

"Present Tragedy And Memory of Past
Torture Still Haunt The Caribbean"

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VICTOR REID'S "NEW DAY" REVIEWED IN LONDON MERCURY EDITORIAL

MARCH ISSUE of London's *Life and Letters* (The London Mercury), carries an editorial devoted to chapters of Victor Reid's *New Day*, which is the leading feature in the magazine. In part, the editorial, written by Robert Herring, says:

Soon after its inception under Mr. Desmond McCarthy, *Life and Letters* made, or contributed to, literary history by devoting the whole of one issue to a condensed version of that Welsh writer's, Richard Hughes, novel, *High Wind In Jamaica*. Twenty years or so later, I am now able to carry that departure a step further by printing chapters from a novel I have brought back from Jamaica and, as already announced, by following these next month with a number given over exclusively to writing from that vigorous island.

Richard Hughes' novel, despite its title, was set mainly elsewhere than in Jamaica and dealt with white people. Mr. Reid's deals with his own people, is set in his own country, and covers its history from the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 down to the granting of the New Constitution in 1944. I have read *New Day*; it was the first thing that made me feel happy in Jamaica, for present tragedy and memory of past torture still haunt the Caribbean. We think, perhaps too readily, of Columbus and our own explorers adventurously reaching these islands; we forget that for others, the thousands upon thousands, who were dragged to them. We speak of the New World, of the Land of Gold; we forget that for millions who came to these shores it was the Next World, a Hell set in the midst of Heaven, and that the only gold they knew was that of their own red spilt blood. The islands of the Caribbean are heavy with the evil of those long-lasting days of black man's agony and white man's shame. The black man's body

could be broken, or nearly; his spirit never was. Unlike the Indian, faced with oppression, he never became resigned, never gave up the will to live. There can be few races who have resisted and survived and come through so much cruelty and oppression as has the African. The reasons lie in the virtues of courage, loyalty to each other, kindness and what is apt to result from these three—a vigorous cheerfulness. It is this vigour which you can find today, and where I first found it was in Mr. Reid's book. The only recommendation I will give it is that it needs none from me. The chapters I chose offer, I hope, some idea of his quality, and they do form a sequence. But I would say that the book carries one with it from the very first page and this despite what might seem at first sight the difficulty of its Jamaican English.

The quality of Mr. Reid's prose speaks for itself and so does the skill with which he handles the several layers of personality of his main character, as an old man, being again a boy and a young man, recounting past days while living through new ones. The flash-back technique can be boring, but in Mr. Reid's hands it becomes a means of maintaining our interest on several planes at once.

I have printed these chapters separately, because they stand on their own, which is their particular merit. A more general one is that, the book being historical, they provide a background against which next month's (April) Jamaican number can be usefully seen.

The Daily Gleaner

22nd March 1948.