police and soldiers sent to the Naparimas. There were however no further incidents in either San Fernando or Princes Town. On the 27th February, Freeling wrote as follows to Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

I have the honour to enclose copies of the proclamations issued by me for the regulation of the Carnival of 1884 which commenced on midnight of the 23rd instant and ended at twelve o'clock last night. By these proclamations the use of torches and the wearing of masks was prohibited and full notice was given throughout the Colony that law and order would be enforced. Precautionary measures were taken by strengthening the Police Force in the out districts by quartering the company of the 1st Battalion — Royal Scots were stationed here in the Police Barracks in Port of Spain — and by swearing in Special Constables.

In Port of Spain, no disturbance or resistance to authority took place. At San Fernando, the Police were assaulted and arrests were made.

At Princes Town it was found necessary to read the riot act and for the Police to fire upon the mob who attacked them. Two deaths occurred and two or three people were wounded. One of the men shot was, I understand, a king or leader of the bands.⁶⁶

On the thirty-first of March, Derby replied: Perhaps if rather more firmness had been shown three years ago, this bloodshed would not have occurred but it is hoped that the rioting has now been effectively checked. I approve of the manner in which the disturbances were prevented in Port of Spain and put down in San Fernando and Princes Town, while expressing regret at the loss of life which occurred at this latter place.

On the twenty-fifth of March, Freeling, now at the end of his Governorship in Trinidad, again wrote the Secretary of State for the Colonies, reporting this time on the necessity for an increase in number of the Police Force by another fifty men, and the importance of drill in the use of firearms.⁶⁷ His request was however refused. Trinidad was not to become a police state — the Force would have been too expensive to maintain. The comments on Freeling's letter by the Colonial Office officials make interesting reading:

Sir S. Freeling seems to be a timid Governor and the recent Carnival disturbances have perhaps unduly alarmed him.

Lord Derby is not prepared to sanction the immediate addition of so large an amount to the annual cost of the Police.⁶⁸

The reaction of the newspapers to the successful suppression of Canboulay was on the whole favourable. There were a few 'maudlin reports' about the deaths, but it seemed to be generally agreed, now that the Canboulay had been abolished, that it had always been somewhat of a nuisance; and now that it had been made to die it went to its grave practically unmourned. In 1885, the Government once more took fairly elaborate precautions, and quite successfully, to avoid any trouble at Carnival; and in the years that followed, Carnival having been cured of its dangerous rioting was further purged of its obscenity by proclamations in 1891, 1893 and 1895.⁶⁹ The throwing of missiles (including flour) at onlookers was forbidden, pierrots had to register with the police in advance, and the Pisse en Lit costume was made illegal. By the turn of the century, the way was clear for the respectable classes to re-enter Carnival, and for the festival to develop once more into a truly national event. The respectable classes then gradually took it over, purged it further, controlled it and remade it in their own image.

Did the abolition of Canboulay, then, mark the end of the negro revolt against the Colonial Government? The answer is no — unless we view the Canboulay riot as essentially the spontaneous revolt of the lower class negroes against the Colonial Government to preserve their sub-culture. This however is hardly a tenable view, though attractive (in modified form) to some modern writers.

Canboulay could be killed, because the middle class blacks and coloureds were willing to have it so, and in fact cooperated in its suppression as Special Constables. Carnival was kept, because it could be made to conform to their wishes and their understanding of tradition. The same middle class blacks who had at first resisted the suppression of Canboulay, partly because, as *Fair Play* had put it (November 23rd 1881) Captain Baker had "wanted to treat Trinidadians as a set of savages", had now switched sides so to speak. In fact even *New Era*, the mouthpiece of some of them wrote: "Has not the time now arrived to stop altogether the Masquerade and Coolie Hosein as they are both a disgrace to a civilised British Colony?"⁷⁰ Their opposition to the Government was now to take a new and more constructive direction; for it was indeed these educated blacks and coloureds who were in the later 1880's to form the more militant backbone of the group which was to fight for political reform and for the election of Members to the Legislative Council for their country.

CHAPTER THREE

The Indians

The slaves were emancipated on the 1st August 1838. Mainly negroes, with a sprinkling of mulattos, they constituted a little less than half the population of Trinidad, then some 40,000 people. Many of them, soon after obtaining their freedom, left their masters' estates and began to erect small cottages on unoccupied lands or on small lots purchased by themselves; and though living off the estates, a number continued to seek employment there.¹ The majority of the emancipated however, continued to live on the estates, actually occupying houses and lands free from all rent, and yet exacting from their ex-masters whatever wages they could, the greatest number of them receiving from forty to fifty cents per measured

task of field-work (which it was estimated should be done in one day). Due to the labour shortage, the planters had of necessity to submit to the terms of the labourers. The consequence was that the greater number of planters who had been extricated from their liabilities (mortgages and debts) by the compensation grant given to slave owners on emancipation, soon became indebted to very large amounts, especially those who had attempted the introduction of improvements. On several estates the labourers lost their wages, their employers having been utterly ruined. In many cases the ex-slaves behaved very generously, in trying circumstances, continuing to work for several months before exacting wages. Other employers seeing the fate of their fellows, lest they be placed in the same position, began to give less wages and exact more work. The labourers became dissatisfied and began gradually to retire from estate field work. It was about this period that they were ejected from the houses and land they occupied on the estates and their provision grounds destroyed, which, as may well be imagined, caused considerable bitterness. In retrospect, it is difficult to blame either planters or labourers for this grim situation on the sugar estates. It was a situation that resulted mainly from economic forces operating outside the island and the labour shortage within. On the cocoa estates where work demands were less acute and the relations between masters and slaves had been more humane, labour problems never reached the point of crisis.

Thus, by around 1840, sugar production in Trinidad had begun to decline. The planters seemed to have two alternatives; rationalise the industry (cultivation and manufacture) by labour-saving

devices, or find an external source of cheap and reliable labour. The former was rejected because capital was lacking to embark on a serious programme of modernisation. The importation of a cheap and easily managed labour force was to the planter the only solution. Brereton in her article "The Experience of Indentureship" summarily relates what then happened.

They (the planters) tried many places . . . but each source had drawbacks; cost or inadequate numbers or unsuitable labourers. It was India which proved satisfactory . . . Immigration began in 1845. Between 1845 and 1892 93,569 labourers came. About 90% of the immigrants came from the area of the Ganges plains: United Provinces, Oudh, Bihar, Orissa, and Central Provinces. Hindi was the predominant language of the immigrants and non-Hindi speakers in Trinidad were so outnumbered that they, or their children learned to speak it. The caste derivation of the immigrants broadly reflected the situation in India. As in India, high castes were far outnumbered by immigrants from the lowest groups. Between the two extremes were many from the intermediate castes of artisans and cultivators. To give some figures, between 1876 and 1885 the caste derivation of Hindu arrivals in Trinidad was: Brahman and other high castes 18 per cent, artisan castes 8.5 per cent; agricultural castes 32 per cent; low castes 41.5 per cent.

For the first ten years of indentured immigration in Trinidad, the system was one of experimentation. By 1854 the system was firmly established and though the details were altered from time to time the basic element — a long contract with a single employer, maintained by the sanctions of the criminal law — was unchanged until 1917. An 'indenture' means a contract, and the indentured Indians signed a contract before they left India which bound them to accept certain terms. For the period their indenture lasted they could not leave their employer, nor demand higher wages, nor live off the estate they were assigned to, or refuse the work given them to do. Once the indenture expired however they became

free, and if they remained in Trinidad their legal status was not different from the rest of the population.

On arrival in Trinidad the Indian was assigned to a plantation for three years. At the end of this period he could reindenture himself to the same plantation or another one for two periods of one year each or he could work independently with no indenture, but then he had to pay a special tax for two years. He could then return to India but at his own expense. It was only after another five years (this time as a 'free' Indian able to live and work as he wished in the island) that the immigrant would get a free passage to his homeland. The minimum wage was twenty five cents a day. The law prescribed a 45-hour week for the indentured labourer. Out of crop in practice the work was much less than this even as low as thirty hours. In crop, in the factory, the law allowed 15-hour days. A multiplicity of ordinances governed the immigrants' health. All plantations had to have hospitals and the District Medical Officer paid visits at fixed intervals. There are few if any recorded instances of extreme neglect of immigrants' health needs. But poor sanitation, unsuitable diet and endemic disease made the population a sick one. The physical conditions under which most indentured Indians lived were wretched. They inhabited barrack ranges; each range contained several rooms which measured 10' by 10' by 12' to accommodate a married couple and all their children, or two to four single adults. The partitions between the rooms never reached the roof and there was absolutely no privacy or quiet for the occupants. Cooking was done on the front steps. Latrines were not general on the estates until the twentieth century and the water supply was usually poor. Between 1870 and the late 1890's the estates were obliged in law to supply food to all labourers in the first two years of indenture.

Each year the planters sent in their requests for new labourers, and the new arrivals were assigned to the estates by the Immigration Department. This body headed by an official called the Protector of Immigrants, was the agency which ran the immigration system in Trinidad. There were several officers who regularly inspected all plantations employing indentured labour, scrutinising the hospitals, wage-books, housing, dietary provisions, water supply, and hearing and

investigating complaints. They were backed by a staff of clerks and interpreters. The Protector was the co-ordinator of the whole system and acted as a court of last appeal for the immigrants.²

It is important for us to know not only how satisfactory were the Indians' living conditions in the 1880's but also how far were they considered satisfactory (and particularly by the Indians themselves) at that time, if we are to estimate the effect of this in providing a background for revolt. Unfortunately there are few if any records preserved of what the Indians thought of their living conditions. Undoubtedly for the vast majority of them, Trinidad was a preferred place to India, as evidenced by the fact that so many remained in Trinidad after the end of their indenture, and a number who had returned to India came back a second time to the West Indies. There is almost no agreement about anything else. Some commentators of the time compared their situation to slavery; others found conditions almost ideal. We will look at one or two of these contemporary accounts as they illustrate how far reality can differ from legislated conditions, and how the situation could vary from one estate to another.

Robert Guppy was an English lawyer who came out to Trinidad about the time of emancipation, ran an estate at Diego Martin which failed, and then settled down near San Fernando, in the south of Trinidad, where he became an eminent lawyer and mayor of the town. He was for years much opposed to Indian immigration (though not to that from Africa). In 1888 he testified as follows before the Royal Franchise Commission:

As first in the list of evils which afflict the Colony, I look

upon the system of housing the Indian Immigrants in barracks The barrack is a long wooden building eleven or twelve feet wide, containing perhaps eight or ten small rooms divided from each other by wooden partitions not reaching to the roof. By standing on a box the occupant of one room can look over the partition into the adjoining one, and can easily climb over. A family has a single room in which to bring up their boys and girls if they have children. All noises and talking and smells pass through the open space from one end of the barrack to the other. There are no places for cooking, no latrines. The men and women, boys and girls, go together into the canes or bush when nature requires. Comfort, privacy and decency are impossible. A number of these barracks are grouped together close to the dwelling house of the overseers, in order that they may with the least trouble put them out to work before daylight in crop time, which they do by entering their room and, if necessary, pulling them off their beds where they are lying with their wives. If a man is sick he is not allowed to be nursed by his wife, he must perforce go to the hospital far away, leaving his wife, perhaps without the means of subsistence, to her own devices. With all this, can anyone wonder at the frequent wife-murders and general demoralisation amongst the Indian immigrants? In fact the barrack life is one approaching to promiscuous intercourse. And the evil is not confined to the coolies. The owner in England compares notes with other absentees and expects his crop to be made at the lowest rate. As to the means, that matters not to him. The overseer holds his situation subject to twenty-four or forty-eight hours' notice and to escape losing his place and consequent beggary he must have but one object in view: that of screwing the most he can out of his bondsmen.³

The second description is given by a French Roman Catholic priest Fr. Massé who had no love for the English but who through his long residence in the colony and acquaintance with the overseers knew what was happening.

For ten years the immigrants belong to the Government, and it is really slavery disguised . . . Their daily wage on the average is not more than a quarter of a dollar (25 cents) but they give

them a house, a garden, and at the beginning of each week a certain quantity of rice for their food. Their work is excessive during the crop. They get no rest day or night. The English law punishes very severely a master who beats the coolies and every manager who beats one before witnesses cannot find a job after on the estates where there are coolies. That does not prevent the managers when they are not satisfied with them and they meet them alone, from giving them a thorough beating, taking care however, that only feet and fists are used so that no traces of the beating shows. But the coolies take their revenge. They repay terribly the managers who are cruel towards them and they have killed more than one.

The coolie women are the followers of their husbands and have to do all the most laborious work in the house and in the garden. When they are travelling, if they have a donkey, it is the men who ride and the women follow on foot. The heaviest loads to be carried are theirs. They marry their children sometimes when they can scarcely walk but they do not let them live together until they are of age. They keep themselves completely isolated from other races. Very economical, with the little that they earn, they find means of saving with which, lending at usury, they sometimes succeed in living in very comfortable circumstances. At the races in Port of Spain last year, a coolie won the prize with his horse, the most beautiful of all and of a very high value. According to the area of India where they have been recruited, the coolies are Mahommedans or follow the cult of Brahma. They have their priests whom they call 'babagie' and of whom half are worth nothing as a coolie who spoke creole told me. The coolie wears a turban on his head. He ordinarily has hanging at his neck a gold coin or a silver coin, English or American to which he has soldered a holed ring to hang it by. He has a big band of cloth, very light, with which he covers the loins. Very often he has no other clothes, thus the whole bust is nude. A good number however have the bust covered by a small garment, very light, resembling to some extent the tailor-made waistcoats and which are only open halfway. Many have a big round bracelet of silver on each of their wrists and several rings ordinarily in silver on their fingers, some of these rings go round several times in the form of a spiral. In place of the turban which is



Labourers in the Cane Field

their national headress several have adopted a little bonnet in cotton. It is the coolies themselves who make their (silver) trinkets. All the coolie women have one or several necklaces of a size and varied length among which most often is a necklace of coins of silver or gold, to each of which they have put a ring of which the hole is in the direction of the thickness of the coin and not on the flat as in the greater number of medals. They all have one or several pendants at each ear. Many have rings passed through the whole of the upper lip. The jewels in the ears and nose are ordinarily of gold. The coolie women have three or up to a dozen silver bracelets, along each arm and a big round open ring in silver at each foot under the ankle. They wear on their heads a long piece of cotton print of which one side goes down the back and of which they allow the other end to fall in front tucking it in at the waist band. The kind of waistcoat which the men wear, they wear themselves, or at least the garment which the men wear, they wear themselves, or at least the garment which covers the top of the body looks very much like that of the men. They have a sort of skirt to complete this outfit. With the men, nearly always the various pieces which make up the costume are white. Each piece of the garment of the women is of a different colour.

Sir H.W. Norman, the Governor of Jamaica, and who had considerable experience in India, came out to Trinidad in 1885 as Commissioner to investigate the Hosay massacre of 1884, and he on the whole felt that the living and working conditions of the Indians were in general adequate; though he does mention the fact that they were now much more prone to complain than formerly.

The coolie is more prone to complain than he used to be, and . . . he sometimes does so in a rather unruly manner and generally he does not behave as well as he used to. I have read through various documents recording complaints by coolies and against coolies, and I am bound to say that, looking to the large number of the coolies, to the fact that some of them are perhaps unreasonable and others idle, and bearing

in mind that the position of an indentured coolie, usually a man in the very prime of life, but still young, and in a foreign country, is very abnormal, and that all overseers and managers cannot be expected to be men of great patience and kindness, I think the complaints on both sides are much less numerous and less important than might have been expected. From some estates no complaint has been received for a long period. In looking over a diary of complaints, too, I observe that several of them are made by coolies against superiors who are their own fellow-countrymen, and who, I regret to say, are still styled in the Colony "drivers". I have found no reason to believe that complaints are not carefully inquired into and justly dealt with, while it is a matter of fact that the coolies are usually well-fed, not over-worked, and are well treated in sickness. A large proportion elect to remain in Trinidad when they are entitled to a passage back to India; and of those who go, a large number take sums of money with them, and not a few, having gone back to India, return again to Trinidad. Some coolies, too, remain on particular estates for many years. Occasional cases of injustice or ill-treatment, no doubt occur, but on the whole the coolie is well used. There is some evidence to show that the tasks for those who take task work, have been increased since the price of sugar fell, but some complaints on this head have fallen through upon investigation, while in nearly every case the coolie who performs task work has to labour for fewer hours than those who work by time, an arrangement to which he can revert if he dislikes task work.⁴

Surgeon Major D.W.D. Comins from the Indian service visited Trinidad shortly after this time and he also found the lot of the Indians to be not an unhappy one:

The cooly likes this work (estate work) and prefers it to any other; for although the hours are long, yet the pay is good, and he is treated liberally in other ways Some of the barracks and cottages for coolies on the Colonial Company estates are the best in the West Indies and may be taken as models of comfort and suitability.⁵

On the other hand Comins comments unfavourably

about Petit Morne estate which was owned by the same Colonial Company.

I have nowhere seen so forcibly exemplified the want of some sort of latrine system or sanitary precautions to prevent the ground round the huts and ranges being fouled. The drinking water is obtained from large iron tanks which catch the rain water and also from a large pond near the works in which bathing is also done.

On the whole, it seems that on most estates living conditions were acceptable to the Indians, though complaints were becoming more and more numerous. Working conditions were worsening and the immigrants as we shall see later, were beginning to take their own steps to remedy this. Sugar bounties given by the French and German Governments were allowing the export of cheap beet sugar to England. This was affecting the prospects of West Indian sugar, though Trinidad was placed in a relatively fortunate position. In Trinidad, central factories were first established in the West Indies — a number of estates or 'farms' feeding in canes to the one factory which in some cases was modernised with efficient rollers and crushers for the canes and the new vacuum pan process for the manufacture of sugar.⁶ Faced with the marketing difficulties, attempts were to be made to reduce wages and cut down costs further, but the whole process was vastly accelerated by the crisis of 1884 when the Germans dramatically increased beet production, the Government subsidy was doubled and sugar production in France also increased, so that cheap beet sugar flooded the British market, the traditional market for West Indian sugar. From Trinidad in 1883, 54,496 tons of sugar had been exported worth £886,172. In 1884 60,961 tons were exported worth only £642,255.⁷

Obviously, Trinidad's sugar industry was not ruined as more sugar was exported than in 1883, but the planters' profit margin was cut to the bone. They howled in protest, strove for the eventual exclusion of bounty-fed sugar from the English market, or later for special trade terms with the United States; and at once they put the squeeze on labour.

Wages of the artisan class, mechanics, carpenters, masons, were to be reduced. An attempt was made to lower the wages of the non-indentured labourers but this was unsuccessful as the labourers immediately left the estates and the reduction had to be cancelled. By law, the daily wages of the indentured labourers could not be reduced. However, a large number of them had elected to do task work instead, which at one time paid as much as 1s. 3d. a task, three of which could be performed in a day by a strong, hard-working man. This was now radically changed, and the amount of the task was vastly increased. This affected the Indians greatly, for they depended on task work for their little 'extras'. Significantly, the annual remittances to India dropped at this period from an average per head in 1882 of £5-14-11 to £4-10-11 in 1883, and £4-4-2 in 1884. We can well imagine too that attempts were made to induce the Indians to work harder during their normal working hours and to squeeze every possible bit of labour out of them. In addition, any improvements or repairs to barracks, water-tanks etc. would have been postponed as far as possible. Psychologically and physically then, the indentured labourers were to feel the economic pressure. Undoubtedly, the dissatisfaction resulting from this must have played some part in encouraging the Indians to seek to enter San Fernando in violation



East Indian Festival

of the law during the Hosay of 1884. A very important factor in the psyche of any group, is how they are considered by others. A man who is commonly thought of as criminal and knows it, is only too prone to accept this estimate of himself. To most of the absentee owners the Indians were merely 'hands'; while alternatively, it was a well known fact "that where the proprietor or the attorney lived on the estate strikes rarely occurred" simply because a human relationship was involved. The impersonal was however often pushed to an extreme and one wonders whether the Indian — especially those of the lower caste — might not simply have accepted this as their unfortunate lot in this reincarnation. Whatever about this, at least a number of the immigrants must have felt that they were as much men as their masters and particularly at Hosay time as we shall see. They could well ask their master then in the words of Sha-Shi-Pi-Ya the Chinese novelist,

If you tickle us, do we not laugh?

If you prick us, do we not bleed?

If you poison us, do we not die?

And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

But even when an estate owner did regard his immigrant labourers as 'my people' as the equivalent of peasants on his grandfather's domain in France — still he would look down on them at least to some extent as inferior persons, and this for a number of reasons, quite apart from the important class element. Firstly, from the religious viewpoint, as Brereton puts it: "The 19th century was an age when the more sinister aspects of Hindu culture fascinated and horrified people".⁸ Practices for instance, like 'Suttee' — the custom of con-cremation of a widow

on the pyre of her deceased husband, which continued in families of high rank in India up to the 1880's; the practice of 'thuggee' — strangling by a confederacy of professional assassins according to certain rigidly prescribed forms and after the performance of special religious rites linked with Kali the Hindu goddess of destruction. According to the Thuggee Report of 1879 registered Punjabi and Hindustani Thugs still numbered 344 (and the name 'thug' through transference now applies to any cut-throat or ruffian); infanticide — in India female infanticide was attributed to the custom of hypergamy which forbade a woman (though not a man) of a particular group or section within a caste, to marry a man from any section beneath hers, thus severely restricting the field of marriage for women in the highest section. Sometimes the numbers killed could be ghastly. Somewhat before this period the British counted only 63 females living in Kathiawar, an area of more than 4,000 people. The fire-walking — walking over a pit of hot stones or coals, a practice from South India carried on for a number of years at Peru Village near St. James, and in one or two other places in Trinidad, was regarded as the working of the devil, and described in the press as "degrading practices", "vile customs" carried on by "gangs of semi barbarians". "There is something really diabolical in it", wrote one priest; but Fr. Marie-Francois, the Roman Catholic priest of St. James, had other ideas.⁹ He had printed huge posters in English and in the Madrassee and Calcutta dialects, announcing that running across a half-extinguished fire it was impossible to get burned, and offering five dollars to anyone who could remain in a fire for five minutes.

The priest then, taking no chances, doctored the fire with oil, and had no takers for his bet, but the offer showed in what low repute the religious practices of the Hindus were held by the Christians. Moslem practices also (the Moslems formed one fifth of the immigrant population) were held in disdain and particularly that of Hosay, called by one newspaper "painted devilry".

Though among the upper class Trinidadian whites, there was an appreciation of the fact that India had its ancient civilisation and culture, they believed that the Indians in Trinidad were almost all low caste and they were therefore concerned more with the savagery exhibited by the Indians to the white men and women in the Indian mutiny of 1857 and the possibility of a similar happening in Trinidad. The *Port of Spain Gazette* editorialised on 26th November 1870, "The horrors of the Indian Mutiny are fresh in the recollections of Englishmen, and we do not need to be reminded that the race to which our immigrants belong is easily roused".

All classes in Trinidad also stereotyped the Indians as wife-murderers for since the proportion of Indian men to women in Trinidad was three to one, sexual temptations were constant, and one account of the time had it that "the coolies are very jealous and at the least proof of infidelity on the part of their wives they kill them without mercy".¹⁰ Usually in a sensational fashion. For example, two cases in September 1879 in which one gave his wife a dozen slashes with a cutlass and another whose wife left him five years before to live with another man, with one chop of his cutlass cut off the top of her head. In

general too, the Indians were considered to have a low morality, as shown in their semi-nudity in dress in a Victorian age when men and women were covered from neck to ankle; they were also considered to be particularly addicted to lying. In the courts, the Moslems swore on the Book (the Koran) and the Hindus on water, but that did not stop them from perjuring themselves. One writer tries to explain this by saying that the Indian 'found himself defenceless in a strange land' and therefore had recourse to lying, but in so many cases the lies were so blatant and easily discoverable that there seems to have been some sort of lack of comprehension or perhaps a sign of disrespect or revolt against the whole proceedings. The general attitude of the white planters to the Indians is summed up in L.A.A. de Verteuil's *Trinidad* published in 1884 where he wrote: "The new comers, who belong to the lowest castes, are filthy in their habits, lazy and addicted to pilfering. As a class however, they have proved obedient subalterns, industrious and steady Is the coolie better off in his own country? No Encourage (then) by all means the emigration of these poor creatures to a land of freedom (from caste) and Christianity, where their social and moral condition becomes vastly improved".¹¹

There was also to some extent mutual racist feelings between the whites and the Indians, as one white man wrote in 1883: "the coolies act towards strangers like the Jews formerly acted with the Samaritans".¹² However the English tourist of the time considered the Indian as a superior racial type to the negro, 'the grave dignity of their faces contrasting remarkably with the broad, good-humoured but common features of the African'; and quite possibly

this attitude was shared by a number of white Trinidadians also.¹³

The Trinidadian black looked down on the Indian immigrant. The Indians who were still indentured had to carry a ticket of leave when not on their estate, and the 'free' Indians a certificate of freedom, and a common taunt from the blacks in 1870 was reported to be: "Slave, where is your free paper". The Indian was also regarded as a miser and a usurer by the improvident African. Moreover, since the immigrants were frequently in prison (because a breach of their contract was a criminal offence and not a civil one as in other contracts) they acquired a bad name. This possibly had little influence on them. According to Kelvin Singh "geographical and social distance from the other races gave psychological protection to the majority of Indians" and in addition since they looked down on the Africans they did not care what the latter thought of them.¹⁴ Brereton sums it up as follows: On the whole, creoles (blacks) in 19th century Trinidad despised Indians. But there is plenty of evidence that the contempt was mutual. It is a remarkable fact that in the 19th century when Indian men outnumbered women by at least three to one, they did not take African wives or mistresses. As late as 1871, the Protector of Immigrants believed no single case existed among male or female immigrants of cohabitation with an African Some Indians who had returned to Calcutta from British Guiana were asked by the Protector of Immigrants there what they thought of Africans; "they spoke of them with the greatest disgust, saying they are a coarse woolly headed race, more like monkeys than human beings and that they never associated with them in any way". In India, caste was closely linked with colour and there was a general contempt for the darker-skinned. Perhaps this contempt was transported to the West Indies, by the Indians, to reinforce the existing race and colour prejudices.¹⁵

Up to our period, (the 1880's) there was however little competition for jobs between the Indians and

blacks and relatively little contact between them, and there is consequently little evidence of inter-racial hostility in the 19th century. Mutual contempt is not always sufficient grounds for violent action. Thus the Indian in Trinidad was almost completely isolated from other groups and could be assured of no sympathetic hearing from them. Their only protection (apart from the self-interest of the planters) was from the British Government. In addition, leadership was largely lacking within the Indian community.

At this period the Indians in Trinidad (apart from a few free living on the estates) were made up of the indentured estate labourers and the 'free' Indians not resident on the estates. These latter constituted over one third of their number, and were shopkeepers or petty tradesmen or artisans or small cultivators. A few, as for instance Teelucksing, Gokool, and Kowlessar, were estate owners, and a considerable number were small-holders; for some Indians had acquired Crown Lands in parcels of 5 to 10 acres when a scheme was initiated in 1869 to enable small-holders (particularly creole squatters) to acquire Crown Lands.¹⁶ The scheme was expanded to include Indians who had served their indenture period and who were offered land or money grants as a substitute for their due return passage to India. In the next ten years about 2,640 Indians acquired 19,000 acres in a way that was not open to other groups and after 1880 the system of Crown Lands sales in small parcels continued with similar opportunities for all groups. But these Indians, whether they were isolated farmers or lived in the new Indian villages such as Fyzabad were too immersed in their own affairs to provide leadership for the Indians on

the estates. With the exception of some shopkeepers who were linked to the estates there seems to have been no acceptance by the labourers of leadership from outside.

On the estates, conditions were not favourable for the emergence of leaders, with the long hours of labour and the often poor health of the workers.¹⁷ Most immigrants too, were illiterate and had had no experience outside their village in India. They were divided by caste (though much weakened in Trinidad) and there were six or more dialects spoken in Trinidad among the Indians. There were religious differences between the Hindus and the Muslims. Possibly too, according to some authors, the inadequacy in Indian leadership was due to deficiencies in the Indian character — being too docile, passive and tentative, too group-inclined.

Some leaders did emerge. They came either through the 'Sardar' or headman or 'driver' system employed on the estates, or through the ties of *Jabaji Bhai* or Brotherhood of the Boat developed on the long sea voyage from India to Trinidad. Of the headman on the estate who, under the white or coloured overseer, controlled the labourers, Comins wrote:

The position of a headman or 'driver' on an estate is a coveted one. He has much influence and often owns a shop in the neighbouring village, seldom in his own name; and by this and by lending money to newcomers soon becomes wealthy.¹⁸

However according to Tinker. "It was an absolute principle of the system that no Indian labourer should acquire a recognised position as a leader or even as a negotiator".¹⁹ and so a headman was selected not because of his high caste or priesthood which

might make him respected by the immigrants but because of his toughness, that is, ability to control labour. Apart from control of labour, the driver could also take the lead as chief organiser and coordinator for example, in the handling of the box money or 'susu' system and the organising of the Hosay celebrations. Sometimes, they settled caste disputes on the estates. But often they were caught in a difficult dilemma, for if they sided with the labourers against the overseer they were liable to lose their position, while if in a dispute they supported his authority, they lost their leadership influence with their compatriots, as is clear by the many complaints made against them to the Stipendiary Magistrates. At least one headman however played a prominent part in the lead-up to the Hosay massacre.

The *Jabaji* or shipmate relationship was preserved on the estates. Shipmates gave money or moral support to one another. For example, if one of them had a court case the others came to the court with him. Of the eight known leaders of the Petit Morne strike in 1883, six have been identified, of whom three (Aliar, Ramburnsingh and Soman) were jabagis on the 'Scottish Admiral'.²⁰ Quite possibly they were also involved in the incidents of 1884. According to Haracksingh though, in general, leadership was badly lacking:

The majority of the disturbances which occurred during the indenture period appear to have been spontaneous in nature, and as such were not marked by any degree of planning or coordination. In almost all instances the Indians seem not to have been pressing for any new conditions but attempting to resist tampering with those they already enjoyed.

When one considers the lack of leadership and trust among many of the workers and the inferior

position of the Indian women, one is inclined to feel that many at that time shared the mentality of an Indian shopkeeper of some twenty years ago who prominently displayed on his shop along the Eastern Main Road the following notice:

“In God we trus’ In man we bus’ In woman wus’ ”

In God we trust: it was indeed in their religious-oriented culture that the Indians in the 1880’s were to find stability and a certain unity and strength; as Kelvin Singh writes:

The role of the Indian priest, Hindu or Muslim was extremely important in giving the mass of the Indians psychological protection in a society basically hostile to them racially, culturally, economically.²¹

By the 1860’s a number of Hindu temples had been built and a ‘puja’ (act of worship) would as often as not be communal and public rather than individual. A small triangular flag was put up on a green bamboo and planted near the dwelling where the puja was held — a white flag in honour of the god of truth (Satyadeo — who was the most popular); a red flag in honour of Hanoman (the monkey-faced god worshipped to ward off danger); a yellow flag in honour of Lakshmi (prayed to for wealth) and sometimes in honour of Krishna; very rarely the unfurling of a black flag in honour of goddess Kali to whom a goat was sacrificed. Divali, the festival of lights, was celebrated on a far, far lesser scale than today. The *Port of Spain Gazette* of 27th October 1897 mentions that houses and places of business “were illuminated with tiny tapers or chirag” (little earthenware bowls filled with coconut oil and having lighted cotton wicks). Phagwa, the Spring festival of India with its singing competitions and the throwing of

liquid colour, was a minor celebration compared to what it is today. Kartik-ke-nahan — ceremonial bathing in the month of Kartik (October - November) in the sea in large numbers was common, the devotees believing that they would obtain almost the same boon as bathing in the sacred river Ganges in India. Temiterna or fire-walking became popular in one or two places in Trinidad in the early 1880's.

The caste system had largely broken down and inter-caste weddings in the usual Hindu fashion were celebrated but since they were not officially recognised by the government, the children from such unions were illegitimate. Indian songs and dances, religious and non-religious, are occasionally mentioned by writers of the time. The pundits sometimes expounded from their religious literature, the Ramayana or the Bhagovat Gita. The Moslem priests or Mulvis used the Quran getting across traditional Indian values and warning against conversion to Christianity. In general, however, Indian religion and culture was confined entirely to the immigrant population and had with one exception no great public impact. The one exception was the Hosay festival of the Shiah Muslim sect.

The Hosay festival was apparently first celebrated in Trinidad about 1850 on the Phillipine estate south of San Fernando.²³ It spread to other estates and areas and was officially recognised by the government, in 1863. Queen Victoria granted permission for Hosay to be observed in the Colony so long as there were Indian residents. Unlike other religious observances it began to be celebrated by Muslims and Hindus alike. By 1880 it had become a truly 'national' festival for the Trinidad Indians and an occasion to demonstrate their power. As Sir H.W.

Norman put it "The ceremony has come to be regarded as a sort of national Indian demonstration There is little doubt that the Indian immigrants looked upon the procession as a sort of means of demonstrating their power". And more important, it was the one day in the year when the Indians were allowed to do more or less what they liked. The psychological change in 'the insignificant man' that the Russian writer Gogol portrays in his short story *The Cloak* became evident among the Indians. As Gogol's hero set out to work towards the purchase of a new cloak "even his character grew firmer, like that of a man who has made up his mind, and set himself a goal". And when he acquired the cloak "that whole day was truly a most triumphant festival for him". So too, with the Indians preparing for the Hosay and celebrating the feast itself. Father Massé in his diary writes of the Hosay:

Each year the Indians have a grand fete. On that day they are treated with consideration, all sorts of things are done for them. In the state of exaltation in which they remain, the least disagreement which is caused them can bring about terrible evils. When these processions pass on a road they always keep to the middle of the pavement, their masters, the Governor himself, if he should pass there, must take the side.

The Protector of Immigrants felt that ganga smoking (very common then among the Indians in Trinidad) helped to put the people into this exaltation on the day of the festival.²⁴ "Owing to . . . the ganga and opium smoking and drinking which went on it (Hosay) had degenerated into a mob of excited and wildly noisy and quarrelsome rowdies".

But whatever the reason, the Hosay by 1880, had acquired a sort of symbolic value in the eyes of the

Indians. Their cultural life, their national life, their self-esteem were concentrated in the celebration of this Hosay or Mohurrum Festival as it was officially known, and which we will now examine in detail.

Every year the Hosay Festival was celebrated on the 10th day of Muharram (or Mohurrum), the first month of the Islamic Calendar, in order to coincide with the anniversary date on which Imam Hussain (sometimes spelled Hosein or Hussain), the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed was slaughtered at Kerbala, Iraq, some 1360 years ago.²⁵ The Hosay festival was introduced by the Shiahs, a Moslem sect which comprises about five per cent of the world moslem population. These Shiahs were among the immigrants brought to Trinidad from India.

The celebration of the Hosay festival in Trinidad owed not only its origin but also its decorative form to the invasion of India by the Moguls centuries ago. The Islamic faith of the invaders was adopted by many of the Hindus, and not only adopted but also adapted, for many of the converts did not entirely abandon their customary forms of religious expression. And so the austere observance of the Hosay festival as it started in Arabia became, in India and thus among the Indians in Trinidad, an occasion for colourful processions with the carrying of 'tajahs', drum-beating, and much ceremonial bye-play.

The Sunnis, the largest Muslim sect, celebrate the Hosay festival by observing additional prayers, by fasting, reading the Koran, and distributing alms. But it is the Shiah festival which entirely dominates in Trinidad today and was also predominant one hundred years ago.

Officially, Hosay commemorates both the death

of Hassan, the older son of Mohammed's daughter Fatima and Hasrat Ali, the fourth Caliph (or chief ruler) of Islam, and his younger brother, the already mentioned Hussain. The Caliph Ali was assassinated in a Mosque at Kufa, and in the struggle which followed to seize the Caliphate, his son Hassan was mysteriously poisoned to death. Yassid, the son of the Governor of Syria, and a drunkard and an immoral man, took power and hounded down Hussain, one of the few bold enough to resist him. Hussain, with only seventy-two followers was caught one day in the desert near the small town of Kerbala and surrounded by an army many hundreds strong. Hussain's followers were attacked and fought stoutly to the end, and their leader was reputedly the last to fall. In his book *A Short History of the Saracens*, Sayed Ameer Ali writes of the event:

One by one the defenders fell until at last there remained but the grandson of the Prophet Able no more to stand up against his pitiless foes, alone and weary He lifted his hands to heaven, and uttered a funeral prayer for the living and the dead. Raising himself for one desperate charge, he threw himself among the Ommayades, who fell back on every side. But faint with loss of blood he soon sank to the ground and then the murderous crew rushed upon the dying hero. They cut off his head, trampled on his body and with savage ferocity subjected it to every ignominy.

The victors mounted his head on a spear and marched with it in procession rejoicing through the streets of Kerbala.

To the Sunnis, the Hosay festival if it truly represents any part of the Kerbala tragedy, it is that of the victors' parade and the dancing with the martyr's severed head. The Shias however see it as a celebration in honour of the martyr's moral victory.

From enquires made through the medium of the Immigration Department from the principal Moslems on the principal estates in Trinidad, John Scott Bushe, then the Colonial Secretary, wrote in a circular letter to the Stipendiary Magistrates, on August 5th 1884— It would appear that for the celebration of the religious portion of the festival of the Mohurram, which is held in commemoration of the death of Hassan and Hosein, the grandsons of Mahomet, it is considered necessary that the Mussulmans on each estate on which tadjah are built should be allowed to dig on the night of the appearance of the 12th new moon after the last Hosea, and from some particular spot at which they have previously been accustomed to procure it, a certain quantity of earth which is supposed to represent the bodies of the martyrs above named.

The procession is held on the 10th day after the appearance of the new moon, and until that day, when it is placed in the tadjah, the earth is kept, a light burning near it, sacred from the touch of all except the priest. After the procession the earth is removed from the tadjah, which are then destroyed and it is considered necessary that the Mussulmans only should be allowed to bury it, as is the case when digging it, in some particular spot. As far as has been ascertained, the above are the only religious parts of the festival.²⁶

Thus the more striking part of the festival, the procession, had even in the eyes of the Shiah, a less religious role, but nevertheless an important one.

Great care was devoted to the building of the Tadjahs or replicas of the tombs of the martyrs which were carried in the procession, and both Hindus and Muslims assisted financially.²⁷ The estate owners sometimes collected money for the Tadjahs on pay day (at the request of the headmen) in similar fashion to their collection of money for the Christian Churches. In both cases, Hindus were often the chief subscribers. Generally the building of the Tadjah was

handed down from generation to generation. Sometimes its building was a result of a promise to God, or to seek God's help for a sick relative, or to avoid misfortune which might befall one who forsook the tradition of his ancestors. Usually a couple of craftsmen and many helpers worked at them, using bamboo, multi-coloured paper, tinsel and pieces of glass. They ranged from 15 to 25 feet in height, on a base about 10 feet square and were wheeled along in low carts or trolleys.

Two nights before the climax of the festival a very small Tadjah was placed on the sanctified earthen mound and prayers were offered up. The eve of the festival observed as the anniversary of the actual day is known as Katal Kay Raat (which signifies 'the night of the murder') and on that night as in the case of the night before the bands from the various estates would go out to meet one another, arrange the order of procession, and enjoy the company.

On the final day, called Ashura ('Tenth of Mohurrum') the tadjahs were pulled by hand to the place of assembly where the procession began. Each tadjah became the centre of a small procession in which men and women walked together singing songs to the memory of Hassan and Hussain. There was much ceremonial drum beating on the skin drums or Tassa drums (the beaters of these drums in the 1880's sometimes being creoles paid for the occasion, and creoles were sometimes also employed to pull the trolleys with the tadjahs), shouts of "Hosein", "Hosein", wild dancing and stick fighting using the small duelling sticks.

Between the tadjahs could be seen spinning 'moons', semi-circular in shape, about ten feet in

diameter, 150 pounds in weight, mounted on a central pole and borne by a strong man, a red one to represent the murder of Hosein, the other blue to symbolise the poisoning of Hassan. The procession which could include numerous tadjahs and be over a mile long, ended with the destruction of the tadjahs by dumping them into a pond on the estate, a river or the sea, though in Iere Village they were sometimes buried with the bier protruding from the ground.²⁸

The following is a description by a French Roman Catholic priest Fr Massé, written about the Hosay of 1881.

3rd December 1881. It is today that the great feast of the coolies took place this year. I was at the Hotel de France (Port of Spain) when three of their Hosays drawn on carts passed by in the street. They were quite artistically made, very tall and did not lack elegance. A numerous crowd of coolies surrounded them. Several were executing dances in front of them. All were shouting at each instant Hosay! Hosay! In former years all the coolie hosays filed one after the other in the streets. This year they took another direction (presumably towards Cocorite). Few were seen in the town. At San Fernando the procession is magnificent. (As it passed on the streets below the Roman Catholic presbytery the priests would come out to enjoy the spectacle). Today, more than 150 Hosays must have filed past accompanied by thousands of coolies.

At the top of each Hosay is a statuette coarsely made by the coolies. They go very far from their houses to look for some suitable clay which they mix with the blood of a goat. Each of them then goes to dip his finger in this bloody mud and mark his forehead. With what remains, the statuette is made and left in the hole where the mud was mixed and which is covered very carefully and at the corners of which there are poles more or less high from which fly streamers of different colours.

When the Hosay is going to be thrown in the sea one of the coolies takes the statuette and returns in all haste to

replace it in the hole, which is filled in and becomes holy ground. Among the coolies many belong to the religion of Buddha (Hindus). Why have they adopted this Mahomedan feast? It is difficult to know. One can suppose that this fusion took place in the guise of a great national feast for all the coolies of whatever religion, with the faculty to see in the statuette, one the representation of the martyrs of the Koran; the others one of the idols which they adore. What is certain is that for many of the coolies this feast is not religious. It is simply to take the opportunity of amusing themselves. In any case the Hosays which each year they throw into the sea represent a value of more than two hundred thousand francs.

This feast nearly always ends in brawls in which blood flows. In the quarter of Cocorite where the greatest conglomeration of coolies is found, they have given each other some very rough blows today.

In fact, in the Hosay celebrations of 1881 which were the most disorderly on record, a leading Indian called Harracksingh was killed. According to one account, a Hindu, and another a Christian, Harracksingh, a very wealthy headman from Palmyra estate, was determined that his estate should lead the San Fernando procession, and while endeavouring to get the lead the Phillipine people had struck him and killed him. The incident caused some recrimination and heart searching. Particularly after the Carnival riots of 1881 just months before, it was becoming evident to the Government, the upper class and the more peaceable citizens that there was need of effective control of the unruly masses.

In fact, long before this killing and particularly in the 1870's, there had been an outcry about the danger the Indians posed to Trinidad. For instance, the *New Era* of 3rd April 1871 had stated, "the day is not far off when these Coolies, bent on having everything their own way, and meeting with the slightest resistance on the part of the authorities, will

break out in open rebellion, and reproduce here the barbarities of the great chief Nana Sahib in British India a few years ago". Perhaps the accounts of recurrent unrest against British rule in India in the 19th century, the news of mutinies on ships carrying Indian labourers from India, Indian unrest in Guyana and Surinam, encouraged the Indians in Trinidad to insubordination and in the airing of their grievances. The *Port of Spain Gazette* of 18th May 1870 said that scarcely a mail passed without conveying "the news of coolie risings in the sister colony", (that is, Guyana) "some of which have now and then led to encounters with the police and to the severe beating of managers and overseers". The "existence of a general feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the immigrants", it further commented, frequently led to work stoppages on the estates, as well as occasional visits to the local magistrates and to the Immigration agent for the redress of their grievances. In 1872 there were "severe outbreaks of fighting". But there is little doubt, that in the 1870's the fears of an Indian rebellion were altogether hysterical.

By 1881 however, there had been a considerable change.²⁹ The growth of the Indian population was nothing short of phenomenal. In 1871 they numbered 27,425 or 25% of the island's population. In 1881, 48,820 or 31.8%. When one remembers that practically all the Indians were adults and the proportion of males among them was very high and that they were concentrated in certain areas, one can realize that the fears expressed in the newspapers were understandable if not reasonable. In addition, on the political scene, the Indians were beginning to exercise some influence. As early as 1867, the editor of the *San*

Fernando Gazette had written about "the steady increase of alien voters," most "utterly ignorant of the obligations required of them". Mainly shopkeepers and small retail traders in High, Ciperio and Coffee Streets, or clerks in offices, in 1883 the Indians were to account for over one third of the votes cast in the San Fernando Borough Council elections.

Prejudice against the Indians fed more and more on fear — and fear of them particularly at Hosay time. In 1859 there had been trouble at the Hosay celebrations at St. Joseph; in 1865 in a fight between two tazia groups of Endeavour Estate in Chaguanas and Woodford Lodge for precedence in procession, maces and clubs had been freely used and one person killed — and now one more in 1881. It took little imagination to see that it was but one step for the Indians at the Hosay festival when massed in their thousands, to kill outsiders instead of one of their own, and especially with the Carnival riots fresh in their mind.

Fairplay of December 14th 1881 gave a rather cavalier account of the most recent killing:

On the 2nd the Hosein procession came down with its usual noise and drunkenness, and one poor fellow was sent post-haste to *Calcutta* to tell his countrymen how happy and free they are in Trinidad. He was despatched with heavy blows from sticks and was sent to the hospital where he made his exit to *Calcutta* the next day. The cause of his death was the usual desire to be in front. Phillipine Hosein has always taken the lead and it seems that Petit Morne Hosein wanted to do so. Hence the fight.

The *San Fernando Gazette*, after describing the effect of the incessant rains on the "slender and flimsy fabric of the pagodas," and the long wait for the passing spectacle of the fair sex at "the galleries

and windows of all the houses in High Street" — went on to state:

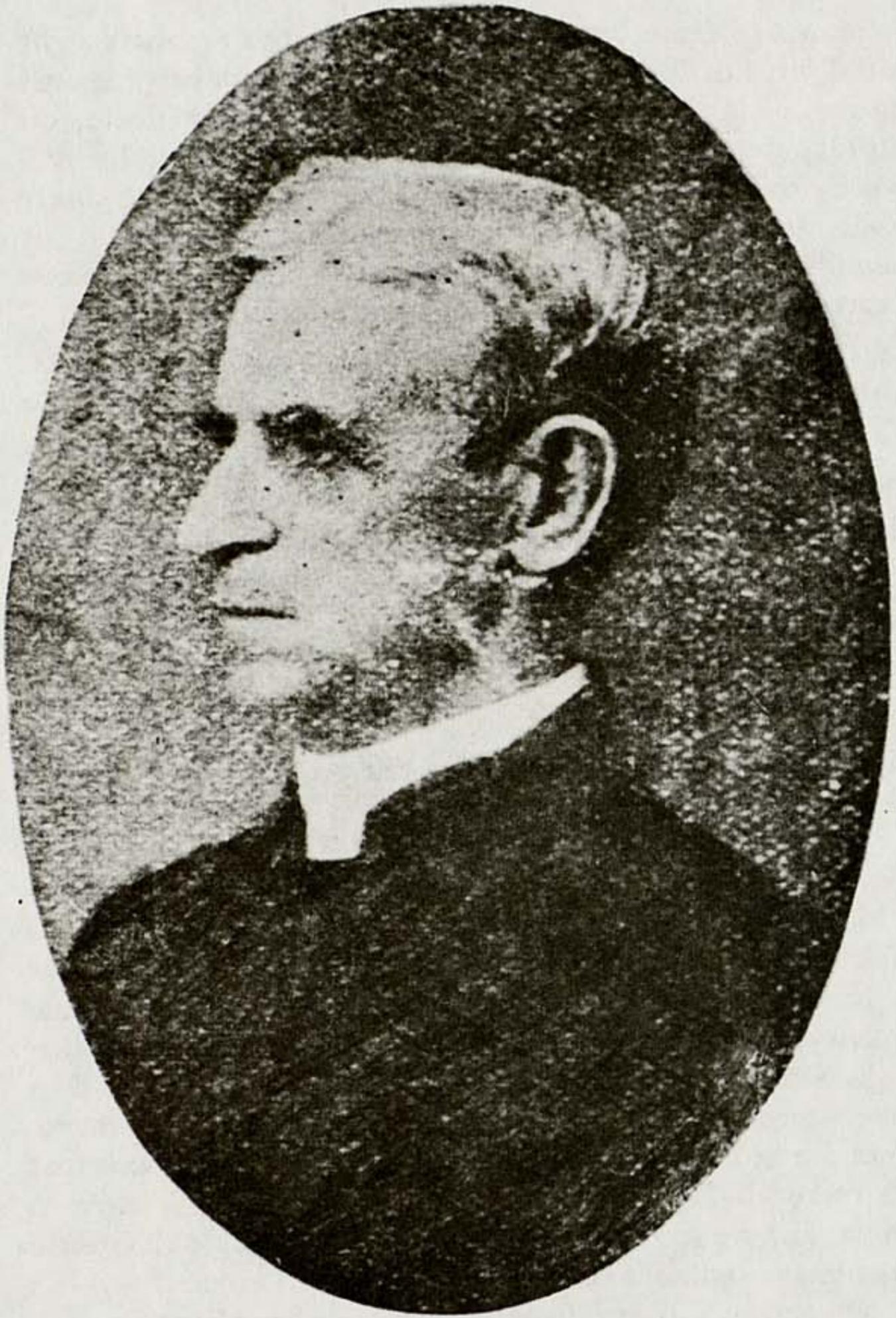
There was a fight between two rival parties — not a fight indeed but a deliberate attack by one of a certain party against another of a rival band, which resulted in the death, on Saturday morning of Harracksingh, a well-to-do and influential coolie driver of Palmyra estate. We shall in due time direct public attention to certain conditions of the coolie Hosein not dissimilar to those which have caused so much apprehension in certain quarters respecting the Canne boulée.

Early in 1882, a few Moslems (Indians) went to the Reverend Grant, a Canadian Missionary among the Indians, and told him that they looked on Tadjahs as idolatrous and scandalous and asked his advice. He suggested that they petition the Governor. Soon, the petition signed by one hundred and seven Mohammedans (of the majority Sunni sect) was placed in the hands of Sir Sanford Freeling. The petition went as follows:

May God bless your Excellency, the protector of the poor etc.

We are the Mussulmans of Trinidad. We believe in one God. We abhor all idol worship. This Taziya is one form of idol worship and is no part of our religion. When people drink rum and like vain fellows swing their sticks and shout Hasan and Husain before Taziya we get much shame because gentlemen think that this is the Mahomedan religion. Neither in the Koran nor in any Sacred Book of ours are we told to make Taziya. In this play quarrels arise, injuries are inflicted, bones are broken, men are killed, and it is our good name that gets reproach, hence we are in distress. Our religion arose in Arabia, and we have amongst us many Arab people all faithful Mussulmans and none of them ever heard of Taziya.

On account of our distress we entreat your Excellency to issue an order for the discontinuance of this play, and whilst we live we will remember your kindness, and praise your name for having judged so wisely.



Rev. Dr. K.J. Grant, D.D.

We are your Excellency's very humble servants,
 Bahadur Ali, Shopkeeper S. Fdo. Yakub, S. Fdo.
 Kurban Ali " " Saikh Dular, Shopkeeper
 S. Fdo
 Sukhouwat Ali " Sayad Mohammed Isa,
 Couva.³⁰

Followed by 101 other signatures.

The Governor brought up the matter of the Hosay disorders in the Legislative Council, and no doubt due largely to fears resulting from the Carnival riots of 1881 and its subsequent regulation, in July 1882 an Ordinance regulating the Festivals of Immigrants was drawn up. The Administrator, John Scott Bushe, sent it to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, for approval, accompanied by the following explanatory note:

For many years the celebration of the anniversary of the Muharram, sometimes known as the taziya-dari, by the Indian immigrants has been attended with more or less disturbance. This festival which partakes of the character of a religious celebration, includes the conveying or large tazyias of models of the tomb of Husan and Husain, grandsons of Mohammed, from the estates to the nearest town, and depositing them at night in the sea. For some nights before the day of festival the Coolies congregate in different localities to arrange the order of procession, and drums are beaten and torch lights used to a late hour, ending sometimes in quarrels, fights and bloodshed.

On the day of the festival itself about 12,000 Coolies from the estates in the Naparima district alone congregate and take part in the celebration, proceeding by different routes and meeting from different points at San Fernando, and it may be understood that much rivalry is engendered between bands belonging to different estates, some attempting to prevent others from carrying certain banners, or from taking precedence in the procession; while the festival is regarded as a favourable occasion for settling former disputes and avenging old quarrels. The native population in large numbers swell the ranks of the procession, and while taking no active part in the

coolie fights increase the confusion which prevails.

The police authorities have endeavoured with partial success to regulate the processions in such a way as to prevent disorder and acts of violence, but on the occasion of the festival in December last there was an unusual amount of friction between bands, which resulted in the death of one of the immigrants and in arrests for offences of a minor description.

A similar state of things in British Guiana led to the passing some years ago of an Ordinance, which is said to have worked well in that Colony, and upon which the Trinidad Ordinance has been based.

It is not the object of the Ordinance to interfere in any way with the festival, but to empower the Governor to make such regulations as may seem best fitted for maintaining the peace and preventing the scenes of disorder which have become too frequent on such occasions. Great care will, of course, be taken to explain fully to the immigrants the nature and object of the regulations so that no misapprehension may exist as to the intentions of the Government.³¹

The Ordinance itself entitled The Immigrants Festivals Ordinance 1882, empowered the Governor to make regulations defining the routes of the processions (both the Hosay and the Temiterna or fire-walking) whether on plantations or on the public highway; and to provide for the maintenance of peace; all such regulations were to be published in *The Royal Gazette*, and the following penalties were laid down for breach of the regulations:

— “liable on conviction to be imprisoned with or without hard labour, for any term not exceeding six months, or to pay a penalty not exceeding twenty pounds. Any one offending against this section may be arrested without warrant by any constable within whose view the offence is committed and by him detained until he can be brought before a justice of peace.”

No details were spelled out in the Ordinance and

it remained in abeyance for some time.

At this time Sir Sanford Freeling was seeing a deputation of Bahagees (Moslem priests) from San Fernando about some matter, and they represented to him that the indians would be very aggrieved if they were prevented from holding their procession and going into San Fernando, as they looked upon it as a sacred place. Sir Sanford told McHugh, the chief Hindi interpreter to tell the people that they would not be interfered with and would be allowed to pass through San Fernando as had been the practice ever since their introduction into the country more than thirty years before.

During the previous months there had been considerable unrest on the estates and a number of work stoppages. The indians came to complain at the Immigration Office in gangs with their hoes and cutlasses. They seemed to believe (and perhaps correctly so) that the more demonstration they made with reference to a complaint that more certain they would be of receiving redress. The general opinion among the authorities was that the attitude of the immigrants was much changed for the worse. As Sir. H.W. Norman put it later: 'After a residence of some time in Trinidad the coolie not only becomes a man of more independent spirit than he was when in India but according to some reliable evidence he often becomes somewhat overbearing'.³² And Mitchell, the Protector of Immigrants found the indians much changed from eight years before being "more insolent as well as independent, and I ascribe this to a knowledge of their own power. Our chief interpreter Mr. McHugh says, a coolie, on being told by him the number of coolies in the island, said: 'Why, we could

drive them into the sea'; whereupon another coolie said, 'What, with our sticks?' "

Then in September 1882 there occurred the first major strike in Trinidad — at Cedar Hill estate (run by the Colonial Company) when a gang of workers assaulted the overseer.³³ On the 29th September 1882 the police arrested seven men who had committed the assault; the indians became very riotous and ultimately drove the police, who were unarmed, off the ground. Later in the day with an armed force, the Assistant Inspector of Immigrants saw twenty-six indians arrested. In the preliminary inquiry which followed shortly after, several were let off, but some twenty were committed for trial. This strike aroused considerable apprehension among the authorities.

Sir Sanford Freeling, the Governor, then instructed Dr. Mitchell, the Protector of Immigrants, and Baker, the Inspector Commandant of Police, to meet and determine whether it would be possible at this late stage to have the ordinance enforced. They determined that the notice given was not long enough to have the ordinance enforced for that year.

Father Massé in his diary on 22nd November 1882 gives a rather lurid account of the situation at that time.

Today is the great feast of the Coolies of which I spoke last year. It does not take place at the same time every year because the coolies do not count the years by months but by moons. This feast has put the Government in a state of uneasiness and here is why. In the course of this year the coolies of several plantations revolted and it became necessary to employ the armed forces against them. Many say that they were not absolutely wrong because certain people and above all a good number of overseers ill-treated them. A commission

was set up lately to listen to their complaints, unfortunately too well founded. But they did not receive the decision they would have liked, even though blame was given to those who treated them so badly. That exasperated them. They carry in their heart a secret hatred which they have allowed to be seen at different times. Indiscretions coming from some of them have shown that they were hoping to profit from their annual feast to revenge themselves on the whites. The Government was afraid. It intimated to them the order that they should not go out this year and they were not to cross San Fernando with their banners. They replied to the Government that they would go out all the same just as in the past and that they would be sorry if they wanted to put obstacles in the way of the march which they had the habit of following up to that time. The Government gave in. A weakness which has shown the coolies that they can slight it. However, sinister rumours were circulating. The police of San Fernando were tripled by the agents who had been sent down from Port of Spain and the inhabitants received an order to keep themselves armed to be ready to fire on the coolies if they tried to make disorder. The Government, after all its precautions, did not think San Fernando safe enough. It sent to Barbados for three warships which were anchored in front of the town and which made a lot of noise on the eve to intimidate the coolies who have been very prudent the day of their feast; but who, according to certain rumours, were holding in reserve some oil and powder which they did not use, either because they allowed them to do as in former years, or because the display of armed force and the sight of the warships made them afraid.

In any event, in spite of fears of the worst, the Hosay of 1882 throughout Trinidad was relatively free from disorder.

The following year (1883) Stone, the Sub-protector and Inspector of Immigrants, was present at a deputation consisting principally of Hindus, which waited on Sir Sanford Freeling.³⁴ "The reason of the deputation," Stone testified later, "was in consequence of an assault by a bailiff on one of their

number, and the bailiff apologised in the presence of His Excellency. As far as I recollect, Sir Sanford then asked them if they would mind their processions being stopped from going into San Fernando, and then implied a promise that they should not be stopped. Mr. McHugh interpreted this to them, and as far as I could tell gave the correct substance of what Sir Sanford Freeling said. Some time after this Sir Sanford Freeling said he did not mean this." Later in the year, the vacillating Governor ordered rules drawn up for the coming Hosay of 1883, and the Protector of Immigrants and Inspector Commandant of Police wrote to Sir Sanford Freeling saying that they thought it would be injudicious to do this (that is, prohibit entry to San Fernando) for that year, in consequence of the promise made by him "which seems to have been distinctly understood." A meeting was then called of planters and certain officials of the Immigration Office to determine whether the processionists should be allowed to enter San Fernando. At this meeting the planters were very decided in the opinion that it would be injudicious to interfere with the entry into San Fernando because it was the Indians' only amusement and in consequence of the promise made by Sir Sanford Freeling.

The usual precautions of putting the fire brigade on standby, and calling out all the police available were taken for the Hosay of 1883, but though the celebrations passed off peaceably enough in San Fernando, serious disturbances took place in Port of Spain and quite serious ones in Chaguanas. The *Trinidad Recorder* of November 14th gave the following account of the Hosay in Port of Spain, their account representing the general feeling of

the Trinidad Press at the time.

On Saturday last about three in the afternoon, Queen Street presented one of those sights which we do not remember seeing even on our sadly celebrated carnival days. It was "Hosein" day, and the coolies from various parts of the country were in town. We observed very few of their celebrated "chateaux", and everything would have passed off very quietly but for one incident. It appears that these coolies following fast in the footsteps of our fighting masqueraders, now form themselves into separate bands, and when they meet, a nice little scene ensues. Well, on Saturday last at the hour above-mentioned, the respective bands from St. James and Laventille met in King Street, and a terrible fight was the result. We understand that a constable received a severe blow which threw him off his horse. The scene in Queen Street where the fight ended is indescribable. Hundreds of these Coolies, screeching and yelling, well armed with sticks, were pursuing each other. We understand that on arriving at the police station they were quieted and separated. Steps should certainly be taken for the suppression of such barbarous scenes. What can foreigners think of us, when contemplating in broad day-light such scenes as the one we have tried to describe above? On the same day detachments of police constables were sent to different parts of the country to keep order among the "Hosein" celebrators.

At Chaguanas it was arranged by the police that the Indians from the three estates neighbours to Endeavour should celebrate Hosay in the village.³⁵ Those from Endeavour were restricted however and could go only as far as the bridge near the estate. These two groups had gathered and were playing Hosay within sight of one another, when a stone was thrown which hit an Endeavour Indian in the eye. Stone throwing then became general on both sides and in spite of the efforts of the police to prevent a clash, the Indians from the other estates led on by creoles, rushed towards those from Endeavour and

attacked them. A number of Endeavour Indians assaulted the proprietor of the neighbouring estate and his manager, Kernahan. As Kernahan's brother had been killed by Indians on his estate some four years before it may well be imagined that the attack was not dismissed lightly. Information was laid against three labourers, Subrensingh, Patarras and Marroo, and they were ordered to be jailed for three months with hard labour. René de Verteuil, the owner of Endeavour, and who was with his labourers on the occasion of the fight, tendered his testimony for their defence, but it was rejected as irrelevant.

It was a well known fact at this time that justice in Trinidad was not even-handed. Whether magistrates or juries were involved the Indians generally came out the losers. Father Massé wrote in his diary of the 4th June 1879:

Abbé Dupoux has received in his house a little coolie whose father was hanged two years ago for having killed a child. They now speak of another murderer who is in the prison at Port of Spain and as culpable as the coolie but who nevertheless has every chance of being acquitted because he is a mulatto. The greater number of juries being of his class he is going to make of his case an affair of colour and even though they see that they are deciding contrary to their conscience, the jury will find means of absolving him.

According to the *New Era* of January 1881, all the Magistrates in Trinidad were corrupt except one — and he had just died. This paper went on to speak of the disgraceful swindle of 'the poor coolie Baseer'.

On September 10th 1881 the *San Fernando Gazette* had stated: "We should be very sorry indeed to see revived the late scandals of the San Fernando Police Court; and especially do we deprecate the recurrence of those petty tyrannies and alarming

injustices to our coolie immigrants.”

The Indians themselves could have spoken, and did complain now, of many other cases of blatant injustice. In the increasingly tense atmosphere of 1883, the Government realised that the Indians would not be satisfied with anything less than full justice. The trial of the labourers for the Cedar Hill riots came up at this time. To the consternation of the planters, all those committed for trial were discharged as the Chief Justice ruled that their acts did not constitute a riot. This result was looked on as a triumph; the workers went back to the estate with flags flying and the decision produced a general confidence among the immigrants. Meanwhile, de Verteuil was not prepared to leave his three labourers in prison.³⁶ He complained to the Governor that “the three informations laid against the several coolies were all heard and tried in one case and that the evidence addressed was in his opinion quite inadequate,” and that his own testimony which was tendered for the defence was rejected as irrelevant. (He said that it had been quite impossible to recognise which Indians had done the deed. It had become simply a question of punishing someone for the riot). The Governor brought up the matter with the Executive Council consisting of the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney General, and the Officer commanding the troops, and all the Indians were released after imprisonment for one month and nineteen days. Many felt that judicial decisions such as these were seriously undermining the power of the law to restrain the immigrants. “Will it be believed,” went the *Port of Spain Gazette* of 9th February, 1884, “that the coolies (from Endeavour) were

liberated by order of the Governor?. . . . the effect will be disastrous in the extreme.”

On the 27th January 1884 Sir Sanford Freeling wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Right Hon. Earl of Derby, as follows:

I stated I had no information of the existence among the labouring population of an impression that acts of violence could be committed with impunity with reference to the effect of the trial before the Supreme Court of the cases connected with the disturbances which took place on the Cedar Hill Estate in September 1882, I have the honour to forward without delay copy of a report received today from the Protector of Immigrants in which he states that he finds Mr. Pasea, the Inspector of Immigrants in the Southern districts of the island where the Cedar Hill Estate is situated is of opinion that the impression produced by the result of those trials was one that such offences might be committed with impunity. . . .

I may mention that an overseer was assaulted and beaten during the present month in the Woodford Vale estate, the property of the Colonial Company and part of the same management as the Cedar Hill Estate.³⁷

Midnight of the 23rd February marked the beginning of the Trinidad Carnival. Very strict regulations had been formulated and promulgated for its control. By these proclamations, the use of torches and the wearing of masks was prohibited and full notice was given throughout the colony that law and order would be enforced. Unfortunately, though there were no disturbances in Port of Spain, at San Fernando the police were assaulted by the town bands and arrests made, and at Princes Town it was found necessary to read the riot act and for the police to fire upon the mob who attacked them. Two deaths occurred and two or three people were wounded. Sir Sanford Freeling was very worried and



Hindu Girls

immediately dispatched fifteen of the 'Royal Scotts' to Princes Town on hearing of the disturbances, and twenty five Marines from the *Dido* were landed to replace the police and soldiers sent to the Naparimas. The Governor, apparently feeling that he was losing control of the situation in Trinidad, wrote to Lord Derby asking his authorisation to increase the Police Force on a permanent basis by fifty men.³⁸ Since in December 1882 the Secretary of State for the Colonies had already sanctioned an increase of fifty men, it was not surprising that this time the request was refused.

However, now that action had been taken against the creole maskers it was inevitable that the regulations about the Hosay would be enforced as the older residents would otherwise appear to be second class citizens, which might provoke further trouble. On the other hand, an injudicious enforcing of regulations might cause revolt among the Indians and so the Government called together a commission consisting of certain planters and officials and the clergymen Morton and Hendrie, missionaries for many years among the Indians, to give recommendations about the intended regulations. Their report was submitted to Sir F. Barlee, then acting Governor, and a draft of regulations was proposed by the Protector of Immigrants and the Inspector Commandant of Police. These were approved by Sir F. Barlee on the 30th July 1884 and their promulgation ordered. They stated:

Regulations

Made by the Lieutenant-Governor under the provisions of the Ordinance No. 9 of 1882 for the government of the Mohurrum Festival, commonly called here the Hosé, and the

Temiterna Festival, commonly called here the Madrassee Festival, and of the Processions held in connexion therewith.

1. Indian immigrants living on any plantation or in any village intending to celebrate the Mohurrum Festival, commonly called here the Hosé, or the Temiterna Festival, commonly called the Madrassee Festival, and the processions connected with such festivals must choose from amongst themselves headmen, not exceeding six in number, whose duty it will be to regulate, control, and take charge of any such procession, and to carry out such instructions as they may receive from the stipendiary magistrates of the district in which the plantation or village is situated, or from the police for the purpose of preventing breaches of the peace or other disorderly conduct during the celebration of the festival.

2. The names of the immigrants selected to act as 'headmen', and also the day or days on which the festival is to be held, must be sent to the stipendiary magistrate of the district by the 'headmen' not less than nine days before the date fixed for its celebration, and the magistrate, should he see no objection, will grant to the immigrants a written authority for holding the festival, and issue such other instruction as he may deem necessary for the preservation of good order etc.

A copy of such authority and instructions, together with the names of the 'headmen', shall be forwarded by him to the chief officer of police in the district in order that the police may see that such orders, etc., are duly carried out.

3. No such procession will be allowed to enter the precincts of the towns of Port of Spain or San Fernando, nor will any such processions be allowed to use or cross any high road or public road except on the express permission in writing of the stipendiary magistrate of the district in which the procession shall pass.

4. Immigrants not residing on plantations may, with the consent of the proprietor or manager of any plantation and on the written authority of the stipendiary magistrate of the district, be permitted to join the immigrants residing on any plantation in the celebration of this festival, but they will not be permitted to bring any Tadjah from without on to such plantation.

5. No hakka sticks or other offensive weapons or torches or firesticks shall be carried by any immigrants in any such procession on any high road or public road.

6. No other than an immigrant or the descendants of immigrants shall take part in any such procession or in any way interfere with such procession.

7. Stipendiary magistrates are hereby empowered to grant such licenses to the Mahomedan 'headmen' of any plantation or village and to others being Mahommedans, as shall be necessary for the burial of the sacred earth representing the bodies of the martyrs, or for the carrying out of any religious rites connected with the festival of the Mohurrum.

8. The magistrates may on reasonable grounds cancel any permission or license that they may have granted.

9. The police shall have power to enter on any plantation or land for the purpose of enforcing these regulations, and shall also have the power of arrest for the contravention of any of these regulations.

10. Every 'headman' and every immigrant taking part in any such procession, or any one who may contravene Rule 6, or who shall wilfully disregard any of the above regulations, or shall wilfully disobey any orders or instructions given by the magistrate of any district or the police in virtue of these regulations, or who shall assault any magistrate or policeman or any one acting in their aid, or shall aid or incite any one to do so, shall be held guilty of an offence, and on conviction thereof be liable to be imprisoned with hard labour for any term not exceeding six months, or to pay a penalty not exceeding £ 20, as provided in section 5 of Ordinance No. 9 of 1882. Government House,

30th July 1884.

By command,

(Signed) J. Scott Bushe

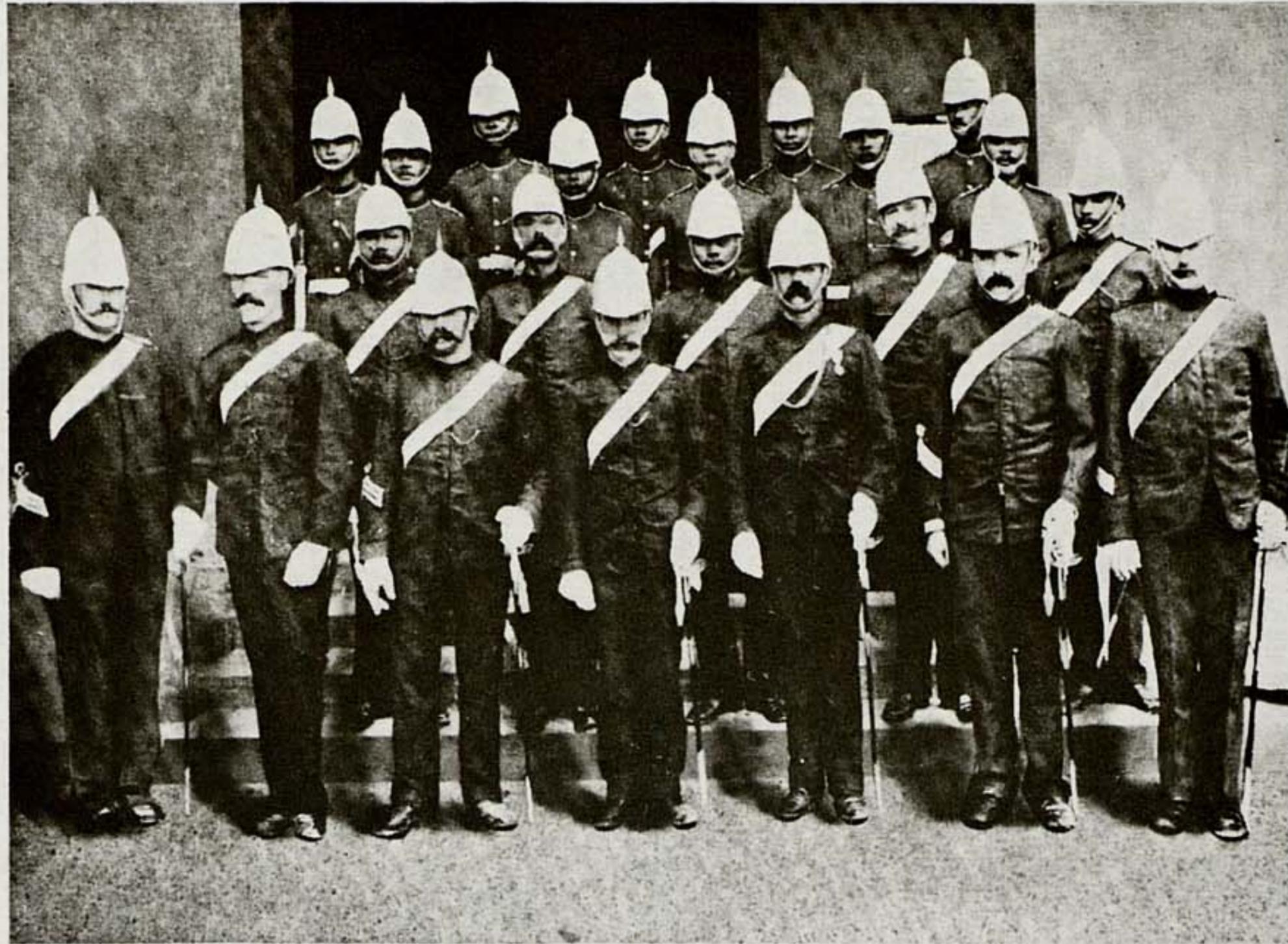
Colonial Secretary.³⁹

As might be expected, this issue of regulations was very unpopular with the immigrants. As might have been expected also most opposition came from the San Fernando area. H.P. Hobson,⁴⁰ the Stipendiary

Justice of the Peace for San Fernando, had brought before him at San Fernando, Oropouche and Princes Town, the Moslem headmen of the estates and villages and through the Hindi interpreter had the regulations carefully interpreted to them in order that they might fully understand their meaning. Several Hindus also attended the meetings and although the Moslems were comparatively quiet the Hindus expressed great dissatisfaction and stated that they intended to take the Hosays through the high roads to San Fernando, and at the same time urged the Moslems to do so. Hobson considered their demeanour to be menacing and so reported the matter immediately (25th August) to the Acting Colonial Secretary. Clearly, the Government and the immigrants were on a collision course.

The regulations had been deliberately designed to prevent any attempt on the part of the creole masses to involve themselves in the Hosay, as also to minimise the importance of the non-Moslems, that is, the Hindu majority, in the event. But the Hindus saw the Hosay not only as a religious festival but much more as a national festival, and refused to be pushed aside. There were discussions and meetings and the resultant action took the form the most typical of unrepresented colonial peoples in the 19th century — the petition to the Queen or her representative.

The San Fernando procession, as we have seen, was by far the largest of the Hosay processions, and though places in the procession were not altogether fixed, traditionally it was the men of Phillipine estate who led, and the men of the moment were naturally the headmen among the Phillipine Coolies. It was not therefore very surprising to find that when a petition



A Group of Warrant Officers and Sargeants

emanated from the coolies against the abolition of the Hosay celebration (as they saw it), that it came from a headman of the Phillipine estate. The headman's name was Sookoo, he was also the driver or overseer of the estate, and he was a Hindu. Along with twenty-one other Hindus and eleven Moslems from twenty-six different estates, he forwarded a very carefully worded petition to the Governor. The formulation of this petition and its signing by the headmen from the various estates must have involved a considerable amount of organisation and group solidarity. It was a very definite sign that the Indian community was becoming conscious of its power in unity and growing numbers.

The petition went as follows:

To His Excellency John Scott Bushe, Esquire, C.M.G.,
Administrator in and over the island of Trinidad and its
Dependencies, etc.

The humble petition of the undersigned humbly and respectfully showeth:- That Sookoo, Coolie of Phillipine Estate, South Naparima, for and on behalf of his respective fellow labourers on the several estates hereunder mentioned.

That your petitioners view with sorrow and alarm the intention of the Government under which they serve to suppress their annual festival of Hosein, which your petitioners have hitherto always celebrated with the strictest regard to decorum as becoming their religious obligations.

That your petitioners are willing, and now declare their readiness to pledge themselves that should your Excellency deign to withdraw the Proclamation in regard to the said festival which has been caused to be issued by your Excellency's predecessor, your petitioners will vouch for the decent behaviour of their fellow immigrants, whose lot is cast in this part of the aforesaid quarter in which they reside.

That your petitioners consider the Hosein to be a special mark of your petitioners' religious belief, which they understand to be imperatively ordained for them to observe, and

that during the festival season your petitioners rigidly abstain from liquor of any intoxicating kind.

That your petitioners consider to prohibit them from observing their religious rites when the moon calls your petitioners to do so would be detrimental to them, and would consequently tend to embitter your petitioners' existence.

That your petitioners always believed the English Government countenances and gives toleration to the religious creed of all who dwell within her wide domain. Submitting the premises with anxious hope to your Excellency's favourable consideration, your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

(Signed) Sookoo his X mark Coolie and 31 others.

Witness to marks and signatures,

(Signed) J.W.B. Allmann,

Phillipine Estate,

22nd September 1884.⁴¹

The petition was cleverly designed to show that the festival was purely religious in nature, that there would in the future be no question of public disturbance, and that it was recognised that the regulations did not come from the present (acting) Governor. Extremely moderate in nature there was only the slightest hint ('embitter your petitioners' existence') of any threat.

Nevertheless the petition brought a quick response, the Government had learned its lesson from the Carnival riots and the Hosay was only one month away. Within four days the Colonial Secretary had written a reply which was handed to the Protector of Immigrants, Charles Mitchell. On the 30th September, Mr. Pasea, the Assistant Inspector of Immigrants received a letter from Mitchell bidding him to send for Sookoo to have the reply read and explained in his presence. On the receipt of this communication Sookoo and fifteen of the other petitioners were sent for to attend the San Fernando

Police Court. They attended in their traditional Indian dress, strikingly foreign in the coldly English influenced court of law.

The answer to their petition was as follows:

To Sookoo and Others, Naparima.

The Acting Colonial Secretary is directed by the Administrator to acknowledge the receipt, through the Protector of Immigrants, of the petition which Sookoo and other Indian immigrants in the Naparima district addressed to his Excellency on the 22nd instant, on the subject of the Regulations which have been made by the Government with reference to the celebration of the festival of Mohurrum, commonly called here the Hosea.

The Administrator regrets that the petitioners are under a misapprehension as to the intention of the Regulations in question which were adopted by the Government after the most anxious care and consideration, and which were framed with the sole object of ensuring order throughout the Colony.

The Regulations do not in any way interfere with the religious rites connected with the festival, nor indeed have the Government the slightest desire to infringe those rites, but no procession can possibly on the ground of religion claim to enter the towns of Port of Spain or San Fernando, or to proceed along the high roads of the Colony without the permission of the magistrate of the district.

The Administrator does not consider that the Regulations, which after careful inquiry into the whole matter, were drawn up in the interests of the immigrants themselves, will impose any impediment to the peaceful and lawful celebration of the festival, and his Excellency is therefore unable in anyway to modify them.

(Signed) W.R. Pyne

Government House, Sept. 26th, 1884 Acting Col. Sec.⁴²

In the presence of Mr. Pasea, and Messrs Child and Hobson, the Stipendiary Magistrates at San Fernando, the reply was read and explained to them in their own language, by Mewa, an interpreter in the immigration department.⁴³

Sookoo flew into an enormous rage. "I can only

die once", he said. "I cannot die twice. There is going to be a row. Galbahoga, galbahoga," he burst out in his own language, "Mutiny, there will be a Mutiny. If there is evil let evil come." Whether this threat of mutiny recalled to his listeners the Indian Mutiny of some twenty-five years before with its butchery of British sahibs, and of which some of the group may have had personal experience, we do not know, but several of his fellow Indians took alarm and tried to make peace, suggesting that they petition the Queen; but Sookoo was intractable: "We will have no more petitions," he said; "We will fight it out with the strength of our hands." And on this note the meeting ended, Mewa reporting Sookoo's words to his superiors.

The authorities were fully aware of the unrest that could be caused by the refusal of Sookoo's petition. In 1884 as we have seen, sugar prices had fallen. A recession existed in the island and the planters had been trying to get more work out of their immigrant labourers. Since the wages of the Indians were fixed by law the estate owners had instead increased the amount of work given as a 'task'. The coolies had protested and complained in vain. Then there were twelve labour strikes in this year (the largest number of strikes for any one year from 1870-1900).⁴⁴ The authorities believed that strikes were efforts to incite the Indians to rebellion and offenders were severely punished. In 1883 the number of commitals for persuading immigrants to strike had been five, in 1884 it rose to twenty-one, the highest number up to 1900, the average number per year from 1870 to 1900 being only seven.

From early in the year the newspaper editors

seemed to have convinced themselves that the Indians were on the verge of revolt. On the 12th January 1884 the *San Fernando Gazette* referred to the "coolie disturbance" which had created "so much alarm" in South Trinidad, both in Government and planters' circles. The germ of dissatisfaction was still there ready to erupt into "a rebellion" among "those half spoiled and partly misunderstood people". The Indian labourers after "a trying ordeal" had become "the masters of the situation" and now "with a vengeance which is scarcely justified by the past", these "openly rebellious" people, (*Port of Spain Gazette*, January 1884) fifty thousand in number, half of them able-bodied who could turn out in case of an emergency, against twenty-five thousand non-Indians, divided among themselves' were determined "to have their own way." Early in January there was a "serious disturbance on the Cedar Hill Estate, the scene of previous disturbances of a similar nature among Indian labourers, in which the life of one Metcalfe was in danger. He was molested and beaten up. But for the timely intervention of the driver who was also injured, he would have been killed." On March 1st the *Port of Spain Gazette* had again insisted: "Let us not forget that these Asiatics now form one-third of our population and that fanatics of an effete superstition and a most corrupt form of ethics, they must as a matter of self-preservation, be kept in subjection to our laws." On the 18th October 1884 the *Port of Spain Gazette* once more as the spokesman of the non-Indians said that the Indians in Trinidad had more adult men and women than the non-Indians: "They are united while we are divided." It suggested, "let the coolies

know that they will, in all cases, be severely punished, whenever they attempt to take the law in their own hands"; the Government "must devise means to break down the power of the Brahmins."

In October 1884 came the report on the rising of the Indians of Zorg-en-hoop (Surinam) through the newspaper *Argosy* of British Guyana, for the redress of some grievances.⁴⁵ Fifty soldiers sent to pacify them were attacked with sticks, stones and bottles, and in the firing that ensued seven Indians were killed, one wounded, and the ring-leader arrested. Almost at this same time, the indentured Indian immigrants on El Socorro estate near Port of Spain resorted to violence, as they complained that they found "the tasks given them by the manager and overseer too large." They attacked the overseer Roberts in the "most brutal manner with cutlasses and hoes"; and with these weapons walked to the immigration office in Port of Spain where they met some indentured labourers of another estate who had also gone on strike. On the manager's complaint, warrants were issued against five ring-leaders, but the arrest by the police was prevented by other Indian labourers. The soldiers with guns then arrested them. According to the *Port of Spain Gazette* (11th October 1884) the "demeanour of the coolies during this disturbance" was "something serious."

With this serious situation then in mind, steps were immediately taken to have the regulations regarding the Hosay, as well as the answer to Sookoo's petition widely disseminated. A circular was sent by Charles Mitchell, the Protector of Immigrants, to the managers of some eighty-three estates throughout the island enclosing two copies of the regulations, one

of which was to be posted "in some conspicuous place on the estate where it will be protected from the rain."⁴⁶ The circular continued, "I hardly need point out to you how valuable the assistance and cooperation of those in authority on estates may be in explaining these rules to their labourers." A copy of the reply to the petition was sent to the managers of the twenty-six estates, so that it could be read to Sookoo and the other petitioners who resided there. In addition, the regulations were prominently displayed in all the different police stations and when the Assistant Inspector of Immigrants visited an estate he invariably spoke about the regulations. The Indians however never undertook to discuss the subject with him. As he wrote later: "The coolies showed generally a great disinclination to discuss the subject and I could not get any information from them as to whether they intended making tadjahs or not; their answer always was they did not know, and that it would depend on what their fellow countrymen did."

It might have been thought that the silence of the Indians on this matter was ominous, and that indeed was the general opinion of the Government. Time was rapidly running out for the Hosay was to take place on the 30th October. Reports sent in by the officials all pointed to trouble. Consequently on the 23rd October a meeting of the Executive Council was held. Scott Bushe, the acting Governor, was fairly ill, and so Pyne, the acting Colonial Secretary, was now the Administrator.⁴⁷ The meeting was attended by Major Bowles, the Officer in command of the military in Trinidad, and as the worst was to be feared, it was decided that his troops were to be

called in to assist the police. Detailed arrangements were made: The troops were to be divided into four parties, twenty-five being stationed at St. James Barracks, twenty at San Fernando, fifteen at Couva and fifteen at St. Joseph. The Captain of *H.M.S. Dido* was to anchor off San Fernando, and a party of marines from the ship was to do duty at Princes Town. The volunteer force to the number of forty were to be on duty at the police barracks in Port of Spain, and fifty police, armed and supplied with ten rounds of ammunition were to be stationed in that town also. Police, similarly armed, were to be stationed at Couva (thirty police), Princes Town (twenty), Chaguanas (fifteen), St. Joseph (twenty), and Arouca (sixteen). Mounted men were to act as scouts in all the districts.

Telegraphic or telephonic communication was to be maintained between the several stations where it had been established and an engine and carriage were to be in readiness at Port of Spain, St. Joseph and San Fernando to shift around the police or military by train as needed in emergency. In Port of Spain and San Fernando the fire brigade was to be on stand-by.

It was at San Fernando, however, that most trouble was expected. Eighty police were to be detached to San Fernando all well armed (in fact the Inspector Commandant of Police who accompanied them took forty rounds of ammunition per man, and field kits). A flag staff was to be erected on the police tower at San Fernando for the purpose of signalling the man-of-war *H.M.S. Dido* in case help was needed, and telephonic communication was to be established between the telegraph office and the police station at

San Fernando. All movement of police and military was to take place on the 27th of the month — that is, three days before the Hosay. Trinidad being what it was then (and still is now), doubtless within a short while at least the general tenor of these preparations must have become known to the Indians.

Meanwhile, on the estates, the managers had done their best to discourage all participation in Hosay celebrations or at least to confine them to the estates. They felt that the Government was serious and consequently harm might come to their labourers, who were vital to them during the period of recession; and the depression was hitting them hard enough already.⁴⁸ At Malgré Tout Estate and La Ressource, the workers at the urging of the managers decided to have no Hosay; likewise at Reform, Paradise Estate, Ben Lomond, Bon Aventure and a number of other small estates. In some cases, however, the Indians only pretended to the managers that they would have no Hosay, but on the quiet made their preparations. On the whole though, up to Saturday, 25th October, it seemed that the effect of the regulations would be to reduce the celebrations considerably. That Saturday night, Peter Abel — the manager of the factory at Usine Ste Madeleine, — whose Indians had said that they had discontinued the celebration of the festival for the past two years and were not making a tadjah this year, learnt that a tadjah was being built. He called up the leading Moselms who said it was only a small one and would not leave the estate. Petit Morne under the management of William Lugay Johnston had traditionally headed the procession from the Northern districts into San Fernando. They were on the whole a refractory set of labourers with a

will of their own. They had started to build a Tadjah a week before, and now, as Hosay approached, they compelled Reform workers to follow their lead.

Balgopal, born in Lucknow, India, and in Trinidad for more than twenty years; had been originally indentured to the Barataria estate, but was at this time a shopkeeper in San Fernando with a second shop at Diamond Village near Wellington estate. The Wellington Indians frequented his big drinking house. He had memories of the mutiny, and his words and the drink he sold stimulated the Wellington labourers to action. That same Sunday afternoon, the word spread from the shops along the muddy estate roads into the hot and crowded barracks, from estate to estate, to the streets of San Fernando, like the cool evening breeze penetrating everywhere — the tadjahs were abuilding.

On Monday at La Ressource, the coolies decided to build a tadjah because 'other estates were making them they must have one as well'. At Bien Venue, the manager was ill and could exercise no restraining influence. But at Esperance, Paul Vessiney, an old and experienced manager, tried to stem the tide by offering to take on his own account all the expenses for a small tadjah provided the coolies promised to stay on the estate. At the same time he threatened not to assist in any way, (for example, picking up money, supplying the means to cart the bamboo) if they went to San Fernando. Paul had realised that if many estates built tadjahs, inevitably they would be drawn to San Fernando. His coolies accepted his offer; but at Phillipine, Golconda, Retrench, Wellington, the tadjahs were being built in haste and hourly grew in size and splendour. With



“Brave Baker of The Bobbies”

seemingly irresistible impetus the tidal wave rolled on.

That morning, a special train left Port of Spain, having as its passengers the Inspector Commandant of Police with seventy-two armed policemen and Major Bowles in command of twenty soldiers also destined for San Fernando.⁵⁰ The train puffed its way ponderously and noisily through the peaceful green canefields to the dusty station, from which the military and police marched to the barracks, no doubt to the wonder and edification of the townspeople and the Indians there from the estates. Both soldiers and Police were quartered in the police barracks. Mr. Pasea, the Inspector of Immigrants for the South, met Captain Baker there on his arrival and briefed him as to the situation on the various estates. As darkness had begun to set in, *H.M.S. Dido*, having dropped off the Marines for Princes Town, was silhouetted against the setting sun as she proceeded to the anchorage of San Fernando. A signalman was at once landed for service in the police barracks and the Captain, Frederick Van der Meulen, was soon in touch with Captain Baker. Captain Baker immediately decided to send out patrols on the main roads, and at his request Robert Johnstone, the Assistant Warden of Naparima Ward, Union and Oropouche, accompanied by Mr. Lange (from Oropouche) rode round the Northern district. They found Tarouba and Corinth Indians just returned from the public road and warned them they were breaking the regulations. They seemed to Mr. Johnstone as yet undecided as to whether they would brave the police and go to San Fernando on Thursday. The Northern districts were also patrolled by James Evans Johnstone, Assistant Clerk of the

Peace in San Fernando, with other gentlemen to act as scouts. They met the Indians of Petit Morne and Usine on the public road a little beyond Ste Madeleine village. They told them they were wrong and they would be punished for it. They took no notice and brushed past the scouts. They understood what was said, but said they would go on in spite of the law. About midnight the Indians from Petit Morne and Usine, no doubt by prearrangement, held a meeting near St. Clements Church with the Indians from Tarouba, Corinth and Cocoyé village. This meeting, at which crucial discussions took place about the Hosay, was still in progress an hour later when a patrolling party came on them, and was again ignored. Though we have no information about the Southern districts, the pattern was no doubt the same.

That Monday night in San Fernando there was an air of trouble brewing. At 9.00 p.m. an alarm was raised. A fire had broken out in the town. The troops however were not called out as it was felt that the police could deal with the situation. In fact the fire was controlled without too much difficulty. On the morning of Tuesday, the 28th October (the Hosay procession being due on the 30th) a large body of labourers came down from Petit Morne to San Fernando ostensibly to complain about their tasks to the Assistant Inspector of Immigrants, but possibly also to size up the situation there and to give and receive information. The Inspector told them that he knew they had been going out unlawfully on the public road and that they would get punished if they were not careful. They said they did not mind. The police might come and shoot them if they liked. This was to

the authorities the most foreboding aspect of these days — the Indians seemed to have made up their mind to do what they considered to be their right and were not in the least concerned about any action the authorities might contemplate. All this information and the reports from the scouts were channelled in to the Inspector Commandant of Police, and gave cause for alarm.

In Captain Baker's words "after that (the night of the 27th) information reached me from all quarters that the coolies were determined to come into San Fernando on the Thursday. I did not think myself they would make the attempt but nevertheless did not lessen precautions to prevent them." Baker did not give full credence to the reports because on the day of the 28th, he, Pasea and Bowles had ridden or driven round several estates in the neighbourhood of Naparima, and found that "everything looked very quiet," and they had advised the Indians very strongly not to break the regulations. In addition, that evening Pasea and Baker had gone on horseback to Ste Madeleine Village and round by Union Hall and again found everything quiet. Clearly, for Baker seeing was believing, but eventually even he was to admit that something serious was in the offing.

Little information is at hand about the situation at this time in other parts of the colony. The Marines from *H.M.S. Dido* who had been sent to Princes Town were being made as visible as possible by shuttling them around by train. In all the districts, mounted scouts were patrolling at night. At Couva, a procession came out on the public road with Tadjahs on the 28th, and Fitz Simons, the Inspector of Police for the Southern districts, who had a small

party of the detachment of the North Staffordshire Regiment in support of the police, arrested five prominent Indians, and no further processions took place. Those arrested were brought before Magistrate Newsome the next morning, and four of them were sentenced to six months imprisonment each.

On Tuesday night in the Northern district outside of San Fernando there was again a meeting of the workers from Tarouba, Corinth, Cocoyé village, Petit Morne and Usine St Madeleine at St. Clement's Church. An attempt was made to stop Petit Morne from joining the others, but in vain. At the meeting which continued till three in the morning, the majority seemed to be in favour of going into San Fernando on the 30th, but there was still some uncertainty about this. Agreement was clearly made to meet again on Wednesday at the same place, even though this in fact was a definite breach of the regulations, but having been subject to no arrest on the Monday night there was more assurance among the leaders that the police would take no action. The position in the Southern districts seems to have been much the same. All this was reported to headquarters.

Convinced at last that there would be trouble on Thursday, that Wednesday Captain Baker was an anxious man, and as it were, chaffing at the bit. He held long discussions with Child, the Magistrate of San Fernando, and both agreed that action should be taken.

That afternoon he telegraphed Pyne the acting Administrator.⁵¹

My situation here at present is as follows:— San Fernando quiet, and as far as I can judge no attempt will be made by

the coolies to enter the town either tomorrow or at any time during the Hosea. At St. Madeleine's Cross, about three miles from the town, the Coolies from some estates have assembled with their tadjah, etc. on Monday and Tuesday nights, and I have cautioned them on both occasions against doing so, as well as having the principal leaders identified for after-proceedings. At the cross, Victoria Village, about one and half miles from the barracks, the same has occurred, and I have pursued the same course. Shall I enforce the Regulations at these places tonight, or shall I confine myself to keeping the coolies out of San Fernando? If the Regulations are enforced tonight there possibly may be a row, but on the other hand it would stop the probability of a row tomorrow and the Regulations would have been enforced.

This telegram Pyne showed to the Attorney General, the legalistic Ludlow, who approved of and concurred in the reply sent by Pyne, which was as follows:-

From your telegram it appears the coolies have actually assembled where they are since Monday and Tuesday nights. This being so, there seems no more reason for enforcing the Regulations in this respect than has existed for two days past, so long as there is no riot. If there is a riot you must take your orders from the magistrate of the district. It will be the duty of the police to frustrate any attempt on the part of the coolies to enter San Fernando.

At 7.30 p.m. Pyne received a second telegram from Captain Baker.

Received telegram. Having warned them for two nights, think effect of allowing them to assemble at cross roads will undoubtedly increase difficulties tomorrow, as I am now informed that their intention is to enter San Fernando. S.J.P. agrees with me. Awaiting instructions.

To which Pyne telegraphed the following reply:-
It is not expedient now to interfere with peaceable assemblage. Adhere to instructions in last telegram.

At 9 p.m. the following telegram was received by Pyne:-

Everything now leads me to think that the coolies will try and enter San Fernando tomorrow. Force quite sufficient to prevent it. Think that Regulations should be enforced to-night. Awaiting instructions. Magistrate agrees with me.

To which Pyne replied:-

One hour ago I telegraphed to you that it was not expedient now to interfere with peaceable assemblage. Adhere to instructions in last telegram. This afternoon informed you that it would be the duty of the police to frustrate the coolies entering San Fernando in defiance of the Regulations. Adhere to these instructions.

James Evans Johnstone was patrolling the Southern district later that night. It was still and quite dark, the moon was just past first quarter. As the patrol was riding near Friendship estate, the sound of distant drums and shouting came across the cane fields to their ears, and as they rode on they saw the torches. The Indians from Bronte, Jordan Hill and Cupar Grange were coming down the high road. They were wildly excited, shouting and beating the drums and with their sticks raised. The patrol drew up their horses across the road. At the crucial moment, however, the manager of Friendship, James Harkin, appeared on the scene and spoke to his headman who withdrew his coolies and the patrol induced the others to return to their estates.

To the North of San Fernando near midnight, the Indians from Petit Morne, Usine and Ste. Madeleine Village, Tarouba, Palmyra, Trois Amis, Reform and Corinth were all out on the public road. Robert Johnstone, the Assistant Warden of Naparima, met them with his patrol. He cautioned them to go back to their estates, telling them that if they attempted to enter San Fernando the next day they would be fired upon. At four o'clock on

Thursday morning, a good hour before the first signs of dawn, Gunpot, an official interpreter, drove up in a cab while the Indians were still assembled. He accompanied Johnstone to meet the Petit Morne headman, 'Najurally', and interpreted for the Assistant Warden, telling the headman that for three nights running he had broken the law and it was time for him to go home. He replied that when the other estates touched his flags he would go home, which some time after he did, but not before important decisions had been taken.

If we are to judge from subsequent events it must have been decided on that Wednesday night that the Hosays would be carried through San Fernando. Apparently no clear decision was arrived at as to the course of action to be followed if the police intervened. It was felt that since they had done nothing about the contravention of the law on the preceding three nights, neither would they act on the day itself. It was determined also (it seems) that the estates would not go in order separately as they were always accustomed to do in the procession, but the men from different estates were to be together in the front, and the women would be at the back or absent from the procession. The men were to carry hakka sticks, long six-foot, wicked-looking poles. As was the case at Carnival when the bands united to fight the police, so here at Hosay they were to unite to force their way into San Fernando. After the end of the meeting the Indians did not return immediately to their estates. Those from Usine Ste. Madeleine returned only at 7.00 a.m. in a state of excitement the manager had never seen equalled on any similar occasion during an experience of eighteen years.

“I felt convinced”, the manager, Peter Abel, was to say later, “that some joint course of action was decided on”. The die was cast and in only a few hours the issue was to be resolved.

On that morning, Thursday 30th, Captain Baker once more cabled Pyne:-

All quiet through the night. Large bodies of coolies assembled at cross roads, not returning to their estates until between four and five a.m. Expressed themselves determined to come into San Fernando. Shall let you know what is going on as soon as possible.

As far away as St. Joseph, some thirty miles from San Fernando word had spread that there would be trouble in the Southern town. In San Fernando itself late that morning there were large numbers of black and coloured creoles belonging to the bands of various nationalities who had rioted at carnival and who were prepared to riot now (at least in the opinion of Captain Baker). Each band had a captain regularly in charge of the band which numbered about one hundred men. One of the Justices of the Peace in the town saw “lots of coolies and creole roughs about.” He heard one creole say “I am glad there is going to be a row in San Fernando today, and there will be a damned row.” Another observer noticed there “roughs who had caused the riot in Port of Spain at carnival time.” Some merchants, from information received about the attitudes of the Indians, closed up their shops. A number of the Indian shopkeepers went out of the town to meet their compatriots. The police and soldiers began to muster for their march to the junctions for the roads leading into town.

Meanwhile, that morning on the estates, the

managers were making frantic last-minute efforts to get their workers to stay on their estates.⁵² Some were successful in this. At Concord, Louis de Verteuil strongly advised 'his people' to abide by the law and though they were enticed by the Indians on the neighbouring estates, as a body they remained at Concord, only a few going off as spectators. At Paradise they had made no tadjah, and the manager Gomez warned them strongly, so all but four men remained on the estate. At Canaan they amused themselves on the estate and threw their Hosay (at the end of the day) into the estate's pond. The Indians on some half dozen other estates made no tadjah and in one or two cases even worked on the estate as usual; but this was altogether exceptional. At Wellington estate, the manager, Bell, promised his workers a sum of money if they would throw their Hosay into the Papure River or in the pond. They told him "No meet 'em police night time; must go Petit Bomy (San Fernando), no go lose 'em place." They were soon joined by the Hosay from Picton.

At Esperance, Paul Vessiny insisted with his workers that the soldiers (whom most of the labourers had seen in town) would fire at them if there was no other way of stopping them going into San Fernando. They were impressively shaken by his arguments and ready to give up the idea of leaving the estate, but just then they saw Wellington's and Picton's Hosays advancing along the road; and the sound of the drums and the shouting drew them along with their Hosay to join their countrymen. At Phillipine estate, Dobson, the manager, had his Indians promise not to go out that day and they asked him to close the gates to prevent any strangers

coming in. He did so. But then he observed the Wellington and Picton Indians on the public road. They had left their tadjahs a little behind. They rushed towards the gate trying to force their way in. There were two riders, Balgopaulsingh and Bundunsingh. Balgopaulsingh had a sword. Dobson asked them where they were going to. They said they had come for the Phillipine Hosay. Dobson replied that the Phillipine Hosay was not going into San Fernando. Balgopaulsingh then said "if Phillipine people are women we will take away their Hosay." Dobson called the estate constables and other people to help to keep them back. There was tremendous confusion and everyone got wildly excited. The estate owner, Gardier, called out from his house to open the gate and let the people do what they liked. The Indians headed by Balgopaulsingh then rushed in and carried the Phillipine Hosay off the estate. Most of the Phillipine labourers followed their Hosay. Dobson still tried to stop them, shouted to them that they would be shot if they went to San Fernando. Balgopaulsingh called out in turn to the people: "It is only powder they have got in the guns; they cannot shoot people like fowls." And off they went in wild triumph. At Retrench, the workers left their estate and carried their Hosay to Ciperio Cross. The manager of their estate George Ghent followed them and begged them in God's name not to persist in going to San Fernando as they would be shot. Their reply was (one and all) "What the Phillipine coolies do, we will do." The Phillipine and Wellington Indians then appeared shortly afterwards and went in the direction of San Fernando and Ghent turned despairingly home.

At La Ressource when the manager told the Indians they would be shot down if they attempted to carry their Hosay into San Fernando, they replied that "they didn't care a damn" and went out to the main road. At Bien Venue, the manager was ill so the labourers went on the high road to San Fernando. As they passed La Plaisance, the workers from that estate rushed out to join them. James McQuaide, manager of Reform, told his Indians just before he left the estate that morning, "Keep in mind that you must not go into San Fernando; so sure as you go, so sure you will be shot." Their answer was: "If Petit Morne go, we must." And Petit Morne went.

William Williams was a Baptist missionary residing in San Fernando.⁵³ About midday on that fateful Thursday he climbed close to the top of the San Fernando Hill, a sharp peak of argillite rising in forested splendour to nearly 600 feet, from which he could get a clear view of the plains around. The ripe canes had been reaped and the new canes were still fairly low, so he was able to see the movements on the roads leading to the town, with the help of his powerful field glasses. He saw the Indians leave Wellington and Picton estates. A few minutes later he observed the workers from Lennon's and Rowbottom's estates. On passing Retrench they were joined by the Indians of that estate and about half past one they reached the Cross. The Wellington and Picton Indians appeared to halt opposite Phillipine and were joined by the gang of that estate. They continued their way and were shortly joined by a large body of Indians from the lagoon districts. All these proceeded towards San Fernando and met the other division at the Cross. The whole body,

thousands strong, moved on towards the town in spite of the efforts of two mounted policemen who were evidently using their best endeavours to get them back. They moved slowly and deliberately, growing closer to the town. The sound of their drums and their shouts came now to Williams' ears. He could see the long hakka sticks they carried — a veritable sea of sticks — and their wild gesticulations. Then they came in sight of a group of armed police and a line of military and this, far from deterring them, spurred them on in a growing rush towards the guns.

The police and military had been in position some time before the coming of the Indians which was about 2.15 o'clock. About 1.30 a report had come to police barracks from the scouts who had been sent out earlier that morning, that the Indians were advancing rapidly on San Fernando from all directions, drumming and dancing and whirling their way ever closer. Captain Baker, from returns received, estimated the probable numbers of people coming from the Northern districts as 2,500; from the South 4,000-5,000 and from Guaracara and the East 1,900; (immediately to the West of San Fernando is the sea); and he disposed of his men accordingly. He sent ten armed police under Sergeant Superintendent Giblan to the junction of the Point-a-Pierre and St. Joseph Village roads on the Northern approach to the town; and went himself to the junction of the circular and Princes Town roads by Mon Repos estate to cover the Eastern approach. The police were all armed with carbines and had twenty rounds of buckshot cartridge per man. Major Bowles marched his soldiers to the number of twenty to the guard house at

Cipero Street, and a party of armed police also twenty in number were sent to the same place to cover the road from the South. While they were there with Mr. Child, the Magistrate, and Gunpot his interpreter, word had come that some two thousand Indians accompanied by creoles dressed as Indians and armed with hakka sticks and cutlasses were playing at the cross roads near Union Hall. It was said that they were determined to advance on San Fernando. Two messengers on horseback, Police Constable Scott and Constable Jacob were sent in quick succession to warn them not to come to the town. The messengers returned and reported that the Indians would not listen to what was said and were advancing. The soldiers and police (now only fourteen in number since six had been sent to quell a disturbance in town) had at once proceeded to the gate leading into a house called Les Efforts, some nine hundred metres from the guard house. There, after the police sergeant had consulted with Major Bowles, the armed police were drawn up across the road in a single rank and the military at about fifteen paces behind in double ranks. The men were hardly in order before several riders came galloping up saying that the Indians were advancing rapidly and would not stop. In about ten minutes more the procession of Indians had come in sight crossing an iron bridge near the cross roads. They had then appeared over the final rise before the police position and had come on steadily preceded by a great many creoles, possibly over a hundred of them, also armed with sticks who came on ahead up to the police and military and stood all round and especially behind them. The Indians, as they saw the police and

military, had come on with a yell and a rush, their front ranks as far as could be seen composed only of strong young men from different estates armed with formidable hakka sticks, the Indians' favourite weapon, six or seven feet long and heavily weighted at one end with iron or brass rings and nails. They also carried sticks with cutlasses at the end. Many creoles and Indians observing affairs from a safe position behind the police panicked and ran back towards the town crying 'the coolies are coming. The coolies are coming. The police have run.' Major Bowles gave the military the order to fix bayonets, and the Sergeant made the police fix swords on their carbines. In one last attempt a mounted policeman rode forward and ordered the people to keep back. They took no notice of him and he returned. The situation was extremely critical.

At this juncture, when the Indians were some sixty to eighty metres off, Arthur Child, the Stipendiary Justice of the Peace, advanced with Gunpot his interpreter and two policemen and tried to obtain silence, holding up his hands and calling out three times, Gunpot at the same time shouting out in Hindustani and telling the people to keep back. But they were still waving their weapons, jumping and dancing and shouting Hosay, Hosay. The confusion was indescribable. As Major Bowles put it 'the coolies were making a great noise, and those in front were dancing and leaping in a most diabolical manner'. Giving up his attempt to stop them, Arthur Child hastily read the Proclamation commonly called the Riot Act (warning them that they were liable to be shot), which few if any heard, and rapidly retired dodging the blows from the sticks

aimed at him. Gunpot was submerged in the surging mass.

The Indians were now some thirty metres distant from the police and closing the gap rapidly. The breathless Child asked the Sergeant if he was loaded. He replied "No." "Then", said Child, "load and fire." The Sergeant, a Barbadian, six years in the Trinidad police force and who had served in the West India regiments, with great coolness and assurance, then turned to his men and gave the order: "Load." The yelling crowd still pressed on, for though those in front may have wished to halt, the Indians in the rear were pushing forward thinking the ammunition was blank. And with the *melée* a mere twenty metres off, the Sergeant shouted "Fire".

The carbines roared and smoked as the police fired a volley of buckshot. Scattering, it hit numerous men in the crowd. The mob stopped their advance, but the pressure from the back forced a few forward. Sergeant McCollin gave the order for independent firing and almost immediately a half-volley rang out, and as the police stepped forward there succeeded a series of running shots, some policemen firing three times. The mob threw down their *tadjahs* in the middle of the road and scattered all over the cane pieces and down the road fleeing in wild terror. When the Sergeant gave the order to cease fire, five or six men could be seen lying dead, or wounded and writhing on the road, with their oozing blood cruelly staining their white garments. The police in single rank made a rush and the few remaining Indians fled, massing eventually on Union Hall Bridge and after a short consultation dispersed.⁵⁴ The police now advanced three or four hundred metres down the

road and took up another position where they remained till the last Indian was out of sight; then they returned to their original position, and the work of removing the wounded to hospital began. They were carried away to the San Fernando hospital insensible or groaning, in the police ambulance cart and in other carts lent in the emergency. Nearly fifty men had been found in the cane pieces on the road sides, many only slightly wounded. Four men had been killed. Major Bowles remained on the ground till 4.30, then retired to the Ciperó guard house and at 5.30 returned to police barracks. Some of the terrified Indians ran almost the whole way back to the estates. What became of the Tadjahs we do not know; in the face of the present massacre the commemoration of past killings had suddenly become of no significance.

Meanwhile, Captain Baker was still stationed at the junction of the Circular and Princes Town roads near Mon Repos estate, which he had reached since two o'clock, his men drawn up at one side of the road, leaving a free passage to the public. He saw no Indians in the form of a procession, only a few were passing into the town, of whom he took no notice. A great number of the lower orders of San Fernando collected near the police. It struck the Captain as significant that small parties of Indians came down and had a look at his force and then returned. About three quarters of an hour after he had taken up his position, several people, creoles and Indians, left San Fernando going eastwards and at the same time Baker got news that there had been firing at Ciperó Street. Information was also given him that the Indians were advancing on the east road. The captain

asked Bhoodoosingh and Ramdeen, two shopkeepers of San Fernando whom he had heard had considerable influence with the labourers, to use it and endeavour to prevent them from continuing, an activity that could only lead to a repetition of the just executed massacre.

The two Indians, long resident in Trinidad and well known and respected by their compatriots, had heard the news of the shooting and had already tried to stop the crowd gathered at Ne Plus Ultra and Cocoyé village, from coming in to San Fernando. They had told the labourers to go back, that "plenty people had been shot." Some had wanted to stop, others shouted "Hosay, Hosein, go on, go on!" Some said "they were only going on the road, that they were not going to fight and if they were not allowed to pass they would put down the Hosay and return." A creole told them: "Go on, your countryman telling you lie; they are not going to shoot you." Some old Indians had said "the Government will not interfere with us if we do no harm, it looks upon us as its children." And the labourers had brushed past the shopkeepers, who had then ridden back to the road junction. Now, at Captain Baker's request, they made another attempt to stop the crowd; but in vain. Finally Bhoodoosingh got off his horse to try with his hunter whip to force them back. He siezed the Petit Morne Hosay and begged them to stop, but was carried along by the crowd, till fearing he would be shot with them by the police, he got out from among the Indians into the cane piece at the side of the road.

By this time, the shouting and the noise of the Hosay procession could be clearly heard by the police and the tops of the tadjahs in brilliant shimmering colour could be seen over the fresh green of the

canes, advancing steadily along the Royal Road towards the town. Captain Baker wheeled his men across the road and fixed swords. Then told off his men into sections of five, twenty men in front and twenty in rear, each party in double rank. He ordered the front rank of the right half-company (one sergeant, one corporal and ten men) to fire one round (from a kneeling position). He cautioned them to fire low, the men to remain at the slope except those commanded to fire, this being to prevent the possibility of further firing unless ordered. He handed a copy of the Riot Act to Johnstone, Justice of the Peace, and he and James Drennan went on foot towards the approaching procession. The Indians and creoles coming towards San Fernando ahead of the procession in loose order, seeing the two determined men approaching ran off the road into the cane piece. Many of them were armed with sticks. When the two men had proceeded about two hundred metres from where they had left the police, they stopped, and holding up their hands as they got within a few feet of the Indians, they commanded silence. A few of the men in the front appeared by their gestures to wish for silence, the great majority pushed on and continued shouting and throwing their sticks in the air. They were chiefly armed with hakka sticks. The Indians were about two thousand in number and much excited and approached the men so rapidly that they were carried along with the crowd. The different estate gangs were all mixed up, an unprecedented occurrence. There was not a woman or child to be seen. Johnstone and Drennan and the two Indian shopkeepers did all they could to stop the procession, the latter two speaking in



Sword Stick

their own language and telling the labourers that many had been killed at the Les Efforts entrance. But they would not stop and cried out: "Let them (the police) shoot us too"; and there were general cries of "we will go to San Fernando." They could now see the police drawn up across the road and blocking all passage, yet advancing as rapidly as ever. As they were now coming close on the police, Johnstone read the Riot Act in a loud tone of voice. He was all the time being pushed backward by the people, who still advanced while he was reading. One of them made two blows at him with a hakka stick, which would have silenced him for good, but in both cases the blows were warded off by other Indians. Drennan then pushed his way through the crowd and got up on the bank and into a cane piece. He shouted to Johnstone to come out as he would interfere with the police action. Just then, to add to the confusion Bhoodoosingh's riderless horse dashed past.

The crowd was within twenty five metres of the police. Johnstone, now back in the safety of the police, told Baker "I have read the Riot Act; it is not safe to let them come any nearer." Baker shouted out to the crowd to stop, but if they understood him they paid no heed. Indeed, they were in a very excited state, rushing forward evidently with the intention of breaking the ranks of the police. In addition, there were large crowds with sticks close up to the rear rank, who from the look of them would have been quite ready to attack the police in the rear if they were engaged in the front. Seeing this, Baker decided that his position was most critical and with "the knowledge and concurrence of the Justice of the Peace" he gave the order to fire.

Ten shots rang out. At close range, the buckshot did terrible execution. The first and second tadjahs fell with men under them. Men in the front rows dropped bleeding to the ground. There was a sudden deathly silence. Not a word was spoken; not a sound was heard. All that vast assembly stood perfectly still. Then within seconds as though a spell was broken, once more murmuring and then shouting began, and movement and life came back to all but a few of the crowd. In the back of the procession some old Indians said "they are only trying to frighten us, the ammunition is blank"; and though some knew they were wrong, others in the crowd took them at their word; and with the initial shock over, the people seemed inclined to rush on the police. Captain Baker called out that if they came on he would fire again. One Indian came forward dancing excitedly in front of the police, between their very bayonets. He seemed under the influence of ganga and was pulled out of the way by Drennan, to whom there appeared to be others in the same drugged and excited condition.

The Justice of the Peace then went up to the crowd and advised those in front to go away. They replied (many of them being from Petit Morne estate) "shoot him all man" which means let us all be shot. Behind the front rank he saw some ten bodies lying on the ground, and reported this to Baker, who sent out Dr. Knox to see what could be done. As the mob still stood their ground, about thirty paces off from the police, once more Bhoodoosingh and Ramdin endeavoured to persuade them to depart. On the contrary there were others in the crowd

urging them on against the police. For over an hour the crowd stood stationary, swayed in neither direction, and then gradually and almost imperceptibly they dispersed and disappeared. The scenario was quite different from that of the first shooting where within a minute and a half almost no Indians were to be seen.

Dr. Knox and Drs. Eakin and Knaggs went out among the wounded and worked with untiring zeal staunching their flow of blood and alleviating their sufferings. Leon de Gannes made arrangements to transport the wounded, and they went off in carts with their friends accompanying them to the Colonial Hospital. About an hour and half after the shooting all the Indians had cleared off; and shortly after, darkness descended on the scene.

The Northern approach to San Fernando, as we have seen, was guarded by Sergeant Giblan and ten armed policemen, but the news of the fate of the others had effectively stopped this band of Indians; they threw their tadjahs into the Guaracara River and dispersed.⁵⁵

The reaction of the newspapers to the massacre was varied. The *Port of Spain Gazette* of 15th November justifying the verdict of the Coroner in the subsequent inquest wrote that the Magistrate was "fully justified" in giving the order to fire and that: In every well-regulated community, but especially in countries possessing an ignorant and semi-savage, and therefore excitable and easily misled peasantry, the supermacy of the law should be upheld at all times and regardless of consequences . . . As to the cause of the coolies' utter contempt for the authorities and their disregard of breaking the law, the whole evidence proves clearly what we have stated in former articles, viz. that the coolies had by reason of the weak vacillating policy of the

Government, the utter incompetency of the head of the Immigration department and the extraordinary decisions both in the higher and inferior courts, become convinced that they could when they pleased, do as they pleased, regardless of all law and authority; in fact in what they attempted to do at the boundaries of San Fernando, they only repeated what they have been doing, and have been supported in doing, on the estates for months past, that is, taking law into their own hands. We repeat again what we have so often said before, viz. that had the coolies been stopped when they took to leaving their work on the slightest pretence and defiantly marching into town, armed with cutlasses and hoes; had strict justice been meted out to them when in order to vary their usual 'wife chopping' they took to beating overseers and managers; had we never had such verdicts as that one which our readers will remember we called 'a miscarriage of justice' then we say, the coolies never would have placed themselves in such a position as that in which so many of them lost their lives on the 30th ultimo. Such is the conclusion at which we have arrived and it is one which any independent and impartial inquiry will unquestionably confirm.

The *New Era* of November 3rd took a much more moderate line.

For days past public opinion had oscillated as to the intended conduct of the coolies. There is no denying the fact that recently they had been in a state of ferment from causes other than religious sentiment; there had been a tension in the relationship between them and their employers; they had not scrupled to take the law into their own hands; and many timid minds had pictured the possibility of another Cawnpore being re-enacted here: the approaching Hosein, which in itself is always a most exciting cause to the Indian mind, added much to the gravity of the situation, and, as we think, without being called alarmists, that the Government would have been wanting in duty if they had sat with folded hands after the premonitory symptoms of Coolie rebellion during the past fortnight. It was said, and as had been proved afterwards, that they had been secretly arming themselves for a bold resistance to legal authority and had openly uttered threats quite in

harmony with the character of these children of the desert.

The news of the slaughter of the coolies have(*sic*) caused a certain sensation in Port of Spain where public opinion does not approve of the policy: the Government are deemed to have acted with haste and undue severity.

On the 2nd November, the Administrator, John Scott Bushe, telegraphed the Right Hon. Earl of Derby as follows:

Regret to inform you of serious outbreak of coolie immigrants; police compelled to open fire; twelve dead, about one hundred wounded; majority slightly wounded. Coolie immigrants completely dispersed; all quiet.⁵⁶

On the 6th November, he sent by packet boat (steamer) a full report with a number of enclosures to the Secretary of State which arrived in London on the 27th of that month. On the same mail boat, a letter describing the incidents in vivid if inaccurate detail arrived from J.E. André, a prominent French creole once resident in India, addressed to the Secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Immediately the secretary, Chas. H. Allen, sent the letter with a stiff covering note of his own to the editor of *The Times*. Next day it was published in that well known newspaper under the heading 'MASSACRE OF COOLIES IN TRINIDAD'. "The atrocities in Trinidad reported below," Allen had written, "require no comment of mine, as they will no doubt form the subject of a strict Government Inquiry." Indeed, the publicity given in *The Times* resulted in a swift inquiry into the matter being instituted by the Government. After consultation with his staff, the Secretary of State for the Colonies telegraphed Sir H. W. Norman, the Governor of Jamaica and a long time resident of India, asking him to undertake an inquiry; and this was followed by an official letter (which he received on his arrival in

Trinidad) on the 16th December giving him his official terms of reference — “you will inquire fully into the circumstances of this lamentable occurrence and the causes which led to it, and the sufficiency of the precautions taken to prevent disturbances on the occasion of the Hosein festival.”

Sir H.W. Norman arrived in Trinidad via Barbados on the evening of the 31st December and was met by the Administrator, John Scott Bushe, who took him to Government House, which was unoccupied and where every provision had been made for the Commissioner and his private Secretary.⁵⁷ Beginning on the morning of the 1st January and until he embarked on the return mail steamer for St. Thomas on the afternoon of the 7th January, he was engaged in prosecuting the inquiry, reading many documents and interviewing some thirty-four persons. He also visited San Fernando for the purpose of seeing the two points at which the police were posted.

He wrote his report at sea. In it he analysed the causes of the riot. He considered that neither the living nor the working conditions of the Indians nor the loss of \$56,000 invested by large numbers of them with the Rev. Richard, a presbyterian clergyman nor any other grievance felt by the coolies, have, I am convinced, had anything to say to the attempts to infringe the laws with respect to processions. I am led to believe however, that coolies have been induced rather to oppose authority, by being at times much indulged by an amount of consideration which could not permanently be extended to them. I think, too, that the circumstance of bodies of coolies being allowed to come to the Immigration Office to prefer complaints in an overbearing way, carrying their cutlasses and other agricultural implements, without punishment, has encouraged among them

the notion that they are powerful and could do what they please They should be firmly but kindly dealt with.

He felt that the disobedience to the regulations was quite deliberate.

I have no doubt that the great bulk of the Coolies perfectly understood the regulations, and that with possibly few exceptions, all who persisted in going forward were determined to disobey them Some of the coolies (he had examined some of them during his stay in Trinidad) intended to go right up to the police, despite warning, but allege that if their advance was then forbidden they would have gone back.

In conclusion he recommended first "that though I am much in favour of reserving most offices in Colonies for qualified natives of the Colonies the particular appointment of Protector, where coolies are numerous seems to me one that would advantageously be filled from India." And secondly, "since there can be no doubt that the coolies feel their power, or rather, I should say, have an exaggerated idea of that power, and that concessions would now be looked on as weakness, I would suggest that the Government 'strictly carry out the present rule'."

It is difficult at this distance in time of one hundred years, to judge the situation with entire accuracy, and it might be considered rather daring to contradict the conclusions of an official commission, nevertheless, the passage of time can cast new light on the past and add a certain objectivity to judgment. One cannot help but feel that the conclusions of the commissioner were not completely free from bias, and that his stay of one short week was not altogether adequate for an analysis of the situation.

It would appear incredible that none of the grievances of the Indians "had anything to say to the

attempts to infringe the laws with respect to processions." In 1884 there was a great build-up of worker unrest which surely bore some relation to the Hosein massacre. A modern historian, Kelvin Singh, goes to the other extreme to the Commissioner, and writes: "Yet when the Indians *had revolted against their working conditions* on the sugar plantations (stress mine) in 1884-5 they met with universal condemnation." Truth may sometimes lie on one extreme or another, but here it seems to lie somewhere in between. Certainly the planters felt that a case could be made (however incorrectly, in their view) that the collision of the Indians and the police was due to the illtreatment of the Indians and they were prepared to counter this case. The Commissioner wrote in his report:

'I should mention that three gentlemen of influence (Messrs. John Cumming, J. Fenwick and Leon Agostini) representatives of the interests of the owners of estates, waited upon me and begged that they might be allowed to submit their representations if in the course of my inquiries I was led to attribute the collision to the treatment of the Coolies by the planters or their agents'.⁵⁸

In his evidence before the Commissioner, the Rev. Grant noted that "the loss of the coolies money through Mr. Richards had no effect on the Hosay; the coolies have behaved with excessive moderation concerning their loss." One could perhaps conjecture that their frustration at the loss of the money though originally suppressed found an outlet in the Hosay riots.

An attempt could also be made to differentiate between the clash at Les Efforts and that at Mon Repos. In the first, the procession was normally led by the Indians of Phillipine estate. This time they had

certainly come out reluctantly. Haracksingh writes of this: "Sookoo the Phillipine driver (and originator of the petition in favour of the procession passing through San Fernando) cannot be accounted for at this moment; he must have been caught between his manager's orders to remain on the estate and his own enthusiasm to join the procession on the public road." One Phillipine Indian testified later: "I went because the others went"; and with the accustomed leading estate hesitant, there was no stiff backbone of resistance, so that when the shooting occurred everyone fled within minutes.

At Mon Repos, matters were quite different. The Indians knew that some of their number had already been killed and still they persisted in going on. Even when they were shot down they did not run. There seemed to be in this group a core of resistance centered around the workers from Petit Morne. And so, as far as we can, at this distance of time, we will examine carefully the role of Petit Morne estate in the Hosay massacre.

The first thing that might strike one as strange was that though Petit Morne was accustomed to lead the procession from the Mon Repos direction to San Fernando, they did not take part in the petition presented by Sookoo. Possibly this was due to jealousy, but perhaps also because they were concerned at the time with more fundamental matters. The conditions as regards sanitation on their estate were bad (as we have seen). They were not satisfied with their conditions of work. There was a strike at Petit Morne in 1883. Child, the Stipendiary Magistrate for San Fernando, mentions another disturbance: "On one occasion a disturbance arose at

Petit Morne, Mr. Johnstone's residence. I went and told the people to send a deputation of two or three to the Protector of Immigrants if they thought they had a grievance. Instead of doing this they went up in a body." They again went up in a body on the day before the Hosay, and they were the ones who encouraged other estates to come out and to build their tadjahs. Mattadeen, the unofficial interpreter on the estate, and a house boy at Petit Morne testified: 'When they went to get the sacred earth I went amongst them and explained these orders (about not leaving the estate for Hosay and crossing the public road). To get the sacred earth they crossed the high road. The coolies said Government has always allowed the tadjahs before, why does it want to stop them now? From what they said I concluded they meant to disobey the orders, and I informed Mr. Johnstone, the manager of the estate of this'. On the Tuesday previous to the Hosay they were even more determined and told the interpreter Gunpot, who said they might go to gaol if they broke the law: "Dead one time, can't die twice" and "If they want to put us in gaol they can do so; if they want to kill us they can kill us." Of the Indians shot, seventeen were from Petit Morne (the largest number by far from any estate), and though the Indians from all estates were mixed up together the Petit Morne tadjah was in front. The authorities had refused two requests for processions to cross the main roads, and the Petit Morne Indians were apparently convinced that, just as they had stood up for their rights at work which were threatened with erosion, so too with their rights at Hosay. Anyway, they were so badly off they had little to lose. In modern terms, they

simply could not take the pressure any more.

Perhaps in this matter too, there was a little more organisation than appeared on the surface. Gunpot, the official interpreter, claimed that the Indians "were egged on to resist the law by coolies and creoles"; Child testified: "The roughs I saw out on the 30th October were some of those who had taken part in the Carnival riots, and had expressed their determination to help the coolies. I believe that many roughs came from Port of Spain. These roughs belong to organised bands, which we have tried hard to break up." One newspaper report claimed that the Indians had secretly armed themselves beforehand. And there was certainly organisation. Until within half a mile of San Fernando the women and children were mixed with the men, but then they fell into the rear and went into the fields on either side. There seemed to have been an unusual number of hakka sticks being carried, also some maces, and cutlasses, evidently weapons carried, if not for a clash with the police, at least with the intention of intimidating them. One need not envisage this confrontation with the police as having any end other than that of forcing the way to San Fernando. The victory would have been symbolic, the retaining of a customary right, but one which, in the unity it provided among the Indians in Trinidad was of great practical importance. The Indian mutiny was triggered by a religious matter of bullets smeared with pigs grease, but it embraced much more. The Indian 'revolt' in Trinidad was focussed on a religious rite but expressed a general attitude of rebellion inclusive of the world of work. Thus the authorities in Trinidad were perhaps not so far wrong when they preferred

to regard it almost entirely in terms of a power struggle (and consequently gaoled a number of ring-leaders, creoles and Indians, for inciting others to break the law; and held no investigation of Indian grievances).

In the aftermath of this 1884 débâcle the reaction was for closer Governmental regulation and even discontinuation of the festival.⁵⁹ The very regulations which had precipitated the clash remained exactly in force. In 1885 there were the same police and military arrangements as for the Hosay in 1884. Some creoles were arrested for interfering with the Hosay festival, but from this year until after 1900 the Hosay celebrations continued on a reduced scale and were held quietly without any disturbances of any sort. In short the massacres of 1884 had important results.

As a number of officials commented at the inquest into the 1884 killings, since that incident the Indians had become once more quiet and amenable, 'much improved in demeanour', while before 'they had become very overbearing'.

There was only one strike in 1885, and few throughout the eighties in spite of the worsening economic situation. The competition for jobs along with the strict enforcement of the Hosay regulations banning the creoles from taking part, served to split the creoles from the Indians. If 1884 was, as it would appear to me, a year of revolt for the Indians, it was a premature revolt and served only to bring them more into a position of subservience which was to continue into the early 20th century. Nevertheless it served a useful purpose, in forcing the Indian population to concentrate on agriculture

and business, on the accumulation of personal wealth, which gave to many individuals a power and prestige which would later redound to the benefit of the whole immigrant group. It also gave them time to integrate into the wider community so that when they did emerge as a force in the political consciousness of the island, they were regarded as Trinidadians rather than as the strange wild aliens of the 1880's; a threat to the very existence of the colony.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Whites

Victorian Trinidad was a rigidly structured society, as we have seen, and no sector was more hierarchical than the white. The Portuguese, for example, were classified almost automatically as lower class, along with the few 'poor whites' (generally of Irish descent) who had emigrated from other West Indian islands. The middle class, overseers, shop assistants, clerks, non-commissioned officers in the police, were mainly English or Scottish expatriates with a few creoles, and could move up to the upper class by marriage or acquisition of wealth. The upper class, which some writers refer to as 'the white élite', (though probably this term would not have been recognised or acknowledged at that time), dominated social, economic and political life in Trinidad. It consisted of two main groups.

First, the British officials in the most important posts and with them the wealthy English creoles, that is, Trinidadians born of English parents or Englishmen who had made Trinidad their home and who were creoles by adoption. The second group were the French creoles. More numerous than the English, they were mainly whites of French descent; but the term was generally understood to include people of Spanish, Irish, Corsican and German descent, and almost invariably Roman Catholics. As was the case with the English creoles, people born in Europe and habituated by a long residence to the French creole society were considered creoles.

The French creoles dominated the white *élite* society and set its tone to a large extent. They were not merely European descended people in the tropics. They were very much a part of Caribbean society and in Trinidad its most formative factor, determining the attitudes of Trinidadian society for better or for worse, and establishing particularly at this time, new Trinidadian viewpoints and ways of life as distinct from the Metropolitan. Sometimes their influence was for evil, as Louis de Verteuil wrote of the white Trinidad creoles: "In the mass, however, creoles may be characterised as improvident, fickle disliking agriculture and other occupations which require exertion and steadiness of purpose."¹ Consequently and as the patois proverb of the time put it: 'Outi gros cabrit qu'a sauter, petit cabrit qu'a passer' (Where the big goat jumps, the little goat must pass) the black creoles following their leaders (though not like sheep!) showed to a large extent the same attitudes towards work and life. Many French creole families who had fled from the proclamation of the

Black Republic of Haiti had established estates in the La Brea, Guapo, and Oropouche areas.² They and their children brought with them a terrible immorality and a spirit of debauchery, so much so that La Brea and Oropouche were known as the Sodom and Gomorrah of Trinidad. By 1880 the magnificent sugar plantations were ruined or were the property of the English, but the planters' evil practices left a legacy of irreligion among the working people and peasant cultivators of that area.

But the influence of the white creoles was for good also.³ Bryan Edwards in his *History of the British West Indies* admits that the white creoles had "a turn of mind and disposition unfriendly to mental improvement", but he attributes this to the climate, and continues:

I cannot therefore admit that the creoles in general possess less capacity and stability of mind than the natives of Europe, much less can I allow that they fall short of them in those qualities of the heart which render man a blessing to all around him. Generosity to each other, and a high degree of compassion and kindness towards their inferiors and dependants, distinguish the creoles in a very honourable manner. If they are proud, their pride is allied to no meanness.

Thus through the influence of the élite, attitudes, customs, ways of life became more distinctly Trinidadian and less European, so that a French creole (and to a lesser extent an English creole) who returned to Europe found himself marginal to the Metropolitan culture. That is not to say that the élite created the Trinidad culture; far from it — but they borrowed from many sources and adapted and adopted and moulded their own way of life, and this slowly permeated down to the rest of society, creating a Trinidadian outlook and environment.

To give a few examples: of the Arawak customs the hammock was adopted whilst most others perished. The Ibo *fou fou* of the slaves, with an addition of ochroe and sometimes herbs, was glorified into the French creole *cou cou*; the traditional French brandy gave way to the creole 'punch'; the Venezuelan alpagattas became the casual wear of the creoles as alpagates. Creoles like Garcia and de Bossiere defended even the bamboola and the East Indian drums against the attack of the English Attorney General Ludlow, because they belonged to the Trinidadian people. In religion, the devotion to the coloured Virgin of Siparia, La Divina Pastora, or Siparia Maie as the East Indian called her, was common to Amerindians, creoles of all colours, and East Indians, and took on peculiar local forms in spite often of the opposition of the French or Irish priests. And it was particularly at this time that the élite gave the lead in identifying themselves and other creoles as Trinidadians, a phenomenon which was to lead in the 1890's to the political slogan 'Trinidad for the Trinidadians'.

Nevertheless, in spite of this tendency to unity it is a fact that the white élite remained at a distance from the rest of the population for reasons which nowadays one would classify as racist, but which then would never have been viewed by the élite in that light. Borde gives the traditional explanation of the French creoles in his book:

The free coloured men stood almost in the same relation to the white as the European bourgeois did to the nobility under the feudal system. In this way the white race in America was formed into an aristocracy of skin, very much like that of blood which then existed in Europe. Moreover, the free

coloured men, like the bourgeois of the eighteenth century, who came to look upon the French nobility as a vain prejudice of birth, have come to consider the distinctions established between the whites and themselves as a stupid prejudice of colour.⁴

In modern terms, what appears on the surface to be entirely a distinction based on colour was in practice dependent largely on class and economic status, as illustrated when, occasionally, a member of the white *élite* married a slightly coloured person (who by virtue of their marriage would then become white) their child would be accepted in society. The old French creole 'maitresse de famille' would (though with great reluctance) have allowed her daughter to marry such a person because in spite of his colour he was (let us say) a de Rochefoucauld; while if the daughter thought (God forbid!) of marrying a (white) Portuguese, that would have been equated with such dreadful disasters as small-pox, earthquake or apostasy. That is, class distinction was almost coextensive with colour distinction but not based entirely on it. There was, it seems, little hypocrisy about this, but a constant refusal to view matters from the point of view of race. Race was seldom mentioned in polite society and in the numerous personal letters I have perused from this period, class enters into them frequently enough, but never race. There was no attempt to justify racial discrimination (as at present in South Africa) on religious grounds. The distinction was mainly social so that in business and politics the white and coloured could meet on equal grounds and coloureds could be accepted there on a personal basis.

The whites, then, were the dominant class socially and from the economic viewpoint also, and under the administration of the British Government, they were to some extent the ruling class as well. The form their 'revolt' was to take was to be a constitutional one. The group of whites (and initially some upper class coloured) who had little or no say in the Government, attempted to have the constitution changed to give a wider base for representative government, to wrest some control of the Legislative Council from the British officials and from the sugar interest. No definite party attempted this task, and the aims of those involved were disparate and so very suitably they were called the Reform movement rather than the Reform party. To understand what they were trying to accomplish it is necessary to examine in detail the system of Central Government in Trinidad in the early 1880's. This was described by Louis de Verteuil in his book *Trinidad* published in 1884. Trinidad is a "crown colony", under the control of the Colonial Office, the government of which is administered, locally, through a resident Governor, assisted by an island executive, and a legislative council. On several previous occasions attempts had been made to obtain a representative form of government; and for the last time, in the year 1853, but without success; they were opposed both here and at the Colonial Office.

Executive Council. — It consists of the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General, and the Commander of the Forces, under the presidency of the Governor. It is a mere consultative body, which the Governor calls together on important occasions in order to have their opinion, which he may follow or not, as he pleases.

Legislative Council. — This council consists of the Governor, as president, and fourteen members, of whom six are "official" and eight "non-official". The official members

are the Colonial Secretary, the Chief Judge, the Attorney-General, and the Protector of Immigrants. The non-official members must be British-born subjects; they are nominees of the Crown, and chosen from among the most respectable inhabitants of the colony.

The legislative council discusses and adopts such ordinances and measures as are introduced or proposed by the Governor, or any members of the council. To become law, all measures passed by the council must receive Her Majesty's sanction. The legislative council discusses also and votes the estimates for each following year. The items may be ranged under two heads, viz.; the fixed and the un-fixed establishments. The estimates, as regards the fixed establishment, are laid before the board as a mere matter of form, and are not submitted for discussion. Members, however, may propose alterations in the shape of resolutions, which are transmitted to the Colonial Office for consideration. The unfixed establishment is regulated every year. All motions for money must come through the Governor.

There are regular meetings of the board on the first day of each month, or on the day following, should the first be a Sunday, and at any other time the Governor may think proper to call the members specially together; and the board is to sit from day to day until the standing business is disposed of; the president and eight members to form a quorum. In the absence of His Excellency, the senior member presides. The sittings are public, and the proceedings reported in the newspapers of the colony.

The Governor is invested with extensive powers; and, as he has the uncontrolled appointment of all officers who are not on the fixed establishments, he can suspend and dismiss them without referring to the Colonial Office. All others he can suspend from office — even the members of council — until Her Majesty's pleasure is made known. He may require the attendance at the Council-Board of all the members, and exact that of the official section. The chief judge being by position the only independent member of this section, the Governor may be said to have the command of the votes of the officials; and he can, with a little stratagem and his own casting vote, form a majority on any important question he

wishes to carry or oppose. He has also the control of the public funds; and the receiver-general, it seems, is justified in paying out any sum of money on the Governor's warrant. By royal instructions he is not authorised — except in urgent cases — to order the payment of any sum of money above £ 200, without special authority from the secretary of state, and previous sanction by the board. He can also veto any measure passed by the legislative council.⁵

“It was the great myth of Crown Colony Government that the Governors and English officials were impartial administrators and at the same time the special protectors of the poor.”⁶ The Crown was the representative of the unrepresented masses; hence the need to keep power and responsibility in the hands of the Governor. But in practice the Governor and officials were far from impartial. Socially, the Governor and officials mixed with the wealthy creole planters and merchants, especially the English sector, and acquired their outlook and views. In addition, some officials, both British and creoles were themselves planters. And since it was from among propertied men that the unofficial members of the Legislative Council were appointed, their views often coincided with those of the officials.

Between 1862 and 1898 there was an unofficial majority in the Council. This had been conceded on the condition that if the unofficials consistently combined to oppose the Government, extra officials were to be nominated. Moreover, in 1868 the Duke of Buckingham, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in a circular despatch had defined the functions of the nominated unofficial member as follows:

He will naturally understand that holding his seat by nomination of the Crown, he has been selected for it in the

expectation and in the confidence that he will co-operate with the Crown in its general policy, and not oppose the Crown on any important question without strong and substantial reasons; but of the validity of these reasons he will be himself the judge.⁷

In practice, the unofficials rarely combined to vote against the Government; there were few issues on which they strongly disagreed with the official policy, and unanimity was hindered by religious and national divisions. When there was serious disagreement, especially in matters involving taxes and expenditure, considerable deference was shown to the unofficials, the Colonial Office sometimes siding with them even though they might have lost the vote in the Council; since the Secretary of State regarded the unofficials as representing the bulk of the taxpayers of the Colony, the wealth of the community.

Throughout the 1870's and into the 1880's, the Council was largely controlled by the British unofficials who represented the sugar interest, sugar being the only industry in which British capitalists had significant interests. Whilst the Council included men who were lawyers, merchants, cocoa planters, French creoles and Catholics, in practice they had little influence on policy unless their wishes coincided as they frequently did, with the British sugar interest. Nevertheless, such men as Louis de Verteuil and Jean de Boissiere were very often in opposition both to the official members and to the other unofficials who basically represented the same British capitalistic system. The policy of the Council from the point of view of 'nationality' was almost entirely in favour of English and English creole interests, sugar interests from the economic viewpoint, and Anglican from the religious. No one who was English

oriented, *and* a sugar planter, *and* an Anglican remained for very long in the Reform movement of the 1880's and 1890's; such men, to a large extent, already had control of the Government in their grasp; and so it is those who belonged to any other category, which did not embrace all three requisites above, who formed the heterogeneous reform movement.

Apart from controlling the Legislative Council, the British sugar interests also exercised influence on the Colonial Office through the West India Committee in London which more and more came to represent only the British Guiana and Trinidad sugar companies. On more than one occasion this body tried to exert pressure on the Colonial Office even in small matters. For example when Governor Freeling in 1884 reduced the sentence of three coolies who had rioted at Endeavour estate at Hosay time, the West India Committee pushed for and succeeded in getting an official query on the matter (since they feared consequent labour unrest would affect the sugar companies' income.)⁸ The sugar interest had for long years controlled the Legislature in Trinidad with few if any objections from Trinidadians, part of the reason being the general despair of any change, and natural apathy. The *Port of Spain Gazette* wrote on 10th April 1875: "there is no public opinion here", and commented that as usual there were no more than half-a-dozen persons present at any one time to witness an important meeting of the Legislative Council. Why was it then that the early 1880's saw the beginning of a movement for reform which to some extent overcame the universal apathy? The answer to that is complex.

Economics played a part, for wealth was the

basis of political power both in England and in the West Indies. Economically the position in 1884 reflected a change from the years before. From the 1840's until the coming of Governor Gordon in 1866, the English creoles and expatriates had been completely dominant in Trinidad both economically and politically. Sugar was king and was increasingly English owned. Charles William Warner, the Attorney General in Trinidad for twenty-five years, had been the virtual dictator of the island's policy, according to some historians. Governor might come and Governor might go, but he seemed to go on forever. The Legislative Council in those days was purely sectional, — strongly English, protestant and sugar sweet. Then in 1870 Warner fell from power, being forced to resign by Governor Gordon at the insistence of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, over a question of trust funds for two minors held by Warner as Trustee. When the minors came of age and applied for the capital it was not forthcoming having been swallowed up by Warner's high living and twelve children. Governor Gordon then proceeded with a policy of liberalisation — opening up lands to rich and poor alike, making it possible for small purchasers to buy lots of five acres or more at a moderate price, and with a minimum of delay and red tape. He was also tolerant towards Catholics and favourable to French creoles. They, indeed, after their almost complete ruination consequent on the difficult period before and after emancipation when they lost their sugar estates, had taken to cocoa cultivation, and by the 1870's their economic position had vastly improved, cocoa exports rising to over 8,000,000 pounds per annum and continuing to escalate.⁹ By 1880, out of 129 sugar estates (listed in the Annual Register of the

'principal estates and their owners') forty were owned by expatriates, thirty-two by resident Englishmen, and thirty (mainly small) by French creoles. But of 99 cocoa estates in 1880, seventy-six were owned by French creoles, and cocoa was the backbone of the new French creole prosperity. In 1879 total exports of sugar, molasses and rum from the Colony were worth £814,334, whilst cocoa exports were worth £490,490.¹⁰ All other exports totalled only £142,887 of which £23,560 was from asphalt and £25,191 from coconuts. Thus by 1880 there were many men of substance among the French creoles and also the coloured who had benefitted by Gordon's land policy and through secondary education. In those days, as we have seen, property was the basis of political power, and as the 'respectable' class now included French creoles and coloured, there was a shift in political power. This economic change provided the essential basis for reform.

Historians looking back with the benefit of hindsight, have placed 1870 as the watershed of English creole dominance in Trinidad, but to those living in Trinidad in the 1880's this was not at all clear. Gordon had been succeeded by Governors Longden and Cairns who had no definite policy in any direction, and after them came Irving (1874-1880), who once more positively tended to give control to an English group. He was succeeded by the spineless Freeling, whom the English clique also partially dominated. Thus to some Trinidadians of the period, Gordon's rule seemed to be more of an exceptional interlude than the establishment of a new permanent policy. Even in 1882, a top British official in the

Trinidadian civil service was reported to have said in public, "we must destroy the French influence at any price".¹¹ Coupled with the fear of a retrograde return to government by an English clique, was the sugar crisis of 1884. This affected the whole country. If sugar went down, so did the basic economy of the whole island, and cocoa was liable to suffer. The crisis, of course, was far worse in the minds of the sugar capitalists than in reality; nevertheless, from 1884 to 1885 the imports fell by 11% and exports from £1,831,903 to £1,512,314.¹²

It seems to me that we have here a repetition of the phenomenon we have already seen in the case of the Indians and the blacks — a desire to save something that was once possessed but now seemed to be on the verge of being lost. In this view, the attempt to control the Legislature was an attempt to prevent the loss of economic power and wealth and political participation which had already been partially realised since the time of Governor Gordon. Consequently the movement was basically conservative. If a new political set up was sought it was with a view to save something already gained, now rendered precarious by the economic crisis of 1884. This at least seems to have been the motivation of some of the French creole reformers, and it was, in addition, undoubtedly the desire to control expenditure in the financial crisis which placed the British sugar unofficials for some time in the Reform camp. But the middle class coloured and a few French creoles simply wanted a bigger slice of the political pie.

However, apart from the economic thrust, there was a new factor in the 1880's Reform movement

which had not existed before and was undoubtedly of great signification at this juncture. It was the growth of a new spirit of patriotism — one is still afraid of calling it nationalism.

Ideas are the real makers of history, and Trinidad in the 1870's and 1880's saw the birth and flourishing of a new idea — a new ideal — the concept of being a Trinidadian and the ideal of Trinidad for Trinidadians. And yet in the 1880's they would not perhaps have phrased it in quite that way for it was only in the '90's that 'Trinidad for the Trinidadians' was to become a political slogan.

The idea had a long gestation period. Whilst the English who lived in Trinidad could easily return to their homeland, conditions in France both during the revolution and in 1830 discouraged any return there, and the French creoles being planters rather than merchants had also less financial mobility than the English. And so when the English creoles spoke of 'home' they meant England; to the French creoles it meant Trinidad. Some time before 1860, Léon de Gannes wrote in his poem *Exil* about his beloved Trinidad when he was away in Europe:

How my soul languishes in its exile
With not even a reflection of your touching beauty.¹³

Indeed, the beauty of their homeland was very close to the hearts of the French creoles; even the profligate Le Cadre sang wistfully (in French)

Sometimes I'll go
To watch the silver'd deer by moon at night
Or the agouti in the soft twilight
Of eving's glow.

Sylvester Devenish spoke of 'our isle without compare'; Eugene Lange, of 'Monos, enchanted isle! How I love your smiling shores'.

When Governor Gordon (1866 –1870) gave the French creoles and the Catholics some semblance of equality with the English, there followed a considerable rapprochement between the two sectors. Alphonse Ganteaume found in the planned tunnel under the English Channel an encouragement to French-English unity in Trinidad:

Now France and England make
A path beneath the seas
And they in friendship take
Their hands to tightly squeeze.

Louis de Verteuil called for the same unity in this book *Trinidad* (1884):

In a colony like Trinidad diversity of races will probably continue to exist for many years – a contingency which some may deplore, but which should not disturb their equanimity. In fact, it would be a most suicidal policy on the part of the Government to allow, much less to encourage, any one class of colonist to arrogate to itself a superiority over the rest. More difference of origin, or religion, or of social habits, should not be permitted to raise barriers between different sections of the community; still less should they form an excuse for hedging in a few as a superior estate.

Let us toil together in peace, and side by side; it will be for the advantage of all.¹⁴

In the early 1870's Léon de Gannes had pointed out in his short story 'Une queue de Cheval' that all born in Trinidad were equally Trinidadians.

My father Juan Pedro was Venezuelan, and my mother Marie Claire was Guadeloupian, – follow my reasoning – I am a Trinidadian, having been conceived at Monkey Town and born at Bourg-Bamboo.¹⁵

French creoles in letters to the newspapers defended the coloured and poor as being also Trinidadians.¹⁶ By the mid-1880's patriotism was highly fashionable.

In the Legislative Council in 1884, Dr. de Boissiere found the Music Ordinance objectionable because it was class legislation, and to the accompaniment of loud cheers from the gallery, attacked Ludlow, the expatriate Englishman who, as Attorney General, had introduced it; while George Garcia objected to it because it prohibited the Bamboola, the traditional instrument of the "respectable peasant class".¹⁷ In 1886, for instance, at a dinner for past students of St. Mary's College, A.J. Maingot said: "The very mention of our fatherland (Trinidad) arouses within us all the nobler powers of the soul."¹⁸ Hoetink, the Dutch sociologist pointed out that a creole identity usually emerges in two stages, first, the local whites develop a cultural identity different to that of the metropolitan country and its representatives; which in Trinidad appeared fairly early because it was French inspired as against the English metropolitan. The second stage involved the growth of a cultural, even national, identity which affected non-white groups.

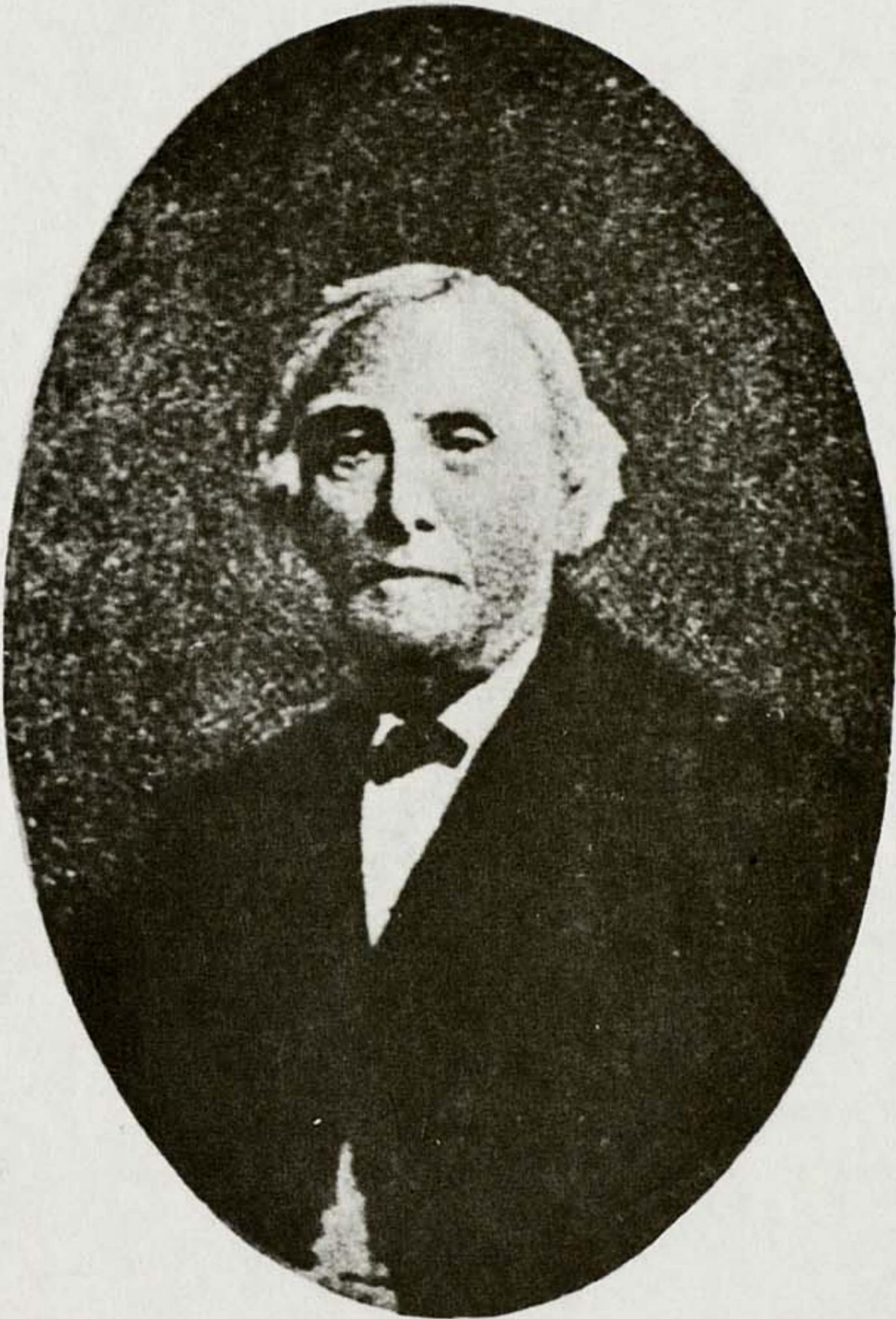
A number of French creoles from the 1870's fostered this patriotic spirit as it related to all Trinidadians. Unfortunately some modern historians have misinterpreted the terminology and limited their appeal to the whites only. Borde and others wrote of 'Spanish, French, English' being all Trinidadians (once they were Trinidad born), but does not mention coloureds and negroes. E.V. Goveia failed to realise that French, English, Spanish were mainly cultural descriptions, not racial, and were not meant to exclude coloureds and sometimes not even blacks. For instance, Father Massé in his diary speaks continually of "the Spanish at Erin", who in fact were

all coloured. He mentions "a young Spanish girl in love with an old English protestant slave"; and on the steamer from La Brea he writes of "English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Coolies jostling each other." Where were the blacks one is tempted to ask, until reading de Verteuil's *Trinidad*:

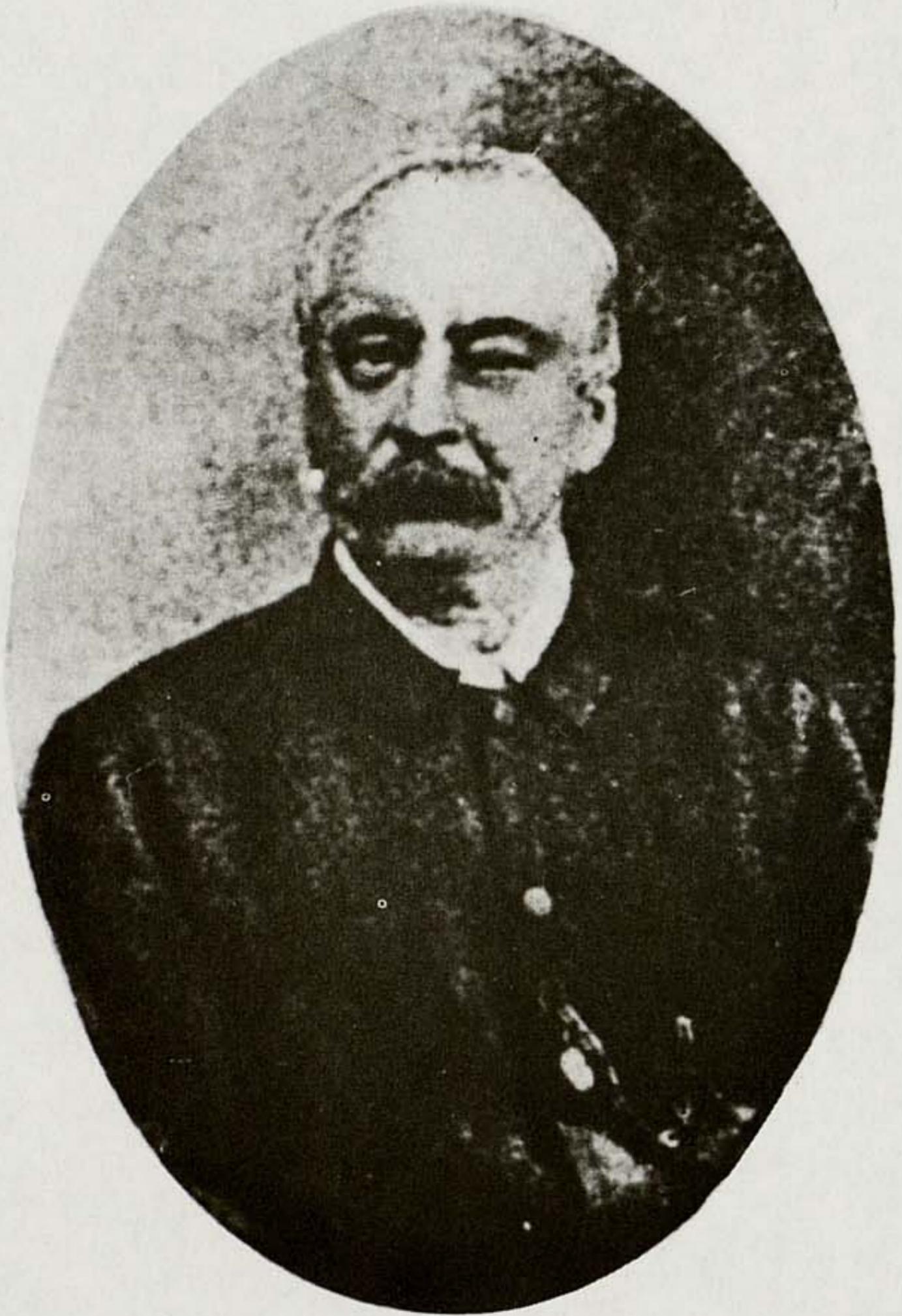
The emancipated class and their descendants bear the distinctive characteristics of three European nations with which they were intimately connected; and these characteristics are to a certain extent borne out by external appearance and deportment of the three specimens: the French negro resembling in these respects a French European, the Spanish a Spaniard and the English negro an Englishman'.¹⁹

An advertisement for an exhibition by Cazabon, the coloured Trinidadian painter, identifies him as "the French painter Cazabon". Moreover, in general the French creoles avoided using racial denotations; Garcia, as we saw above, spoke of "the respectable peasant class" not "the coloured farmers"; and throughout his book de Verteuil writes of "small proprietors", "emancipated labourers", "disbanded soldiers", "descendants of persons who were free before emancipation", "inhabitants of Spanish descent", practically never of negroes or coloured except when he is examining ethnic origins specifically. And so when the French creoles write of 'creoles' without qualification, it should be taken to apply to everyone, not merely the whites, unless it is otherwise clear.

The central figure in this patriotic call was Sylvester Devenish. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Port of Spain said of him: "He was brought up in the polytechnic school in Paris, one of the most capable employees in the Colony, but because he is too proud and too honest for the others, they have



Count De Verteuil



Hon. Syl Devenish

succeeded in making him lose his job to get rid of his criticisms which he did not use sparingly, and by which he proved to them that they were either asses or thieves."²⁰ Syl (born in France but the son of a precapitulant family of Trinidad), a surveyor, an engineer, an artist, but above all a poet, was naturally then very antagonistic to the English officials; but he distinguished sharply between them and the English creoles, and included the latter, and in fact all creoles (French, English or black or coloured were all included in the term 'creole' as used by the French creoles) in his patriotic appeals, which were in poems printed and distributed in leaflet form. In *Invocation* (to God) he wrote:

Give to Trinidad, riches, happiness and prosperity;
 Spread your abundance in the womb of her children;
 Make the task of each of us light;
 And towards those who harm us make us forgiving.
 Let us be one large family.

And three years later in 1880 he published *La Cuisine de Jupiter*:

You creoles, be sons of your country,
 Without bothering from where you are descended;
 Leave to the few fools their foolish affectations.
 And may your country be proud of you.
 Be creoles in heart
 And always with honour,
 Under the banner of your country,
 All united.

Apart from his publications, Syl had an enormous personal influence among the literary men in Trinidad and did most to spread this spirit of patriotism. One of his friends was Gustave Borde who lived permanently with a coloured woman (whether inside or outside of matrimony I have been unable to discover with certainty) and who was himself friendly with J.J. Thomas, the black writer who translated his

books into English. Borde wrote in his introduction to his well known *Histoire de la Trinidad sous le Gouvernement Espagnol* (published in 1876) Without a knowledge of history there is no patriotism we become strangers to our country following our weaknesses or our inclinations, we make ourselves British, French or Spanish when in spite of everything we are Trinidadians.

Brereton has this to say of Borde:

Borde identified himself as a Trinidadian rather than as a French creole. He wrote to instruct Trinidad's youth in the history of their country for patriotism could come only from a knowledge of the past. Borde was the first Trinidad historian to express "nationalist" sentiments as opposed to British or Empire loyalty. In this of course he demonstrated one of the differences between the French creoles and the English white sector. But Borde's anxiety for the old "national" division to disappear was limited to the white sector. He believed that Spaniards, Frenchmen and Englishmen were all Trinidadians but he had little to say about non-white Trinidadians. And in this too he reflected the limited outlook of the white upper class.²¹

But Borde of course has made absolutely no reference limiting his remarks to the 'white sector'. On the contrary it is the modern historian who has so limited his statement because of lack of precision in a matter of semantics.²² The *Trinidad Review* of 2nd August 1883 edited by the black author J.J. Thomas seemed to have had no doubts about it and praised Borde for having laid 'nineteen years of a talented life on the altar of patriotism'.

Thus it is quite clear that Devenish and Borde meant to appeal to all Trinidadians to develop a sense of patriotism. And there is need to stress this point, because it is only if this sense of being all Trinidadians together is grasped that one can fully

understand the reform movement of the 1880's. There had been calls for elected representatives before in the 1850's, but it is only at this time that the movement becomes truly national and not merely ethnocentric. For though the French creoles first propagated the idea, the upper middle class coloured were very early in the movement. In fact Brereton goes so far as to state "it was the coloured and black middle class which began to articulate a 'national' ideology".²³ Though she gives absolutely no evidence of any kind for this, in 1889 J.J. Thomas did argue in his book *Froudacity* that "educated and respectable creoles of all colours shared a common love for their country and a common sense of identity. "These were the people he called the 'colonists' who had the capacity and the right (in his view) to participate in the government of the Colony." As A.J. Maingot put it in 1885: 'Every true patriot must needs long to see the franchise conferred on his countrymen'.²⁴ Thus, patriotism was identified with reform.

This movement which had this positive character of an appeal to patriotic sentiment also had a negative and perhaps more forceful side to it. It fed, undoubtedly, as many nationalistic movements do today, on a sense of antagonism. A realization that Trinidad was being exploited by the English for their own ends; that most of the civil servants imported from England were either sybarites or parasites. "Fourth and fifth rate men who as a rule come out to the smaller Colonies from England, partly because they are unable to get employment at home Socially unfit to fill the positions to which they are appointed".²⁵

In 1884, Syl Devenish attacked the unpopular Attorney General, Ludlow, over the Music Ordinance,

in a printed song *Sur le project de Loi* published under the pseudonym *Violin String* to be sung to a popular tune of Béranger's, and telling of even worse evils to come —

All because a man insane
Whose high sal'ry we do pay
Though a sou he should not gain
Angry with us wants his way

It's Ludlow

It's Ludlow

Who's the people's scourge you know.

To the *New Era* Ludlow was "past praying for"; whilst Mayne, the Magistrate of Port of Spain, with his healthy florid complexion had no business taking sick leave as frequently as he did.²⁶ Falkland Pyne at the Treasury was insufferably arrogant, and Robins, the Assistant Engineer in the Public Works Department, was "*unfit for the post*".²⁷ And it was the high expenditure in the Public Works Department that was most frequently attacked. Massé reports a conversation he had with a French creole:

I asked why the mother country sends in to the most important posts in the island, people who show by their acts the greatest inefficiency. Why, for example, the Chief Engineer after having at the beginning of the railway brought his estimate and demanded a sum which he declared would be sufficient to finish the work, why did he afterwards, two or three times, ask for new sums of money which more than doubled the first amount? 'It is an English tactic', I was answered. 'They are all mixed up in it, except the Minister of Finance.'

Indeed, corruption and inefficiency were said to be the hallmarks of the British Administration. There was a general reaction to the regime of Governor Irving, his centralisation, his extravagant public spending and suspected 'bobol', his appointments of

expatriates to the top posts in the Civil Service. After his departure *New Era* called for an investigation into "Public Justice, Public Works (especially railways and roads), Public Expenditure, Public Instruction."²⁸ Creoles felt also that many civil service jobs could and should be held by them. They sometimes applied for them even to the Colonial Office — but in vain. In the '80's, jobs became a very sore point. In this connection Massé tells of his meeting on the Port of Spain/Cedros steamer with a white creole, Willy Knox, who was employed in the Public Works, "and has for his boss a young Englishman recently arrived from London. This young man has set all his subordinates against him and they can no longer bear him. He has been stupid enough to write a letter against the creoles of which the tenor has come to their knowledge. Mr. Knox is in quest of that letter which, if he has the luck to get it, he will publish in the daily newspapers".

J.J. Thomas wrote around this time of 'pure blooded Englishmen who have rushed from the destitution of home to batten on the cheaply obtained fleshpots of the Colonies'.²⁹ He considered that too often they were appointed over the heads of 'deserving' creoles, and this was especially the case in the legal and medical fields where many creoles were properly qualified. But the undoubted leader in these attacks against British officialdom and the expatriate capitalist firms was Philip Rostant, a well-known radical and member of a prominent French creole family. He expressed and exaggerated the hostility of the French creole 'old families' against the English and he developed a sort of 'anti-colonialism' in which he united with him all the

respectable colonists, white, coloured and black.

In fact the initial impetus for Constitutional Reform came from the newspapers and most probably from Rostant. He was frequently an editorial writer for the *Port of Spain Gazette* from January 1881 to October 1884, and by August 1882 the *Gazette* and three other major newspapers advocated constitutional reform as the only way of adequately controlling expenditure and taxation, though their very moderate proposals emphasised the conservative character of the movement. Attacks against Irving and his Director of Public Works, J.B. Tanner, were frequent. The San Fernando water-works completed in 1881 were regarded as a mess, and were in fact described by Governor Robinson in 1890 as "a lamentable failure". According to Bodu, "the expenditure on alleged public works included such items as "Miscellaneous £20,000" for which there was nothing to show". Although Bodu is not always trustworthy, in fact the Commission appointed in 1892 to investigate the building of the railway found that not alone was there gross inefficiency but also corruption.

Meanwhile events in Jamaica were to exert an influence on the reform movement in Trinidad. In 1882 there occurred the 'Florence affair', which H.S. Will describes as follows:

The schooner *Florence*, allegedly bound for St. Thomas with a cargo of arms and ammunition, arrived in distress at Kingston on 22nd July 1877. Musgrove (the Governor) wrongly advised by his Attorney-General, detained the ammunition and refused to allow the schooner to sail with the arms until a bond had been given for their legitimate disposal. The owner of the cargo brought two actions against the Governor, which were finally concluded in July 1881, damages

of £6,700 being awarded against Musgrove. These judgements raised the question whether the Governor should be indemnified from imperial or colonial funds Lord Kimberly, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, instructed Musgrove to apply to the Legislative Council for a vote to cover the damages and costs awarded against him. This decision aroused strong feeling in Jamaica, where it was argued in the press and at public meetings that colonial funds should not be applied in a matter where only Imperial interests were involved, nor should the colonists be made responsible for the mistakes of officials in whose appointment they had no say, and for whose actions they were not responsible.³⁰

Two official members of the Legislative Council resigned and in January 1882 the Council passed a resolution by seven unofficial to five official votes against the payment. Later, six unofficials were to resign. Lord Derby, the new Secretary of State, was in favour of a change and Jamaicans being upset by the economic situation, the political pressure for change was high and there was a general agitation among all the respectable class for constitutional reform. On the 9th March, 1883, during the Florence debate in the British Parliament, Gladstone, then Prime Minister, spoke in such a way as to indicate the possibility of constitutional reform for Jamaica. (which in fact was given in 1884). This encouraged the Trinidad Reformers and they were possibly behind a petition addressed to Governor Sir Sanford Freeling in September, signed by 809 proprietors, merchants and others calling for a judicious reduction in expenditure on public works and on establishments. On the 1st December 1883 the *Port of Spain Gazette* again took up the cudgels, favouring ex-officio membership of the Legislative Council for the Mayors of Port of Spain and San Fernando, and the further

addition of six members elected 'by owners of comparatively large properties to represent the wealth and intelligence of the country'.

We know of no public reaction to the newspapers' call for reform. This need not surprise us. The newspapers had a very limited circulation and people were apathetic. In its beginning and indeed throughout its existence, the reform movement had a number of leaders but relatively few followers. The logical place for expressions of the wish for constitutional reform was of course the Legislative Council, but while the chief reformers were French creoles or coloured Catholics, the Council largely represented the Protestant English sugar interests, then closely allied to the Colonial Government. Of the eight unofficial members in 1886, G.T. Fenwick was the planting attorney for the largest English sugar firm, the Colonial Company; Frederick Warner was the Legal Counsel for the same company; Finlayson was a wealthy merchant and sugar planter; George Garcia, a Spanish creole lawyer, was altogether a Government man looking forward to legal promotion in the Government service; Léon Agostini, a conservative French (Corsican) creole, was director of Trinidad's largest commercial agency dealing mainly in cocoa and sugar; Paul Guiseppi was owner of the large Valsayn and Caroni sugar estates. Dr. Louis de Verteuil and Dr. Jean de Boissiere were the only two not completely identified with that group. Louis had been a keen Reformer in 1853, but now at 76 years of age was not one to initiate proposals for reform which his colleagues in the Council would not have welcomed, and which in any case would have been rejected.

Indeed, Trinidadians were becoming more and more suspicious of the dominance of the sugar interest in the Legislative Council, and its removal was to be one of the aims of reform in the 1880's. *New Era* was to write in 1885 of the Legislative Council, and the unofficials:

Men who are selected for the business of Government from a particular class will naturally be prone to give undue prominence to their exclusive interests It is only in the natural order of things that our Legislature would be used as a machinery for the furtherance of the particular interests of the class whose supporters so largely preponderate in its composition We are entitled to denounce a system which renders it possible that the interests of a single class should enjoy such an undue preponderance as has been claimed for the sugar interest of late.³¹

These sentiments were already very much in existence in 1883.

However, on August 23rd 1883 the *Trinidad Review* was able to note an encouraging sign: "The independent spirit which is gradually showing itself on the unofficial side of the Council Table is a matter of congratulation to the Colony". The article also pointed out the need for the unofficials to act with unity, at least "on occasion". On September 20th, the *Review* reminded its readers of "Mr. Frederick Warner's blunt assertion some years ago that unofficial members of the Council have no responsibilities to the public", and cast doubts on the motives of many of the unofficials who seemed now to have suddenly acquired interest in the public weal. What in fact had happened, was that for the first time in years the interests of the sugar planters as regards control and economy temporarily coincided with the wishes of most of the educated people and were



Dr. Jean Valleton de Boissiere

opposed to those of the Government. Thus, in spite of the new found unity among the unofficials, the only two members of the Council who were at first completely above suspicion in the eyes of the Reformers and the 'liberal' newspapers were de Boissiere and de Verteuil. The fact that de Boissiere took no active part in the reform movement does not take away from his role in developing an early sense of independence and patriotism. It is unfortunate that there is no proper record of the debates in the Legislative Council, as de Boissiere was apparently a strong speaker. We are told that when he attacked Ludlow over the Music Ordinance in 1884, he was cheered so loudly by the public that some people had to be silenced or put out of the Chamber. The *Review* wrote of him in 1883, "To Dr. de Boissiere the thanks of the Community are due for his activity and persistence in resisting the aggressive measures of Government on several recent occasions." An important figure in the initial drive in the Legislative Council for a greater say in financial control and government (even though we cannot call him a Reformer), he deserves a fuller acquaintance, apart altogether from the fact that some of his characteristics are reminiscent of his most prominent great-grand-nephew, Eric Eustace Williams.

Dr. Jean Valleton de Boissiere, M.D. (Edin.) M.R.C.S. (London), a worthy scion of a Huguenot family of the ancient *noblesse* of Perigord, France, was born in Trinidad on the 24th March, 1830.³² Driven out of France by religious persecution, the family emigrated to Trinidad in 1792, so that it may be said to be one of the oldest in the island of those who were at the time called 'New Colonists' to

distinguish them from the old Spanish settlers. He received his secondary and University education in the British Isles and in 1853 he was House Surgeon at the Westminster Hospital, London. He joined the Royal Army Medical Corps as Surgeon-Captain and served in the Crimean campaign, and for his gallantry received the Turkish and Crimean medals. At the conclusion of hostilities he was ordered out to India to join the British Forces in quelling the Indian Mutiny. When that task was accomplished he returned to Trinidad on a visit to his parents, but finding his father in failing health, he resigned his commission in the Army to take charge of the family estate in Trinidad, the Champs Elysées, in Maraval, then a sugar plantation. He never relaxed his interest in the medical profession, and when in the 1870's the smaller sugar estates were forced to close (in 1874 the Champs Elysées estate produced only 60 hogsheads of sugar, the second smallest production of an estate in Trinidad) he had to rely on his profession for a livelihood. Before 1870 he was an unofficial member of the Legislative Council. "He displayed a constant spirit of independence and non-subervience'. Unfortunately he was conservative and highly individualistic — the de Boissieres, partly on account of their religion, had been traditionally different from the other French creoles — and was never a party man or the type who would fit into a united front. Thus as the Reform Movement played their game out, he remained on the sidelines.

Thus the only true Reformer in the Legislative Council was Louis de Verteuil. Dr. Louis Antoine Aimé de Verteuil M.D. (Paris) — a descendant of an ancient and noble family in La Vendée — was born in

Trinidad on the 24th September, 1807. His father was an officer in the expedition of Sir Ralph Abercromby in the conquest of Trinidad and settled near Arima in 1797 building up a cocoa estate. Louis did his secondary schooling and University education in France and returned to Trinidad in 1837, and soon had a large clientele as a private practitioner. He displayed a lively interest in all matters that affected the welfare and progress of his native land. For three consecutive years he was Mayor of Port of Spain, was a member of the Education Board, and helped in the foundation of St. Mary's College, was President of the Medical Board, deeply interested in agriculture, and the author of a book *Trinidad*. He was one of the leaders of the Reform movement of the 1850's which sought elected representation in the Legislative Council, and was to serve for thirty-two years as an unofficial member of the Council. In 1884 he was the Senior Unofficial on the Council; and he was for years the unofficial representative of the Catholic Party in official matters.

Dr. Louis was a strong character, but not of the same forceful and individualistic type as de Boissiere. 'He was a man of profound culture, courtly manners and chivalrous gallantry, loved and respected by all who came in contact with him. He was a charming personality, endowed with a high sense of Gallic humour and was both in private and public life the most outstanding figure in the Colony, being known as the Grand Old Man of Trinidad. His charity was unbounded and his affection for children keen and practical, as was evidenced by the free clinic which he kept at his home (in Frederick Street) every morning for the sick children of the poorer classes. He

possessed an almost classic reverence for his calling. Professionally, he was essentially a physician of the Victorian era, faultlessly dressed in frockcoat matched with shining top hat".³³ Dedicated as Louis was, in the 1880's he was able to command the respect of the more moderate reformers and the backing of the 'respectable' class, but the more radical Rostant considered him almost an obstacle to reform.

Two events external to Trinidad which occurred in 1884 helped to further vitalise the Reform Movement. First of all, the British Government granted Jamaica a new Constitution, setting up a Legislative Council composed of the Governor, four ex-officio members, two nominated officials, and nine elected members, any six of whom could veto a financial proposal unless the Governor declared it to be of paramount public importance. Secondly, in this year Germany doubled bounties on sugar beet exports and France greatly increased her sugar exports also. Cheap sugar flooded the British market, on which over half of British West Indian sugar was sold. Trinidad's sugar industry was faced with imminent ruin as a petition from the sugar planters was soon to point out. In the Legislative Council on the 4th June, Dr. de Verteuil put forward the following proposal which was seconded by Dr. de Boissiere and passed unanimously.³⁴ In summary it went as follows:

1. That His Excellency be requested to bring under the notice of the Secretary of State for the Colonies the present depressed condition of the sugar industry of the island; caused mainly by large bounties given in Germany and other beet producing countries . . . and which threatens the very existence of this and other colonies. We claim as an act of

justice that the conditions under which we compete with foreign sugar should be more equal and more just.

2. Our trade with the United States of America is daily becoming more precarious.

3. That the Imperial Government should allow the Government of this island to make reciprocal Tariff arrangements with the United States of America whereby a market for our principal production might be found.

It is not surprising to see the sugar interest passing such a proposal, but a more careful examination of it shows two unusual features typical of these times of yearning for more independence. Firstly, the request was made in the strongest possible terms — we claim as an *act of justice* — and secondly it asked for the country (virtually as a sovereign state)! to be allowed to negotiate directly with the United States of America. (When a reply was received in March the following year from the Secretary of State, he agreed that a reciprocal arrangement between the States and Trinidad was to be considered and arranged by the British Government). With the financial state of Trinidad worsening daily, on the 3rd December at the Council meeting, Dr. de Boissiere advanced the motion (seconded by Dr. de Verteuil) that His Excellency the Administrator be requested to inform the Secretary of State for the Colonies that in the opinion of the Council it is desirable that the salary of the office of the Governor should be reduced at the first fitting opportunity to £ 4,000. After discussion of the motion, a vote was taken. In favour of the resolution were de Boissiere, de Verteuil, Garcia, Fenwick and Finlayson. Against; the Protector of Immigrants, the Attorney General, the Colonial Secretary, Frederick Warner, the Administrator John Scott Bushe. The Chief Justice

declined to vote. The votes being equal, the motion was declared to be lost. On the 2nd December, the Reform Movement got an important boost with the publishing of the first number of *Public Opinion* with Philip Rostant as editor. Bodu describes it thus:

'Public Opinion' newspaper made its first appearance on the 2nd December and from the start was highly successful. This journal was the outcome of an idea of the late Mr. Hypolite Borde, who saw that the newspapers published here were too high priced to reach any but the wealthier classes of the population, and were besides but the mouth pieces of certain cliques. He, therefore, purchased the necessary plant for the establishment of a newspaper on popular lines and entrusted the entire management of it to Mr. Philip Rostant whose long experience of the country and undoubted talents as a journalist eminently fitted him for the position. The price of the newspaper was fixed at 6 cents per copy, and it speedily obtained a large circulation among all classes, both on account of its cheapness, the soundness of its views on matters of importance and the excellence of its literary matter.'

From its inception, *Public Opinion* strongly advocated reform and its editor, Philip Rostant was soon in the forefront of the Reform leaders.

Various estimates have been made of Rostant's character. He was a French creole of impeccable antecedents. According to one account, his grandfather, Maurice de Rostang d'Ancézune, was one of seven brothers, sons of a nobleman with estates near Carpentras in southern France. The family was ruined by the agrarian disturbances prior to the Revolution.³⁵ Maurice and his wife decided to come to Trinidad and in 1787 took up lands near San Fernando. He was known as 'Doctor' for although not formally trained he had considerable medical knowledge and he gave his service free to all who

came. When Trinidad was captured by the British in 1797, de Rostang anglicised his name to Rostant. According to another account, the de Rostangs were from the Vendée in the west of France (like the de Verteuils) and would have acquired the typical outlook of the nobility of that area — an interesting comment on Philip Rostant's political activities for those who believe strongly in inherited attitudes. The Vendéan nobility was probably unique in France. Not since the 17th century had they exercised their seigneurial privileges, the *corvée* was practically unknown, nor had they imposed the crippling taxation on their peasantry so prevalent elsewhere; they exercised a benevolent and patriarchal feudalism These noblemen who hunted and drank with their peasantry and tenants had already sown the seeds of egalitarian principles.³⁶

Maurice de Rostang's eldest surviving son, Léon Toussaint, born in 1794, by the time he was twenty-one was reputed to be owner of fourteen rich estates in the country. Certainly he was known as 'King of Couva', the district in central Trinidad where most of his sugar estates were situated. By 1862, however, he was heavily in debt and eventually sold off all his estates and retired with very little wealth indeed. He had three sons, one of them being Philip. Philip had been educated and lived for years in Ireland. As a young man he had been personally acquainted with Daniel O'Connell and Tom Sheil and had attended numerous meetings of the Repeal Association, the monster gatherings of Fr. Mathew and the meetings of Conciliation Hall (aimed at the repeal of the Union between the English and Irish Parliaments). From this experience he regarded the public meeting as "the greatest and most powerful lever in the hands of a people struggling for political rights."

He was also influenced by Cardinal Manning's liberal views on social questions. Rostant owned a cocoa estate and had been writing editorials for years for the *Port of Spain Gazette* and the *San Fernando Gazette*, before he became editor of *Public Opinion*. In his old age, he was to marry an East Indian woman. Possibly because of this, or as an attempt to discredit his political radicalism or due to his dark ruddy complexion and short curly hair, various rumours were spread about him, which probably had no truth in them at all. His niece puts it this way: Intermarriage in each generation had cemented the French families in Trinidad into a clan which rallied strongly to the support of any one of its members who might be in trouble. Particularly was this the case if scandal threatened the reputation of one of its women. That a married woman might have 'affairs' was accepted — so long as these were conducted with discretion. But should 'consequences' ensue, the entire clan would unite to conceal the fact from the eyes of the world Such an occurrence is supposed to have taken place in my mother's family, the child in question being a boy named Philip. I say, is 'supposed' to have taken place, for there is no actual evidence that Philip was really (such) a changeling, and it is possible that the rumours as to his origin were promulgated later to protect the good name of the family and to clear it of responsibility when his behaviour had at last become public.³⁷

However it is important to realise that Rostant's political or social behaviour at this period did not alienate him from the French creole families. He was very much one of them.

In December 1884, in *Public Opinion*, he strongly advocated reform, which to him meant elected members. He had no doubts that Crown

Colony Government was a disaster; as he put it later: Our entire body politic is tainted by the mephitic breath, the deadly influence of the Crown Colony system of Government. Until we uproot that curse from the face of the land, those things and others of the same nature must continue to blast every effort at establishing and maintaining those public institutions the life and breath of which, in all civilised communities is publicity. Our system of Government is founded on secrecy Crown Colony Government is killing us, let us, at any cost get rid of it!

Then, according to Will

Opposition to the constitutional changes advocated by Rostant manifested itself inside the Legislative Council. On 10th January 1885 the unofficial nominated members unanimously passed a resolution favouring a change in the constitution, which was so moderate as to suggest an attempt on their part to frustrate the demands for the introduction of elected members by securing a more conservative change. In order to ensure economy in public expenditure the resolution favoured an increase in the unofficial members, or the introduction of financial representatives as in British Guiana, or a change 'in such other manner as Her Majesty may deem fit'. J. Scott Bushe, the officer administering the government, informed Derby that one unofficial had told him that six of their number would resign if their views regarding a constitutional change leading to more effective control over public expenditure were not entertained; the difficulty of replacing them would, in his view, 'be well nigh insurmountable'. He advised some change, for unless a concession was made there would be 'considerable popular agitation' Derby (the Secretary of State for the Colonies) informed (the) Governor, that before considering a reform of the constitution he required proof that the unofficial members inadequately represented the interests of the community, and that they could not effectively control public expenditure without an increase in their number.³⁸

Derby then undercut the unofficials' position by informing them on the 2nd March that their request made on 3rd December for a cut in the

Governor's salary would be granted, even though the vote before the Board had been lost.³⁹ As for showing that they did not adequately represent the interests of the community, if the unofficial members proved this, they would of course be cutting their own throats. It is no wonder then that they remained silent. It is furthermore difficult to accept Wills's suggestion in its entirety, that the motion passed by the Council was directed at stopping further reform. For one thing, there seems to have been little if any public agitation for reform and consequently little danger that the British Government would grant it; then, the motion was proposed by Frederick Warner and seconded by Louis de Verteuil, both of whom in varying degrees and times supported reform. On the other hand the motion was passed unanimously by all the unofficials (John Bushe telling the officials not to vote) and the 'sugar group' who were certainly not permanent advocates of reform.⁴⁰ It is unfortunate that the debates were not published in Hansard form. One may speculate that the sugar interests were so worried about the need to ensure financial control that reform was used as a sort of threat to the British Government, or that different members voted for the motion for different reasons.

A somewhat similar situation arose in September of the same year, when in a Council debate on the annual estimates, the unofficials proposed a resolution incorporating the principle of control over the estimates; Fenwick referred to the futility of the nominated members' attempts to control expenditure and suggested a change in the constitution (to give elected members,) similar to that of the Mauritius Constitution granted the month

before. De Verteuil was in favour of a committee of all the unofficial members and certain officials to consider the estimates. There was no formal motion passed on the resolution, it being withdrawn upon Governor Robinson promising to consider the matter. On his report it was considered in the Colonial Office and action was taken in early 1886. We simply have not enough information about the Reform Movement at this juncture either inside or outside the Council, to come to any definite conclusions. No newspapers for 1885 are available in the Government Archives, but from their attitude in 1886 it is clear that in 1885 there was no major dichotomy between the 'reforming' unofficials in the Council and the Reformers outside. Rostant in an issue of *Public Opinion* in 1886 shows initially no bitterness whatsoever towards de Boissiere or de Verteuil, or Warner. What we can be certain about however, is that the appointment of Sir William Robinson as Governor in 1885 was initially a helpful step to reform. As Governor of Barbados he had introduced legislation extending the franchise and establishing voting by secret ballot, and his later encouragement of economic diversification and of a peasant proprietary fitted in well with Rostant's views.

On the whole, then, 1885 was a very quiet year for the reform movement. Rostant continued to campaign for reform in *Public Opinion* but in general was content to bide his time. Possibly he was waiting to see the results of the motions proposed at the Council level. There was, though, one area in which circumstances in 1885 were becoming more favourable to reform, namely, among the Roman Catholics.

In the few years preceding, there had been a considerable change in the attitude of Rome to popular and democratic Government. The disaster of the revolutions of 1830 and the overthrow of the temporal power of the Papacy in 1870 had given the Church of Rome a fear of government by the people; but the ultra conservative Pope Pius IX died in 1878, and his successor, Leo XIII, reversed his policy, and in 1885 issued the Encyclical on *The Christian Constitution of States*. It was to be published in full in a number of January editions of 'Public Opinion' in 1886. It stated:

There can be no public power except from God alone To exclude the Church which God himself has constituted from the business of life, from the laws, from the teaching of youth, from domestic society is a great and pernicious error No form of government is *per se* condemned so long as it has nothing repugnant to Catholic doctrine, and is able if wisely and justly managed, to preserve the State in the best condition. Nor, is it *per se* to be condemned whether the people have a greater or less share in the government; for at certain times and with the guarantee of certain laws, such participation may appertain, not only to the usefulness, but even to the duty of the citizens Wherefore, it is evident that there is just cause for Catholics to undertake the conduct of public affairs, for they do not assume these responsibilities in order to approve of what is not lawful in the methods of government at this time; but in order that they may turn these very methods, as far as may be, to the unmixed and true public good, holding this purpose in their minds, to infuse into all the veins of commonwealth the wisdom and virtue of the Catholic religion.

The Encyclical thus gave a positive mandate to Catholics to enter into politics in a democratic state with the deliberate intention of encouraging legislation and government in their favour.

Significantly, many of the prominent Reformers

in Trinidad were militant Catholics, (having fought vigorously against the government over the marriage ordinance issue in 1863) so that while it is difficult to trace in detail the motivation for the Reform Movement, without a doubt it was partly due to the desire of the Catholics for a Government more fair in their regard. Referring, in 1889 to controversies regarding the relative status of government and assisted schools, Governor Robinson was to allege to the Colonial Office that the Catholic Church was freely using 'all methods within its reach of gaining influence as a means of supremacy under a free and more or less popular government'.⁴¹ And one of the nests hatching the spirit of reform in 1885 was St. Mary's College.

The principal at that time was Fr. James Browne. Born in Dublin in the 1830's, Fr. Browne, had as an impressionable youngster seen O'Connell's mass meetings for repeal conducted under the guidance of the priests. He had come out to Trinidad within a year of the foundation of the College and experienced the strong anti-Catholic sentiments of the Government. A newspaper report in September 1863 of a Legislative Council meeting gives an indication of this attitude:

Mr. G. (probably Ganteaume) asked if it was true that His Excellency (the Governor) had refused to put the names of two 'foreign' priests who lately arrived, on the pay-sheets of the clergy. His Excellency replied that it was quite true, and that his reason was that those persons (he would not call them gentlemen) had undertaken to conduct the new College, the avowed object of which was to draw Papists away from the Collegiate school, which cost the Colony £3,000 a year, at least £100 per annum for each boy. He should like to see any public officer removing his boys on account of their faith or morals



Hon. H.A. Alcazar, K.C., M.L.C.

or any such nonsense. He would rather receive Papist pupils for nothing than that the school should be without them, for they would be sure to lose their ridiculous faith in time Not one cent of public money should go towards that impudent institution, directly or indirectly, while he remained in the colony.⁴²

Father Browne became principal in 1876. He was not an academic man and had been temporary parish priest of a number of parishes. Each year he made a tour of the island recruiting pupils. Liberal in his views, he strenuously and successfully opposed attempts to have illegitimates barred from entry to the College. In 1885 he founded the College Club with H.A. Alcazar (a young coloured lawyer aged 25 and a prominent Reformer) as secretary.

Apparently, reports of the Club's activities got back to the Mother House in Paris, and the Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers asked for an explanation. In his reply of 24th July 1886 Father Browne stated that the club was founded merely "with the aim of inviting past pupils to come together, to pass their evenings in a profitable and entertaining way, and to have them near us so we can direct them along right ways I myself am the President".⁴³ The past pupils came on a Sunday, 7.30 — 9.00 p.m. to use the library, billiard table, and to play indoor games such as cards or chequers. Once a month there was a carefully prepared debate for the past and present pupils on such innocent topics as:—

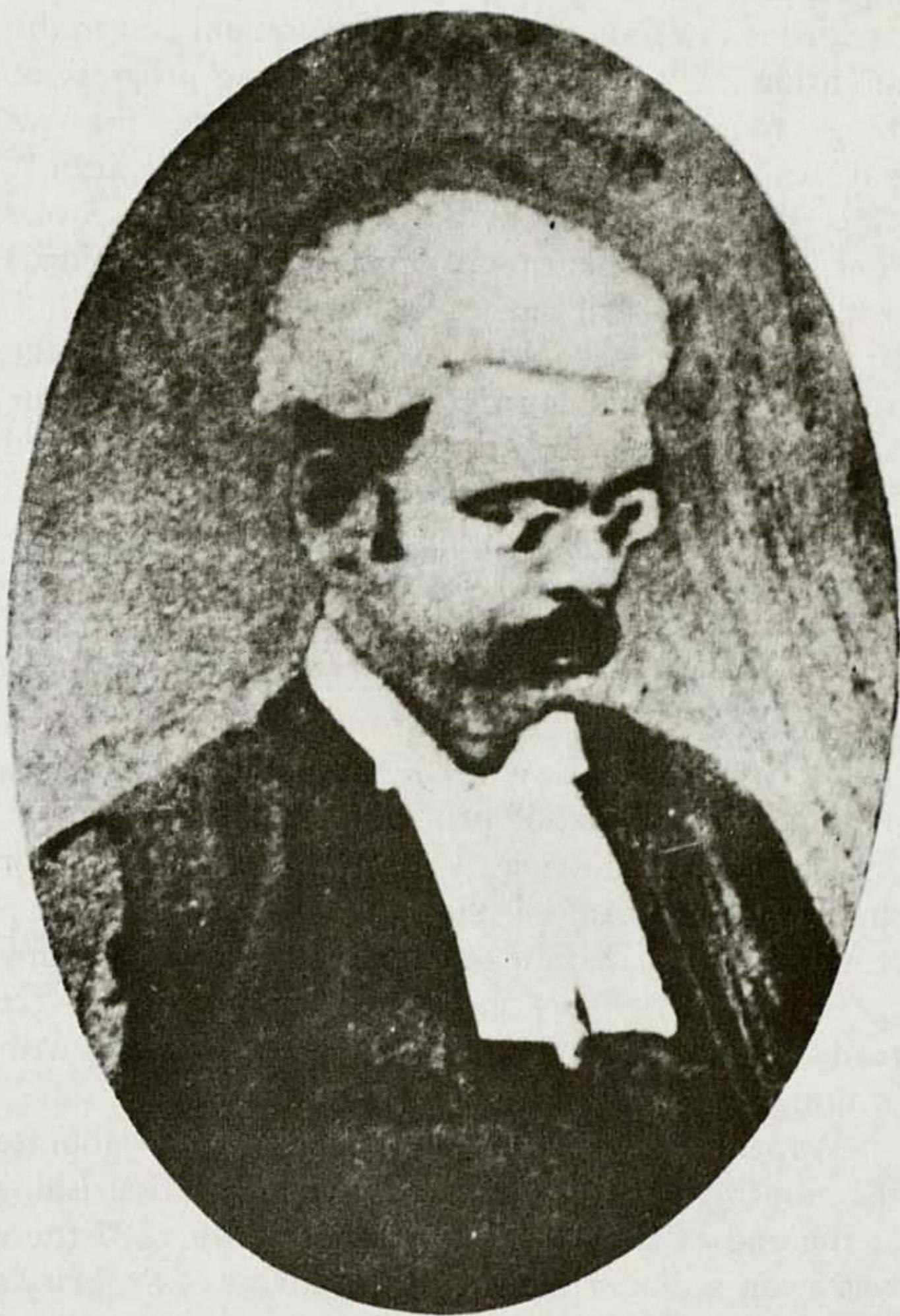
- in March (1886): Who did more good for his country,
Napoleon or Washington?
- in April : What is the best form of
Government?
- in May : The advantages of the Press.

Father Browne was also in constant touch with Louis de Verteuil, "the oldest friend of the College, the champion of the Catholic cause in Trinidad", who lived opposite the school and attended the six a.m. mass at the College Chapel every morning. And Father Browne's activities became well known to the authorities, for when he appeared before the Franchise Commission in 1888, Gatty, the Chairman, greeted him with: "I may say at once, that in asking the clergy to come here we do not ask them to come here and give political opinions we do not ask for political opinions."⁴⁴

Towards the end of 1885 the attendance of past pupils at the club was not satisfactory and steps were taken to remedy this as Rostant reported in *Public Opinion*, of January 19th 1886.

The C.I.C. College Union Club was started by the Rev. Fr. Browne, the Superior of the College of the Immaculate Conception as a link to unite in friendly intercourse the present and former pupils of the College. . . . They have had some important meetings in which questions vitally affecting the material, intellectual and moral progress of the country, have been discussed. These discussions, carried on after the model of parliamentary debates, are a splendid training of our young men to that temperance of language, that discipline of the mind, so essential as a preparatory step to the active part which many among them must sooner or later, take in the public affairs of their native land. The Rev. Fr. Browne having perceived that there was lately a serious falling off in the attendance of members called the attention of the most zealous among them to the fact Among the suggestions made to revive the flagging spirit of the members was that of periodical dinners at which the Press of the island would be represented.

The first dinner in January 1886 was very well attended and went off in splendid fashion.⁴⁵ After



L.A. Wharton, K.C.

the first toast to the College, Mr. Louis Wharton gave the second toast to 'Trinidad our Home'. "It is imperative on us", he said, "to take active and intelligent interest in our own government and in the condition of our people; to watch the progress of things and aid their advancement in order that we may reap all the advantages open to a free nation". (Cheers) A.J. Maingot, the Vice-President, spoke next. "The very mention of our fatherland (Trinidad) arouses within us all the nobler powers of the soul..." Mr. Wharton referred to the introduction of the franchise into this country. "Gentlemen, every true patriot must needs long to see the franchise conferred on his countrymen, but every true patriot also desires that as a condition precedent his country should be fit and ready to receive the franchise Are we fit *now* to receive the franchise? Gentlemen, we are not. (Several voices: 'you are wrong. Of course we are'.)" Maingot then went on to say that though people were not ready at the moment, the meetings of the College Club "if properly carried on (that is, with a large attendance) will tend to prepare us for the Franchise". Among the other speakers was Philip Rostant who gave a passionate anti-Crown Colony speech and tried to show that Trinidadians were ready for a moderate franchise. He was greeted with prolonged applause a number of times.

Apparently the banquet served to reinvigorate the monthly debates, for the Club was still flourishing at the end of the year.⁴⁶ On January 6th 1887 there was again a dinner for the past students of St. Mary's College. Once more, Rostant was in effect the chief speaker at what had become, in reality, a political meeting. He spoke once more in favour of moderate

reform. "We wish", he said, "to give the Franchise to those who represent something, to men who are able to understand thoroughly the responsibilities of citizenship. . . . As education spreads, as properties are acquired, the number of electors will increase". Apart from these two instances, no information is available as to other activities of the Club, and we can only conjecture as to the exact importance of the role of the College in the Reform Movement; possibly Alcazar exerted some influence in a quiet way among members at their weekly meetings.

Rostant himself was very conscious of the importance of religion in Trinidad's politics.⁴⁷ When in June 1886 Léon Agostini resigned his seat in the Legislative Council consequent on the failure of his firm, Ambard & Co., Rostant called for the appointment of another Catholic to preserve 'the balance of power' — four unofficials to be Catholic and four non-Catholic. He was not too happy over the appointment of the Anglican, Fitt, to fill the vacant seat, even though Fitt's wife and children were Catholic. Rostant must have been fully aware that the election of members under a fairly wide franchise would give a Catholic majority. He did not however mention this in public. Archbishop Gonin, too, steered well clear of religio-political involvement. The Catholic nature (if such it was) of the Reform Movement could never be made explicit. This would have frightened off the non-Catholics and nullified any chance of success vis-a-vis the British Government.

On the 27th November 1885, Governor Robinson had forwarded the requests of the unofficials about financial control to Stanley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, asking whether

he might not introduce Louis de Verteuil's proposal of a finance committee.⁴⁸ Of the Colonial Office officials, Wingfield doubted the advantage of the change, but Herbert minuted in favour: "it may stave off the inconvenient demand for Home Rule (i.e. elected members) which has been springing up". Stanley was to agree with this — and so, at a Legislative Council meeting of the 16th February, 1886 Robinson addressed the Board as follows: The unofficial members have hitherto complained that they have had no control over the expenditure of the Colony, and that the estimates were laid before them 'cut and dried' and without sufficient explanations. Upon my recommendation, the Secretary of State has practically handed over the control of the finances to the unofficial members of Council. The manner in which this control is to be exercised will be shown in the message about to be read by the Hon. Mr. Scott Bushe. I can only say for my part, that in making the suggestion I did to the Secretary of State I endeavoured to show the confidence I repose in the ability and liberality of the unofficial members. I trust that the confidence is reciprocated and that the 'new departue' will in practice be of advantage to the best interests of Trinidad.⁴⁹

The Colonial Secretary then read the following message:

His Excellency, Sir William Robinson, has the honour to inform Members of Council that in accordance with the suggestion made by him on the 27th November 1885, the Secretary of State for the Colonies has sanctioned the following procedure in reference to the Annual Estimates. In future, those estimates, after having been laid on the table of the Legislative Council and before being passed in full Council will be referred to a special committee. This committee will be composed of all the Non-Official members, together with the following Official Members, viz. the Colonial Secretary, the Auditor General and the Director of Public Works. These latter Officials will afford every explanation necessary, the estimates will be discussed item by item and

recommendations, if any, will have to be embodied in a report to be addressed to and considered by the Governor before the estimates are finally proceeded with in Council. In making this suggestion to the Secretary of State, the Governor believed that he had acted in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the people, and he trusts that the Unofficial Members of the Council will realize the heavy responsibility which has now been imposed upon them, and that the practice to be enforced will be not only convenient but advantageous to the public welfare.

In spite of Governor Robinson's statement, the Secretary of State had not 'practically handed over the control of the finances to the unofficial members'. From the constitutional point of view, the introduction of the 'new departure' was altogether minor and could be described as mere 'window dressing'. The Secretary of State could disallow estimates unanimously voted upon by the unofficials and the Governor could still recommend to the Secretary of State the cancellation of a vote notwithstanding the unanimous agreement of the unofficials. The committee was basically a 'distractive device' as Martin Wight puts it in his book on the Development of the Legislative Council.

The development of committees of the legislative council has provided the great means of canalizing the political activities of unofficials and of diverting their attention from insoluble general issues by securing their cooperation on limited particular issues.⁵⁰

On the 19th February, a change was made in the Official section of the Council, the Chief Justice and the Receiver General being replaced by the Auditor General and the Director of Public Works.⁵¹ Rostant considered these changes in the Council to be "important moves affecting the welfare and future of the Colony, and may be looked upon as a stepping

stone to further changes in time to come". Things in the Council looked hopeful for reform but outside there was little enthusiasm. At a lecture on the 10th February 1886 at the Princes Building on 'Popular Political Representation' by Henry Schuller Billouin, presided over by the Mayor of Port of Spain, Eugene Lange, there was a very scanty attendance and only a moderate degree of interest evinced in the subject, even though to attract an audience there had been also on the programme 'vocal and instrumental music'.⁵²

By May, Rostant was beginning to find fault with Robinson who had bought for the use of the Fire Brigade a house belonging to Justice Fitzgerald and which he considered a white elephant, so that the incident smacked of the usual collusion between the Governor and the English officials. Rostant also attacked the unofficials for not querying the additional estimates for 1885, and by June was quite disenchanted with them:

The Legislative Council now stands in a more false position to the public than ever it did before. The unofficial section has played fast and loose with its trust by insisting upon an increase of responsibilities with a vehemence which imparted a certain gravity to the proceeding and then proving itself lamentably indifferent and unequal to the boon of its own seeking.⁵³

Governor Robinson had gone to England for six weeks; possibly he was summoned for consultative talks at the Colonial Office. He returned on the 16th July. Meanwhile the unofficials had discovered the truth about the 'new departure'. The Secretary of State had disallowed a vote of money for the steamer to the Five Islands and Monos and two other matters passed by the unofficials. Consequently on May 10th

on a proposal of Frederick Warner's, seconded by de Boissiere, the Council agreed that a message of regret for this be sent to the Secretary of State. Then the local Government recommended the cancellation of an order for 500 immigrants already agreed to by the Council. On the 2nd August de Verteuil moved "that the Council regrets to learn . . ." that such a recommendation had been made. This resolution was passed by a majority of one. It of course made little difference. In two months time the Secretary of State expressed in turn his regret that the Acting Governor had not consulted the Council but he adhered to the Governor's recommendation. At that meeting of the 2nd August, the Attorney General had spoken of the limited freedom of the unofficials but the Governor on the 9th August on being questioned on the matter declared that:

His own view was that unofficial members were entitled to the greatest possible elasticity of opinion and action. His Excellency read the letter in which he had offered a seat to Mr. Fitt in support of that view, and an extract submitted to the Secretary of State on which the recent concession was based. He said that the responsibility of members would commence with the next estimates. The estimates when passed bound both official and unofficial members alike. His Excellency hoped that the unofficial members would so exercise their privileges as to enable further privileges to be bestowed upon them, as it was impossible that so large and rapidly developing a colony as Trinidad could always be kept in leading strings.⁵⁴

It is doubtful if this gave the unofficials much consolation.

At this stage Rostant seemed still to have some faith in de Verteuil, de Boissiere and Warner, the last of whom he continued to believe was a supporter of reform.⁵⁵ He thought that the vote on de Verteuil's

motion amounted to "a real triumph for the non-official section of the legislative council"; but when it seemed in October that the unofficials might refuse an increase in Robinson's salary and so induce him to leave the colony, Rostant was furious and wrote: "no palliative is possible in our system of government without an infusion of the elective element in our legislative council". In the Council meeting of November 2nd de Verteuil said that he and the other members voted against the increase in salary of the Governor with the view that it was not justifiable under present circumstances. If it were not for the miserable condition of the Colony they would have voted for the increase as he believed that no Governor of Trinidad had ever shown greater anxiety for the welfare of the people than Sir William Robinson had. This refusal to increase Robinson's salary roused Rostant to a fury. He never forgave de Verteuil, and the following week he wrote in 'Public Opinion':

It remains for the people of Trinidad, no matter what their origin, their religion, their complexion, to join together in one strenuous effort and shake off the incubus which has, for half a century, weighed so fatally on their shoulders.

From the day we entered public life, we did not cease to point out that the bane of the country was the unofficial section of the Legislative Council. They have always been an impediment in the way of good Governors and a cloak to cover the misdeeds of the bad ones. We repeat more emphatically than ever: Unofficialism, *viola l'ennemi*.⁵⁶

Thus, by November 1886, it had become clear that little was to be hoped for from action in the Legislative Council. The unofficials could not or would not help reform. From their viewpoint, they had realised that Robinson's 'new departure' meant

very little, and that not much was to be expected from him. In fact, in his despatch (182) to the Secretary of State he pointed out that in the Municipal elections in Port of Spain, of 703 voters only 62 polled their vote, and in San Fernando 62 out of 118. He remarked: "If these figures may be taken as any criterion, representative institutions — of which the two Borough Councils are at present the only specimens in the island — would not appear to be much appreciated." Rostant on the other hand felt that the unofficials represented more and more only the sugar interests and did not really want reform. He now pinned his faith in Sir William Robinson, in the new Attorney General, Gatty, who seemed at first to be very much in favour of reform, and in Sir John Gorrie, the radical Chief Justice appointed in 1885 and whom Rostant claimed applied "equity rather than the letter of the law". The merchants and planters saw the economic situation worsening daily (the bankruptcy of Ambard & Co., the largest French creole commercial firm, had been a tremendous shock to the community) and felt that something had to be done.

In the Port of Spain City Council, when the term of Mayor Eugene Lange came to an end, Francis Damian, a retired lawyer and a wealthy man, was elected in his place. He had long decided that if he was Mayor he would begin his term of office with an inaugural banquet in the London style. This was held at the Town Hall on the night of Thursday, 18th December.⁵⁷ The City Councillors, Senior Government Officials, Members of the Legislative Council, the Mayor of San Fernando, the Press were invited. The Hall was tastefully decorated, the food was

plentiful and the wines particularly choice. There was a series of after-dinner speeches. According to Rostant some of the speeches had been prepared well beforehand, but others definitely sounded as though the wine had had its effect. There was a general spirit of *bonhomie*, French creoles lavishing praise on their old enemy Charles William Warner; the Governor saying that "having been Governor already of two colonies possessing representative institutions it was only natural that his leanings should be in the direction of liberal principles"; Gatty, the Attorney General, a toast or two further on, bettering him with the statement that he 'was certainly in favour of elective assemblies and representative government'.

Whether or not the banquet was designed with political intentions it certainly evolved along those lines. Rostant was there and may have had a considerable input; and in fact it is difficult to resist drawing the conclusion that at this banquet was hatched the plan for the great reform meeting that was soon to take place. Nine days after the banquet on November 27th the *Port of Spain Gazette* reported:

It is reported that a public meeting will very shortly be called for the purpose of inaugurating a movement for the introduction of the elective element into the Legislative Council and it is stated that several persons of influence in the Colony are in favour of such a movement.

The editor then went on to give his advice to the Reformers that they should remember "a maxim given by the Dervish of the Desert to Alexander the Great: 'Never do or undertake anything without having first well considered the consequences'." But at this stage all the newspapers except the *Gazette*

were in favour of Reform. Rostant was filled with a spirit of euphoria — in fact it was bubbling over in his editorials of 30th November and the 10th December. The day has come at last when the people of Trinidad are thoroughly aroused to the absolute necessity of a reform of our Legislative Council. So long as the country went on prospering in despite of corruption and mal-administration little heed was taken of the doings of our rulers the sugar crisis has brought the matter home to them. The publicity given to our affairs by Sir William Robinson; the masterly handling of the Trade and Taxes Commission by Sir John Gorrie; the revelations made by this paper of blunders upon blunders of the utmost magnitude, committed by the Auditor General of the Colony have opened people's eyes and shaken much of the apathy in regard to public affairs which had hitherto characterized the inhabitants of the colony.

Everyone, even some of the unofficial members of the Legislative Council, is in favour of the abolition of non-representative government. The present system has been tried and found wanting.

And in the same issue of *Public Opinion*, on the 10th December, Rostant triumphantly reported that the requisition requesting the calling of a public meeting was 'sent to the Mayor today'. This went as follows, and was signed by some sixty-nine Burgesses.

Port of Spain,
10th December 1886.

To His Worship Francis Damian Esq. Mayor of Port of Spain.
Sir,

We, the undersigned Burgesses of Port of Spain have the honour to request, that, in view of the general wish which now prevails for a moderate change in the constitution of the Legislative Council of the Colony, Your Worship will be pleased to convene a public meeting of the inhabitants of the colony to pass resolutions and take the necessary steps for petitioning Her Most Gracious Majesty on the subject.

We remain Sir,

Your obedient servants,

Arnold Lamy	Jules Maingot	Henry Ganteaume
Conrad Stollmeyer	Wm. Kell	Arnold Knox
Joseph Penco	F.A.F. André	Alex McGrier
F. Agostini	B. Devenish	V.L. Wehekind
Ed. Ganteaume	Henry Hughes	J. Joseph
Léon Agostini	E.A. Babilon	Jas. Jos. Hobson
Wm. Howatson	J. Rily	Geo. Armstrong
J.E. Coryat	J. Bodu	Wm. Seaton
Julien H. Archer	H.A. Alcazar	Ed. Power
D. Campbell	A.P. Pierre	Edgar Tripp
J.F. Chittenden	J.A. Lamy	Geo. Fitzwilliam
L. Geofroy	I. Salas (Proprietor of El Venezuelano newspaper.)	
Jas. P. Pollonais	Eug. Wehekind	A.W. Llanos
Eug. P. Masson	H.B. Phillips	Ad. Wuppermann
Fred Herrera	W. Scott Kernahan	J. F. Urich
Carl Boos	P. Emile André	Ch. Aug. Fabien
John A. Rousseau	Felix Lazare	Vincent Brown
A.E. Henderson	G.B. Alston	Geo. Goodwille
Jas. Miller	J.G. D'Ade	W.T. Patterson
Wm. Davidson	Jas. Skeoch	L.J. Alcazar
Geo. E. Daniell	B. Murray	Fritz Zurcher
J. Joseph Lewis (Proprietor, <i>New Era</i>)		Phillip N. Bernard
P. Rostant (Proprietor, <i>Public Opinion</i>)		
Aucher Warner	N. Jean Pierre	Geo Muir

Since it was Rostant who undertook to get the requisition signed (possibly with help from Eugene Lange) and he obviously tried to make it as representative as possible, one cannot draw any conclusions from its composition except that the movement had support from all sections, being supported by prominent English and French creoles, by seventeen planters and proprietors as well as thirty-one merchants, and thirteen barristers and solicitors, and including prominent coloured men like Vincent Brown, Alcazar and Masson. The requisition was of course confined to burgesses of Port of Spain.

On the day before the requisition was presented to the Mayor, a Legislative Council meeting was held which finally showed the futility or incapacity of the unofficial opposition in the Council.⁵⁸ De Verteuil brought forward the motion seconded by his friend de Boissiere that "the Council keeping in view the present depressed condition of the Colony, is of opinion that on the occurrence of a vacancy in the Public Service, the salary attached to the Office so becoming vacant should be reconsidered prior to any new appointment being made, provided however that such salary is not less than £200 a year.' This motion was directed at the well known feather-bedding in the Civil Service; but de Verteuil should have known better than to suggest something that tended to tilt the apple cart and to reduce the fruits of the officials' labour. As a letter to *Public Opinion* of December 17th expressed it:

The Legislative Council is 'an assembly of men composed of two sections (the official and the unofficial) whose only pledge is to each other "tickle me and I ll tickle you". Need more be said to indicate how the proposal to reduce salaries exceeding £200 a year constitutes a grievous offence against a fundamental maxim of our glorious constitution.'

No wonder then, that scarcely had Dr. de Boissiere's last words died away, than Gatty, the Attorney General sprang to the attack declaring that the motion was unconstitutional; and he was eagerly followed by the Solicitor General, Maxwell Phillip who in sonorous tones declaimed that the motion was "an infringement of the prerogative of the Crown" since the positions were given by gift of the Crown; (the *Voice of St. Lucia* was to express disappointment, over this, in him, "a man who has professed liberal and patriotic views all his life".)

The Governor then tried (according to *Public Opinion*) to get his own back on de Verteuil for his championing of no increase in the Governor's salary, saying, "I consider the resolution of Dr. de Verteuil a reflection upon the capacity of the Governor. . . ." and then addressing the old Doctor directly, "I don't know what your object is or whether it is with a prophetic eye, Sir, you see the desirability of securing the suffrages of the future electors of Port of Spain". Frederick Warner thought the number of officials needed cutting down and not their salaries; and the other unofficials did not care to rock the boat. Thus the motion never came to a vote, a final proof according to Rostant of the hopelessness of the system and the incapacity of the unofficials. He was quite jubilant at the failure as he felt that this would strengthen the movement for elected members. And perhaps it did.

Because Rostant was the most eloquent and energetic Reformer it is easy to fall into the error of assuming that he wielded effective power in the group. In the things that mattered he was, however, a lightweight. He himself had little economic status and not all the personal connections that were necessary. He was viewed by most people as a radical and the men who mattered never forgot that he had been a bankrupt and had had to flee the country. His prodding and his organisation and hard work were absolutely essential but when the move was to be made it had to come from men of substance. In spite of Rostant's fulminations against the unofficials, the group that eventually backed him were basically the group who would have recalled many of the same men who were unofficials, to elected seats in the Council. The

Reform Movement was mainly an upper middle class movement and most of the white Reformers were linked socially, in business or by blood or marriage. Rostant himself was a member of that group. He was in close contact with de Verteuil, de Boissiere and Warner, as evidenced for instance by his editorial of May 14th 1885; after criticising the supplemental estimates for 1885, he continued, "we may perhaps excuse the Hon. Dr. de Verteuil and Dr. de Boissiere in regard of their not being quite *au fait* at figures, but the Hon. Dr. Frederick Warner being a lawyer" should have queried them . . . "We have just learnt on going to press that whilst the Supplemental Estimates were being passed, Mr. Warner was engaged amending his motion and that certain items escaped the attention of the other two members owing to the hurried manner in which the estimates were gone through'. Rostant's neice — Marie Alice — was married to Lechmere Guppy, the son of Robert Guppy, then the Mayor of San Fernando. The elder Guppy had views closest to Rostant's. Eugene Lange was Louis de Verteuil's son-in-law, a Gioannetti (very close friends to the Ciprianis) was his daughter-in-law, his brother was married to a Ganteaume, his nephew to an André (simply to mention some of the names on the requisition list). The English group were also linked very closely socially and in business, but even at this state there was not too much socializing between them and the French, and Rostant may have served as a useful link. The coloured Reformers were mainly lawyers and certainly in touch with some of the French creoles either through the law or as being past pupils of St. Mary's College. As became obvious on the day of the public meeting, the leaders among the

Reformers had not met very often (if at all) nor had they formulated any well defined programme. It was quite definitely a movement and not a party. It was also very fashionable; in the Legislative Council for example Philip seasoned his statement that "we have no parliament as yet" with, "God speed the day". And though the unofficials considered (according to Rostant) that it was their duty not to commit themselves officially to the Reform Movement, in fact a number of them hinted quite strongly that it had their support. Outside the Council if one wanted to be considered a patriot he had to give at least lip support to Reform; and after all even the Governor was in favour of it — as Rostant wrote on the 30th December summing up the political events of the year (1886);

Without the providential aid of extraneous influence, years of disappointment might probably still have been reckoned upon as in store for us. . . . We have only to single out the three perhaps most prominent men in the Public Service, in the persons of the Governor, the Chief Justice and the Attorney General, and contrast their general demeanour with that of the predecessors who have figured before them in the course of the past fifteen years.

The meeting which the requisition of December 10th called for, was fixed by the Mayor for Saturday 15th January 1887 in order that the Christmas festivities and the Horse Races in the Savannah might in no way detract from it. Public meetings had been typical of previous reform movements, but they were small scale and held in halls. Those who petitioned for a meeting had not specified its type or location. The large scale public meeting in the Savannah was a victory for Rostant, but possibly it scared off a number of people; for instance only nine of the

sixty-nine requisitioners attended the meeting.⁵⁹ It was just three years after the Hosay riots, and a time of economic distress, and difficulties could be foreseen. Such a meeting was truly a revolutionary step for Trinidad, for it meant opening up the movement to at least the lower middle class, and making use of sheer crowd size to impress the Government and perhaps induce further support for reform — for then as now, ‘nothing succeeds like success.’

Once more it was Rostant who undertook the practical steps to ensure that the meeting was a success. His first move was to make sure that he did not alienate his more conservative supporters. As early as 30th November (by which time Rostant had presumably a public meeting in mind) he wrote, “We warn our friends, that none but moderate views will prevail”. He constantly stressed this idea in *Public Opinion* and (as we have seen) at a dinner for St. Mary’s College past students on January 6th 1887. The meeting was advertised by word of mouth, by advertisements in the newspapers and by posters printed at the offices of *Public Opinion* and distributed throughout the country and even in the rural districts. Rostant looked forward eagerly to the big day, hoping for the best.

The great Reform Meeting (as Rostant was later to call it) was held on Saturday, 15th January 1887 at 2.00 p.m. at the Savannah just north of Port of Spain. If we are to have a true idea of the support for reform, it is important to know how many people attended the meeting and for what motives. Unfortunately, the accounts given of the meeting varied widely. On the one hand there is the account given by the English writer Froude who was visiting Trinidad at the time:

The political demonstration to which I had been invited came off the next day on the savannah. The scene was pretty enough. Black coats and white trousers, bright coloured dresses and pink parasols, look the same whether the wearer has a black face or a white one, and the broad meadow was covered over with sparkling groups. Several thousand persons must have attended, not all to hear the oratory, for the occasion had been taken when the Governor was to play close by in a cricket match and half the crowd had probably collected to see His Excellency at the wicket.⁶⁰

Bodu gives a more sympathetic description: The Race Stand served both as auditorium for the more aristocratic Reformers and rostrum, while the people congregated in their thousands in front of that structure to harken to the orators and express their sympathy generally to the movement. Rather incongruously, a cricket match was taking place a short distance off, and the manly form of Sir William Robinson, who was one of the players, might be seen careering over the ground in the orthodox suit of flannels. The weather was on the whole fair, although a sudden slight shower caused the Savannah, from the number of umbrellas unfurled, to assume for a brief period the appearance of a vast field of overgrown mushrooms. (This was) the largest and most orderly public meeting ever held in Trinidad A political change would be hailed as a relief by the great majority of colonists of every colour, class and creed.⁶¹

The *San Fernando Gazette* thought that only 2,500 to 3,000 people had responded to the invitation "which had been profusely placarded about the country not one third of them knew the real purpose of the meeting". The *Port of Spain Gazette* of January 8th 1887, said that most of the people who attended the meeting were an "idle rabble", presumably lower class blacks, misled into thinking that the Governor had invited them to attend. According to the Attorney General, Gatty, large

numbers of Indians were present under the impression that they had been commanded by the Governor to be there. Rostant thought that 15,000 persons were at the meeting and come to show support for reform. It seems certain that more than five thousand persons were present, but their reasons for coming must forever remain a mystery.

The detailed account of the meeting which follows has been taken from the *New Era*, as the *Port of Spain Gazette* and *Public Opinion* were strongly prejudiced on opposite sides. The meeting began with the appointment of Philip Rostant as secretary, whilst the Mayor of Port of Spain took the chair. He said: "It is a gratifying thing for me to preside at this meeting. I am a child of the soil. (*Cheers*) I have all my interests centred in the island. It is the object of my life that the government of the island should be such as to promote all those interests together with the general interests of the colony. (*Cheers*) We are assembled here in order to petition Her Majesty the Queen to grant a moderate change in the constitution of the government of the colony".

The first resolution that "the system of Government which now obtains in this Colony is no longer adapted to the requirements and aspirations of its inhabitants" was proposed by Eugene Lange and seconded by Dr. Sicard (for Vincent Brown who was absent). Another speaker was A. Paul whose call for a "liberal franchise" was greeted with cheers. The resolution was carried by acclamation. The second resolution, that "in view of the present crisis, the taxpayers should have a voice in legislation and control over taxation was moved by Robert Guppy, the Mayor of San Fernando, and seconded by

Philip Rostant who said:

Now gentlemen, we have to bring this home to the Government of the Mother Country and if we do not convince the Home Government that really we are in a position to elect a council which will be better than those we now have, that we are in a position to send representatives who are better able to take care of our interest and affairs than the present Government, we cannot hope for success It is my keen conviction that much of our troubles have had their origin in the fatal (pro-sugar) policy of William Hardin Burnley The history of Trinidad from the day Sir Arthur Gordon left us to the day Sir William Robinson arrived may be summed up in four words: culpable extravagance, disgraceful jobberies.

This second resolution, like all the others, was passed by acclamation. Fritz Zurcher proposed the third resolution, which was seconded by Lennan, "that the Queen be petitioned to modify the Constitution". The fourth resolution, "that a Committee be appointed to draft the petition to Her Majesty to be signed by the people and forwarded" was proposed by Goodwille and seconded by Henry Alcazar. Goodwille contradicted himself and the previous speakers in a number of places. For a Scottish merchant who had spent some twenty years in Trinidad he seemed singularly confused. He praised the present unofficial members of the Legislative Council saying that he did not want to single out anyone by name. He then proceeded to name de Verteuil as truly outstanding. He called for a universal franchise — because it was the best way of making sure that the present unofficials were returned to the Council. It is hardly likely that Goodwille's confused opinions were shared by many of the Reformers, but his speech certainly showed the lack of preparation for the meeting, where it might have

been considered that a united front was of some importance. The fifth resolution "that a subscription list be started to defray expenses" was proposed by C.F. Stollmeyer and seconded (in the absence of Eugene Ciprani) by Philip Rostant. "The great Reform meeting terminated", wrote the editor of the *New Era*, "having been attended with a success undreamt of by its most ardent supporters". The *San Fernando Gazette* on the other hand thought the meeting a failure, but printed a letter to the editor which enthused that the demonstration marked "a departure from an effete Crown Colony Officialism and the dawn of a new era of political liberty".

Subsequent to the meeting, the members of the Petition Committee who had been elected on January 15th met to formulate the petition, their final meeting being held at the Town Hall on the afternoon of January 25th.⁶² The draft of the petition was definitely adopted and arrangements were made to have it published and sent around for signatures. The committee comprised His Worship the Mayor, Chairman, and Messrs. Payne, Goodwille, Fitzwilliam, Lange, Guppy, Brown, Joseph, with Rostant as secretary. Once again Rostant was the man who did most of the work. He played a prominent part in the drawing up of the petition and had it printed and distributed from the offices of *Public Opinion*. It went as follows:

We venture to approach the throne, trusting that Your Majesty will graciously deign to listen to our petition which respectfully showeth:

1. That the system of Government which now obtains in this Colony is no longer adapted to the requirements and aspirations of its inhabitants.
2. That Trinidad, from the extent and surpassing fertility

of its territory, that salubrity of its climate, its almost unique geographical position at the mouth of the great Orinoco, and its incomparable harbour, is calculated to form one of the most valuable dependencies of Your Majesty's dominion.

3. That the material and intellectual progress of the Colony since 1850 entitles the taxpayers to have a voice in its legislation and some control over its taxation and expenditure. In support of this your petitioners beg to submit the following comparative statement. (There followed a statement of the imports, exports, general and local revenue and education).

4. That in 1850 there existed no appreciable middle class in the Colony. Since then, a material change has taken place in that respect. Almost the entire rural population — exclusive of Indian labourers on estates — consists of owners of freehold properties, whilst the majority of the inhabitants of towns and villages are also proprietors. These properties have been acquired by the thrift and industry of their owners, most of whom have passed through our schools. The above facts and figures show that each year a very large number of young men become qualified by their education to exercise the political rights now prayed for by your petitioners.

5. That the crisis through which the Colony is now passing, a crisis chiefly attributable to the depression in the price of its main staple, makes it the more advisable that the taxpayers should be enabled through their representatives to co-operate with the Government in the adoption of such measures as may tend to mitigate its effects.

Wherefore, your petitioners humbly pray . . . that a Royal Commission be named by His Excellency the Governor as was recently done in Jamaica to inquire and report on the advisability of such a change in the Constitution of the Legislative Council as will admit therein elected members.

(The petitioners were mistaken, for the Jamaica franchise commission had been appointed after the Secretary of State had decided to introduce elected members into the Legislative Council, and his decision was not therefore dependent on the findings of the commission.) It remained then to have the petition circulated and signed, which work fell mainly

on Rostant's shoulders. (One wonders how he managed to do all this politicking and still run *Public Opinion!*) Will, in his book *Constitutional Changes in the British West Indies* made this comment with regards to the signing of the petition.

Although the petition was signed by over 5,000 people it is not easy to judge the support for the movement. Evidence given before the Royal Franchise Commission supported the allegation that some of the rural population signed the petition without understanding it and under the impression that it concerned roads, the poor condition and lack of which were widely felt outside the towns It was further alleged that the petition had been touted in San Fernando; Rostant himself admitted that the organiser there had been paid at the rate of \$1 for 1,000 signatures. (This admission is not as extraordinary as it seems, for it was not unusual to meet the expenses of those who organized petitions. Payment by signature, however, must have been a strong temptation). A.W. Baker, the Inspector of Police, wrote: The Franchise Petition represents nothing. It was worked entirely by Mr. P. Rostant, in many instances through paid agents. The signatures were obtained for Roads, Schools etc. etc.⁶³

Whilst signatures were being collected, Rostant was still in a jubilant mood and beaming on the whole world. On February 22nd, in an editorial, he tried to sum up the relationship of the unofficials with the Reform Movement. "A wise discretion" had been exercised in not signing the requisition to the Mayor. Meanwhile, "they themselves have been steadily moving in the direction of reform". They should now sign the petition since their resolution (Fenwick's asking for a constitution on the lines of that of Mauritius) and the petition ask for the same thing; and they now have come to a recognition of "their utter uselessness in the future as agents for the transaction of the business of the country under the

present system of Government." And even the *Port of Spain Gazette* was intermittently in favour of reform:

We are still of opinion that the introduction of an elective element into our Legislature, always provided the electorate were liberal enough and wide enough to exclude all risk of class Government, would, if made gradually and progressively, be of advantage to the Colony.⁶⁴

The Governor had in due course forwarded the petition to the Queen, and the officials of the Colonial Office had then got to work on it. Will gives a detailed account of what went on behind the scenes; the general feeling being an inclination "to accept the inevitable without prolonging the fight".⁶⁵ And so, Knutsford, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, informed Robinson that "H.M. Government are not indisposed to consider whether the colony may not now receive a Constitution as nearly resembling that of Jamaica as the circumstances of Trinidad may justify". He continued:

The question whether one half of the Council can properly be made elective must depend upon the result of an enquiry by a Royal Commission, which should be appointed, as in the case of Jamaica, to ascertain the number of persons who would receive votes under a system of qualification sufficiently liberal to enfranchise all who are capable of exercising the franchise with intelligence

On the 24th September 1887, Robinson made public this answer of the Secretary of State for the Colonies and set about the appointment of a Franchise Commission. Rostant exulted:

It is with the greatest joy, and may we add, no small degree of self-congratulation that we have to announce to our friends the complete success of the Great Reform Petition. H.E. the Governor received a despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on Friday last, announcing that the prayer of

our petition had been granted and that a Constitution will be given to the Colony on the lines of that of Jamaica. His Excellency will as soon as possible do the needful to enable Her Majesty's Government to decide as to the franchise and electoral districts.⁶⁶

However on the 30th September he wrote: "a Paper states that many gentlemen who had signed the Petition have since changed their minds. We do not believe this is possible". The evidence for this change of mind is rather tenuous and probably affected only a few, but among them those who counted. Three reasons can be assigned for this change. The first and perhaps the most important reason was that the sugar market had improved. As Robinson put it on the 27th October 1887 to the Members of the Legislative Council: "The sugar crop of last season (January) was the largest ever reaped exceeding 87,000 hogsheads.⁶⁷ The prospects of this industry are certainly brighter, and the outcome of the conference to be held on the Bounties question is naturally looked forward to with the greatest anxiety". Rostant had much the same to say in *Public Opinion*: "Thanks to the persistent efforts of agitation against the sugar bounties, the accidental relief which the producers of cane have experienced from the failure of the beetroot crops abroad" and due to their various economies and increased efficiency they were in a far better position than they had been at the end of 1886.⁶⁸ Thus the crisis mentality had disappeared (temporarily it is true) from the sugar barons and the support of some of them for reform waned — and as we have already seen it was the sugar interest which counted with the British Government.

Secondly, there was the controversy over Chief

Justice Gorrie which *may* have caused a few prominent supporters of reform to lose enthusiasm. Will gives a full account of the matter:

The weakening of support for reform among the propertied classes may have been partly due to Rostant's attempts to give the movement a popular character by the 'monster' petition and meeting. But the more substantial reason lay in the actions of the Chief Justice, Sir John Gorrie. Gorrie was in the tradition of other liberal colonial judges and governors, whose careers were stormy because their social and political views clashed with the prevailing values of narrow societies in which the rights and privileges of property were pre-eminent. Gorrie's liberal views led him to examine not only the form of Trinidad law but also its working, and to strain judicial procedure in order to administer what he considered was even-handed justice. Informing his attitude was sense of responsibility towards those who, in their recourse to the courts, were at a disadvantage through poverty, and ignorance of language and law. His openly-expressed sympathy for the poorer creoles and Indians, combined with a quick temper and outspoken, and at times violent, language, soon estranged him from important elements in Trinidad society. In particular, he incurred the strong enmity of lawyers, among them Gatty, Garcia, and Aucher Warner, by his attitude to judicial procedure, which he sought to cheapen and expedite. He also antagonized the merchants, who as defendants, had profited in the past from the expense of, and delays in, the administration of justice which the poorer plaintiff could not withstand. At first, the movement against Gorrie took the form of pressure for a second puisne judge, and hostile criticism in the press, but on 31 August 1887 the Chamber of Commerce laid a petition before the Legislative Council asking for a 'full and formal' enquiry into the administration of justice in the Supreme Court. The effect of these developments on the reform movement was considerable. Planters and merchants who had been divided on reform were united in the defence of property. Further, their attack on Gorrie provoked a demonstration in his favour in which Rostant played a leading part; for some owners of property this

identified the cause of Reform with which they sympathised with a manner of administering justice which they deplored. Finally Gorrie's administration of justice created a lack of confidence among capitalists, particularly those connected with the cocoa industry, and a more general feeling of unease among employers of labour and owners of property It would, however, be an over-simplification to suggest that every opponent of Gorrie became an opponent of reform.⁶⁹

Thirdly, the appearance of Froude's book *The English in the West Indies* in early 1888 was crucial for the Reform Movement. The book aroused positive hatred for the author among most educated Trinidadians and John Jacob Thomas produced a book *Froudacity* to counter his exaggerations. The popular London magazine *Punch* wrote of him:

'Bout Froude there is no mystery,
He writes without restriction;
His fiction is all history,
His history is all fiction.⁷⁰

But Froude had a great influence among a few people in important positions. Gatty, the Attorney General, who was to chair the Reform Commission, was so greatly influenced by him that he used the very phrases of the book to pose searching questions, "irrelevant to the authorized work of that Commission and immediately undermining to the cause of Reform".⁷¹ Froude had been a guest of Gatty's during his stay in Trinidad and had apparently made of him a strong opponent of the elective principle. The English officials at the Colonial Office were also influenced by Froude.⁷² One of them minuted his comments to the Secretary of State with the statement: "The agitation is that of a small clique, and is very happily hit off by Mr. Froude in his book."

In short, some few prominent people seemed to have changed their minds on reform and this enabled Governor Robinson and the Colonial Office to claim that it had not as widespread support as the petition indicated. It was true that it "certainly never aroused general popular feeling" as Robinson wrote of it, based as it was on the support of the white and middle class black and coloured. (Though Robinson himself admitted that it was "on the whole very respectably signed.") But it is hardly true as Will tries to make out that the non-appearance before the Franchise Commission of men who had signed the petition was due to their change of heart. At the very first meeting of the Commission, Captain Baker, one of the Commissioners stated that "there are many people who will not come forward and give evidence as it is a public meeting".⁷³ Then, Gatty's inquisitorial method of conducting the Commission, was as Guppy said, "a trap . . . by which we might be involved in mystifications, paradoxes and contradictions . . . to the end of making our labours abortive"; and Louis de Verteuil put it even more clearly:

I may say that I have seen several of those gentlemen who were asked to come here as witnesses and I asked them why it was that they did not come and if they took an interest in the matter. Several of them answered that they could not attend simply because they could not submit to the close cross-examination to which some of the witnesses had been subjected. . . . I must say that I believe so for they are not perhaps wrong.

Rostant also complained 'Mr. Gatty backed by Captain Baker put questions to the witnesses which, besides being insulting to the gentlemen who took round the Reform petition to be signed are evidently intended to undermine if possible the value

of the petition itself".⁷⁴ And Rostant advised the country people not to appear before the Commission. Thus, it is difficult to maintain that non-attendance on the Commission meant a change of mind, on the part of erstwhile Reformers.

By January 1888 Governor Robinson had had appointed as members of the Commission, Stephen Gatty, the Attorney General, as Chairman; Arthur Baker, Inspector Commandant of Police; David Wilson, Sub-Inspector of Crown Lands and Commissioner for Northern Provinces; Michel Maxwell Philip, local born coloured Solicitor General, Louis de Verteuil and George Garcia, unofficial members of the Legislative Council; Robert Guppy, Mayor of San Fernando; Francis Damian, Mayor of Port of Spain; and H.B. Philipps. Rostant surprisingly approved of them. He however should have known better. To begin with, unlike the similar Commission in Jamaica, this one included Officials and one can hardly but conclude that they were put there of set purpose by Robinson. In addition, at least Baker's views as an opponent of reform were well known. Nevertheless, Rostant wrote: "a select Commission in which the Colony has complete confidence, has been entrusted with the settlement of the franchise and the electorate".⁷⁵ In successive issues of *Public Opinion*, Rostant gave summaries of the personalities and careers of the members of the Commission — On February 3rd: Stephen Gatty, the Chairman of the Commission, the Attorney General, the third son of the Rev. Dr. Gatty, sub-dean of York Cathedral; won a scholarship to Oxford; in 1874 called to the Bar; 1883 Attorney General of the Leeward Islands; 7th May 1886 appointed Attorney General of Trinidad.

His speech at the Mayor's Banquet was "like the sword of Perseus which slew the monster of apathy and distrust". On February 14th; Francis Damian, born in Trinidad in 1830 of Martiniquan parents, descended from the Chevalier Damian of Piedmont and ultimately from Damiano, a royal Count of Italy; a widower; a militant Catholic; twenty-one years in the City Council and now Mayor of Port of Spain; conciliatory by nature.

Then there was Robert Guppy, the irascible Englishman, the Mayor of San Fernando, and the most radical of all the Reformers and certainly of those of the Franchise Commission. Captain Baker, who asserted himself very strongly in the first few meetings in opposition to Reform, and Louis de Verteuil who spoke out very strongly at the end in favour of the elective principle; the other Commissioners playing in general a more subordinate role.

The first meeting of the Franchise Commission was held in the Council Hall at Government House on the 2nd February 1888 at 11.00 a.m. Gatty, having read the letter of appointment and terms of the Commission, announced 'that the whole question of whether the Constitution of Trinidad is to be altered depends upon the results of this enquiry', and he insisted "it is quite evident that the Secretary of State has not made up his mind yet".⁷⁶ There was no discussion of this matter in the Commission either then or later, and certainly Gatty could not have made such a statement without at the very least the connivance of the Governor. In addition, it is hardly conceivable that the Secretary of State for the Colonies had intended otherwise since that was all

the Reformers' petition had asked for, "a Commission to be named to inquire and report on the advisability of a change in the constitution of the Legislative Council as will admit therein elected members". Rostant had then simply been over-enthusiastic in his assumption that elected members had been granted — that was to depend on whether a suitable franchise could be obtained. (The clause in the Secretary of State's reply "as in the case of Jamaica" had been presumably slipped in to make the wording of his answer accord with that of the petition.)

The Commission held a total of sixteen meetings, most in Port of Spain but also in San Fernando, Arima and (of all places) 5th Company Village. Apart from a score of 'proprietors' briefly interviewed at the last named place, the following is the complete list of persons examined:—

Lawyers: Louis Wharton, Felix Lazare, H.A. Alcazar.

Wardens: Harris Harragin, Wm. Gray, L.M. Fraser, James Lynch O'Connor, L. Pierre, Robert Johnston, H.C. Warner.

Clergymen: Fr. J. Browne, Reverends K.J. Grant, O.W. Darling, W.B. Laurie, J. Morton, A. Ramsay, H. Adams.

Educationalists: Lechmere Guppy, A. Fortuné, Charles Bradshaw.

Merchants and Shopkeepers: Charles Fabien, Edgar Tripp, James Wharton, James Drennan, William Spencer Clerk.

Proprietors and Estate Owners: Eugene Lange, J. Crichlow, A. Arbuckle, Antonio Ferreira.

And from professions as diverse as doctor (Dr. Siccard), to undertaker (Henry King), and interpreter (Timothy Sirju), to newspaper proprietor (P. Rostant

and Joseph Lewis); and many others — H.E. Rapsey, Adolphe Boucaud, Alex Riddell, Michael Lennon, J. Cruickshank, Mr. Guppy, J. Maisoneuve, E.L. Francois, Egbert Carter, Robert Hewitt, W.L. Lewis, H. Cholomel, T. Morgan, James Lynch, J. Agostini, J.C. McHugh, Hon. C.A.W. Mitchell. A few letters and recommendations were also received. In short, if the Commission had been impartial, a fairly good idea of what many people wanted with regard to reform could have been obtained. Indeed, as regards the question of franchise and electoral districts the Commission definitely benefitted from the wealth of information and ideas pouring in to it. But on the fundamental question (which is our concern here) of whether or not elected members should be granted, the commissioners had little to learn. Their minds were made up beforehand.

At the first meeting of the Commission, Gatty announced: "It (reform) has been done before in these colonies and they gave gone back. We ought to be very careful". But even this slight appearance of impartiality was soon to disappear. He insisted that witnesses be treated as though they were in court; and he brow-beat every witness without exception in order to prove that reform was not really wanted by sensible people. Some few (ignoramuses!) had the courage and spirit to answer him back. For example he squelched poor James Cruickshank, an accountant, with: "You signed the petition?" "I did." "I suppose you did not know that there were a great many convicts upon it?" "No, sir! I did not!" But when he tried the same question on Julian Maisoneuve, superintendent of the streets of San Fernando, the latter retorted, "Oh, but if the

strict law was carried out we would all be in jail” (laughing) — and when Gatty could not silence the excellent Julian he had him put out of ‘court’.

At various meetings there were quarrels between Gatty and Guppy, and within a short space the three English officials, Gatty, Baker and Wilson were separated off from the other Commissioners by their anti-reform attitude. By the 20th March, Rostant wrote in *Public Opinion*, of petitioners “who would willingly and most cordially have come to town to give their evidence, had they not been scared by the insulting questions of Messrs. Gatty, Baker and Wilson”. As the meetings dragged on, Captain Baker left the Colony on leave, and the Commissioners had to mourn the death of Michel Maxwell Philip. At the meeting held on the 11th July *in camera* Gatty announced that because of his wife’s health he had to leave for England on the 21st July and continued “I do not see any object in summing up this evidence . . . I would certainly never advise the English Government to introduce the elective system at all”. He then read a letter from the absent Baker to say that in his opinion “the Franchise Petition represents nothing”. But this attempt to force the issue backfired and seems to have incensed the other members. Louis de Verteuil insisted: “The time has come, when in this colony, there is a wish, there is a longing for Reform, and that reform is the admixture of the elective principle. . . . and if we come to any decision I will vote in favour of reform”. On the 14th July, at Gatty’s last meeting a vote was taken on the matter and all but the three English Officials were seen to be in favour of Reform — but Gatty’s parting shot was “It is not a matter of voting; the Queen wants to be

advised". It was decided that Louis de Verteuil as the senior unofficial Member of the Legislative Council would chair the next meeting, and Gatty left, promising to write the Commission's report in England. This he never did. The months passed, the report never came; de Verteuil wrote Gatty, tried to get in touch with him — and all in vain. Eventually Louis de Verteuil summoned a meeting on the 31st October to draw up a report. This was finally completed and agreed to at the next meeting on the 29th December. Louis de Verteuil in summing up significantly gave reasons of patriotism for his support of reform:

Although I am a member of the Legislative Council of this Colony this is my opinion. I believe myself that the members of the Legislative Council perhaps have not been appointed as they ought to have been. (The people have lost confidence in them). I hope that whatever fears some members of the Commission and some members of this Community may have with regard to the ultimate result of the change that is proposed, that those fears, although they might be in the eyes of those in authority justified, I hope events will prove that they were ill-founded. Perhaps it is not because I now live in Trinidad but because I was born in Trinidad and all my interests are centred in this island, and that all my family young and old are inhabitants of Trinidad, but you will understand very well that I must, unless I would be a bad citizen, that I must wish for the best results.

The actual signing of the report took place on 3rd January 1889.

It recommended the election of nine members to the Legislative Council on a franchise based on a scheme submitted by Guppy, but modified by the Commission, which increased several of Guppy's qualifications and imposed others. Guppy himself opposed only one of these amendments: by four votes to three, Guppy, Phillips, and Wilson voting against, the Commission recommended excluding from the franchise

those who being under forty 'cannot read and write the English language or understand the same when spoken'. The Commission estimated that their proposals would enfranchise about 12,000 or considerably less if the education test was imposed. The majority report did not include any statement of the case for reform.⁷⁷

Louis de Verteuil's comment on the report was: "the dissenting members were government officials and could not have the same concern in the welfare of Trinidad as its native inhabitants. The signatories of the report had all a permanent interest in the island". Meanwhile Gatty, who had been far too busy or ill to formulate the Commission's report, sent in an extensive minority report of his own, extremely strongly worded against Reform. Wilson also sent in a short report of the same type. Whether or not Gatty had been in direct touch with the Colonial Office officials, they all unanimously adopted his views when it came to considering the report and the Secretary of State followed their advice giving as the ground for refusing elected members that the colony had enjoyed "remarkable prosperity" under the existing constitution and there was "no strong and general expression of public opinion" in favour of constitutional change, and that such a change would not "be likely to conduce to the public good". Knutsford, the Secretary of State, recommended instead (and his recommendation was adopted on 23rd July 1889) that the unofficial members of the Legislative Council be assigned to represent districts as follows: Town of Port of Spain, 2 members; one each for the counties of St. George, St. Patrick, Caroni and Victoria; and one for the counties of Nariva, Mayaro, St. David and St. Andrew; one for the Town of San Fernando; and one for Tobago

(which had just been joined administratively to Trinidad). And this minor adjustment was the sum total of all that the great reform movement had succeeded in obtaining. The *Port of Spain Gazette* rejoiced (on 7-1-1890) that the improvements gave "the death blow to the bubble agitation for democratic reform" while avoiding the "perilous extreme of elective government for this heterogeneous and educationally backward colony". And with the knowledge that the Colonial Office had complete control of the reins of power and that there was no chance of further protest succeeding at the moment, the Reform Movement subsided for the while.

Why did the Reform Movement fail? According to Will:

The reason for the failure of the Trinidad reform movement lay mainly in the colony, and particularly in the withdrawal of support by the propertied and professional classes; among the reasons for this withdrawal were dissatisfaction with Rostant's methods and the unease created by Gorrie's administration of justice.⁷⁸

This hardly seems however to fit the facts. Ultimately, the decision to grant or refuse elected members rested with the Colonial Office. While Will has fully recorded what the officials of the Colonial Office minuted in their correspondence with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, sometimes what is *not* said is much more important than what is said, precisely because it is an accepted assumption on both sides. An examination of the overall development of the Legislative Council in the British Colonies reveals some interesting facts. First, from the point of view of *race* all the racially white colonies received representative government before the non-white.⁷⁹ When representative government existed prior to

1870 in the West Indies it was because the legislatures were practically all white. It seems that race was an underlying assumption in the minds of the Colonial Office officials and brought to the surface in a rather forceful way by Froude — “The white minority could not be trusted with the exclusive possession of political power. The blacks could not be trusted, with the equally dangerous supremacy which their members would insure them.” The Jamaican crisis, and only because it was a crisis, forced the representative issue but once the crisis was over (and Mauritius and Guyana benefitted from it and from their own unrest) was in no way regarded as a precedent.

From the point of view of *nationality* all the English colonies received representative government before the foreign; Cyprus (1882) and Malta (1887) having some control over their legislation well after the less developed Australian colonies. Trinidad’s ‘French’ composition may have been kept in mind here. *Religion* was perhaps only incidental in this respect. Moreover, Trinidad was to some extent a ‘plural society’. To give Furnivall’s classic definition: A plural society; a society, that is, comprising two or more elements or social orders which live, side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit . . . In a plural society there is no common will except, possibly, in matters of supreme importance, such as resistance to aggression from outside. In its political aspect a plural society resembles a confederation of allied provinces, united by treaty or within the limits of a framed constitution, merely for certain ends common to the constitutional units and in matters outside the terms of union, each living its own life. But it differs from a confederation in that the constituent elements are not segregated each within its own territorial limits.

In a plural society everything tends to constitutional retardation. As the *San Fernando*

Gazette of January 22nd 1887 had expressed it: Trinidad, especially of all West Indian Colonies, is a land of varied and distinct communities, with traditions, aspirations and hopes apart and antagonistic to the principle of racial unity which alone can make Legislative Representation a safe thing in the hand of an educated and privileged minority.

Gatty successfully played upon these fears at the Colonial Office with regard to the East Indians.

Finally, though perhaps apart from the sugar interest there was no important withdrawal of support for reform among the propertied classes, Robinson the Governor was able to pretend that there was. By 1888 at least some Trinidadians were disillusioned with him. In the *Tattler* of August 1888 there is a drawing of a hand entitled "the hand of promise in the Robinson era". The four fingers are labelled Poorhouse, Education, Sanitation, Reformatory, the thumb — Reform and the palm Minor Industry. Then is published the sketch of a hand entitled "The hand of fulfilment, Robinson era". It is completely blank. Robinson never really pushed reform. In his despatch of 28th May 1887 he told Knutsford that so long as there was an official majority, he would not object to the unofficial members being entirely elected.⁸⁰ Two months later he wrote: "I do not consider that the majority of the population or that the leading inhabitants are in favour of the change advocated, but I think that a majority would view favourably the introduction by election of new blood and new ideas into the unofficial section of the Council." He had of course little means of finding out what the majority thought, but could easily attribute his views and those of the sugar group to them. In 1889 after the sitting of the

Commission he gave Knutsford no further guidance. And the Colonial Office Minutes do not support Knutsford's contemporary reputation as a man who favoured reform. He chose not to regard the Jamaica constitution as setting a precedent, and the Colonial Office officials recommended change only when the immediate weight of the demand was such that they considered it impolitic to refuse it, or when they judged that the change was inevitable. Thus, unless there had been far, far greater support and serious agitation for reform in Trinidad it seems very likely that elected members would not have been accorded. Reform failed in 1888 as it was to fail again in 1895 because the Colonial Office (the Secretary of State) was opposed to it. It was only in 1924 that Trinidad was to have its first elected members.

Thus, the 'revolt' of the whites (and middle class coloured) failed, just as had that of the negroes and the Indians, and it was only to be two or three score years later that what had been fought for was to be even partially realised. Historically then, these three revolts could be classified as 'dead-end failures', that led nowhere and resulted in nothing, except perhaps the imposition of further controls by the (British) Government. However, in a way, they all served a deeper purpose. They gave a consciousness of group solidarity, and in the last case the incipient sense of a Trinidadian nationality. If materially they accomplished nothing, they helped in whatever small way to keep alive a spirit of questioning and to inspire and induce an independence from the colonial mentality. They are therefore worth remembering in the history of our nation.

Notes and References

Certain abbreviations are used in the notes, notably, *POSG* for *Port of Spain Gazette* and *Brereton RRT* for *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad* by B. Brereton. CO for Colonial Office documents, London; P.P. for Parliamentary Paper. Other abbreviations, if need be, may be clarified by consulting the Bibliography under the name of the author of the book or article.

CHAPTER 1

The Environment

1. Massé diary
2. Tradition – Dr. Eric de Verteuil
3. *Catholic Encyclopaedia*.
4. B. Brereton RRT Ch. 2; L. de Verteuil *Trinidad*.
5. R. Scheult, *Trinidad's Medical Service*.
6. Massé diary.
7. L. de Verteuil *Trinidad* p. 179; B. Brereton RRT p's. 18-20.
8. L. de Verteuil *Trinidad* 179.
9. B. Brereton RRT pgs. 16-18.
10. G. Carmichael p. 281.
11. Biography of Braaga.
12. E André, *Naturalist in the Guianas*.
13. Ibid.
14. Massé diary. Also the passage on the maroon – Massé is quite definite that the man did not know that slavery had ended.
15. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 164 et seq.
16. Tikasingh, Thesis Ch. 2
17. Leaflet published by Syl Devenish.

18. B. Brereton RRT p. 210.
19. Information from Michael Pocock.
20. Borde, *Histoire de L'Ile de la Trinidad*. p. 266
21. Massé diary; this and the following instances show how intricately colour, manners, religion and nationality were bound up with class concepts.
22. Massé diary.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 189 et seq.
27. Quoted in B. Brereton RRT p. 203.
28. Massé diary.
29. Information from Olga Marvrogordato.
30. From Co – reference unfortunately lost.
31. Massé diary; unless otherwise indicated, the whole section on Abbé Jouin is from Massé.
32. Notes written in the margin of his copy of Bodu by J.H. Collens.
33. Massé diary.
34. The account of the trial is taken from the *Echo* Sept. 1870 and the *Chronicle* Sept. 1870.
35. Massé diary.
36. Mitto Sampson, *Carib. Quarterly* 4, Nos 2&3, pgs. 250-262.
37. Massé diary.
38. Dr. Brereton informs me that there is a copy of this pamphlet bound into the Colonial Office documents in London.
39. L.O. Inniss pgs. 82,90,99; also from Inniss, the quotation given later – 'the very rowdies whom he kept down'
40. Quoted in B. Brereton RRT p. 43.
41. Norman report – Parliamentary Paper, p. 50.
42. *Trinidad Review* – 27 December, 1883.
43. *New Era* 15 November, 1880.
44. Bodu p. 35
45. *POSG* 15 March, 1884.
46. *Trinidad Review* 1 November, 1883.
47. Bodu
48. *POSG* 26 January, 1887.
49. Bodu
50. B. Brereton RRT p. 54.

CHAPTER 2

The Blacks

1. Massé diary, as also all the unacknowledged quotes in the paragraph below.
2. J.J. Thomas, quoted in Brereton RRT p. 105.
3. Hannibal, quoted in Brereton RRT p. 104.
4. Massé diary.
5. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 160.
6. Brereton RRT p.116 et seq. and also the following two paragraphs.
7. L de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 184.
8. L de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p.s 161-163.
9. This and the following quotes are from Massé diary.
10. Massé diary.
11. Fraser, *History of Carnival*, CO 295/189 f. 391.
12. Pearse, *Carib. Quarterly* 4, Nos. 2&3, p. 184. And in support of my contention that Carnival remained the festival of all Trinidadians, white and black, I quote in full from the rather rare book, *Five Years in the West Indies* by C.W. Day, Volume I, page 314 et seq. which gives an interesting account of the Trinidad Carnival in 1848.

I was residing in Trinidad during the Carnival which commenced on Sunday, the 7th March at midnight . . . The maskers parade the streets in gangs of from ten to twenty, occasionally joining forces in procession. The primitives were negroes, as nearly naked as might be, bedaubed with a black varnish. One of this gang had a long chain and padlock attached to his leg, which chain the others pulled. What this typified, I was unable to learn; but as the chained one was occasionally thrown down on the ground, and treated with a mock bastinadoing it probably represented slavery. Each mask was armed with a good stout quarter-staff, so that they could overcome one-half more police than themselves, should occasion present itself. Parties of negro ladies danced through the streets, each *clique* distinguished by boddices of the same colour. Every negro, male and female, wore a white flesh-coloured mask, their woolly hair carefully concealed by handkerchiefs; this, contrasted with the black bosom and arms, was droll in the extreme. The ladies who aimed at the superior civilisation of shoes and stockings, invariably clothed their pedal extremities in pink silk stockings and blue, white or yellow kid shoes, sandaled up their sturdy legs. For the men the predominating character was Pulinchinello; every second negro, at least, aiming at playing the

continental Jack-pudding. Pirates too were very common, dressed in Guernsey frocks, full scarlet trousers, and red woollen cap, with wooden pistols for arms . . . Turks also there were, and one Highlander . . . There were also two grand processions, having triumphant "wans", one of which was to commemorate the recent marriage of a high law-officer; the other . . . represented the Sovereign pair of England . . . The best embodiments were the Indians of South America, daubed with red ochre; personified by the Spanish peons from the Main, themselves half-Indian. . . Many of these had red Indian quivers and bows, as well as baskets . . . One personation of Death . . . stalked about. I noticed that whenever a *black* mask appeared, it was sure to be a *white* man. Little girls dressed *à la jupe*, in the *vrai creole negro* costume, looked very interesting. All parties with the assistance of bands of execrable music, made a tremendous uproar; and most of us were glad when the priestly saturnalia was over.

13. Fraser, *History of Carnival*, CO 295/289 f. 391 et seq.
14. Brereton, Savacou.
15. Ibid.
16. Newspaper extracts included in CO 295/289 f. 524 et seq.
17. CO 295/289 f. 516 et seq.
18. Hamilton report from POSG 22-10-81.
19. Massé diary.
20. CO 295/289 f. 267.
21. Hamilton report from POSG 22-10-81.
22. *Brierly* p. 322.
23. CO 295/289 f. 330 et seq.
24. *Brierly* p. 322.
25. CO 295/289 f. 465.
26. The description of the Riot is taken mainly from an article in the *Sunday Guardian* (Frances Richards) 1 March, 1981 and from CO 295/289 f. 465 et seq.
27. *Carib. Quarterly* Vol 4 p. 259.
28. Massé diary.
29. *Brierly* quoted on p. 323.
30. *Brierly* p. 328.
31. CO 295/289 f. 267.
32. CO 295/289 f. 463.
33. CO 295/289 f. 282 and 295.
34. CO 295/289 f. 288 et seq.
35. *Brierly* p. 326. According to *Brierly*, — 'by two prominent, and with the lower class influential, citizens; one a general contractor and the other a man holding a very minor government appointment.' *Brierly* goes on to say that the latter 'headed a mob on Tuesday to the space of grass between the Court House and Police

Barracks and there burnt Captain Baker in effigy'. This certainly implies (like the Hamilton report) that the riots were led if not actually instigated by a few middle class agitators.

36. CO 295/289 f. 330 et seq.
37. *New Era* 7 March, 1881.
38. CO 295/289 f. 330 et seq.
39. Brierly p. 326.
40. *New Era* 7 March, 1881.
41. CO 295/289 f. 308 and 319.
42. Brierly p. 327.
43. CO 295/289 f. 269; and Carmichael.
44. CO 295/289 f. 346.
45. CO 295/289 f. 269.
46. CO 295/289 f. 341.
47. Tikasingh Thesis Ch. 5.
48. CO 295/289 f. 322.
49. *New Era* 11 April, 1881.
50. CO 295/289 f. 295.
51. Brereton Savacou p. 57.
52. Hamilton report *POSG* 22 October, 1881.
53. Massé diary.
54. Brereton Savacou p. 53.
55. A. de Verteuil, *Trinidad's French Verse* p. 151.
56. CO 497/4.
57. February 1883, *Fairplay*, *POSG*, *New Era*.
58. *San Fernando Gazette* 10 February, 1883.
59. *Fairplay* 8 February, 1883.
60. *POSG* 26 January, 1884.
61. *POSG* January 1884 and Brereton RRT p. 173.
62. Carmichael p. 296.
63. Brereton Savacou p. 54.
64. *New Era* and *POSG* of this period.
65. *New Era* 3 March, 1884.
66. CO 295/301 Despatch of 27 February, 1884.
67. CO 372/10.
68. CO 295/301 Despatch of 25 March, 1884.
69. Brereton Savacou.
70. *New Era* 3 March, 1884.

CHAPTER 3

The Indians

1. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 16.
2. Brereton, *Calcutta to Caroni* p. 25 et seq.
3. Bridges, p. 82.
4. Report of Sir H.W. Norman in Parliamentary Paper 4366.
5. Comins, pgs. 10, 31, 40.
6. Beachey, p. 103 et seq.
7. Parliamentary Paper 8655.
8. Brereton, *Carib. Issues* 1, No. 1; details from British Encyclopaedia.
9. Cothonay, Ch. 8.
10. Massé diary.
11. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 24.
12. Massé diary.
13. Froude, p. 65.
14. Kelvin Singh, *Calcutta to Caroni*, p. 49.
15. Brereton, *Carib. Issues*.
16. M. Ramesar, 6th Conference of Carib. Historians.
17. Haraksingh *Carib. Issues* Dec. 1976;
18. Comins, p. 18.
19. Quoted in Haraksingh, *Carib. Issues* 1976.
20. Tikasingh Thesis, Ch. 5.
21. Kelvin Singh, *Calcutta to Caroni* p. 49.
22. Jha, *Calcutta to Caroni*.
23. Carmichael, p. 273.
24. Comins, p. 42.
25. N. Ali, Thesis.
26. Parliamentary Paper 4366.
27. N. Ali, Thesis.
28. Tikasingh, Thesis Ch. 5.
29. Tikasingh, 5th Conference of Carib. Historians.
30. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 76.

31. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 1.
32. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 46 and 53.
33. Weller, p. 50.
34. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 60.
35. CO 295/301, despatch of 26 March, 1884.
36. Ibid.
37. CO 295/301 f. 102-104.
38. CO 497/4.
39. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 3.
40. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 5.
41. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 8.
42. Ibid.
43. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 16.
44. Jha – for the whole of the following paragraph.
45. Jha.
46. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 22, 23, 33, 34.
47. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 6, 9, 10.
48. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 77-83.
49. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 71.
50. For this section dealing with the actual riot, snippets are taken from all over the Parliamentary Paper 4366 so that it is impossible to give detailed references, which indeed are hardly necessary for though the minor details are very interesting they are of little historical importance.
51. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 6 & 7.
52. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 77-83.
53. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 18.
54. *New Era* 3 November, 1884.
55. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 18.
56. Parliamentary Paper 4366, pgs. 6, 40, 75.
57. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 39-49.
58. Parliamentary Paper 4366, p. 40.
59. Tikasingh, Thesis Ch. 5.

CHAPTER 4

The Whites

1. L. de Verteuil *Trinidad*, p. 164.
2. Massé diary.
3. Quoted in Borde p. 313.
4. Borde. p. 228.
5. L. de Verteuil *Trinidad*, p. 190.
6. B. Brereton RRT p. 25.
7. Quoted in Martin Wight p. 112.
8. CO (Reference lost – it is from Despatch No. 66 of Freeling).
9. Brereton, RRT pgs. 49 & 50.
10. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 266.
11. Massé diary.
12. Parliamentary Paper 8655.
13. Poems in manuscript by de Gannes, Le Cadre, Devenish, Lange and Ganteaume, see *Trinidad's French Verse* by A. de Verteuil.
14. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 156.
15. A pamphlet by Léon de Gannes.
16. Brereton RRT p. 208.
17. *New Era* 5 March, 1883.
18. *Public Opinion* 19 January, 1886.
19. L. de Verteuil, *Trinidad* p. 156.
20. Massé diary. Sylvester Devenish was in fact in the forefront of the movement against the corrupt practices of some British Officials. According to Rostant (*Public Opinion* Tuesday, May 8th, 1888) as Surveyor General in 1878 he wrote to the Secretary of State in London asking for a Commission of Inquiry which was granted. Governor Irving did not take kindly to this and brought Syl before the Executive Council which suspended him. Later he was exonerated of all blame by the Commission. His forced retirement was according to Rostant 'another instance of the habitual neglect by the home authorities of native worth.'
21. Brereton RRT p. 58.
22. However, I am indebted to Dr. Brereton for the following viewpoint: 'But in a review of Vol 1 of Borde (in *New Era* 1876) Thomas quotes Borde:— "as descendants in the majority of French colonists, we have in common the same origin, the same country and the same religion", and comments, "we doubt whether the last quoted sentence will give pleasure to at least one

section of true Trinidadians who are more numerous than those who are descended from French colonists . . . it is only fair to ourselves to express the opinion that the exhortation of Mr. Borde to patriotic union, fraternity etc., would without impropriety have extended far beyond the limits he has circumscribed". Thus, Thomas specifically attacks Borde for overlooking the blacks'. — But not the coloured, and of course the sentence that Thomas quotes here would also exclude the English creoles. It does indeed seem that Borde in this phrase overlooked the blacks — did not include them — but probably did not wish to exclude them from his appeal to Trinidadians. He was in fact writing for the small group of French-speaking whites and coloureds and would not have had the others always in mind.

23. Brereton RRT p. 208.
24. *Public Opinion* 19 January, 1886.
25. *Trinidad Review* 23 August, 1883.
26. *New Era* March 1883.
27. *Trinidad Review* 2 August, 1883 and 9 August, 1883.
28. *New Era* 15 November, 1880.
29. Quoted in Brereton RRT p. 54.
30. Will, p. 15.
31. Quoted in Brereton RRT p. 51; *New Era* March 17th.
32. R. Seheult, article on Three Doctors in *Carib. Medical Journal*.
33. Ibid.
34. Council Papers.
35. Bridges p. 89 et seq. Another account from Massé diary.
36. Ross p. 21. But Rostant's reforming policy owed far less to his ancestry than to his experience in the Reform movement in Trinidad in the 1850's in which he was deeply involved. The resemblances between the reform movements of the fifties and eighties are far too great to be merely accidental. The reform committee of 1856 (See Minutes of the Trinidad Reform Association — POS 1856 pages 1 to 8) was aggrieved at the lack of attention 'paid to the Petition of the *Catholics* regarding the stipend of their Bishop'; at the 'Secrecy' in Government measures; at the 'subservience to the will of the Governor' and 'the selfishness of purpose' of the Legislative Council unofficials. The reformers were convinced that 'a change in the system itself has become necessary'. Their action was stimulated by 'the financial crisis' and the excessive expenditure on Government centralisation (particularly the Board of Health) by an unpopular Governor. The methods used were that of a meeting summoned by the Mayor of Port of Spain, followed by an appeal to 'country members'; the use of a newspaper (the *Sentinel*) to inform the public and stir up support; and the petition to the Queen and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Rostant in *Public Opinion* gave a full account of the Reform movement of the 1850's; and where he diverged from the previous methods with regard to a 'monster meeting' the change was clearly deliberate.

37. Bridges, p. 89 et seq. According to Bridges, Rostant was alienated from the French creoles, but this was certainly not the tradition among the French creoles around 1900. And though Bridges has the spirit of the time she makes fundamental mistakes, even for instance placing a whole chapter at the Rostant's estate near the Santa Cruz river – which estate in fact they never owned or tenanted, but they did own the cocoa estate Soconusco in Santa Cruz.
38. Will, p. 165.
39. Council Papers, 2nd March, 1886.
40. Reis, p. 93.
41. Will, note on page 159.
42. Newspaper cutting – Holy Ghost Archives.
43. Holy Ghost Archives.
44. Royal Franchise Commission Report – 3rd meeting.
45. Public Opinion 19 January, 1886.
46. Brereton RRT p. 57.
47. Public Opinion 30 July, 1886.
48. Will, p. 166.
49. Council Papers.
50. Wight, p. 116.
51. Public Opinion 19 February, 1886.
52. Bodu.
53. Public Opinion 1 June, 1886.
54. Council Papers – 9th August, 1886.
55. Public Opinion 10 August, 1886 and 29 October, 1886.
56. Public Opinion 9 November, 1886.
57. Public Opinion 23 November, 1886.
58. Public Opinion 10 December, 1886.
59. Will, note on page 168.
60. Froude, p. 67.
61. Bodu p. 66.
62. Public Opinion 25 January, 1887.
63. Will, p. 70.
64. POSG 4 June, 1887.
65. Will, p. 175.
66. Public Opinion 27 September, 1887.
67. Council Papers.
68. Public Opinion 10 January, 1888.
69. Will, p. 177.
70. Quoted in Bodu.
71. Tattler 1 March, 1888.
72. Will, p. 184.

73. Franchise Commission Report, meetings: 1st, 4th and 5th.
74. Public Opinion 24 February, 1888.
75. Public Opinion 10 January, 1888.
76. Franchise Commission Report.
77. Will, pgs. 180-181 — as also the following paragraph.
78. Will, p. 187.
79. Wight — facts taken from throughout the book.
80. Will, pgs. 173 and 187.

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