WRITING IN THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN
A STUDY IN CULTURAL DEVOLUTION 1)

BY

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It is the glory, but also the curse of the British Empire that it has never deliberately intervened to direct the thoughts of those that have come under its sway. For good or ill, those that have been its servants have been practical men, constitutional lawyers, railway engineers, concerned with the external world of things rather than people. The glory, because the peoples have been able to some extent to evolve in freedom; the curse, because of the inevitable clash of values, and, in a sense, the social neglect of things of the spirit. Thus in the lands of ancient cultures, the old beliefs, the old laws have persisted, as uneasy bedfellows with the new forms of a materialist and individualist economy which has inevitably developed as part of the British action. As it has been said of India, the main charge against England must be that great enterprises were embarked on without the slightest thought of how great they really were.

But what of the lands which have no common culture, and the peoples who have been introduced to fill the short-term needs of practical economy? Here, in a sense, there seems little glory, except perhaps the deep and unreasoning British belief in history and the healing action of time. It is my hope that I may show that this belief is not altogether unreasonable, and that scattered

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1) Nu het tijdschrift Eldorado helaas zijn verschijning heeft gestaakt, is het de redactie van de W.I. Gids een genoegen hierbij een artikel te kunnen plaatsen, dat oorspronkelijk bestemd was voor een speciaal nummer gewijd aan de kunst van het Caribische gebied. Deze bijdrage is in 1949 geschreven.

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