

# A Corner in Paradise as Part Payment From France



Mont Pelée, the volcano that buried St. Pierre.



Martinique's link with Napoleon-- The statue of Josephine, a native of the island.



Not German shells, but a volcano. Martinique's ruined Cathedral at St. Pierre.

## The Plan to Cede Martinique, and the Resources We Should Gain

By Grace Phelps

MARTINIQUE, the best known of the French West Indies, may soon belong to the United States, if the proposed plan to cede it as part payment of the war debt of France to us is carried out.

Whether the inhabitants of the island would be as enthusiastic over the idea of becoming Americans as were the natives of the Danish West Indies, which became part of the United States nearly two years ago, is a moot question. The fact remains that the plan is being seriously made abroad and is seriously considered here, especially by a pan-American group anxious to extend our influence over the entire West Indian group of islands.

Leaving aside for a moment the political and economic reasons for and against such a transfer, we would fall heir to 800 square miles of a delightful tropical country of strange exotic fruits and flowers, a romantic history and fascinating Creole women—the most beautiful in feature, color, dress and carriage to be met with in all the West Indies.

It has been two years since I visited Martinique, but the glimpse I had of it then has made it for me, as it has been familiarly known to travellers for centuries, the pays des revenants, the Country of Those Who Come Back.

Martinique has not been "in the news" since the terrible volcanic eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902, which destroyed the town of St. Pierre at the foot of the mountain, the lives of 26,000 men, women and children, and even the ships at anchor in the harbor.

Where once the busy natives piled up in warehouses and on the dock the huge horseheads of molasses, sugar and white rum for which the island is famous, slept through the noonday heat or merrily danced the bamboula in the streets at carnival time, now nothing is left save ruins covered with molten lava or overgrown with creeping vines, with here and there a brilliant lizard, frightened from a crevice.

The French Government has not encouraged the rebuilding of St. Pierre and has given land in other parts of the island to those who were absent from the town the day of the eruption, and so escaped with their lives. But further down the coast lies the prosperous town of Fort de France, somewhat saddened by the absence of thousands of its men who have gone to fight for La Patrie, but still busy.

Josephine, ill-starred wife of Napoleon, was born in Martinique, and her statue, splendid and melancholy, dominates the public plaza, or Savanne, near the centre of Fort de France. Here, too, was born Mme. de Maintenon, the beautiful courtesan, whose influence on Louis XIV was responsible for one of the religious massacres during his reign.

The French have no such race prejudice as we have here in the United States, and both within and without the law intermarriage has been the custom. It is this crossing, together with the original Carib Indian strain, which produced the beautiful, supple, colored Creole, who proved so fascinating to Lafcadio Hearn in his two years in Martinique.

Color, however, and a tropical languor always had a fascination for Lafcadio Hearn far exceeding that of the pink and white beauties of northern climes. He might therefore be accused of prejudice if it were not for the testimony of other visitors to Martinique, not to mention the living proofs visible to present day travellers.

It was early in the morning, so early that the sun had hardly risen, when I caught my first sight of a Martinique belle. We had left the steamer in a small boat and rowed through a jumble of 'n' canoes, or little canoes, with their bronzed little paddlers eager to dive into the water for our pleasure, and our pennies. But the sight was no novelty, and I was anxious to get to shore to see the market while the supplies were plentiful and bargaining was at its height.

### The Beautiful Creole

So we left the disappointed 'n' canoté behind and were soon on the dock. Lafcadio Hearn himself could not have picked out a more beautiful type of Creole than the girl passing up and down there. Against a background of her darker sisters, who humbly stepped aside with their baskets of tourist trinkets to give her more

room, she swayed like a brilliant bird of paradise.

Tall and slim, with perfect features, her dark eyes now mischievous, now coquetting, she paraded before us in her gayly figured purple and yellow dress, fastened high in front over a stiffly starched white petticoat. On her head she wore the yellow calendered (painted) turban—typical of Martinique—with one end sticking up in front, and in her ears hung heavy hoops of gold.

Just what she was doing there at that early hour was not obvious, unless she considered it her duty to give strangers a favorable impression of Martinique on their arrival. However, beauty needs no excuse in any land, and the men of the party were especially pleased, though she was too shy to talk to them and would not permit herself to be snapped.

The streets of Fort de France are narrow and during the busy hours of the early morning or late afternoon are crowded. Shops or bazaars with corrugated iron shutters which roll up, leaving the entire place exposed, open on the still more narrow sidewalks. The gutters run with water which comes from a stream led down from the hills behind the town. Occasionally a tropical "white wing" with a long hooked pole loosens a jam of cocoon shells or other refuse which threatens to choke back the stream and prevent the sewage being carried off.

The bazaars are rather uninteresting, being a confused jumble of goods, crockery and implements of various sorts. One bazaar, however, is the exception. It is where the squares for the turbans are sold. The gingham, madras or silk for this purpose is designed in France especially for the colonies, and a marvellous combination of colors and designs these squares represent. In addition to their original colors the squares are painted a brilliant sulphur yellow between the stripes or squares. Besides making the turbans stiff when tied, the yellow seems to have some sort of significance, similar, I gather, to the ancient use of purple as a symbol of royalty. At all events, it is a costly process and the calendered turban is only worn by the better class of blacks and creoles.

It is the market which is the most attractive place in the town, for here are the mechanics, the women who, save in the fish market, are the vendors of provisions.

There are all kinds of strange looking tubers and roots, among which one can distinguish white potatoes and yams. Of the others, one is the mabi, a bitter root from which is made the favorite native drink, mabiage. A little white rum and sugar is added to the juice. The favorite drink of the white population, however, is the cocoyage, known in other West Indian islands as the swizzle. This is made of an egg, cocoon milk, a little gin and sugar, beaten up together with a stick made of a young twig with a whorl of twigs at the end which has been shortened, stripped of bark and the whole polished. Every visitor to the West Indies brings home a

swizzle stick, but if he is fortunate enough to get it in Martinique he calls it a baton-léché.

There are bananas and plantains of many varieties, mangoes and tamarinds, avocados and oranges. Hines and many other fruits whose names I have forgotten. At one counter in the market an old portuese was putting out her wares. A small boy had helped her lift the heavy wooden tray from her head and was scurrying around trying to dump up trade for his gran'ma's fruits. Fries! Strawberries! Mountain strawberries!

I went over to buy a basket, but the old dame, wrinkled and wise from years of meeting tourists, or perhaps with a memory of the back-breaking task of picking the berries 'way up on the mountainside, knew there was more money to be gotten out of selling them by the saucerful. Taking a cracked saucer from her tray, she gave it a dextrous swipe with the dirty pad she wore over her turban as a base for her tray, and placed in it ten strawberries, with the request in patois that I pay a franc for the privilege of eating.

I did not eat the fries. Later, however, I had a chance to sample the berries and found them rather like very sassy raspberries.

As a Lizard As an Entree

A favorite dish in Martinique is made of the iguana, a huge lizard. It is said to taste like chicken. I cannot testify to this fact, for like the monkeys which I was promised in a pie in St. Kitt's, the iguanas seemed very shy during my stay. Or perhaps it was the closed season for them.

The interior of the island is very mountainous, and the fer-de-lance, one of the most poisonous snakes known, keeps natives as well as travellers from exploring those regions. The roads, too, are bad, so that many persons born on one side of a mountain range live and die without seeing the natives in the valley on the other side.

The portuese, girls who carry produce and merchandise over the mountain roads

to inland places, are very careful not to travel at night, for fear of the fer-de-lance. These portuese travel forty or fifty miles a day with their burdens, swinging along erect and easily. So accustomed are they to heavy weights on the head that when their trays are emptied, they hasten to fill them with stones. Horses and mules used over the same roads play out in a very few years, but the human carriers seem none the worse for their work.

The mongoose, a small, weasel-like crea-

ture, is practically the only wild animal on the island. It was introduced, as in all West Indian islands, to destroy the rats, the carriers of the dreaded bubonic plague of the tropics. There is a curious crab found on the east coast, with one claw larger than the other, which he carries folded up close to his body. The natives, who likened him to a Catholic penitent striking his breast and crying, mea culpa! mea culpa! have nicknamed him crab-c'est-ma-faute (crab-it-is-my-fault!). The natives are an odd mixture of Chris-

night they roam the city and country doing evil. A quaint native name for the zombis (which explains one of their characteristics) is: Those Who Make Noises at Night None Can Understand. The country people are especially fearful of the zombis, but even in the towns the natives look grave when the subject is mentioned by whites.

There is a tree growing on the island whose seeds are red, with an irregular black spot. These spots, the natives say, are caused by the touch of the zombis. None the less, this belief does not interfere with the native practice of stringing the seeds into necklaces or wearing them into mats for the tourist.

But if the interior, with its hana evergreen forests, is impenetrable to the traveller, save with a guide and a cutlass, the town has one attraction which makes up somewhat for the lost delights of the jungle. This is the carnival or mardis gras.

Big and little, black or light colored, for this one season in the year every native is white. A white wire mask, with just a touch of pink in the cheeks, or white paint with a splash of red, disguises him perfectly. And there is none too sick, or too old, or too young, to join in dancing the bamboula.

The mardis gras may be French, but the bamboula is pure African, and the songs sung all refer rather unpleasantly to certain individuals who have incurred the wrath of their fellow islanders. Led by a group of devil masqueraders, the crowd of men, women and children surge through the streets, swaying back and forth in time to the beat of the big drums, the kas and the rattle of the smaller calabasses, or swinging in a kind of hugging dance. At the end of each song, the dancers take up the refrain:

Bamboula, bamboula!  
Zamboula, zimboula!  
Bo! Lo! Bo!

### Martinique's Great Figure

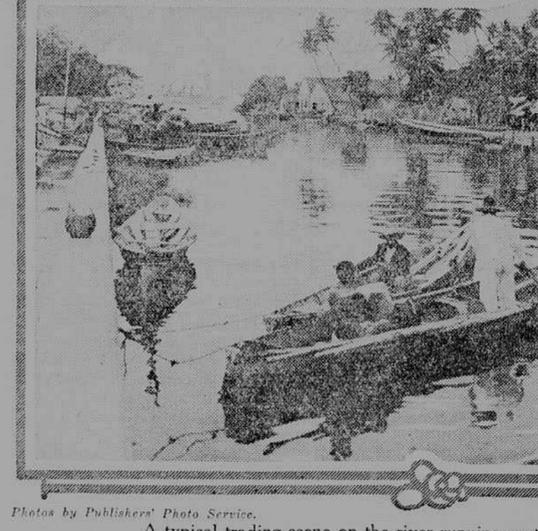
By far the most interesting figure in the history of Martinique is that of Pere Labat, a Dominican father, who lived in the island in the early part of the seventeenth century. Methods of distilling, sugar cane raising and even engineering projects instituted by Pere Labat remain in Martinique to-day. Yet all that is remembered of the stern fighter, priest and layman, is a legend which the Creoles use to frighten their children into good behavior.

Slavery was introduced into Martinique before Pere Labat's time, yet it is always associated with him because of his cruelties toward the negroes, whom he believed literally to be "limbs of Satan." And when at night a light is seen twinkling on an inaccessible mountainside, it is believed to be the lantern of Pere Labat, condemned to wander thus as a penance for his cruelties. Slavery was abolished in 1848. Many Creoles, especially among the women, were freed voluntarily years before, yet Pere Labat's lantern still twinkles in Martinique.

Socially there is little distinction to-day between the races in Martinique, and politically there is none whatever. It is the color problem, therefore, with our less liberal social and political attitude, which this country will have to face if the island should be ceded to us. It is the same problem which faces us in the Virgin Islands, formerly the Danish West Indies, where class and not color was the dividing line under Danish rule. In Martinique there is also the barrier of language, for where English is understood and spoken in the Virgin Islands, only the French patois is to be heard in Martinique.

Judging from reports that have reached me from St. Thomas since the American occupation, the color problem is not being met very happily there. That we would be more successful with the Creoles of Martinique, who enjoy far greater economic and political freedom than did the natives of the Danish West Indies, is unlikely. Trade, too, is bound up more closely with the mother country than was the case with the Danish West Indies. The white rum which is distilled in Martinique forms the basis of the fine French perfumes.

Furthermore, Martinique is only one of the French West Indies. Its population of 185,000 slightly exceeds that of Guadeloupe, the second island of importance in the group. Besides Guadeloupe there are four other islands belonging to France in the West Indies, all closely connected with the mother country, and in all of which the population is 95 per cent black or colored.



Photos by Publishers' Photo Service. A typical trading scene on the river running past the city of Fort de France

# The Pathos of "Plain Clothes"

By Sarah Addington

A CIVILIAN friend of ours, with impossibly bad eyes, love him a prodigious sigh the other day and vowed aloud that he was a man among men once more (since November 11) and no longer subject to the condescensions and insults, implied and otherwise, of his lady friends. He declared that his Norfolk was the uniform of the future and would slanders please take notice?

But with due respect to the Norfolk, he released that announcement too soon. For although American girls are flirting with the Prince of Wales these days and Mrs. Vincent Astor has turned working girl in a "cy" cafeteria, that well known and over-ridden word that begins with a "d" and ends in "cy" is still just a word. We have with us this year the aristocracy of the uniform, still and yet, and let nobody think he can deny it. The demon democracy still has wings with which to fly, apparently, and feet with which to run, for no sooner do we catch hold of one of his loose ends than, lo, we have lost another.

Returned husbands, for example. We have one. He was tractable in the old pre-war days, like all other men, and then, with the shadow of danger over him and the

glory of a uniform upon him, he became a being to be feared, respected and truckled to. Equal rights? Vanished. His rights, that was all.

Now, however, he's back and seemingly the old order should be established. But here's the sticker. Returned husbands have a fatal weapon: they put on their uniforms at any impending crisis. Just as the wife person begins to tread the old familiar paths of feminine tyranny and pluck the

fruit of small conquests and domestic triumphs out comes the hateful khaki to strut around the house and assert its male domination. Ask any woman if she'll say the same things to a creature in splendid and olive drab as she will to the craven wretch in housecoat and baggy trousers. She won't, and (to make it rhyme) she don't, and thereby comes a new foe in the life of women, the horrid remnant of a great war. The peace table has its problems of reconstruction, indeed, but so has the breakfast table, and reconstruction on the domestic scale needs a Colonel House at every hearthstone.

Husbands are not more culpable for this dominion of the uniform, however, than are certain others. There is the new elevator boy, for one, he who wears his leggings and khaki trousers with a bell boy's coat and hasn't been arrested yet. It is those leggings, of course, that give him that indescribable air of patronage, but that does not make enduring it any easier for the abused tenants, who pay exorbitant rents, for the privilege of living in the house and like to dispense the favors and benefits themselves.

Or try to get a job these days and see how blue serge is treated. Nothing to it,

my man. It is only the doughboy who can land one. You may have all the talent and he none, you may have all the experience and he none; but he's been to war and you haven't.

Your grocer picks out the turnips with a careless hand and a far-off gaze, and though you urge upon him that you want red ones, or blue ones, he still forgets his post as grocer in the light of his recent job as a warrior. Turnips, indeed, mere penny vege-

tables; but he, heigh-ho, has the international viewpoint! He has been to France and back again!

It is the furrin travel that has done more than his share to rob us of trivial concerns and make the soldier of the world the lord thereof, whether in peace or war. One cannot care too much about a leaky pipe if the plumber will insist upon telling you about the Battle of the Argonne Forest. It would be both unpatriotic and picaresque to put the claims of a flooded bathroom against those of that great American epic. (Even though the epic will be expensive literature when it appears upon the plumber's bill later.) And one would not dare foist small talk upon a dinner partner if he really pines to recite the beauties of Paris to you.

And so we plain clothes people must bear the brunt of peace, as they bore the brunt of war. As the Frenchwomen put on dark clothes as a foil for the horizon blue of their heroes, so we must set ourselves up as background for our husbands and elevator and grocery men and let them gather laurel while they may. Which seems fair enough, after all, even if it does entail a servility to husbands that the twentieth century never dreamed of.

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