

BLOTS ON OUR LANDSCAPE

By W. S. Chalmers

Any visitor to Trinidad and Tobago is impressed by the natural scenic beauty and colourful attractiveness of our tropical islands. Ironically we ourselves attach little value to these valuable assets judging from the manner in which they are being rapidly despoiled and dissipated. In making the following observations I am not thinking only of tourists—though to ignore these “blots” could tarnish our image as a tourist resort—but of the need to inculcate in the entire population an appreciation of such assets so that each generation will preserve them for the future. We must make a greater effort to ensure that thoughtlessness and neglect by the individual, by business interests and by the Government do not impair the beauty of the countryside.

Driving through Trinidad there are certain eyesores that never fail to raise my blood pressure. It is regrettable that many of them have been with us not weeks or months—but YEARS.

Let us start with the approaches to our capital city. The entire length of the Beetham Highway is deadly dull — the final mile is a filthy, nauseating disgrace. Shanty Town is a difficult social problem but even this is not a reasonable excuse for the appalling state of neglect that has continued for several years. Surely the “labasse” must be fenced off, ideally with the woven type of teak fencing that adorns the Forest Department Office in Port-of-Spain.

The gloom of both the “labasse” and Shanty Town itself can be lifted by an avenue of closely spaced ornamental trees such as pink poui, yellow cassia or flamboyant. The centre piece too could be planted with shrubs and flowers which at night would help to cut down the dazzling lights of oncoming vehicles.

Even the glorious panoramic view of the city from the Lady Young look-out hardly compensates for the shoddy drive up to that point from the Eastern Main Road. Again, judicious planting of ornamental trees and shrubs could transform this basically spectacular entrance to the city.

The approach to the flyover along Eastern Main Road has been a national disgrace for years. There must be some remedy for the perpetual flooding and silting up of the drains. Why cannot the Highways Department solve the problem? In the meantime there is ample space on the southern side of the road to beautify this stretch with trees and shrubs. Has any city ever been burdened with three such dreadful approaches? Similarly, it would be so easy to enhance the immediate approaches to the airport. The space adjoining the Post Office on Wrightson Road should be developed as a small park to welcome visitors by sea.

Still on our highways: Is there no way of dealing with the irresponsible people who make the roadside their personal dumping ground—spreading coconut shells, old cars and other rubbish indiscriminately? Until we develop a nationwide public opinion that will outlaw such anti-social behaviour, who is to be the guardian of our countryside? If neces-

sary let greater assistance be given to people to dispose of such rubbish. Perhaps it would help if a few culprits were hauled before the courts.

One final moan concerning our roads. Before it is too late let somebody, the Town and Country Planning Department preferably, exercise tight control over the hideous advertising hoardings that are appearing in terrifying numbers all over the countryside. The St. George County Council set a good example recently but this must be followed up. The fact that big business wishes to advertise some product and some individual is prepared to rent advertising space is no justifiable reason for desecrating our countryside as has been done in Europe and America. Let this form of advertising be restricted to the immediate urban areas.

So, on into Port-of-Spain, and a word of appreciation to those public-spirited bodies that have transformed some of our roundabouts to islands of colour and beauty. However, should all this be left to charity ?

Many towns in Europe and America with populations much less than Port-of-Spain and San Fernando have first class Parks Departments with trained staff to maintain municipal parks, grass verges, roundabouts, street flower baskets, etc. Why not us — with our climate and the plants available the city's streets and roundabouts could be a riot of colour all year round.

What of our parks ? The major one—Woodford Square is a disgrace almost on a par with the Beetham Highway. The ill-use it receives from many of its users is not the entire explanation. There is no excuse for the unkempt condition into which the lawns are always allowed to lapse and the absence of daily cleaning and maintenance. It is in a magnificent position to serve the citizens of Port-of-Spain. There is probably a good case for increasing the number of pathways and the use of shrubs to direct the pedestrian flow. The seating capacity should be trebled and many more flower beds planted.

Independence Square is crying out for attention. How much longer are the terrible "temporary" wooden buildings at the western end going to litter the city and ruin the view to the sea ? This locality is ideal for more ornamental trees and the provision of park benches.

Of course a major obstacle to such improvement is the parking problem. When is the Town and Country Planning Department going to insist that buildings employing more than, say, twenty persons provide their own underground parking—this should not be a burden on the taxpayer.

To effect the improvements suggested above would cost so little to effect and maintain and enhance the beauty of our surroundings.

U.W.I., St. Augustine.