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Trinidad Guardian, 5 Feb. 1933:2

OLD STREET CRIES OF OLD TRINIDAD

by Irving Greenidge

WHEREVER this motley band of pedlars plied their trade on week days, railway trains and passenger carts conveyed them on Sunday in full force to San Juan, to add their miscellaneous street cries to those of the local hawkers.

Angelus ushered in the village “bread-boy,” as we called him, a merry-spirited, knock-kneed, jet-black fellow who looked as if he had dyed his gums in burning red and could not stop laughing at the joke himself.

His usual explosive, “Bread-bread-bread! Bread-bread-bread!” is changed this Sunday for a grave and dignified single “Bread,” sung to sol, “Bread,” sung to doh descending.

Close on his heels came the Indian man in loin cloth who in the week sold, “Pomatae! Pomatae!” Today his wares became “Pomatae-ma-ma, pomatae-ae!” chanted with all solemnity to the bread-boy's two-note air, by which he meant to convey to patois-speaking housewives that he was hawking sweet potatoes.

CHINESE MAN

WIZEN-FACED CHINESE MAN

“New, new Sunday!” That was a pigtailed, wizen-faced Chinese, in loose, black, shirt-like uppers and capacious, windy pants. A few hair-pins and shoe laces formed his entire stock-in-trade.

By what reasoning he connected his extraordinary cry with his line of business was always a puzzle to the village boys.

What really brought him patronage was his odd way of going about his business. You might be at your midday meal when from right over your shoulder would come the subdued, high-pitched cry, like the timid mewling of a hungry kitten! It was “New, New Sunday,” as he came to be called, unperturbed by your discomfiture, stolidly offering his wares.

“MOOK FROM BRASSO”

Always around midday, in the broiling sun came “The Mook from Brasso.” He was a short, strongly built Negro, with a regulation pedlar's smile. He wore a pair of huge black spectacles which harmonised irreproachably with his Old Curiosity Shop make-up. You could have got from him anything from a table knife to a length of valence. His was a doggerel cry, which endeared him to the hearts of every boy and girl. Which of us can ever forget it:

“I am the Mook from Brasso,
Who arrive here once again,
I can neither read nor write nor count,
So I leave all the change behind!”

The point of the joke was that the man really belonged to Port-of-Spain but in those days any “green horn” was promptly ticketed for Brasso, known as the most backward settlement in the island, its people being termed “mooks.”

SYRIAN WOMAN

He had a serious rival for our affections in a little Syrian woman. "Coomaye, coomaye," she would whine, "No want it razaar?" How she invariably sought to interest the ladies (coomaye) in her razors (razaar) of all her heterogeneous stock:

She had a trick of giving some slight gew-gaw, a brass pin or maybe a shilling-a-thousand medalet on the San Juan women with high appraisal of their beauty and great promise, when the effecting of a sale seemed hopeless.

Upon this demonstration the grateful woman suddenly recalled the need for some odd household item on which, of course, the shrewd trader recovered the value of the "gift."

THE SOAP SELLER

You could have made out his cry at a distance, "Haye, haye, potick!" He was an Indian vendor of as many kinds of dry goods as the big wooden chest he carried on his head could hold.

He specialized in "sweet soap" though, and passed this assortment of scented packets so rapidly under your nose you scarcely knew which one you had at last "selected."

I fancy I can hear it now,—the sharp, rasping "Cakes-cake-paerakes!" rivalling the sharp cracking of sandbox capsules for crispiness! It was the peculiar street cry of an Indian pastry vendor, a lank-shanked, cross-eyed, sparse-bearded, anaemic-looking man who seemed to be on the edge of his grave.

He was a martyr to persecution from the bigger boys, having earned the soubriquet "Sweet Marie" as the result of a humorous romance with a crazy Creole woman of the district.

SMALL BOYS' TERROR

But the terror of the day for the small boys was the harlequin pedlar of boot laces and thread.

In patchwork clown costume of gayest calicoes, an umbrella to match, the hearse-like drag of his ponderous clogs was enough to send us scampering under the bed, while his cry, a drawling, low-pitched, doleful—"A-a-a-h!" fairly put us out of our wits!

But time has done for them—those romantic street cries. Cheap omnibus and railway service have brought the city and the towns within easy reach of the *remotest* villagers and have rendered the few *straggling* hucksters more of an anachronism in our economy than a convenient factor.