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BRITISH SLAVE EMANCIPATION

1838–1849

BY

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LONDON

PREFACE

THIS is a continuation of "British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823–1838," which was published in 1926, and the work would have appeared earlier if my attention had not been diverted to the slave trade. From the dates it will be seen that I have confined myself to the first eleven years of emancipation, which constitute its initial phase. The Sugar Act of 1846 had the same effect on the agriculture of the West Indian colonies as had the Corn Act of the same year on the agriculture of the home country; and the new regime was not permanently established till the planters had lost both the main supports of their former system—their slaves and their monopoly of the home market. In other words, the period is marked off by two crises, opening with the crisis of emancipation and closing with that of free trade. The Sugar Act, which provided for the gradual scaling down of protection, was revised in 1848, and was not secured against further alteration till the resistance to it in Jamaica and British Guiana had been abandoned in 1849.

I have not attempted to exhibit the working of free labour in all branches of industry throughout the West Indies, but have contented myself with showing its effect on the sugar plantations in certain representative colonies, such as Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana. It will be seen that the last chapter deals with Mauritius. As this colony was not included in my previous work, I have sketched its history since the British conquest in 1810.

The tenth anniversary of emancipation as begun in 1834 afforded Emerson the opportunity for an eloquent address, in which he referred to it as having shown that

" the negro race is, more than any other, susceptible of rapid civilisation," and as having " wrought for the negro a benefit as sudden as when a thermometer is brought out of the shade into the sun." The reader of the following pages will find that the dawn of emancipation was bright enough to afford some justification for this extravagant estimate, but that the day darkened as it advanced. " The real truth is," wrote Sir Henry Barkly in 1854, " that of late years injustice has been done to the character of the negroes in consequence of the disappointment resulting from the over-estimate put forward on all sides of their advancement in civilisation at the epoch of emancipation; the advocates of that measure gladly suffering themselves to be deceived by mere external demonstrations, whilst its opponents found their account in allowing it to be proved for them that slavery was not so brutalising and debasing in its effects as the anti-slavery party at other times somewhat inconsistently asserted."

On the economic condition of the sugar colonies after emancipation there are two Reports by Committees of the House of Commons, one of them in four volumes; and despatches and other documents on the subject are contained in over thirty volumes of Parliamentary Papers. These, with Hansard and the contemporary books and pamphlets, are the basis of this work, which may serve in some measure to open up a tract of history hitherto but little explored.

The assistance I have received from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland is gratefully acknowledged.

EDINBURGH,
September 1932.

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BRITISH SLAVE EMANCIPATION

1838–1849

INTRODUCTION

THE chain of events which brought about the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies is more or less interwoven with that of home politics; and some account of it must be given if we are to understand the mutual relation of planters and negroes, when the latter were fully emancipated in 1838.

The movement began in 1823 and was prompted by a belief that the negroes had not benefited—at all events so much and so speedily as had been anticipated—from the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. It had been taken for granted that when importation ceased they would be better treated in order to promote their natural increase. Their treatment *had* improved; but depopulation, which depended also on other factors, had merely diminished; and it was asserted, quite wrongly, that Africans were being illicitly introduced.

Parliament at this period was still unreformed, and the Tory party, which included most of the West Indian pr[illegible]s, retained the monopoly of office which had [illegible] it, thirty years earlier, from the reaction [illegible]nst the French Revolution. In such circumstances would have been useless to think of immediate emancipation, nor was this desired by the Abolitionists, who

thought it premature, and confined themselves to advocating, under the leadership of Buxton, "the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery." Their policy, but not their method, was adopted by the Government, which undertook to make the necessary reforms in the Crown colonies, but refused to do more than recommend them to the chartered or legislative colonies. Here we have the origin of a controversy between Parliament and the West Indian Assemblies which continued, active or latent, till it culminated in Jamaica at the beginning of our period. The Assemblies made some pretence of amending their slave codes; but none of them could be induced to adopt the scheme of amelioration which had been established as a model in the Crown colony of Trinidad and hence was known as the Trinidad Order in Council; and four successive Governments were content to persist in what Canning called "temperate but authoritative admonition." That the planters were able to prolong their resistance for no less than ten years was due to the emergence of two questions in which Parliament and the public had a much greater interest—the question, first of Catholic Relief, and then of Parliamentary Reform; but the day of reckoning came at last, when the Whigs took office under Lord Grey in 1830, obtained a large majority at the general election of 1831, and next year succeeded in carrying the Reform Bill.

This measure effaced many of the small boroughs which had provided seats for West Indian proprietors and merchants, and shifted the balance of power from the aristocracy to the middle class, with its large proportion of Evangelical Churchmen and Dissenters, who—the latter especially—were the backbone of the Abolitionist movement. In a Parliament so constituted slavery was doomed; but colonial sugar had a monopoly of the home market; and the interest of the consumer as well as of the producer would be endangered if the negro, when he became free, could not be relied on to work for wages.

Most of the Abolitionists were prepared to take this risk, but not their leaders, and not the Government, which confined its attention to expedients for qualifying or regulating the effect of emancipation.

A scheme of this kind was submitted to the Cabinet early in 1833 by Lord Goderich, Secretary for War and the Colonies; but it was so well known to be the work of Lord Howick, the Under-Secretary, that no apology is needed for referring to it as his. Howick was the son of the Prime Minister. In spite of his official position, he had almost identified himself with the Abolitionists, and was described, some years later, by Lord Duncannon as "equal to any office he undertakes and the most indefatigable person I ever knew." [1] His plan was elaborated in two papers, the first of which applied it by way of illustration to British Guiana, and the second, which we will now consider, was "a short compendium of the arguments by which the plan is explained and justified." [2]

Two Acts were to be passed by Parliament, one for the abolition of slavery, but not to come into operation if it had been anticipated or adopted by the colonial legislatures,[3] and the other for the relief of the slave-owners by means of a loan at 4 per cent. to each colony in proportion to the average value of its exports for the previous seven years. In addition to these Imperial statutes, six laws were to be passed by the Assemblies, and great importance was attached to the fourth. Howick pointed out that in old and densely-peopled countries the mass of the population were usually excluded from the occupation of land or, if they occupied it as tenants, as in Ireland, had to pay rents high in proportion to the competition for what was a necessary of life. But in most of the slave colonies, and particularly in Jamaica,

[1] *Melbourne Papers*, 1889, p. 381.

[2] Howick's scheme is printed in the appendix to the Fourth Report of the Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting, 1848.

[3] A fatal defect, as it would have opened the door to all manner of diversity, quibbling and evasion.

Trinidad and British Guiana, there was a vast extent of land unappropriated but capable of cultivation, the price of which was merely nominal; and this was why negroes who had obtained their freedom could never be induced to work on the plantations; for they preferred indolence to luxury or even comfort, and by the labour of no more than seventy days could raise enough food to keep them in rude abundance for the whole year. General, if not universal, apathy would thus be the result of emancipation; and Howick proposed to counteract this tendency by imposing a tax of 40s. an acre on land cultivated for food, and of 10s. an acre on land used as pasture. He reckoned that no amount of work on their grounds would enable the negroes to pay so high a tax, especially as their produce would fall in price as it became more plentiful. The planter would thus be assured of an ample supply of labour; and he would gain directly as well as indirectly from the tax, which would yield enough to permit the repeal of every internal tax "hitherto raised at the expense of capitalists," and even to provide a surplus for the repayment of the British Government loan.

The negroes might resent the exaction of so high a price for their emancipation; but they could not escape it, as the tax was to be deducted from wages. There was to be a new division of parishes, each with a police settlement or "military colony," the members of which would be employed by rotation in police duties and in agriculture. The negroes were to be classified as unskilled labourers, skilled labourers and "all other persons." Estate labourers constituted the first class. They were to work only eight hours a day, but the amount of work and remuneration was to be determined officially every six months; and there was "no reason to doubt that with the aid of the proposed police the labouring classes might be compelled steadily to perform the prescribed tasks." Any unskilled labourer who went out of his parish, except to church or market, would be liable to

conviction as a vagabond; and penalties were to be "denounced" against absence from work, slackness, insubordination or insolence, neglect of children or parents, drunkenness, ill-usage of cattle or stock, and the careless use of fire. The last of the colonial laws, which provided for education and religious toleration, was the only one intended directly to promote the welfare of the negro; but it was dismissed briefly, and did not profess to go beyond "a few general and elementary rules."

Such was the scheme of emancipation which, in the opinion of its author, would conserve "the great principle of personal freedom as contra-distinguished from domestic slavery," and would not infringe another "great principle"—that of civil liberty; for "emancipation, properly understood, does not imply the right to be indolent when profitable labour is to be had, but only the right to labour moderately, in obedience to a general law, for a fair compensation, subject to such penalties for disobedience as the law may have prescribed and as the magistrate alone shall inflict." One may think that, if emancipation had been "properly understood," this scheme would have been presented merely as a course of preparatory training; and it is difficult to understand how the relief of the planters from direct taxation could be mentioned as one of the advantages to be gained from taxing the provision grounds of the negroes. Moreover, these grounds, but not the plantations, were to be burdened with a poor rate. The slave-owners could hardly have had a better offer; but this was not the view of the London West Indian Committee, who thought that the scheme would be "detrimental" to the negroes as well as impracticable, that it would ruin the colonies, and would violate the right of private property, unless the compensation awarded should be equal to the whole of the capital invested. The last of these objections was characteristic of the planters, who always spoke of compensation—and most of their recent apologists do the

same—as if the negroes, when they ceased to be slaves, would cease to exist. They would, however, survive; and, as a certain proportion of them would unquestionably be available as free labourers, their owners could not be entitled to the full value of their human stock.

The only member of Grey's Cabinet whom the Abolitionists could claim as one of themselves was the Lord Chancellor, Brougham; and, a few months before the Ministry was formed in November 1830, it had seemed as if they were disposed to make him their leader instead of Buxton. At a great meeting in May Buxton moved and carried a resolution in favour of immediate as opposed to gradual abolition; but it was agreed that the petition should be entrusted, not to him, but to Brougham, on the ground that the latter "alone was possessed of that power and that influence which Parliament did not seem capable of resisting." Since he came into office Brougham had, however, shown an apathy on this question which disappointed his former comrades; and, to the surprise and disgust of Howick, it was mainly under his influence that the emancipation scheme, when it came before the Cabinet, was rejected. This scheme had been prepared without "one moment's conference" with Buxton, who disapproved of it, or at least preferred another; and the ex-agitator, now on the Woolsack, can hardly have contemplated so niggardly an instalment of freedom when he delivered what Howick called his "old inflammatory speeches." [1]

Soon afterwards Viscount Goderich was induced, much against his will, to accept the Privy Seal and to console himself with the earldom of Ripon. He was succeeded at the Colonial Office by Mr. Stanley, later Earl Stanley, and eventually fourteenth Earl of Derby, for whom space had to be found somewhere, as he had been promised cabinet rank; and Howick resigned.

[1] *Autobiography of Sir Henry Taylor*, 1885, i. 129; Hansard (1833), xviii. 157.

A new scheme of emancipation, prepared under the direction of Stanley, was brought before the House of Commons in certain resolutions which he moved on May 14, and underwent considerable alteration before and after it took shape as a Bill; but, as we are concerned here only with the general effect of the measure, it will be sufficient to summarise it, for the most part, in the form in which it became law. Slavery was to be abolished, and hence the slave codes which the Assemblies had never materially amended would *ipso facto* be repealed; but only slaves not over six years of age were to be made wholly free. The rest were to be " apprenticed " to their former owners, working without payment for forty-five hours a week if they were predials or agricultural labourers, and indefinitely if they were non-predials; but in the latter case the term of apprenticeship was to be four years, whereas in the former case it was to be six years. The predial apprentice, being either supplied with food by his master or growing it for himself within the forty-five hours, would have a certain amount of leisure; and, in order to encourage him to work for wages, he was to be allowed to purchase his release at a valuation. No master and no local magistrate was to have a coercive power over the apprentices, who were to be placed entirely under the jurisdiction of Special Justices, paid and controlled by the Home Government. In addition to the temporary and limited survival of unpaid labour, the planters were to have a large pecuniary compensation. It was at first proposed to give them a loan of fifteen millions, and to establish a repayment fund out of the earnings of the negroes in their spare time; but one party in Parliament wished to benefit the planters and another to relieve the negroes. Consequently the loan became a gift, and was soon raised to twenty millions, whilst, in consideration of this liberality to the slave-owners, the term of apprenticeship, which was originally to have been twelve years, was cut down, as already stated, to a

maximum of six years. In order to qualify for compensation, the colonies must establish this and no other form of apprenticeship; but they might dispense with it altogether, and this was the course adopted in Antigua and Bermuda.

With the important exception that it did not provide for the remuneration of compulsory labour, this plan was a near enough approximation to the views of Buxton as expressed to the Government in November 1832: "The slaves shall remain as they are for a year or two, but be delivered wholly from the arbitrary power of the master and from the whip, and shall work five days in the week for reasonable wages."[1] Howick attacked the measure in Parliament as soon as it had been outlined by Stanley, mainly on the ground that there could be no intermediate state between slavery and freedom,[2] but also because the Special Justices would not be competent to judge whether the negroes did their work well or ill—an objection which would have been equally relevant to his own scheme.

It will be convenient at this point to consider how far the movement which had now attained its object was affected by the conflict of parties at Westminster; for we shall find as we proceed that home politics had a disastrous influence on the course of events in some of the colonies, and particularly in Jamaica. It may be said that slavery can never have been a party question because the Abolitionists comprised Tories as well as Whigs, and because both parties, apart from the action of their individual members, were pledged to abolition; but the hollowness of this comprehension becomes manifest when we find that it included even the slave-owners. When Buxton and his friends formed a society in 1823 for "the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery," their policy was accepted, as we have seen, by the Tory Government—that of Lord Liverpool, with Canning as leader of the

[1] *Correspondence of Wilberforce*, 1840, ii. 524.

[2] His own idea of freedom was, as we have seen, peculiar.

Commons—with this exception, that the proposed reforms were not to be imposed by authority on the colonial Assemblies, but recommended for their adoption; and the chief reason why the Abolitionists concurred in this modification of their plan was that they had a promise of co-operation from the non-resident proprietors, who were naturally supposed to have great influence in the Assemblies, as these consisted mainly of their "attorneys" or agents. It soon appeared, however, that the Assemblies were making only a feint of compliance, and that the London West Indians were countenancing their evasion; and a rift then disclosed itself between the Government and the Abolitionists—the former persisting in a policy of conciliation which was defeating its object, and the latter asserting that the time had come to apply such coercive measures as had been threatened in the last resort by Canning. The rift became a cleavage when, after the death of Canning and the resignation of his follower and successor, Goderich, Toryism of a more intractable type came into power under the Duke of Wellington. The latter said, in 1828, that, "considering the prejudices interwoven with West India views of this subject," we ought rather to be thankful for the progress already made "than to express any strong censure for what remained to be done," whereas Brougham declared that "the progress of the colonies was so slow as to be imperceptible to all human eyes save their own"; and, soon after Wellington had resigned, Sir George Murray, who had been his Colonial Secretary, made the naïve confession: "I have always supposed until this moment that to abstain from any extraordinary activity in the measures to be carried into effect with respect to the colonies was a merit rather than a defect."

When the Whigs took office in November 1830, they were at first too engrossed with parliamentary reform, and too much hampered by a Tory majority in the Commons to attack slavery in earnest; but they did

what they could. It was proposed that the duties on slave-grown products should be so adjusted as to give an advantage to those colonies which adopted the Trinidad Order in Council. Canning had intended to punish contumacy, not to reward compliance; but Sir Robert Peel was so far from approving even of the latter expedient that he accused the Minister who had introduced the measure of pandering to the avarice of the planters, and said he "might find there were more serious and more powerful passions to be conquered. He might find there was pride to be overcome."

Stanley was, of course, a Whig when he introduced the emancipation scheme; but he soon joined the Tories or, as they now called themselves, the Conservatives; and even at that time he cannot have been far removed from his future friends. In supporting his resolutions, he laboured to prove that the apprenticeship, which he called a "frightful experiment," amounted to almost complete emancipation; but, fifteen years later, he described it as modified slavery. "I may speak of the apprenticeship now in these terms, because the *prejudice* that then existed exists no longer"; [1] and he said that he would have made the slaves pay for their freedom, had the Commons not come to a different conclusion.[2] The Conservatives could not directly oppose Stanley's measure because it was accepted by the planters as the only means of obtaining compensation; but they did not conceal their strong disapproval. Peel thought that to trust to wages as the basis of immediate emancipation was "an experiment too hazardous to be made," but was not reconciled on that account to the apprenticeship, which he considered "equally hazardous"; and he suggested that Stanley should borrow from Howick's scheme its

[1] The decline of the anti-slavery spirit will be shown later.

[2] Hansard (1848), xcvi. 175. Stanley in 1848 had a very imperfect recollection of his scheme, confusing the right of the negroes as individuals to purchase their release, which was adopted, with the proposal to tax them for emancipation, which was abandoned.

worst feature—that which practically allowed the Assemblies to fix the mode of emancipation. His own proposal was that a sum of money, "a long way short of twenty millions," should be laid out in assisting the slaves to purchase freedom by their own labour. Lord Belmore, an ex-governor of Jamaica, "was sure, let them do what they would, that they would never get the negroes to work for wages"; and he referred to an increase of population as, in his opinion, "the only natural and safe way of effecting a change from slavery to freedom"—this at a time when, by his own account, three-fourths of Jamaica was bush and wood! Wellington condemned the Bill as showing "the most unequivocal contempt of the rights of private property"; and he still thought, after ten years of fruitless effort, that the colonial legislatures should be called upon to take measures for improving the moral and social condition of the negroes "so as to make it safe to do away with slavery." The proposed scheme was so far from being safe that "before long, matters, he was afraid, would come to such a pass as to reduce us to the necessity of destroying the black population"; and he came very near to inciting the Assemblies to resistance, exclaiming, "Was it possible to think that the colonies would submit quietly to have a law of this kind forced upon them?" Lord Wynford declared that there would be "an end of all property" if the planter was forced to liberate his slaves; and he predicted that "the people of this country"—whose willingness to pay the twenty millions was not disputed—would "bitterly repent" if they did not get their usual supply of sugar.[1]

The apprenticeship, which was enacted on August 29, 1833, and came into force on August 1, 1834, fell far short of emancipation; but it certainly was not worse than slavery, though this is the aspect under which it is

[1] Hansard (1832), xii. 630; (1833) xviii. 1191, 1193; xix. 1064, 1065; xx. 509, 510, 518, 526.

usually presented in our general histories. For example: "Before 1833 the master felt some interest in the life of his slave. After 1833 he thought his interest was best secured by working him to death before the expiration of his apprenticeship. He regarded the negro as a bad farmer regards the farm which he holds on a short lease."[1] The "bad farmer" might no doubt count on getting another farm, but where was the planter to get another set of negroes? That the master actually was working his apprentice out of existence, that the life of the latter was counted by the hour and would soon be counted by the minute, was a statement made by O'Connell at a public meeting in 1837, and is thus characterised in a contemporary number of the *Edinburgh Review*: "This is one of those prodigious assertions which no ordinary mind is fit to generate." Parliament would indeed have been short-sighted if it had not provided against a danger inherent in the limited duration of its scheme. We have seen that it had done so by restricting the hours of labour and placing the apprentices under the protection of the Home Government. There were, of course, evil-minded planters who tried to pervert the system by straining the law or by refusing to their labourers concessions which custom had secured to them when slaves; but such abuses were not sufficient to destroy the value of the apprenticeship in the opinion of those who had practical experience of its working, and moreover were known to be in sympathy with the negroes. Lord Glenelg, Secretary for the Colonies, said that in less than three years it had brought about "an improvement in society and an accession to human happiness of which history furnished no previous example." Sir J. Carmichael Smyth, Governor of British Guiana, declared it to be "a complete and triumphant success." Lord Sligo, speaking with the authority of an ex-governor of

[1] Walpole, *History of England*, 1880, iii. 466. The last sentence is quoted with approval in Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, 1905, i. 145.

Jamaica, said that " the want of complete success " was all that could be alleged against it. One of the Special Justices in Barbados said of those who maintained that the condition of the negroes had not improved, " It is scarcely credible that any man at all acquainted with the innumerable evils of slavery can for a moment make so unfounded an assertion " ; and Daughtrey, the most distinguished of all these officials, wrote from Jamaica, " Of the gradual improvement of the people under the present system no doubt can exist. I know no intelligent person with opportunities of forming an opinion upon the subject, and who has been long enough in the island to compare one period with another, who makes it even a question." These testimonies are confirmed by the fact that during the apprenticeship the exports from this country to the West Indian colonies increased from £2,575,000 to £3,450,000, Nevertheless the apprenticeship was ignominiously cut short ; and for one of the two principal reasons we must turn to Jamaica.

Nearly half of the West Indian apprentices were located in Jamaica, and the part taken by this colony in embittering the long conflict was quite equal to its importance. It was said by a Cabinet Minister in 1839 that there was not a single decision or recommendation of Parliament which had not been resisted by the Assembly of Jamaica, except the Act of 1833, which could have been resisted only at the cost of forfeiting compensation. The Assembly not only adopted the apprenticeship, but did so before any of the other legislatures ; and this speedy compliance so surprised and delighted Stanley that he confirmed the Jamaica Act without waiting to see that the amendments he had suggested were carried out. His confidence was not justified by its result. A " Supplemental Bill " was passed in Jamaica ; but it covered only eighteen months, and when it expired at the end of 1835 it remained in abeyance till June 1836, and might not even then have

been renewed and extended to 1840, if provision for this purpose had not been made in Parliament. The Assembly consisted of 47 members,[1] who were returned by an electorate of about 2200 freeholders. The interest it mainly represented was that of the smaller planters, who were the least educated and the most violent. It was men of this class who refused so to arrange the forty and a half hours of compulsory labour[2] that the free time of the negroes should include Friday afternoon as well as Saturday, and who distinguished between legal and customary indulgences, though, as they were reminded by the colonial Attorney-General, slavery itself had rested only on custom. There was one abuse, however, which the law was designed, but had failed, to prevent. The Act of 1833 provided that no female apprentice should be flogged, and imprisonment was consequently the only serious punishment which the Special Justices could inflict on women; but the prisons, being intended for no particular class, were under the supervision of the ordinary magistrates, and persons of both sexes were flogged for breaches of prison discipline. The Assembly would never do anything to stop the flogging of women, though its illegality in regard to apprenticed women was often represented.

That the Assembly had reverted to its former practice of resisting every step taken for the amelioration and abolition of slavery is shown by the fact that the apprenticeship system was examined and condemned by a committee of the House when it had been in operation for barely three months. In the next fifteen months two more committees were appointed with the same object and the same result; and, a little later, the Assembly contrived to get rid of the Governor, Lord Sligo, by quarrelling with him on a point of procedure arising

[1] Not 45 members, as stated in Hansard (1839), xlvi. 1248.

[2] In Jamaica 4½ of the statutory 45 hours were allotted to the apprentice for growing his own food.

out of its refusal to renew the Abolition Amendment Act. In these circumstances it was natural that the working of the apprenticeship in Jamaica should attract the attention of Parliament; and the Commons appointed a Select Committee in March 1836. The Committee recommended that the system should in several respects be amended by the local legislature, and, in particular, that the abuses in prisons should be corrected; but they stated that, on the whole, there was "much reason to look forward with confident hope to the result of this great experiment," and deprecated any occurrence which should unsettle the minds of either planters or negroes in regard to the determination of Parliament "to preserve inviolate both parts of the solemn engagement."

The Anti-Slavery Society had indicated its acceptance, if not its approval, of the apprenticeship by dissolving itself when the scheme was enacted; but some of its members had never concurred in this decision, and were roused to action by the report of the Select Committee. Their leader was Joseph Sturge, the Quaker philanthropist of Birmingham; and in October 1836 Sturge and three others sailed for the West Indies to study the question for themselves. They returned, with one exception, in May 1837, and gave the public, as a sample of their researches, "The Narrative of James Williams." This was a case of barbarous ill-treatment and proved on investigation to be true; but it did not justify the editor's assertion that it was "the tale of near eight hundred thousand of our fellow-subjects," and that the apprentices were suffering "cruelties unheard of, unthought of, in the worst days of slavery." Equally misleading was a book published by Sturge himself. His indictment of the apprenticeship was supported by facts or assertions which were drawn from only a small part of Jamaica; but it was impossible that oppression could prevail even to that extent unless, as he himself believed, the majority of the Special Justices, who had been

appointed for the protection of the apprentices, had become the tools of their masters. Sturge, in fact, declared that "the greater number of them are as completely subservient to the colonists as if they had been selected and paid as their agents." This was another of "those prodigious assertions" generated by the heat of controversy in an agitator's brain. The general character of the Special Magistrates will become apparent as we proceed; and it may suffice here to quote the high eulogium bestowed upon them by Lord Sligo: "What was in the physical power of man to do they did; and it is a matter of the greatest wonder that so much zeal, so much energy, and such an indefatigable spirit of humanity as pervaded the vast majority of that body should have been displayed by them. In such a climate as Jamaica, where the sun has so tremendous a power during two-thirds of the day, where the great masses of decaying matter and the evaporation from the marshes produce miasma of the most fatal description, these gentlemen, with a courage and perseverance unequalled by any on record, rode about the island in all directions, defying the sun and the rain and disease. The mortality amongst them was in consequence quite lamentable."[1]

The Select Committee of 1836 was reappointed in the following year; but their labours were cut short by a dissolution of Parliament, and they contented themselves with recommending an immediate inquiry into the condition of the West Indian prisons, and "especially into the construction and use of the treadmills which are employed in them, and the nature of the coercion adopted to ensure labour among the prisoners." The Colonial Office had already taken action in the matter by sending out Captain Pringle to conduct an investigation. Treadmills had recently been introduced into the West Indies. Most of them were of local con-

[1] *Jamaica under the Apprenticeship System.* By a Proprietor [Sligo], 1838, p. 32.

struction and mere instruments of torture. Being too light or not properly balanced, they revolved so fast that the prisoners found it difficult, if not impossible, to catch the step. Those who failed to do so—women as well as men—were flogged, and suffered the additional torment of being battered and bruised by the steps of the wheel.

Sir Lionel Smith, who succeeded Sligo as Governor of Jamaica, had instructions to try a policy of conciliation, which was supposed to have succeeded under his auspices in Barbados; but he soon found it a hopeless and thankless task. The Assembly had at least *professed* to ameliorate slavery, but he could not prevail upon it to pay even this compliment to the apprenticeship. None of the reforms advocated in the first report of the Select Committee were carried out; no serious attention was paid to the demand for an inquiry into the use of treadmills and the exaction of labour in prisons; the Governor's messages and the despatches he communicated from the Colonial Office were alike disregarded; and in November 1837 he wrote, "I have no hope that they will correct the evils I have exposed." The Government then took a step, the necessity for which had been urged more than a year and a half earlier by Sligo, when he said that "the remedy must come from home." Early in the session of 1838 a Bill was passed to amend the Act for the abolition of slavery. It empowered the governors of colonies to make rules for the treatment of apprentice prisoners, and gave them a discretionary power to prohibit by proclamation most of the abuses complained of; but it expressly provided that no female apprentice should be flogged or placed on the treadmill, and that after August 15, 1838, no male apprentice should be flogged who would not as a free person have been liable to such punishment.

Meanwhile Sturge in his twofold capacity of orator and pamphleteer had stirred up an agitation for the abolition of the apprenticeship which this measure for

its amendment was not likely to appease. Brougham, who was now out of office and was the first to take up the matter in Parliament, said that at a meeting in Exeter Hall, of which he was chairman, the bare attempt to mention the measure then being passed was "met with tremendous, I will not say dissatisfaction, but abuse and abhorrence." Such language was characteristic of the agitation, which was mere froth and bluster compared with that which had attained its purpose in 1833; for the apprenticeship was not slavery, and the prisons of Jamaica would be just as much in need of reform whether they were intended for apprentices or free negroes, both being sent thither for punishment, whereas before 1834 the slaves had been punished on the estates. Thus the system which was attacked had no organic connexion with what was supposed to be its worst abuse. As the apprenticeship was part of the compensation which had been given to the planters, Ministers could not countenance its abolition by Parliament, and they opposed three motions to this effect, one of which was carried in the Commons by three votes in a snatch division; but they felt that it would release them from a troublesome situation if the planters themselves should decide to cut short the apprenticeship; and there was a difficulty inherent in the scheme which might bring about this result.

We have seen that the term of apprenticeship prescribed for non-predial slaves, who were supposed to be about one-sixth of the whole number, was four years, and would therefore expire on August 1, 1838. Their release might be expected to unsettle the rest of the apprentices, especially as the line of demarcation was not clearly marked. This class, as defined in the Act, consisted of all slaves not usually employed in agriculture or in the manufacture of colonial produce. It would thus comprise domestic slaves, and slaves in the towns employed or hired out by their owners as mechanics,

but not, one would suppose, mechanics attached to the estates; for these were engaged, indirectly at least, in the manufacture of sugar, and their labour, like that of the field-workers, was restricted to forty-five hours a week. This classification had been adopted in dealing with the claims to compensation, and in at least one colony—that of Tobago—had been established by law. Nevertheless on March 30—but not till then—the Colonial Office sent out an intimation that in the opinion of the Crown lawyers estate artisans must be considered non-predials. The planters were now in this position: they must either declare for universal as opposed to partial emancipation on August 1, or continue the apprenticeship subject to the restrictions just imposed by Parliament and with the loss of their mechanics; and before the end of July all the legislatures had decided to take the former course.

The cutting short of the apprenticeship was no doubt a boon to those negroes who were suffering under defects in the law by which it had been established in Jamaica; but, as a measure applicable to all the colonies, it was no less inexpedient than unjust. It prejudiced the planters against emancipation by associating it in their minds with an injustice which was none the less the breach of a "solemn engagement" because, in order to save the consistency of Parliament, they were made to inflict it on themselves. It established a new social system without laws to regulate it or funds to meet its obligations; for there was no time, at least in Jamaica, either to legislate in concurrence with the Home Government or to obtain money from the non-resident proprietors for the payment of wages;[1] and it was grossly unfair to the many negroes

[1] That very few in Jamaica were "prepared with money payment" was one of the reasons urged against abolition. In the first few weeks of emancipation silver was almost unobtainable, and cheques had to be issued down to a dollar, and even to a shilling. The Crown colonies were the last to be affected by the change, and Trinidad had only four days' notice.

who had bought themselves out of the apprenticeship shortly before it collapsed at a price fixed by its statutory termination in 1840. We cannot wonder that Sir Lionel Smith found it difficult to answer their complaints.

It may be thought that we are now free to enter on the study of emancipation; but the controversy between the Jamaica Assembly and Parliament had not been settled—in fact, it was coming to a crisis; and we have still to complete the political introduction to our subject.

Jamaica was the last but one of the legislative colonies to fall in with the general repudiation of the apprenticeship. The Assembly, having thrice examined and condemned this experiment as a substitute for slavery, were now anxious to retain it as a postponement of emancipation; and in agreeing to the Governor's advocacy of abolition they voted an address to the Queen, in which they declared that their concurrence had been forced by a recent Act of Parliament—"an Act dangerous in its tendency to the peace and welfare of the island." They were now far more bitterly estranged from Sir Lionel Smith than ever they had been from Lord Sligo; and the address was followed by a protest in which they denounced the Slavery Abolition Amendment Act because it "placed in the hands of one man the power of making law and dispensing with law by proclamation," and instituted a comparison—very favourable to themselves—between their capacity for self-government and that of "the Commons of England." They seem never to have doubted that in agreeing to give up the apprenticeship they would get rid of the Act for its amendment, and so of course they did—but only in form; for the Jamaica prisons, as we have seen, would still require to be reorganised, though the negroes who might be committed to them had become free labourers, and consequently as much of the measure as referred to this question was at once re-enacted in a shape suitable to the new regime. A Bill which empowered the West Indian Governors to

take over the regulation and management of prisons was passed in July and published in Jamaica on September 25. The Assembly met on October 30, and on the following day resolved not to do business, except so far as might be necessary to maintain the public credit, so long as this Act was in force. The Governor, who was supported by the Council, tried the effect of a prorogation, and then of a dissolution; but the new Assembly adhered to the decision of its predecessor; and on December 24 Sir Lionel Smith wrote to the Colonial Office that he could see no prospect of the deadlock being overcome.

The Prisons Act was based on Captain Pringle's Report on Prisons in the West Indies; and it will be well to give some account of this document in so far as it related to Jamaica. There were gaols in Jamaica and there were workhouses or houses of correction—the former under a central official and his deputies, and occupied mainly by free persons, who suffered no penalty but that of confinement; the latter under local magistrates, and occupied mainly by apprenticed negroes, who suffered the additional penalty of hard labour. The treadmill might be included under this head, but was now usually prohibited by the Special Justices in their commitments; and Pringle had little opportunity of seeing this form of punishment, though he did see it, during his residence in Jamaica from November 1837 to February 1838. Apprentice prisoners were employed mainly on the roads, where they could be seen chained in pairs. Gaols and houses of correction in their internal economy were much the same and equally bad. An excellent code of regulations had been enacted by the Assembly in 1834, but its execution being left—and that only implicitly—to the "visiting justices," it was wholly inoperative. The post of supervisor was usually given to a man who had failed as a planter or in business, and the "boatswains" or warders were sometimes convicts for life. Men and women were separated only during the night, and even then the women, except in two

cases, were under the charge of males; and at a recent inquiry it had come out "casually in evidence" that the warders were in the habit of taking out the women at night to have intercourse with them. The rooms were in general lofty and not deficient in light and ventilation; but the solitary cells, to which apprentices might be committed for three to ten days, were "mere black holes." The prisoners slept on boards, with their feet shackled to an iron rod. They were made to bathe in a pond or river on Sundays, but no other provision was made for cleanliness —not even soap. Pringle recommended that the appointment and removal of prison officials should be vested, as it was in Barbados, in the Governor, who should also have the power of making and revising rules and of appointing inspectors.[1]

We have seen that on two recent occasions the Assembly of Jamaica had brought upon themselves the intervention of Parliament, first by failing to renew an Act of their own for the amendment of the apprenticeship, and secondly by refusing to legislate for the same purpose on the recommendation of the Colonial Office and of two Select Committees. Now they had refused to legislate at all, and that, too, at the moment when a whole code of laws was required as a substitute for the domestic jurisdiction of the slave-owners. They had indeed offered to vote supplies; but it was impossible to allow them to meet for this special purpose so long as they challenged not only the exercise but the principle of parliamentary legislation; for in a protest against the Slavery Abolition Amendment Act they had said that Jamaica recognised the right of Parliament to regulate the commerce of the Empire, but rejected "with indignation its claim to make other laws to govern her."[2] Seventeen annual Acts had expired; taxes could not be levied; the police force had actually been discharged; and 300,000 negroes had been free for five months without any provision being made for determin-

[1] P.P., 1837–38, vol. xl. [2] Hansard (1839), xlvii. 960.

ing the relations of landlords and tenants, employers and workmen. In these circumstances Ministers came naturally to the conclusion that this strike of law-makers should be converted into a lock-out, or, in other words, that those who had abdicated their legislative functions should, for some time at least, be precluded from exercising them ; and in April 1839 a Bill was introduced which provided that for five years—afterwards reduced to two and a half years—the power of making laws should be entrusted to the Governor and Council, with the addition of three salaried officials who were to be sent out as Special Councillors.

It could hardly have been anticipated that a colonial question, and one on which there had hitherto been so little difference of opinion, would precipitate a Ministerial crisis ; but the political situation lent itself to a rather sorry exhibition of party spirit. The Whigs had not long retained the unanimity which had been forced upon them by the necessity of carrying the Reform Bill. Grey's son-in-law, Lord Durham, who was popularly known as "Radical Jack," had left him in 1834, and next year he had been deserted by four more of his colleagues, including Stanley and Ripon, whose politics were anti-liberal. A few weeks later Grey himself had resigned ; and his successor, Lord Melbourne, after having given place for four months to Sir Robert Peel, was now again in office, with a small majority in the Commons and a large adverse majority in the Lords. In the previous year, opposed only by the few Radicals of his own party, he had carried a Bill suspending for five years the Assembly of Lower Canada, which, though a really popular body, was French and disloyal ; but the Tories saw that their opportunity had come when he now proposed to suppress another Assembly, popular only in name, but British.

They found it difficult, however, to give suitable expression to the love of liberty which, as Lord John Russell remarked, had sprung up amongst them "rather

newly." [1] The Assembly of Jamaica had been a synonym for truculence and bluster ever since 1824, when they described themselves, in reference to Canning's modest resolutions for the amelioration of slavery, as "destined to be offered, a propitiatory sacrifice, at the altar of fanaticism." Their two latest grievances had elicited neither sympathy nor attention in Parliament. No opposition had been made to the Slavery Abolition Amendment Act, which they denounced as "illegal and unconstitutional," because it empowered the Governor to make law by proclamation. Burge, the agent for Jamaica, had protested on the same ground against the Prisons Bill, and his petition had been presented by Lord Chandos, now Duke of Buckingham, the chairman of the London West Indian Committee; [2] but the Bill passed unanimously and, except for a few words in its favour from so stout a Tory as Lord Ellenborough, in silence. It was too late now to pretend that the injustice of these measures had unfortunately escaped notice. All that could be done was to excite sympathy for the sufferers by belittling their offence and magnifying their proposed punishment.

This was the task essayed by Peel, who had thought emancipation, even as qualified by the apprenticeship, "too hazardous," and now, when called upon to protect it from a quite gratuitous peril, was to show himself a better politician than a statesman. Jamaica, if this Bill passed, would at least be no worse off than Trinidad or St. Lucia. Yet Peel said that the Bill would establish "the most unqualified, unchecked, unmitigated power that ever was applied to the government of any community," adding, perhaps with a twinge of shame, that he "wished not to be chargeable with the slightest

[1] "Nobody will believe that the Tories are animated by any high constitutional scruples, or that they care about the question except as one on which they can fight a battle."—Greville, *Journal of Victoria's Reign*, i. 196.

[2] Hansard (1839), xlvii. 807.

exaggeration." That the Assembly of Lower Canada had been suspended in the previous year with his entire approval gave him another opportunity of the same kind, which he turned to account by saying that it might seem to be " a practice of Parliament to suspend a constitution every session." He claimed to be impartial, asserting over and over again that he was the advocate neither of the Government nor of the Assembly ; but these protestations might well have been spared, as they served only to give an air of hypocrisy to what would otherwise have been a frankly partisan speech. Much of it was solemn trifling, as where he maintained that the Assembly's revolt against the Prisons Act did not amount to a demand for its repeal. There was an unfair reflection on Sir Lionel Smith for not having mentioned the Act in his opening speech, as this admittedly would have been contrary to usage, and, of course, the inevitable reminder that we had lost America by suspending the constitution of Massachusetts. Peel also contended that only the immediate cause of the Jamaica Bill as stated in the preamble should be taken into account ; but, as Ministers were not likely to accept this limitation, he argued that the conduct of the Assembly could not have been so bad as they represented, because despatches could be cited in which it had been praised. The truth, of course, was that the Assembly had so very rarely done what it was asked to do that its deviations into compliance, though far from disinterested, had been too effusively welcomed by Governors and Colonial Secretaries—notably by Stanley in 1834.[1] Gladstone, however, not only adopted his leader's contention on this point, but went so far as to assert that the Government had gone on, year after year, encouraging the Assembly in that very course of conduct which they now made the ground of a penal measure ; and Grote, one of the Radicals, sought to enforce Peel's view of the preamble, maintaining that the House was in the position

[1] See p. 13.

of a jury which in trying an accused person must confine itself to the indictment, though it may believe him in other respects to be " an unprincipled malefactor."

Russell was able to show that seventeen of the largest proprietors in Jamaica had agreed to resolutions in support of the Bill on the ground that new laws were urgently required, and that without them the benefit of emancipation would be totally lost ; and that several other proprietors who had seats in Parliament had been of the same opinion when the Bill was introduced, and had even expressed themselves in this sense to members of the Government, but had since been persuaded to put party claims above their own principles and interest. Nevertheless Peel insisted on delay, his proposal being that the Bill should be withdrawn till the next session in order to give the Assembly what he called a *locus penitentiae.* On May 6 the second reading was carried by no more than 294 votes to 289. Five Conservatives voted with the Government, but their help was more than neutralised by the defection of ten Radicals and the abstention of about a dozen more.[1]

Regarding this victory as tantamount to a defeat, Melbourne resigned. Peel undertook and began to form a Ministry, but refused to go on when Queen Victoria insisted on retaining the principal Whig ladies of her household. On May 11, as the result of this " Bedchamber question," Melbourne returned to office, and had now to deal with Jamaica in a manner which would conciliate the opponents of his former measure.

The Second Jamaica Bill, which was introduced on May 30, did not suspend the Assembly, but it required them to make submission before being restored to the unfettered exercise of their legislative functions. They were to be called together on October 1, and the first clause provided that they should be asked to legislate for

[1] Hansard (1839), xlvii. 766, 768, 772, 792, 793, 896, 929, 965, 972, 1128 ; Greville, i. 199.

the regulation of contracts and the prevention of vagrancy and the illegal occupation of land, in accordance with an Order in Council which had been in force for six months in the Crown colonies, and that, if they failed to do so within six weeks and in a manner satisfactory to the Colonial Office, the Governor and Council should be empowered to make ordinances. The second clause called upon them to renew the Police Act and the Acts for taxation which had expired, and authorised the Governor, in default of their compliance, to revive such of these laws as he might consider indispensable. In its new form the Bill was partially approved by Peel, and wholly repudiated by Burge in his speech against it as counsel for the Assembly. The former, who had "never felt more strongly on any question," denounced the first clause as nullifying the legislative functions which it professed to restore. The latter thought the second clause worse than the first, since it transferred to the Governor and Council the right of taxation; and he declared that the Assembly was now required to bring upon itself that humiliation which in the original measure was to be inflicted by the authority of Parliament. "There has been no calumny, numerous and atrocious and false as the calumnies have been, against the Assembly so gross as to suppose that there is one of its members who would degrade himself by becoming the instrument of such a legislative body as this Bill would create." The Opposition made two attempts to get rid of the first clause. On the earlier occasion the majority for the Government was thirty-four; but on the second occasion it was no more than ten.[1]

A clause which had so narrowly escaped deletion in the Commons could not be expected to survive in the Lords; but the action of the Opposition peers would have deserved greater respect if they had shown more knowledge or, rather, less ignorance of the question. The

[1] Hansard (1839), xlviii. 520, 524.

first to expose himself was the Duke of Wellington, who remarked that he had opposed the abolition of slavery in 1833, but had supported every measure for carrying it into execution, though he had done so " with great pain," always protesting that Parliament was usurping functions which ought to have been left to the local legislatures. He had predicted, as we have seen, that, if slavery was abolished, we might be reduced to " the necessity of destroying the black population." His contention now was, not that the blacks must be destroyed, but that the whites must be withdrawn—" *that* they might rely upon " ; for property as well as liberty would be endangered if the Assembly were suspended, and those who proposed such a measure could not be " in a state of sanity." He was, of course, confounding the Second Jamaica Bill with the First ; and this became manifest later, when he said that the Colonial Secretary had " never even hinted at any intention on the part of the Government to call the Assembly together." It was necessary for the Marquis of Normanby to explain that, if he had not mentioned this fact—which was the distinctive feature of the Second Bill—it was at least implied in his statement that the experiment would be fully and fairly tried.[1]

Blunders no less surprising were made by Lyndhurst, the late Lord Chancellor, who moved that the first clause should be expunged, and declared that " the liberal Government of this day," having failed to abolish a popular chamber, were now trying to accomplish their object " by a side wind." After betraying incidentally that he thought the Assembly met at Kingston and not at Spanish Town, he said that the Prisons Act had no connexion at all with the Act for the Abolition of Slavery, which was meaningless, unless he meant the Slavery Abolition Amendment Act, with which, as we have seen, the Prisons Act had the closest possible connexion. He

[1] Hansard (1839), xlviii. 1049, 1052, 1058.

then described it as "remarkable" that the regulations which had been made by the Governor and Council under the Prisons Act differed "only in the very slightest circumstances" from those which had been enacted by the Assembly in 1834. There was nothing remarkable in this, as he might have known from Pringle's Report, the Jamaica Gaol Act being admirable in all respects except that of execution, and the sole object of the Prisons Act being to put it into force. This law had in fact existed during all the five years in which two successive Governors had been complaining to the Assembly of the ill-treatment of prisoners. Lyndhurst also asserted that the Prisons Act, though said to be urgent, had not been published in Jamaica till November, whereas it had been proclaimed, as already stated and as the date of the proclamation showed, on September 25. His speech, to which Burge and Merewether [1] had evidently contributed, was refuted by Lord Glenelg, the late Colonial Secretary, in a manner which ruffled his temper; and it was reserved for Brougham, who from 1823 to 1830 had been the unsparing critic of the Assembly, to pronounce this oration "a most impressive and powerful attack upon the present Bill upon almost every point of constitutional law and upon almost every point of fact." When the Bill was reported on July 4, Brougham recorded his dissent for seven reasons; and his fourth reason was so extraordinary as to suggest, in the language applied by Wellington to the Government, that he was not "in a state of sanity." This reason was, "Because the spirit in which these proceedings are conceived is avowedly adverse to the opinions and desires of a vast majority of the inhabitants of Jamaica." Four other peers concurred in most or some of these

[1] Counsel for the non-resident proprietors, as Burge was for the Assembly. In his speech on the First Bill, Merewether had asked, in reference to the proceedings of the Assembly, "whether you can find in the history of mankind a more temperate, a more firm, a more becoming course of conduct." The speeches of counsel are in Hansard (1839), vol. L., appendix.

reasons, but they all took care not to associate themselves with the fourth.[1]

It was impossible for the Government, in view of its precarious position in the Commons, not to accept the amended Bill; but an error had to be rectified which, though trivial in itself, was in keeping with the manner in which the question had been treated in the Lords. The preamble had been altered, but so carelessly that "Jamaica" had been left out, and the only allusion to the colony was "such island." The Bill, as it received the royal assent on July 19, gave the Assembly two months from the date of their meeting to revive the expired laws, and empowered the Governor and Council to renew any such law for a period extending to December 31, 1840.[2]

We shall find that this controversy, and still more the factious spirit which it had evoked, were to have no small influence on the future of Jamaica. Tories as such must have been less disinclined than Whigs to take liberties with a professedly popular constitution, and if they had yielded to their natural bias the Assembly would have been suspended, and emancipation would have been launched in more favourable circumstances than under a system which permitted ex-slave-owners to legislate for those who had recently been slaves. Normanby informed the House of Lords on July 11 that he had received news that morning that the Bill "now no longer in agitation," that is, the First Jamaica Bill, had been hailed with enthusiasm by "all the popular party, by all the newly emancipated negroes," as giving them the assurance of protection till they should be able to protect themselves. He himself thought it impossible to carry out emancipation in Jamaica by means of machinery intended for a totally different purpose; and he had formed that opinion as far back as 1832–34, when as Earl of Mulgrave

[1] Hansard (1839), xlviii. 1096, 1097, 1099, 1100, 1104, 1126, 1194.
[2] 2 & 3 Vict. c. 26.

he was governor of the colony before and after the abolition of slavery. Nor would the temporary effacement of their popular chamber have been much regretted by the better-class whites. Not only did the Council, as we have seen, support Sir Lionel Smith, but in the Assembly itself the proceedings which had given rise to all this commotion were the work of a minority—21 out of 47; and the protest against the Slavery Abolition Amendment Act is said to have been adopted when all but twelve members had gone home. It could, of course, be said that to abolish political rights just when it had become possible for the negroes to acquire them would be an affront to the latter; and this argument had been used, with little enough sincerity, in the debates. Normanby remarked that the Assembly in 1837 and 1838 had passed Acts for raising the franchise which were disallowed by the Home Government; and "these were the parties" who in a memorial to him had said that one reason why they objected to the late Bill was that it would have deprived the emancipated population of those election rights which, from the small value of the qualification and the facility of its acquisition, were completely within their reach.[1]

Hitherto it could not be alleged that the fate of the negroes had been a party question; for, though the Tories as the natural allies of the planters had been reluctant to enforce the amelioration of slavery and had looked askance at its abolition, they had not as a party opposed these measures or the methods suggested for carrying them into effect. Now they had combined with the Radicals to save the Assembly when, in the opinion of a Whig Government, its continuance had become a danger to emancipation; and the reader of the following pages will be able to judge how far in so doing they rendered a service to Jamaica.

Enough has been said to introduce what one may call

[1] Hansard (1839), xlviii. 1030, 1033, 1042, 1098.

the internal development of emancipation; but wider problems relating to immigration and markets for sugar will also engage our attention; and, in order to provide a background for these, it is necessary to consider the efforts and sacrifices that were being made to suppress the foreign slave trade.

At the settlement of Europe after the Napoleonic War British statesmen had sought to form a confederacy against the slave trade; but what they obtained was not co-operation, but merely a free field for their own exertions. The usual arrangement was this. A treaty was concluded between two Powers, one of which and the one that had proposed the treaty was invariably Great Britain. They bound themselves to prohibit the slave trade to their subjects, if they had not already done so, and agreed that each should be entitled to search any vessels suspected of slave-trading which belonged to the other. There was no real reciprocity in these treaties, because there were no British slave-ships, and the privilege which Britain had obtained, and in some cases purchased, was that of being at the trouble and expense of suppressing the slave trade of a foreign State. At the beginning of our period this concession had been made by every European maritime Power; and it was necessary so to extend the system, because, if any Power were not included—and such was the position of the United States—its flag could be used for the protection of a slaver. To prevent this was soon the only purpose served by all the treaties except those with Spain, Portugal and Brazil, which in violation of their engagements were still prosecuting the slave trade, and so finding work for British cruisers, whilst the other Powers merely looked on, their own slave trade, which was all that was covered by their treaties, having already been suppressed. Nor did our efforts meet with success; for the rule then was that slave-ships could be seized only if they had slaves actually on board; and the attempt at suppression was found in

these circumstances to be "a mere farce." A naval officer said it was "almost like enclosing wild animals in a net, but leaving an aperture large enough for them to escape through."

In 1835 Spain was induced to agree that her slave-ships should be liable to capture if they were found to be equipped for the trade; and in 1839 the want of a similar concession on the part of Portugal was supplied by the expedient—certainly a strange one—of an Act of Parliament. It was then that our country rose to the full height of its mission as the arch-enemy of the slave trade; and the magnitude of its effort was thus described, a year or two later, by an exasperated critic: "The utmost latitude, one might almost say licentiousness, of means—public money to any extent—naval armaments watching every shore and every sea where a slave-ship could be seen or suspected—courts of special judicature in half of the inter-tropical regions of the globe—diplomatic influence and agency such perhaps as this country never before concentrated on any public object." [1]

When we consider the cost of these operations, and their practical failure down to the time of the new Spanish treaty, it would not have been surprising had there been protests in Parliament or the press; but the remarkable thing is that there was no such public utterance—none at least of any importance—till in 1839 Buxton himself, the Abolitionist leader, published a book in which he attacked the cruiser system as useless,[2] and even as aggravating the cruelties which it was intended to prevent. He was followed by the veteran Clarkson, an Abolitionist of fifty years' standing, and by Sturge, who re-established the Anti-Slavery Society on a purely pacific basis. When such men could so express them-

[1] Hansard (1845), lxxxi. 1158.

[2] Buxton was not an Anti-Coercionist. His position was that the cruiser system had failed because it had not been reinforced by other methods.

selves, there was no occasion for those who had never sympathised with the movement to remain silent; and the work of our cruisers was henceforth carried on under a fire of adverse criticism, in which one distinguishes the voices of *The Times*, Carlyle, Cobden, Gladstone and John Bright. The last was one of the two members for Manchester, and both he and his colleague, Gibson, were obviously quite alive to the fact that Lancashire supplied most of the goods that were used in the barter for slaves. It may be said that to condemn the use of force against the slave trade was not necessarily to make light of slavery; but in too many cases the two attitudes were combined. There is reason to believe that public opinion was misrepresented by those who on this question professed to be its exponents; but, to all appearance, it had undergone what Lord Denman described as "a lamentable and disgraceful change."

CHAPTER I

DEVELOPED COLONIES

It has been mentioned that two of the slave colonies, but only one of the West Indian group, exercised the option to dispense with the apprenticeship; and, before we examine the effects of full and general emancipation, it will be necessary to consider what had been the experience of Antigua in anticipating the measure.

One of the Leeward Islands and the seat of government, Antigua was a sugar colony of the regular type; but its slaves, who numbered about 30,000, were reputed to be the most intelligent in the West Indies; for the authorities had favoured their religious instruction, and claimed at this period that "the number of teachers of religion, places of worship and schools can scarcely be surpassed in any rural district of like extent in the King's dominions." We have seen that the colonies might dispense with the apprenticeship only if they were prepared to face the risks of unqualified emancipation; and Stanley in putting this choice before them was not encouraging—"I do not anticipate the probability, and should be disposed to doubt the prudence, of any such course." Nevertheless an Act was passed in Antigua in 1834 "for relieving the slave population from the obligations imposed upon them by the recent Act of Parliament," and providing that for a year after their admission to "a state of absolute and entire freedom on the 1st of August" they should retain their houses and grounds as "a temporary and gratuitous accommodation" if they were

willing and able, or willing but unable, to work, and should not be ejected for misconduct except under the authority of two magistrates. This provision was intended to make the transition as little abrupt as possible, and probably also to dispel the idea which had grown up under slavery that the negroes had a proprietary interest in their huts; but the "accommodation" became permanent as well as gratuitous. It was, in fact, with the addition of free medical attendance, part of the remuneration of labour, which was completed by the offer of a shilling currency a day, or sixpence sterling, as wages.

The negroes were not satisfied with these terms—in fact they were "bitterly disappointed"; for the planters in their anxiety to get in the recent harvest, which was almost a record crop, had given a shilling sterling [1]—not to mention a ration of food and gin—for Saturday labour. Hours as well as wages were disputed, the question being whether work should begin at dawn or at sunrise; and, owing to the love of novelty or the unpopularity of managers, there was a constant shifting of population from one estate to another. By the end of August about half of the effective labourers were at work; but they had then discovered that, with three days' exertion, even at the current rate, they could earn enough to keep them in idleness for the rest of the week; and to scarcity was thus added discontinuity of labour. In another month the proportion of labourers at work had risen to two-thirds; but a good many of the remainder had gone off and were not likely to return. Hundreds had left the plantations to become fishermen, bargemen, watersidemen and porters; and the last, who were known by their badges, had increased 300 per cent. Parents, associating agricultural labour with slavery, were sending their sons and daughters into the towns. Adult women had now

[1] Henceforth sterling is to be understood, unless otherwise stated. The currency of Jamaica was assimilated to that of the mother country on January 1, 1841.

become the chief support of the planter; but he could not count even on them, as after earning three or four days' wages they went about huckstering or attending markets.

The planters seem to have shown commendable patience in coping with these difficulties during the autumn, that is, until they began to despair of being able to get in the sugar crop, which would be ready for cutting soon after the New Year holidays; but we must probably allow for an element of exaggeration, as the accounts given of the industrial situation are not very consistent. Dr. Nugent, the Speaker of the Assembly and himself a planter, said on October 30 that, "far from desponding, he looked with exultation at the prospect before them," that agricultural and commercial prosperity was "absolutely on the advance," and that for his part he would not hesitate to purchase estates to-morrow; and Buxton in Parliament quoted "an eminent individual" as writing on November 27 that "the work of the plantations is conducted most satisfactorily, and at a far less expense than before." On the other hand, a committee of the Council, in a report to the Governor of November 22, after reviewing fairly and even indulgently the state of the labour market, said that the prevalent opinion in the Western World was that the labour of freemen must be more expensive than that of slaves, and that this was corroborated by the fact that the amount of weekly wages paid since August 1 nearly equalled the former expenditure in provisions, but had been distributed among a far lesser number; and they added that the work done was not in proportion to its remuneration, dismissal being no punishment, as even the worst labourer could count on re-employment when and where he pleased.

It was evident from this report that "absolute and entire freedom" was in danger of being vitiated by coercion; and this was the effect of an Act, which was

passed on December 29 and provisionally became law, to regulate industrial contracts and to enforce their strict observance. The Governor, Sir Evan MacGregor, had previously refused to accept the measure, and he assented to it now only for a year and in order to secure the crop. It was indeed sufficiently severe. Contracts need not be in writing, but must be made in presence of two witnesses. If a labourer was absent, even with a reasonable excuse, he was to forfeit his wages, unless he had given the earliest possible notice. If absent without such an excuse for half a day or *less*—an elastic term—he was to forfeit the whole day's wages, whilst if absent for two successive days or for two days in a fortnight he was liable to a week's imprisonment with hard labour. For the careless use of fire, drunkenness, ill-using of cattle, wanton destruction of property or failure to provide for infant children, he might be sentenced to hard labour for three months; but the employer, to whatever extent he violated the contract, was to be fined only £5. The object of another clause, which declared it "desirable that servants in industry should be associated in labour and located on the same estates," was to prevent the labourer being seduced from his employment by the offer of higher wages.

Lord Aberdeen, Secretary for War and the Colonies under Peel, disallowed this Act as soon as he had read it; or, rather, without waiting for the report of his experts, he intimated that it would be disallowed. He reminded Antigua of the warning which had been given to all the colonies that they must make their choice between the apprenticeship and unrestricted freedom; and he pointed out that this enactment, which might become a precedent elsewhere when the apprenticeship had expired, was not only unduly harsh, but tended "to promote the silent growth of a new code depressing below the common level of society" those who had lately been slaves, since it made criminal for them offences which were not punish-

able, or not to the same extent, in the case of other free persons. When this despatch was laid before the Council and Assembly, they appointed a joint committee to consider the matter and to prepare a new law. In a long report, dated June 25, the committee protested against the disallowance of a measure which was adapted to the negroes in their present state of infancy; for they had "yet to learn that a rod must not be held over a child for domestic discipline because it cannot lawfully be used on a man." They said that the offences and penalties specified in the Act were precisely the same as those which had been set forth in Lord Ripon's scheme of emancipation, the scheme which has been reviewed as the work of Lord Howick, and the principle of which was that the labourers should be subjected to special restraints; and they took up the extraordinary position that the Government was pledged to countenance this plan, though it had been rejected both by Lord Grey's Cabinet and by the London West Indian Committee. They also claimed that the Act had "on the whole, as a temporary expedient, been attended with very solid advantages to the colony."

Nevertheless they had the good sense to correct, if not to acknowledge, their mistake; and the Governor on August 10 was able to transmit an Act for the settlement of disputes as to wages which was so far approved by the Home Government that, in the official phraseology, it was "left to its operation." The Act provided that verbal or implied contracts should be for a year and terminable only at a month's notice, that no contract for a shorter period should be recognised unless it was in writing, and that the occupation of a tenement by a farm-servant of the landlord should be *prima facie* evidence of a yearly hiring. This assumption was the distinctive feature of the measure. We shall find that in other colonies after the abolition of the apprenticeship a labourer could be punished for the breach of an actual, but not of an *implied*, contract.

Any one who revisited an estate which he had not seen since 1833 would have found little to remind him that slavery had been abolished; for cruelty, exemplified by the whip, was the only concomitant of coercion which could be at once removed. The negroes were still divided into the "great gang" of able-bodied adults and the second gang of the less efficient, the former earning the full sixpence a day and the latter only fourpence-halfpenny; they still occupied their cottages, now part of their remuneration, and had the same facilities for making a profit out of the produce of their grounds and the rearing of pigs and poultry. There had, however, been a change in the laying out of estates. Only two-thirds of the arable land could be used in any one year for growing sugar, and the rest had formerly been applied to the growing of provisions. But the negroes had had enough of the yams, eddoes, and sweet potatoes which had formed their chief subsistence as slaves, and in general refused to buy them. They now ate much bread. They would have no flour but "the best and the finest," and favoured such other imported food as rice and Indian corn. Hence most of the land not under sugar was left in what was called a "naked fallow." This plan had been suggested by the shortage of labour, but it was found to improve the soil, whilst affording more pasture for the cattle.

Antigua is the driest island in the West Indies. It has no rivers and hardly any springs, and its productiveness depends entirely on the rainfall, which, though it averages 45·6 inches, is extremely uncertain. There were several years about the time of the American Revolution when all the crops failed, and the population subsisted entirely on imported food. It was unfortunate for the friends of emancipation that the last of the slave-grown harvests was so abundant, and that there was not such another wet season till 1838; but there was an increase in the average production of sugar, which for five years

before emancipation had been 12,189 hogsheads and for the next five years was 13,545 hogsheads; and we have therefore to explain how this result could be obtained with one-third less labour. There had, of course, been no extension of the working day, which was still one of nine hours; but we can hardly make the pleasing assumption that two freemen were doing the work of three slaves, except indeed in this sense, that the slave-owner had counted his negroes as well as his cattle by the head, whereas the employer counted only those who were more or less efficient. It would appear that rather less work was being done in a day; and the labourer, though becoming more reliable, was still prone to disconcert his master by taking "an afternoon off." In one respect there had been a distinct improvement. "Sham sickness," or, as we should now call it, malingering, had gone out of fashion when it could result only in a loss of wages. The estate hospitals, once so well filled on a Monday morning, were sparsely occupied, and the doctor was paid one-third less per head. This must have made up to some extent for the volatility of labour, and we have seen that less of it was required owing to the discontinuance of growing food on the plantations. Moreover, the money awarded as compensation had been a great boon to embarrassed proprietors, who had used it to pay off mortgages; and in 1834–40 five estates, which had been "dismantled" for many years, were again brought into cultivation.

There is reason to believe—and this is the important point—that the real grievance of the planters was a readjustment rather than a shortage of effective labour. A year or two after emancipation many of the negroes who had left the estates to try their fortune elsewhere were finding their way back. Some were artisans who had saved enough money to buy a small piece of land on which they built a cottage, and tilled the soil whilst still prosecuting their trades. These had no connexion

with the estates; but there were others, and a more numerous class, who had given up field-work without learning anything else. They were allowed to rent cottages on condition that one member of the family worked for the proprietor, whilst the rest were free to work where and for whom they pleased. Towards the end of 1836 "free villages" began to be formed owing to the letting or sale of land in small lots by the missionaries and one or two bankrupt proprietors; but at that time there were said to be perhaps not fifty independent cottages outside the towns. The planters at first looked with great disfavour on "these unattached labourers and their petty settlements" as inimical to the sort of feudal spirit—"the connexion of tenancy and labour" which they sought to promote. In the course of an address to the Governor, May 16, 1839, the Council and Assembly declared that the settlers were becoming rapidly demoralised, that their real support was "a system of plunder on the neighbouring lands,"[1] and that profitable cultivation was rarely to be seen round "their comfortless dwellings." Sir William Colebrooke, who had succeeded MacGregor, wrote in transmitting the address to the Colonial Office that its assertions were quite at variance with the reports he had received from police officers, clergymen and magistrates, that the free cottagers were "conspicuous for their moral and religious habits," and that their homesteads attracted "the attention of strangers for the neatness of their dwellings and the diligent and successful cultivation which was the result of secure possession."

The Colonial Office, which was then trying to establish a uniform system of emancipation throughout the West Indies, had provoked this address by calling upon

[1] There were good and bad settlers, and the latter were a nuisance. For one thing, they cut wood on the estates to sell for charcoal or boat-building.

Antigua to amend some of its laws, including the already amended Contract Act—an indignity which was ascribed to " that hostile and irresponsible agency which, hitherto permanently incorporated with this department,[1] has perseveringly contrived, during a long succession of years and under governments variously constituted, to mislead each successive colonial Minister, and which obviously has aimed and still aims at nothing short of the entire ruin of these islands." The demand for improved legislation was the more resented by the Council and Assembly as they had recently been in conflict with the Governor in regard to their Police Act. This Act had been passed in 1834 for two years, and then renewed. When it was about to expire in November 1838, Colebrooke recommended that the owners and managers of estates should not be allowed to retain the right of nominating the rural constables; but the clause, instead of being amended, was struck out; and the discharge of the whole force was averted only by a proclamation that its appointment rested legally with the magistrates. A new Act embodying this principle was passed on December 6.

The ill-temper shown in the address may have been aggravated by a rise in the remuneration of labour. The comparative cost of the production of sugar as between slavery and freedom depended mainly on whether the food for the slaves had been imported or grown;[2] but as long as the ordinary field-worker was paid only sixpence a day there was thought, on the whole, to be a considerable saving, which was reckoned at about a fifth or a sixth; and there was a prospect of

[1] An allusion to the supposed influence of certain permanent officials.—See *British Slavery and Its Abolition*, p. 227.

[2] Some estates before emancipation had been self-supporting and were losers by the change, because the proprietor had now either to import food or to pay wages for growing it. On the other hand, there were planters who had never grown food, as they thought it injured the soil for sugar.

further gain, because the labourer had found that his earnings, even when supplemented by the sale of his produce, were not enough for the needs of his family, and consequently was again putting his children into the field. Colebrooke regretted that women, owing to the same cause, could not be withdrawn from field-labour. The planters were much afraid that their workers might be seduced by agents from Trinidad and British Guiana, who were offering higher wages; and an Act was passed in 1836 that they should not be allowed to leave the colony unless they could show that they had no relations dependent on them or for whom they had not made satisfactory provision. It was difficult, however, at times of pressure to obtain additional labour at the current rate—so much so that many of the planters offered the further inducement of rum. The negroes had never been given to intoxication, but it was found necessary to protect them by law—and especially the women—from the evil effects of this practice; and at last during the wet season of 1839, when there was an even better harvest than that of 1834, the rate of wages was raised from sixpence to ninepence a day. As the planters were then getting good prices for their sugar, they were well able to afford this increase, especially as it was followed by a marked improvement in the continuity of labour; and the more enlightened began to realise that the formation of the "free villages" was rather a boon than a disadvantage, since it not only enabled them to dispose of the less fertile portions of their estates, but saved them from having more "domiciled farm-servants" than they could normally employ. In any emergency they could now obtain additional labourers who, as they were not housed on the estate, received as much as a shilling a day. Before 1834 there had been a similar class of jobbers, but they were then, of course, slaves, and were hired out by contractors. Task-work, where it had been offered to resident labourers, was found

to be so great a stimulus that they worked without regard to weather and sometimes even by moonlight; and in the autumn of 1841 it was resolved in at least one of the parishes to establish a scale or tariff of work which should be equally applicable to both estate-workers and jobbers, so that any negro of either class who had finished one job on the scale might increase his earnings by attempting another.

The cheapness of the new system was not so generally admitted after the 50 per cent. rise in wages; but it had many other advantages, and no one really questioned its success. The whole slave population had passed at a bound from bondage to freedom without the slightest violation of order. Somebody wrote to a member of Parliament in February 1835: "As to disturbance, there has been nothing like it since the celebrated 1st of August, but the island has been more quiet than at other times." Not a single company of militia was maintained after emancipation; and seven years later it was stated in a magistrate's report that tranquillity had continued, though the police force consisted of twenty-four men and "perhaps 250 rural constables, in nearly every instance estate-labourers." Imports had increased with the demand of the negroes for better food and clothing; the exodus from the estates had resulted in the growth of towns; and St. John's, the capital, had a much more bustling appearance. "Persons returning to it after a year or two's absence have been astonished at the change." In 1841 new villages were "rising up in every direction," and the houses in these settlements were of a superior kind, being generally built of stone and shingled. One of the Commissioners who had been appointed by the French Government to investigate the results of emancipation in the British West Indies stated in his account of Antigua that its prosperity was unquestionable and that, "if the colonists are to be believed, the plantations are worth, without the negroes, as much as they were

worth formerly with their gangs of slaves."[1] The increase in sugar-production during the first five years of freedom was referred to in 1841 by Lord John Russell in Parliament, and the report from which he quoted continued thus: "Since that time there has been a gradual improvement in the general condition of the island, but no very striking change. . . . Imports have increased ten per cent., and it is said that not six people in the island would have the former state of things back again if they could."

The chief defect in the work of social reconstruction which has now been reviewed was that it confounded the questions of labour and rent in a manner which was to be copied later with disastrous fidelity in all the other colonies. We have seen that the cottager on an estate was a tenant-at-will, nominally rent-free, but actually under an obligation more arbitrary than that of paying rent—the obligation of working to the satisfaction of his landlord. As the latter had a remedy against idleness in the Contract Act, he had the less reason to retain *in terrore* the remedy of ejection; and the labourer, having lost the security of tenure which custom had given him as a slave, no longer took the same interest in his cottage and garden. That the garden was seldom even cultivated is stated in a police report of 1841.

Two other defects in the legal basis of emancipation may also be mentioned. An Act passed as early as 1692 imposed a penalty on ministers not belonging to the Church of England who should celebrate marriage; but the great majority of the slaves were under the care of Moravian and Wesleyan missionaries, and, as marriage in their case could have no more than a moral and religious significance, it was frequently solemnised by their

[1] *Précis de l'Abolition de l'Esclavage dans les Colonies Angloises.* Copious extracts from this work—but not the sentence quoted—will be found in a despatch of Stanley to Aberdeen, February 2, 1842—P.P., 1843, vol. xxxiv.

Dissenting pastors. When the slaves became free, their marriages acquired a civil character, missionaries were forbidden to perform the rite, and the clergy who did so were allowed to charge fees. The result was that, whilst more negroes were legally married, the number of those who dispensed with marriage in any form greatly increased and that many who had been married irregularly by the missionaries regarded the Emancipation Act as releasing them from matrimonial as well as servile bonds.

It had always been a serious handicap to the slave-owner that he had to carry on his books a number of slaves who were too old and infirm to be of any real use, and it might have been supposed that the burden of supporting such persons would now be imposed on the parish. In their address to the Governor, November 2, 1833, in which they expressed their desire for immediate emancipation, the Council and Assembly admitted that "in the first place provision must be made for the care of the aged and helpless"; but their only suggestion was that the charge should be met by a voluntary deduction from wages; and we hear no more of the matter till February 1834, when they decided not to make any change in the system of relief, which was "entirely of a benevolent and compassionate character." This may have answered well enough when the objects of compassion could be no more than a very few whites and free blacks, but must have failed lamentably after emancipation, if Sturge, who visited the island towards the end of 1836, was at all justified in his assertion that the destitute condition of the old and infirm was the most painful feature in the state of Antigua. Such persons were allowed to live rent-free on the estates, and, if still able to do some work, received an allowance of food; but the great majority were dependent for support on their able-bodied relatives; and the "compassionate claim" on the parish seems to have

been recognised only in the case of the blind and the maimed.

The abolition of the apprenticeship in 1838 made it necessary for all the other colonies to fall into line with Antigua; and it ought therefore to be mentioned that the slave-owners of this island were aware of "circumstances in the condition of the colony which invite more to emancipation than perhaps in any other." We have seen that one of their grounds for confidence was the progress made by the slaves under the influence of religious instruction. Indeed in 1836, when the young of both sexes were seen to be leaving the plantations, there was a general impression, as we learn from an official report, that education had been "overdone"; and the Assembly complained, just as people of the same class were complaining in England, that popular instruction was not conducted on a system calculated to fit the lower orders for "that station in life" in which they would be most useful. Still more reliance was placed on physical and economic factors as involving the "utter dependence of the labourer on the proprietor and capitalist." The yard or garden assigned to each worker on an estate was very small, only about fifty or sixty feet square. The amount of land that could be purchased or rented by an independent labourer was usually not much more; tillage might be arrested or its produce ruined by drought; and more than half of the food consumed throughout the island was imported by the planters. The reader may have noticed that, though the Assembly borrowed so much of Howick's scheme for their Contract Act, they did not adopt his suggestion of a tax on waste land. The fact was that there was no unappropriated land and very little not under tillage or pasture, except in the mountainous districts where, though suitable for fruit-growing and open without restriction, it was too remote from the markets to be of much use; but we find it mentioned that, wherever the

negroes could establish themselves as squatters, they were "endeavouring gradually to render themselves independent of sugar-cultivation." [1]

We have now to extend our survey of emancipation from the colony in which it originated to the rest of the British West Indies. The other Leeward Islands were St. Christopher or St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Tortola or the Virgin Islands, and Dominica. In all of these, except the last, the economic conditions were similar to those which obtained in Antigua; and it will probably suffice if we deal with St. Kitts as the common type.

Not more than half of this island had ever been cultivated; but there was no public or Crown land available for squatting, the mountains and woodland which occupied most of the interior being all included in the various estates. The abolition of the apprenticeship was followed here by no such dislocation of industry as had attended the abolition of slavery in Antigua. Wednesday, August 1, 1838, and the next four days were given up to thanksgiving and rejoicing, and on Monday work was resumed throughout the island.[2] But it was resumed under agreements, even written agreements, with penalties for desertion and absence, whereas the Antiguan Act, which had suggested this system, was not passed till five months after emancipation. The Assembly had prepared for the ordeal of free labour by passing a Contract Act, June 21, modelled on that of Antigua, and no doubt anticipated that it would pass muster,

[1] P.P., 1835, vol. L.; 1836, vol. xlix.; 1839, vol. xxxvii.; 1842, vol. xxix.; evidence of Dr. Nugent before the Select Committee on the West India Colonies, 1842; J. Sturge, *The West Indies in 1837*, pp. 26, 27, 34, 37, 48, 58–61, 65, 70, and Appendix, p. xii; *Antigua and the Antiguans*, Anon., 1844, ii. 155–164; Hansard (1835), xxviii. 923; (1841) lviii. 28. Sturge's account of Antigua reveals the soundness of his judgment when it was not perverted by his hatred of the apprenticeship. This note will explain subsequent references to the "West Indies Committee."

[2] "Nothing could surpass," wrote a Stipendiary Magistrate in October, "the good conduct of the labourers under this extraordinary change in their condition."

as the latter in its amended form was still in force. But the Colonial Office now insisted on a higher standard of emancipation than had been exacted from its hardy pioneers; and the Act was disallowed, after it had been in operation for over three months, on the ground that it differed fundamentally from a pattern ordinance which had recently been sent out.[1] The Assembly then drew up a memorial in which, with great indignation and at great length, they asserted a right to manage their own internal affairs, and protested against the sending out of Orders in Council as "models for our governance in the work of legislation." Sir William Colebrooke, in forwarding the memorial to Lord Glenelg, said that "without any disposition to encroach on the privileges of the local assemblies, your Lordship is aware that I have long considered them incompetent for the task of general legislation at this eventful crisis"; and in a previous despatch he had remarked that fifteen members of the Assembly for the rural districts were returned, in the absence of most of the proprietors, by only thirty-five voters. The requirements of the Home Government were that no contract should be made for more than a month, unless it was in writing and signed in presence of a Stipendiary Magistrate, who was to see that the labourer entered into the agreement voluntarily and fully understood its terms. The Assembly disdained to legislate under these restrictions, and the negro was not altogether a gainer, for, though free to play fast and loose with his employment, he was also liable to summary ejectment from his cottage. Moreover, both masters and labourers lost the security against hasty decisions which had been involved in the necessity of giving a month's notice.

Wages in St. Kitts as in Antigua began at sixpence

[1] The Order in Council of September 7, 1838, which will be frequently mentioned. If Sturge and his friends had not succeeded in upsetting the apprenticeship, the legal basis of emancipation would have been settled beforehand in consultation with the Home Government.

a day with house and garden, and in both, owing to the abundant harvest of 1839, were raised to ninepence. The former island is only about two-thirds the size of the latter, and the habitable part of it was far more densely peopled. Indeed on some estates, which had been over-manned during the apprenticeship, negroes were actually turned out of the cottages which in many cases they had themselves built. There was thus no shortage of labour, and most of those who left the plantations, finding little to do elsewhere, soon came back. The disallowance of their contract law placed the planters at a disadvantage as compared with their neighbours in Antigua, especially as they had more reason to dread the lure of higher wages in other colonies; and, having lost their limited power of coercion, they now fell back on conciliation. Most of them had ceased to grow food; but, instead of fallowing the land in rotation with sugar, they allowed their labourers to cultivate as much of it as they pleased, and thus "prodigiously enhanced" their means of profit. They seem to have thought that in this way they would obtain the advantages of a yearly hiring, as the negro would not expose himself to eviction till he had secured his crop; but the result was that labour, though more plentiful than in Antigua, became far more erratic. Managers complained that the negro would not come to work till Tuesday or Wednesday; that, if he came on Monday, he thought himself entitled to a day or half a day during the week; and that, when he left for breakfast or dinner, they never knew whether he would return. Extra payment was given, as in Antigua, to strangers in lieu of a cottage, and a labourer resident with one employer was thus tempted to work temporarily for another; but this tendency was checked about 1840, when it became usual to sue the labourer for the value of his house and ground if he had not worked on the estate for a week or a fortnight. As in Antigua, the planters began by refusing to let land—they always refused to sell

it—to independent labourers, and ended by looking with less disfavour on the free villages which supplied them at need with jobbers. In spite of all difficulties, they kept up their production of sugar; and the customs revenue increased with the growing desire of the negroes to possess the decencies and comforts of life.[1]

Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados are the oldest British settlements in the West Indies; and the last, which was by far the most populous, must now be considered. The most important of the Windward Islands, Barbados is about one-third larger than Antigua. It was practically all under tillage—"one uninterrupted field of sugar-cane and Guinea corn," and, with about 12,000 whites, 7000 people of colour, and 80,000 blacks, was said to sustain "the largest population in the world for the same surface." In all the colonies, but most conspicuously in this crowded area, emancipation was inaugurated in a manner which utterly confounded the prophecies of its opponents. Referring to the celebration of the event, the Inspector of Rural Police wrote: "Not a single breach of the peace, of good order or decorum was known to occur, a fact that would scarcely be credited by persons not witnesses to the same." This was rather better than the usual "form" of the Barbadian negroes; but petty thefts and that sort of fighting among themselves which in the more forcible language of the law was called "assault and battery" were their worst offences; and, three months later, the Inspector reported that there had been, on the whole, "less disaffection, less crime, and less punishment among the labouring class since the emancipation than in the same space of time during the litigious apprenticeship system."[2]

[1] P.P., 1839, vols. xxxv. and xxxvii.; and evidence of George Estridge before the West Indies Committee.

[2] The Inspector says elsewhere that the negroes acquired or developed a taste for litigation "under the system of special magistracy." It must have been a singular instinct which prompted them to keep these officials so busy if, as Sturge would have us believe, the great majority of the latter were "completely subservient" to the planters.

The Assembly of Barbados believed, as they well might, that emancipation had been thrust upon them as a punishment for the sins of another colony; and in justification of their complaint they referred to a circular despatch in which it was stated that the Bill for amending the apprenticeship was not brought into Parliament till "no reasonable hope remained" of obtaining from the legislature of Jamaica that remedy for legal defects and practical abuses which had so long been demanded. They passed a Contract Act and had just begun to congratulate themselves on its success when intimation was received that it would be disallowed "as soon as the necessary forms can be completed." A new Act, in accordance with the Order in Council, was passed after considerable delay, and then proved inoperative, as the disallowance of the previous Act had confirmed the negroes in their repugnance to all contracts.

If there were any employers in the West Indies who could count on getting a sufficiency of labour, and getting it cheap, it was the planters of Barbados; but they realised that the density of their population exposed them to the risk of emigration, and were thus impelled to offer what they considered high wages—10*d.* a day with a free house and a plot of land which, if less than a quarter of an acre, was also free. Both house and ground were, however, given on condition that the occupier worked for the estate five days a week and nine hours a day; and, if he wanted more land, he had to pay for it, a certain portion of his wages being deducted as rent. A good many of the labourers took as much as a quarter of an acre, and some took more; and their allotments, whatever their size, were used in most cases for growing sugar as well as, or more frequently in preference to, provisions. Their canes were cut, carted and crushed at the expense of the estate, which valued the sugar and returned to them about two-thirds in cash; and it was estimated that at least £10,000 was thus distributed annually

amongst the negroes. In former days the planters had grown provisions with slave or apprentice labour; but now "little else than sugar-canes" was to be seen on both estates and allotments; and in 1842 about two-thirds of the population were living on imported food. The negroes had another source of income in the rearing of live-stock and poultry, which was little less profitable, as fresh meat at a shilling a pound was dearer in Barbados than in Britain.

These occupations were too attractive and too lucrative to be easily combined with the duties of a wage-labourer. The attempt to reconcile them gave rise indeed to much friction, and this again was aggravated by "the artificial migratory propensity" fostered by irresponsible emigration agents, whose efforts were so far successful that in January 1841 the number of labourers who had left the colony amounted to 2157. The negroes were given to purloining manure for their cane-pieces, and often disputed the charge made for converting their canes into sugar. They had usually more pigs, sheep and goats, if not also cattle, than could possibly be maintained without trespassing on the estates; and there were difficulties more serious because inherent in the system. Five days a week for the estate left only one for the allotment; but if the labourer gave less—and he was said on the average to give only four—rent was levied or raised, and he was liable at any moment to be turned out of his cottage. The more work, the more pay, was a maxim which the planters had been wise enough to adopt. Consequently they began by setting task-work, but gave it up on finding that the task was too often botched or scamped in order to be the sooner finished. For example, the hoe was used so carelessly in weeding as to damage the young canes. This was their own explanation, and no doubt partly true; but one who was not a planter said in 1841 that, being anxious to retain their "super-abundance of labourers" in order to keep down

wages,[1] they had "to proportion out the employment," and that the great grievance of the labouring population was that they were not allowed to do as much work as they could.[2] It is not difficult to accept this view when we find it stated in an official report of the same year that the more effective labourers had for the most part left the estates and formed themselves into independent jobbing gangs, who came to any plantation which had need of their services, and either left when their day's work was done or lodged with the resident negroes. It appears that there were persons who made a living out of getting to know and organising labourers of this class.

This development must have convinced the more intelligent planters of the mistake they had made in not charging rent except as a means of extorting labour or, as one of them expressed it, in adopting "the injurious principle of gratuitous holding." If the negro could have counted on keeping his house and ground so long as he paid a fair rent, he would have been more likely to work on the estate than elsewhere, whilst the necessity of paying rent would have made him more dependent on wages; and this was all the security for continuous labour that a landlord could have without involving himself in contentions which must defeat his object. As late, however, as the spring of 1842 very few proprietors had adopted this system, though a police magistrate stated in his report: "There is but one opinion abroad respecting it, and that is, that sooner or later it must be done." Nevertheless, in May of that year a planter, who had gone to Barbados to inquire into the condition of his estates and had just returned, informed the West Indies

[1] It was contended, however, with some reason, that their system of agriculture required an unusual number of hands. It was described as "a garden cultivation" which must be seen to be understood. The soil was worn out, and its fertility could be restored only by lavish manuring, and by collecting virgin mould from gullies and other channels.

[2] W. H. Burnley, *The Island of Trinidad*, 1842, p. 88.

Committee that there was much greater willingness to work, and that, though the discontinuity of labour was still a source of trouble, the state of affairs was "infinitely better."

As practically the whole island was under tillage at the time of emancipation—there was said to be not "a spot of waste land fit for cultivation"—it may be supposed that the planters would keep a tight hold of their estates, and such indeed was their general disposition; but some of them, in order to recoup their outlay in wages, were not unwilling to let land or even to sell it—in both cases on exorbitant terms. In 1840 there were 475 freeholds of one to two acres [1]; and about this period a proprietor bequeathed a sum of £7000 to his labourers, who used it in buying land for a village. Hamlets were springing up on rented land, especially in the suburbs of Bridgetown; and it was remarked that, wherever the cottagers on an estate were under no obligation to work for it, they might be considered as forming a free village.

It has been mentioned that slaves not over six years of age were fully emancipated in 1834. The idea probably was that they should be kept at school till 1840, the date originally fixed for the termination of the apprenticeship, when the oldest of them would be no more than twelve. The planters, who had formerly had a "children's gang," would have liked to employ them, sooner or later, in some such light work as weeding; but parents were naturally disinclined to associate their offspring with an industry which still bore the stamp of slavery, and nowhere was their reluctance stronger than in Barbados; for Sir Lionel Smith, when Governor of the colony, is said to have advised them that they should "work their fingers to the bone" rather than apprentice their children to the planters, and to have done so without explaining to them

[1] J. Davy, *The West Indies before and since Slave Emancipation*, 1854, p. 109.

the difference between apprenticeship in this its ordinary industrial sense and that which it bore in the Abolition Act. His attitude was subsequently endorsed by the Home Government, which, in the Order in Council of September 7, 1838, laid down that children between the ages of ten and sixteen might be apprenticed to any trade requiring peculiar art or skill, but not " under any circumstances " to the cultivation or manufacture of colonial produce. There was, of course, nothing to prevent such persons hiring themselves for field-work ; but the planters complained that the effect of this restriction was to confirm them in a prejudice against it which endangered the future working of the estates ; and they had some reason for alarm. The police magistrates, who replied to a series of questions addressed to them by the Governor in the spring of 1839, concurred in stating that the children of the negroes were being systematically withheld from agriculture. In most of these reports it was said that they were being brought up in idleness and bad habits ; and, three years later, similar statements were made to the West Indies Committee.

The reader who is familiar with the anti-slavery movement in the British Colonies may be surprised to find among these police magistrates of Barbados the Rev. W. S. Austin, who in 1824 had been expelled from Demerara for his efforts to save the missionary, John Smith, when sentenced to death for alleged complicity in a slave revolt. A living in Wales, and presumably also this post, were the compensation bestowed upon him by the Home Government. Austin's sympathies must have been more with the negro than with his employer ; and it is the more significant that he should have considered the English farm-labourer as nothing like so well off as the former. " When is he ever known to regale on wine, porter and fresh meat, as the more fortunate peasant of this island now frequently does ? " Disposed at the time to condemn the original Contract Act as harsh, he now

thought, in the light of later experience, that it had worked for the general good; and he said of the planters that the way in which they had adapted themselves to the new system was "such as to surprise those who have seen them under former circumstances so unfavourable to the development of the finer feelings of the human character." [1]

[1] P.P., 1839, vols. xxxvi. and xxxvii.; 1840, vol. xxxv.; 1842, vol. xxix.; evidence of William Sharp and George Carrington before the West Indies Committee, and Appendix vi.

CHAPTER II

UNDEVELOPED COLONIES—JAMAICA

WE have now to consider the remaining and more numerous class of colonies in which there was none of that " utter dependence of the labourer on the proprietor and capitalist " which had emboldened the planters of Antigua. This class included only Dominica amongst the Leeward Islands, but, with the exception of Barbados, all the Windward Islands—St. Vincent, Grenada and St. Lucia, Tobago, and Trinidad, and, on the continent, British Guiana.

These were the communities which in Jamaica were known and disparaged as " the conquered colonies," because they had all been wrested from France, Spain, or Holland in the latter years of the eighteenth century, and were thus distinguished from Barbados, Antigua and St. Kitts, which had been settled by English adventurers about 1630, and from Jamaica itself. Not that Jamaica had not been conquered, but that its conquest, having taken place as far back as 1659, was of merely historic interest. Economically, however, there can be no doubt that Jamaica must be ranked with the later acquisitions. There might not be much of its 4450 square miles which was still technically Crown land, but vast tracts suitable for cultivation were yet untilled. One quarter cultivated, another quarter unfit for cultivation, and only one-third under tillage of what was really available, was the estimate of a planter in 1842. With 312,000 emancipated slaves, this colony was by far the most important of its

type; and its condition in and after 1838 must now be considered.

When negroes grew their own food, as, with the exception of a ration of salted fish, was the case in Jamaica, they could, of course, be made to work for their masters so long as they were slaves; but, when they became free, it was only by depriving them of their grounds [1] that they could have been reduced to the condition of ordinary agricultural labourers. Wages could, in general, be no more than an inducement, strong in proportion as they had acquired wants higher than mere physical needs; and, though many had already entered on that stage, they were just those who had made the most of their resources, and now, with greater leisure, would develop them still more. In Jamaica under slavery the negroes had had the equivalent of only one day in a fortnight for working their grounds, and yet had supplied the town population with vegetables and fruit; but during the four years of apprenticeship they had had in most cases every Friday afternoon and every Saturday either for tillage on their own account or for working for hire on the estates, and we shall see shortly how well these advantages had been turned to account. Nor can we overlook in this connexion the political situation. Sir Lionel Smith had been sent to this colony in order to correct the bias of a Governor who was supposed to have unduly favoured the negroes; but he himself was inclined personally to the same side, and the sullen intractableness of the Assembly had driven him into a partisanship far more pronounced than had been that of Lord Sligo. Still more important was the attitude of the Baptist missionaries who had great influence in western Jamaica. Unlike all the other missionaries, they had identified themselves with the

[1] There was usually a large tract of forest within the bounds of an estate. Portions of this were cleared by the negroes and cultivated in rotation; for a plot of such virgin soil recovered its original fertility without manure after being abandoned for seven years.

rights as well as with the welfare of the negroes. William Knibb, the originator of this policy, was still its most vigorous exponent, and was known amongst the planters as " King Knibb " and " the Dan O'Connell of Jamaica."

The reader knows what to expect from the Jamaica Assembly. Otherwise he might have been surprised to find that their Act of 1838 to abolish the apprenticeship was much less liberal than that by which it had been dispensed with in Antigua in 1834. The latter had provided, as we have seen, that the slaves, when they became free, should retain their houses and grounds for a year, if they were willing to work, as " a temporary and gratuitous accommodation." The former enacted that the apprentices, when they ceased to be such, should be liable to eviction at three months' notice, and did not even inform them whether the brief " accommodation " thus implicitly and ungraciously conceded would be gratuitous. As it was particularly desired that the negroes should remain on the estates, it was a singular idea to inaugurate the new regime by threatening to turn them off; but they were known to be much attached to the houses which the custom of slavery had permitted them to hold for life and even to dispose of by will, and to the gardens[1] in which they had buried their dead; and it soon appeared that the Assembly had counted on this feeling as a means of keeping down wages. The passing of the Act in June was followed by a scramble of the planters to arrange beforehand for the working of their estates. They soon realised that it would be advisable in the first place to come to an understanding amongst themselves; and, though the island was too large

[1] The gardens are seldom more than mentioned in the contemporary documents, but were none the less important. They were usually from an eighth to a quarter of an acre in extent, and contained from three to a dozen coconut trees, each of which would yield fruit to the value of £1 to £3 a year. There might also be some bread-fruit trees. Constant manuring and the accumulation of leaf-mould had made the soil " rich beyond conception."

and diverse to permit of their showing a united front, the rate of remuneration most favoured was 6*d.* or at most 7½*d.* a day with houses and grounds. In Jamaica the negro had unlimited provision grounds apart from his house and garden. With this addition, 7½*d.* a day was a much higher wage than the 6*d.* then being paid in Antigua with no such grounds, but only "a spot of land" round the labourer's cottage; and Sir Lionel Smith was not justified in saying, as he said later, that a combination had been formed against the negroes "to grind them down to gratuitous labour." Nevertheless the offer was not likely to be accepted, for the planters had offered much more for free labour during the apprenticeship,[1] and the usual valuation of an able-bodied field-labourer in the appraisement court had been at the rate of 1*s.* 6*d.* a day, and that, too, not for working days but for every day in the year. The constitution of this tribunal, which consisted of one Special Justice and two ordinary magistrates, who were almost invariably proprietors or their attorneys, had been a perpetual source of complaint. It was one of the points in the Jamaica Abolition Act which had been cited for amendment in the Report of Buxton's Select Committee; but it had never been altered, and its injustice was now to be dramatically exposed; for instances occurred in which a negro was offered 7½*d.* a day[2] by the very planter from whom he had recently purchased his freedom at the rate of 1*s.* 6*d.*; and this, moreover, had been the lowest rate for extra labour during the apprenticeship.

Meeting with no encouragement to go on with their proposal, the planters resolved to come to no terms before August 1; and their disappointment was due mainly to Knibb, who would hear of nothing less than

[1] It was not fair, however, to judge them by this standard. When free labour was the exception, it naturally commanded a higher price than when it had become the rule.

[2] Actually about 1*s.* 1*d.*, if we allow for the value of house and ground.

a shilling a day, and was indefatigable in exposing what he called " the sixpenny plot." Addressing a meeting of 2500 apprentices on July 12, he said that they must have such wages as should enable them to contribute to the support of their missions and the relief of the distressed, to pay for the education of their children, and to make provision for sickness and old age, and that, if there were small non-resident proprietors who could not afford these terms, they ought to come out and manage their own estates. " What right had they to employ attorneys at £200 or £300 per annum, and drive in their carriages through Regent Street and have their boxes at the Opera ? " He told his hearers not to be intimidated by the eviction clause in the Act, as it would probably be disallowed, and that in any case he had an offer of £10,000 from a friend in England which, if necessary, would be used to buy land on which they could settle.[1]

As to the small non-resident proprietors who were thus cavalierly disposed of, the inheritance of a West Indian estate had been to many of them an encumbrance rather than a boon ; and it is not clear how they could have improved their position by giving up the practice of their professions at home—for they were not all people of independent means—and coming out to manage a business of which they knew nothing. But the hardest case of all was that of the small proprietors who were resident, as they were usually out of funds till they had realised their crop, and were at their wits' end to know how they could meet the new expense of a weekly wage.

The celebration of complete freedom in Jamaica conformed to its character throughout the colonies—festive as well as religious, but without " even the irregularity of a single drunken individual " ; and on Monday, August 5, the new era opened, inauspiciously enough, with the expected trial of strength between capital and labour. The positions occupied by the respective combatants

[1] J. H. Hinton, *Memoirs of William Knibb*, 1847, pp. 281–91.

were the reverse of those they would have held in a similar conflict in Europe; for the labourer, with his provision grounds to support him, could afford to wait, whilst the capitalist, whose sugar-canes were liable at this season to be choked with weeds, was compelled as a rule to push for a decision. In certain districts indeed, where the unusual dryness of the weather had postponed or averted this danger, the planters did adopt a policy of inaction. On these estates, when the negroes offered to resume work, they were turned away or confronted with excited overseers, who forbade them to put a hoe in the ground unless they would engage to work for 7½*d.* a day. In most cases, however, the planters made every endeavour to obtain labour on these terms, but were foiled by the steadiness of the negroes under the tutelage of Baptist missionaries or Stipendiary Justices;[1] and by the end of the month generally, but not everywhere, the shilling rate had been conceded. The Governor had contributed materially to this result, but he was not himself a proprietor, and showed more interest than knowledge. As late as July 27, after a voyage round the coast, he hazarded the unfortunate prediction that the negroes would "settle down" with a shilling currency, the equivalent of 7½*d.* sterling; but a week or two later he made a tour through several parishes to advocate the higher wage; and a rumour was current amongst the labourers—which showed at least how highly they rated his zeal on their behalf—that the police had orders to apprehend and flog any of

[1] This was the new title of the Special Justices, who had lost their jurisdiction as such with the abolition of the apprenticeship, but two-thirds of whom were retained in Jamaica. Referring to the apprenticeship, one of them wrote thus in a report to the Governor: "The impression which masters had of the protection afforded to the people under that system by the Special Justice is made evident *now* in the pains they are taking to remind the negro that his office is at an end." The word "now" refers to the erroneous idea which had been propagated by Sturge. In Barbados the office was in general abolished, but three Stipendiaries were retained as a court of appeal from the local magistrates.

them who should be found working for less. We have seen that in Barbados Sir Lionel had been blamed for the withdrawal of children from agricultural labour. In Jamaica he had given equal offence by a speech to the apprentices in which he advised them not to allow their wives to do "heavy field-work"—counsel which was said to have resulted in the latter taking to idleness and prostitution. His defence was that by this expression he meant only such heavy work as holing, and that the civilising of the negroes depended on the elevation of their women.

The proposal which, so far, held the field was that of a shilling a day with houses and grounds free; but there was an alternative proposal of eighteenpence a day with rent; and the preference given to the former indicated the general impression that rent, which, of course, had been unknown under slavery, could not or would not be charged before the three months' occupancy allowed by the Act had expired. There had been no mention of rent either in the measure itself or in the course of its discussion; but notices to quit, accompanied in some cases by demands for rent, had been issued as a means of pressure by those planters who adhered to the original offer of $7\frac{1}{2}d.$; and Sir Lionel, in order to put the question beyond doubt, submitted it to the Attorney-General, who, to his chagrin and dismay, gave it as his opinion that the tenants were liable to rent from August 1. It was of no avail that contrary opinions were obtained from the other two members of the Jamaica bar who were not connected with plantation property, and subsequently from the English Crown lawyers; for the mischief had been done. The proprietors and attorneys of small estates pounced on this decision as a means both of coercing labour and of averting or recovering the dreaded outlay in wages; and their proceedings were not always characterised by moderation and good sense. Some of them balanced paid against unpaid labour and exacted rather more of the latter,

whilst others sought to establish a new slavery of debt by demanding more for rent than they paid in wages; but the commonest plan was to levy a shilling a week on every member of the family capable of working on the provision grounds.[1] After November 1 there were forcible evictions, cottages being unroofed and cattle turned into the grounds; but such instances were rare, as it was only a minority of the planters who had issued ejectment notices, and a still smaller number who ever thought of executing them. In order to allow of a deduction for rent, which averaged about 3*s.* 4*d.* a week, the current rate of wages was raised from a shilling a day to eighteenpence; but too many planters dispensed with rent in order to obtain labour, or in other words exacted a labour rent. It seemed as if there could be no settlement; for the tenant fought shy of working by contract, and the landlord was consequently unwilling to part with his only means of enforcing labour by giving him a lease. The general resumption of provision grounds was considered too harsh and too dangerous a measure, and would, moreover, have severed that connexion between the labourer and a particular estate which the proprietors were anxious to

[1] If rapacity and not policy had prompted this exaction, it would have been as senseless as it was represented to be by some of the Stipendiary Magistrates; but it was really a tax on the independent resources of the labourer in order to make him work on the estate from which these resources were derived. If he did so work, the burden would be lightened or possibly even removed. As the provision ground had no prescribed limits, the rent was said to be levied, not on so much ground, but on ground for so many. Bourne, one of the Stipendiary Magistrates, was admonished by the Governor for refusing to sign ejectment papers; but in a pamphlet, subsequently published by his daughter and prefaced by himself, it is said that, "as it was impossible in the first instance correctly to estimate the value of the grounds, taking into consideration the fertility of the soil and other circumstances, it is probable that as near an approach was thus made to an equitable system as could have been expected at the time."—*Suggestions relative to the Improvement of the West India Colonies*, 1853, p. 39. I have given a fuller account of this matter in *British Slavery and Its Abolition*, without, however, as I now think, making sufficient allowance for the difficulties of the planters.

retain; nor would it in many cases have put an end to the independence of the labourer, which was now to be secured, as in Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados, but on a much larger scale, by the formation of free villages.

The first of these settlements had been begun as early as 1835 and appropriately named Sligoville. It must have been intended for negroes who were already free or who should purchase their release from the apprenticeship; and apparently there was no extension of the system till November 1, 1838, when the tenants of the planters became liable to eviction. On the 13th Knibb wrote to Sturge that he was determined to buy land, but knew of none that was suitable and available in his district. Writing to another correspondent on the 29th, he said that he had just been offered 500 acres with a good house for £1000, that he should buy the property that day, and was anxious for a loan, in which he was sure that Sturge would assist. What he proposed was to convey the house and a few acres to the mission, and to re-sell all the rest in lots of one, two or three acres to the negroes, who, when they had built their houses, would be qualified to vote at elections. It would be necessary to buy through a merchant, as he should not be able to obtain the land if his purpose were known. Next day he wrote to inform Sturge of the actual purchase, and mentioned, in anticipation of his help, that the village would be called Birmingham. Soon afterwards he acquired ground for another settlement, and appealed for help to the committee of his mission in London, telling them that he had sold nearly all his furniture to the station and had advanced fully £300. In January 1839 Sturge was informed that " our little Birmingham " [1] was already a refuge for the destitute, some seventy families having purchased allotments and being about to erect houses. In September he was told that two more tracts of land had been

[1] The name appears to have been changed later to " Sturge."

secured, and that one of them had been paid for entirely by Baptist negroes from one estate, whilst at another place seventy lots had been "hired out"; and he must have welcomed the assurance of his energetic friend: "We have the germ of a noble peasantry." Similar efforts were being made in other parts of Jamaica, and the number of villages formed in the first five years of complete emancipation is said to have been from 150 to 200, with a total acreage of 100,000. The houses were probably substantial enough for the climate, though not often of wood or stone. They are said to have been better than those on the estates, and were usually of three rooms, in addition to a small kitchen built out at the back. In some of them were to be seen sideboards and mahogany bedsteads.

The friends of these settlements maintained that, far from being inimical to the interest of the planters, they would promote it, but on "righteous principles." The labourer would still be impelled to work on the estates, not indeed by demands for rent and threats of eviction, but by the necessity of supplementing his income, the amount of land he could buy from the mission not being enough, as a rule, to make him independent of wages. The usual holding was said to be two lots, each 52 by 108 feet. As to what constituted a livelihood for the negro, his pastors and his employers were not likely to agree; and in fact the value of both allotments and provision grounds varied indefinitely with differences in soil and situation. In certain districts, where they were comparatively unproductive, eighteenpence a day in wages was said to be equal to no more than a shilling elsewhere; but the usual estimate was that the annual surplus value of an acre, after providing for the subsistence of the cultivator and his family, was about £25; and the occupation of two acres was not uncommon. We meet with a proprietor of coffee estates who thought that the selling or letting of land to negroes was a suicidal policy for the

planters, but who had himself sold land to them because he knew that, if they did not get it from him, they would get it from somebody else ; and he had sold to individuals two, four, six, eight and even ten acres at a price per acre of £6. In the case of ten acres the purchase had not been all for immediate cultivation, but in order to have a reserve when the portion first tilled had become exhausted. From the same authority we learn that abandoned estates were being let to negroes at a rent per acre of from eight to twelve dollars. That the Assembly looked with some jealousy on the rise of these yeoman and tenant farmers is evident from an Act of 1840, which prohibited the sale of sugar in quantities less than a hundredweight, and of coffee, except in the husk.

The reader may be at a loss to account for all this buying and renting of land on the part of agricultural labourers who, but a few months earlier, had been more or less slaves. Knibb's explanation was that they had saved the requisite amount of money out of their earnings for Friday and Saturday labour during the apprenticeship—a notable admission to come from one who had co-operated with Sturge in overthrowing that "abominable system." Greater facilities for saving were now available, and the number of peasant proprietors continued rapidly to increase. In little more than three and a half years after emancipation 3316 negroes belonging to the Western Baptist Union had bought land and had spent on this purpose and on the building of their houses a total sum of £96,000. From an official memorandum for the parish of Manchester, which was within this area, it appeared that the number of persons subject to land-tax and other burdens had risen from 438 in 1838 to 1866 in 1841 ; and it was estimated by the Governor that, whilst throughout the island in 1838 there were 2014 freeholders who had become so "by the accumulations of their own industry," in 1840 there were 7848.

It may be said that these figures, after all, represent

only a small fraction of the emancipated population; but evidences of general welfare are plentiful and patent. The Baptist missionaries, formerly supported from this country, were now paid entirely by their own people, and well paid too, if we may judge from the country houses, "delightful" or "neat but commodious," with which at least two of them had been provided. We learn from Knibb that from 1835 to 1840 in the three congregations under his care no less than £11,000 had been raised for chapel-building and education, and that in the whole Western Union the sum collected for these purposes amounted to £60,000.[1] A sum of nearly £600 was subscribed to defray his expenses when he undertook a "legation" to the Anti-Slavery Society in 1840; and the flock of one of his colleagues, "composed almost exclusively of black labourers," had raised as much as £2600 in three and a half years. We read of a negro couple whose annual subscription to missions was £10, and of a widow whose "mite for the chapel" turned out to be five dollars. Another fact of the same significance which struck every visitor may be cited—that it was "a very common thing in Jamaica for the negroes to have horses"; and here again we come back to Knibb and his so-called "abominable system"; for he tells us that from their savings during the apprenticeship the negroes bought brood-mares, which were of course an investment, but also a convenience, as they used them for bringing supplies from their provision grounds, which were usually several miles distant, and for going to and from church. No fewer than 106 horses at a cost of £1500 were sold in one year by a planter to the residents on his estate. In addition to breeding horses and growing food, they kept sheep, pigs, poultry, and in some cases a cow; and it cannot, therefore, surprise us to hear of a young married negro who spent two shillings a week on wine and porter, or that one of Gurney's companions, when he stopped at

[1] Hinton, *Memoirs of William Knibb*, p. 422.

a wayside cottage to ask for a glass of water, was offered wine.[1]

Extravagance as well as thrift was characteristic of the negro; but, though he often spent lavishly on dress and on such social functions as marriages and funerals, there was one necessary expense which he could seldom be induced to incur. Accustomed to free medical attendance as a slave, he showed the greatest reluctance to pay for it after emancipation. It was said that he would spend £5 to £10 on a funeral, but would not pay 13s. a year to keep himself and his family in health. Doctors soon became scarce, most of them having been "starved out," and in consequence there was a serious rise in mortality, especially amongst children. Nevertheless, population continued to increase, mainly owing to the greater frequency of marriage.

In a report of June 1841 one of the Stipendiary Magistrates said of the negro that "his bodily powers by the application of money power are multiplied beyond calculation," and that it was wonderful what had been accomplished on "a small lot of land in building, planting, digging ponds and making fences without entailing an entire cessation of labour on the plantations." In these last words we are introduced to the less agreeable side of emancipation, which was necessarily the more conspicuous to the planters. It was an exaggeration to suggest that they were suffering from anything like "an entire cessation of labour," but its deficiency on the estates might be inferred from the want of it elsewhere, as shown by ill-kept gardens and pleasure grounds and the bad state of the roads, for the repair of which the local authorities were unable to obtain contracts. The pick of the labourers had either bought land on their own account or had gone to form the new settlements, which were often in the interior and at a distance from most of the plantations;

[1] J. J. Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies*, 1840, pp. 97, 104, 116, 130, 132, 134, 139, 158.

and, though it might be true that they worked for wages after they had built their houses and planted their grounds, they usually gave only four days a week or even less, except during crop ; and Knibb admitted that even then there was a difficulty in obtaining labour, especially for any unpleasant kind of work, such as the carrying away of " megass." [1] The negroes who remained on the estates comprised a large proportion of the idle and less ambitious, who found the produce of their grounds almost enough for their wants ; and in their case it was almost as hard for the planter to get good work as to get any at all through the coercion of rent. If he paid by the day, he might not get the value of half a day's labour, whilst, if he offered job-work, it was probably done fast enough, but too often scamped. Two tasks at a shilling each could be done in a day ; but the labourer frequently went off at noon after finishing one, and this was all he would do if hired nominally for the whole day. A coffee planter said that he had his weeding done by the piece, but not the pruning of his trees, because in the latter case the negroes, in order to save time, were apt to cut the main branch instead of merely freeing it of faulty twigs. A sugar planter had known his labourers to earn 3*s.* a day in cutting canes by the task in half the time they would have taken to earn 1*s.* 6*d.* by the day, but said that, after exerting themselves in this way, they might be absent for the rest of the week, and that frequently, even in the crop season, he had been left for a fortnight with hardly six people at work beyond the artisans. Labour, in fact, was even less continuous and reliable in Jamaica than we found it to be in St. Kitts ; and there was always the difficulty that the rainy season, which called for special exertions on the allotments, had, of course, the same effect on the plantations, the time for planting and weeding

[1] The stems of the canes after the juice had been " expressed." These were dried and used for fuel. Trucks, running on rails, were now being introduced to carry off this refuse.

vegetables being also the time for planting and weeding canes.

We have seen that the Jamaica Assembly at this period had desisted from its labours rather than comply with certain demands made by Parliament, and that some of the largest proprietors had supported the Bill by which its functions were to be engrossed by the Governor and Council, on the ground that new laws were urgently required and that, without them, the benefit of emancipation would be totally lost. It was more than doubtful, however, whether the state of affairs could be remedied by legislation. The outlook in this respect became even more discouraging when the Assembly, with some trifling securities for its good behaviour, was allowed to continue; and the only hopeful feature of the settlement was that it involved the appointment of a new Governor.

Of Sir Lionel Smith it is impossible to write with anything but the utmost sympathy and respect; but his career showed how difficult it was for a West Indian governor in those days to keep his administration on an even keel. Coming to Barbados shortly before the abolition of slavery by Parliament in 1833, he found himself confronted by a recalcitrant Assembly, and repaid its discourtesy with sternness and contempt. Soon, for reasons which need not detain us, he gained the approbation of the planters and consequently the hatred of the negroes, who, when he left the island in August 1836, pursued him with execrations to the shore. Transferred to Jamaica and arriving there with the highest testimonials from Barbados, he was welcomed by the planters as their deliverer from Lord Sligo, and acquitted himself well enough in that capacity to be vilified by Sturge; but in a few months the perversity of the Assembly had made him so pronounced a partisan of the negroes that at the crisis of complete emancipation he was hailed, with Sturge's full approval, as their father and friend.

Smith's successor was Sir Charles Metcalfe, who had

been provisional Governor-General of India[1] and subsequently was to be Governor-General of Canada. Writing to him on September 27, 1839, the day after that on which he assumed office, Lord John Russell said that "no improvement in legislation and no ability in government can secure to the island prosperity and peace unless a better spirit can be infused into the various orders of society"; and again, "The purpose of this despatch is to impress most earnestly what your own experience will have already taught you, that no change or modification of laws will lead you successfully through your present difficulties, unless you can inculcate temper, forbearance and charity among the Queen's subjects in Jamaica." His task, in short, was to be conciliation; and Russell would have expressed himself with more caution if he had known that he was to get more of that from the new Governor than he either expected or desired.

Metcalfe had been only a few weeks at his post when he convinced himself that the Home Government in their dealings with Jamaica had gone the wrong way to work. They had acted on the assumption that their paramount duty must be to see that the negroes were put and *kept* in the full possession of their freedom, and that whether the planters felt themselves aggrieved or insulted by this policy was of secondary importance. For this, as we know, the planters had only themselves to blame. For ten years they had resisted all the pressure brought to bear upon them to reform their system of slavery, and for four years more to remedy the abuses they themselves had introduced into the apprenticeship; and it was naturally assumed that, if not kept in check, they would make emancipation as little of a reality as

[1] For a year, 1835–36, between the departure of Lord William Bentinck and the arrival of Lord Auckland. If the Court of Directors had not been overruled by the Government, Metcalfe would not have had to make room for the latter. He was already suffering from the cancerous affection of the cheek which was to cause his death in 1846.—J. W. Kaye, *Life of Lord Metcalfe*, 1854, ii. 236, 435.

possible. Hence most of the paid Special Magistrates, who had exercised exclusive jurisdiction over the apprentices, were retained as Stipendiary Magistrates in the general commission of the peace. Metcalfe could not "pretend to say what would have been the consequences," had these officials never been appointed,[1] but was quite sure that their introduction, however advantageous in other respects, had precluded "the formation of that mutual agreement and attachment which exist elsewhere between landlords and their tenants and labourers." That the landlords "elsewhere" had not recently been slave-owners was a consideration which had no weight with him; for, believing that the planters had no wish to recover any portion of their coercive power, he would not have hesitated to "carry on" with the ordinary justices of the peace, were it not that the sudden and complete elimination of their protectors might be too great a shock to the negroes. The number of the Stipendiaries had been reduced, as we have seen, by one-third after the abolition of the apprenticeship; and Metcalfe now proposed to bring about their gradual extinction by taking advantage of every vacancy caused by death, retirement or promotion. This in itself was a reasonable measure and was sanctioned, though only as an experiment, by Russell; but it was recommended by Metcalfe as part of a general policy of conciliation, which he described later as that of "cordially co-operating with the island authorities, legislative and executive, profiting by their good feelings, taking them by the hand and leading them gently to every desired improvement, respecting their just rights as well as those of others, and, above all, not suspecting or distrusting them." He knew "no limit to the improvement in

[1] He need not have been quite so cautious; for the consequences must have been disastrous if Parliament had established a limited form of slavery, such as the apprenticeship, and left the enforcement of its limitations to the ordinary magistrates, who were all slave-owners or their attorneys.

our [1] legislation that might be effected by gentle means," and he could almost engage to get " the most perfect code of laws in the world " adopted as the code of Jamaica.

One remembers the ten years of gentle leading and taking by the hand which had brought the Assembly not one step nearer to the effective mitigation of slavery ; and the suspicion arises that Metcalfe's belief in conciliation was becoming an obsession when we find him defending it with a warmth quite unwarranted by the occasion and unusual—to say the least—in an official despatch. Russell had been informed that he had instructed the Stipendiary Magistrates to discontinue their monthly reports on the state of agriculture, and wrote to ask whether this was the case. Metcalfe replied on April 14, 1840, admitting that he had issued the order, and saying that he had done so because the reports were " perfectly useless," indicated distrust, and were " totally out of place in a system of confidence and conciliation." The information they gave was unreliable and could be obtained only " by intolerable inquisition, such as would have been alike disgraceful to the Government and degrading to the persons subjected to it." This outburst is the more unaccountable as we find from papers enclosed with the despatch that on October 31, 1839, he had intimated that monthly reports were no longer required, and then on January 25, 1840, had ordered them to be resumed during harvest.

We have seen that but for the exertions of its friends in Parliament the Assembly would not have been allowed to resume its functions. Even under a less sympathetic Governor, it could hardly have failed to avail itself of

[1] Metcalfe was, I think, the first Governor of Jamaica who thus identified himself with the colony ; and perhaps no Assembly had ever been dismissed (December 1840) in such terms as these : " Our meetings are so agreeable, and pass with so much cordiality and harmony, that I could not let you depart without reluctance were I not aware that it is essential for your own interests that you should revisit your properties."

terms so little humiliating as were prescribed in the Second Jamaica Bill; and in the sessions of 1840 and 1841 most of the laws deemed essential to emancipation were passed, such as Acts to establish a police force, to define and punish vagrancy, to provide for the building and regulation of gaols, to restrain combinations, and to settle disputes, amongst employers and workers, to encourage immigration, and to enable Dissenting ministers to celebrate marriage. Russell did not think that this legislation approximated in any degree to "the most perfect code of laws in the world"; and as a sample of its character we may take his grounds of objection to the Vagrancy Act and the Act to enlarge the powers of justices in determining complaints between masters and workmen. The former declared it to be vagrancy for a man to desert his wife and children if he left them burdensome to any individual, and permitted anyone in the absence of a police officer to arrest a vagrant. Under the latter Act only one witness was required for the validity of an unwritten contract. Workmen "for any misconduct whatever" were liable to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, but no penalty for any offence was incurred by the master; and, whilst the latter might have the contract annulled on a complaint made by himself, no such remedy was allowed to the workman. "The magisterial authority over the manual labourers of Jamaica will be peremptory and unlimited in the highest degree." On January 29, 1840, Russell had agreed that the Stipendiary Magistrates should be gradually diminished; but on June 25 he intimated that, in consideration of the extensive powers vested in magistrates by many of the Acts passed during the last session,[1] he had decided that the Stipendiaries must be maintained at their present number for four or five years.

It may be thought that a Governor so unwilling to

[1] The object of Knibb's "legation" to the Anti-Slavery Society (see p. 70) was to agitate against some of these "iniquitous laws."

wound the susceptibilities of the planters would be too indulgent a critic of their dealings with labour; but a different spirit is observable when we turn from Metcalfe's political to his industrial despatches. Here there was no question of getting things done by gentle means, the agrarian dissensions being in his opinion "beyond the reach of legislation." Consequently he reveals himself merely as a keen observer, sympathetic certainly towards the planters, but perhaps on that account all the more anxious to be just to the negroes; and one should remember in this connexion that he was a Liberal in India, where he had abolished the censorship of the press, and in home politics a Radical.

That the labourer could count on a subsistence, and in most cases a comfortable subsistence, without working for wages was of course the first fact to thrust itself on his attention. "The usual order of things prevailing in other countries is thereby reversed in this; and it is here no favour to give employment, but an assumed and almost acknowledged favour to give labour. There is a sense of obligation in being served, but none in being employed." Self-interest could operate on the negroes only in so far as they coveted "luxuries and smart clothes and good furniture and riding horses," or were desirous of educating their children and supporting their chapels; and it could not be supposed that those who had not yet developed such tastes would exert themselves "from benevolence to others or notions of duty to the community." During the first four months of his governorship, Metcalfe must have depended mainly on the reports made to him by planters, missionaries and Stipendiary Magistrates; but in February 1840 he set out on a month's tour of the island, and from this point we can accept him as an independent witness.

Contrary to his expectations, which had lately taken a more favourable turn, he found that there was a great deal of mutual dissatisfaction between the planters and

their late apprentices. Labour was scarce because population was deficient, and what labour there was, being independent of the demand, was a law to itself. "The two professions of day-labourer and market-gardener seem rather inconsistent," and, so long as they co-existed in the same person, continuous labour could not be expected. The employers were now making the first general attempt to strengthen their position as such by asserting their rights as landlords, and "labour and rent, therefore, are the questions which agitate the island from one end to the other." We have seen that the mixing up of these two questions, which ought to have been kept separate, was a legitimate cause of complaint. Proprietors were entitled to rent, but not to use it as a means of extorting labour; and it appears that the expedient which but few had hitherto adopted—that of charging equally all the adult members of a family who derived their subsistence from the estate without working for it—was now becoming general. It was often said that there would never have been any difficulty about rent if it had not been associated with labour; but Metcalfe was unable to accept this view. He found in conversing with the negroes that, though they did not deny the equity of rent, they felt it as "a sore annoyance"; for, having been accustomed to the free occupation of their houses and grounds, they could not understand how in this respect, and in this respect only, they should be worse off now than they had been as slaves.[1]

To anticipate the natural growth of population by importing labour was the way out of their difficulties which commended itself to the planters. Metcalfe so far agreed with them that he thought British and Irish labourers might be brought in to grow coffee in the elevated and healthy regions of Jamaica, and Africans

[1] The Governor of British Guiana, after a tour through that colony, made the same report.

to grow sugar in the plains; but he feared that the expense, and the reluctance of the Home Government either to incur this burden or to sanction anything at all suggestive of a slave trade, would be insuperable obstacles; and he was therefore disposed to be content with palliative rather than remedial measures. He was grieved by the spectacle of landlord and tenant clinging to a connexion which had originated in slavery, unable to come to an understanding and merely "squabbling and inflaming mutual ill-will." It was essential in his opinion that the attempt to coerce labour and to correct its inconstancy by manipulating rent should be given up, and that the workers on estates should either obtain a lease of their holdings or be encouraged to buy allotments in some of the new settlements. The latter of these suggestions was the more hopeful; for without contracts, which the negroes abhorred, there could be no leases; land must increase in value before rent "taken for its own sake" could be attractive to the owner; and the importance of residence as a security for labour was probably overrated. The land which custom assigned to the negroes was known vaguely as "a ground"—that is, it had no definite bounds, and its fertility could be maintained, as we have seen, by shifting from one part of it to another. In the free villages, on the other hand, not only were the allotments small, but their exhaustion could not be avoided, and the holders must therefore become more and more dependent on wages, unless indeed those were right who predicted that "they will continue to derive a scanty subsistence from their land and will themselves decline in prosperity along with it."[1] Metcalfe had no such fear, believing that these people, who were mainly refugees from the labour-rent war, had sought in buying land rather a permanent home than a means of livelihood.

From "the cheerless prospects of the proprietors"

[1] We shall find that this prediction was more or less fulfilled.

the Governor turned with relief to the state of the negroes, which he thus described: "The thriving condition of the peasantry is very striking and gratifying. I do not suppose any peasantry in the world have so many comforts or so much independence and enjoyment. Their behaviour is peaceable and in some respects admirable. They are fond of attending divine service and are to be seen on the Lord's day thronging to their respective churches and chapels, dressed in good clothes and many of them riding on horseback. They send their children to school and pay for their schooling. They subscribe for the erection of churches and chapels; and in the Baptist communities they not only provide the whole expense of their religious establishment, but by the amount of their contributions afford to their ministers a very respectable support. Marriage is general among the people (?), their morals are, I understand, much improved, and their sobriety is remarkable." [1]

[1] Much of the evidence taken by the West Indies Committee refers to Jamaica, which is also dealt with in the following Parliamentary Papers: 1839, vols. xxxv. and xxxvi.; 1840, vol. xxxv.; 1841, vol. iii.; 1842, vol xxix.

CHAPTER III

UNDEVELOPED COLONIES

FROM Jamaica we turn to the other colonies whose economic condition placed them in the same category; and it may be well to consider first the colony already mentioned as an exception to the general character of the Leeward Islands. Dominica, nearly thrice the size of Antigua, is the most mountainous of the Lesser Antilles, "truly a highland country, a land of mist and rainbows and mountain torrents." Cultivation had extended only to the river levels and the lower sides of the ravines; and the slaves had worked under conditions which in one respect were a preparation for freedom. As in Jamaica, they had their own provision grounds, usually at some distance from the plantations, where in the time allowed for the purpose they could work as much or as little as they pleased. After emancipation the unusual extent of these grounds deterred most of them from leaving the estates, though wages were no more than 4½*d.* a day; but land could be purchased or leased out of abandoned properties, and there was nothing to prevent squatting in the interior, except the difficulty of clearing the soil and the practical absence of roads. "Fourteen thousand labourers," wrote Sturge in 1837, "are lost in such a fertile wilderness." A good many were soon found to be "missing," and were supposed to have secured land by offering to the owner one-half of the produce. Others, known to have relatives or friends amongst the negroes who had been free before 1838, were

thought to have joined the latter in growing coffee or provisions; and not a few were supplying the demand for fish, "an article of the first necessity to nine-tenths of the inhabitants." There was the usual testimony to good order, the more remarkable in this case, as there was only one police officer in the whole island.[1]

It has been stated that all the Windward Islands except Barbados belonged to the undeveloped class; and the first of these to engage our attention is St. Vincent, an island of 150 square miles, a large proportion of which was still Crown land and, but for the want of roads, would have been available for squatting. Of all the West Indian colonies, this was the only one that rose to the height of a great occasion when called upon unexpectedly to abolish the apprenticeship. The Council and Assembly were quite alive to "the difficulties, the sacrifice and inconvenience which will fall with much severity on persons in all professions, circumstances and situations," but claimed that, "actuated by a spirit of benevolence and an enlarged philanthropy," they had not granted the boon of emancipation on any unworthy conditions. They complimented the Lieutenant-Governor, Captain Tyler, on his "zeal and honourable dealing"; and Sir Evan MacGregor in his despatch to the Home Government referred to "the liberal, harmonious and graceful manner" in which the proceedings had been conducted. The Emancipation Act of this colony, which was modelled on that of Antigua, secured to the labourers, if willing to work, a year's possession of their houses and grounds. A Contract Act was passed and disallowed, and, as in Barbados, a new enactment was framed in accordance with the Order in Council. We have seen that the latter provided that contracts for more than a month must be in writing and signed before one of the Stipendiary Justices, and, as there were only three of these officials

[1] P.P., 1839, vol. xxxvii.; Sturge, pp. 95, 98.

in the island, it followed practically that contracts could not exceed a month. It is remarkable, however, that the negroes showed no reluctance to make such agreements or even to renew them; and the planters in St. Vincent were thus better off than in St. Kitts, Barbados and Jamaica, where they could obtain labour only from day to day.

Task-work was introduced immediately after complete emancipation and continued with great success for several months, when the negroes suddenly gave it up. They said that they found it too hard, but the real reason was supposed to be that it did not, as in other colonies, give them more time for their provision grounds.[1] Wages began and continued at 8*d*. a day with house and ground, medical attendance, and a gratuity—given or withheld at discretion—of salted fish or rum. This in so thinly peopled a colony was a low rate, and was thought to be made possible by the large extent of the grounds. These comprised an acre of virgin soil in the mountains and quarter of an acre on the plantations, the latter of which could be cultivated at intervals during work for wages. It was said that the labourer and his family could subsist on their wages and make 100 dollars a year in addition from their allotments. The labour obtainable was reckoned at no more than seven hours a day and, on the average, about four days a week, and its irregularity was a serious handicap, especially in harvest. Sometimes sufficient canes were not cut, and then the people about the works were idle. Sometimes there was abundance of canes, but the mill had to stop for want of hands. These were some of "the numberless ways" in which the temper was tried,[2] according to a planter, who reckoned that

[1] The advantage of task-work to the negro was that by exerting himself he could earn a day's wage with less than a day's labour; but the spare hours were of little use to him in St. Vincent owing to the great distance of the main provision grounds from the plantations.

[2] For example, no negro who had taken medicine would work again that week.

two-thirds of the women and nearly all the children had ceased to work in the fields. A slight tendency to emigration was soon checked, and there was said to be "no such thing as ejectment"; but, as the labour-rent system must have produced its usual annoyances, one is not surprised to find that the labourers were leaving the estates and settling elsewhere, not to any great extent on the Crown lands, which were difficult to get at, but on freeholds purchased out of their earnings; and here at least the planters in St. Vincent were more unfortunate than in the other colonies, because, although the settlers were willing to do odd jobs on the estates, they drew the line, strangely enough, at sugar. The number of negroes resident on the estates was returned in 1834 as 14,797, and was probably about the same at the end of the apprenticeship; but in 1841 it had fallen to 8,586. Marriage was becoming the fashion, but was often entered into without knowledge of its obligations. "The endless appeals made to me by new married people to dissolve the marriage," wrote a magistrate, "and their surprise that it is not in my power, prove this."[1]

The colonies so far included in our survey were all, with one exception, actually as well as officially British. The exception is Dominica, and we have now to consider the others which retained enough of their foreign character to justify or excuse their appellation of "conquered colonies." Grenada in 1839 was said to be "as French in its language and religion, if not in its law, as at the day on which it was captured."[2] The negroes spoke "a dreadful kind of patois," which was a corruption of French, and they were all Roman Catholics. It was supposed to be for the latter reason that, in spite of wages decidedly higher than in St. Vincent, they had gone, and were still going, in large numbers to Trinidad, where

[1] P.P., 1839, vol. xxxvi.; West Indies Committee, evidence of H. M. Grant and H. J. Ross, and Appendix V.

[2] E. Cust, *Reflections on West India Affairs*, 1839, p. 44.

in the cathedral at Port of Spain Mass was celebrated with even more than European pomp; but exactions of labour and evictions were no doubt another cause of their exodus, and also of their buying and renting small lots of land, not in villages, but here and there on the confines of estates. Purchases of one to five acres at an average of £10 an acre were in one district quite common; and the soil, whether owned or rented, must have been cultivated with great assiduity, for it was said in 1842 that "the export of provisions to Trinidad is as great as of labourers." [1]

An island quite as French as Grenada was St. Lucia, famous for battles and hurricanes, where there were only a few hundreds of English-speaking people and only one Protestant church.[2] It was described by Sturge in 1836 as a cluster of mountains wooded to their summits, "impassable except on foot or horseback," and "to a greater extent even than Dominica an unoccupied wilderness." Estates were generally small and most of the proprietors were resident. A Catholic bishop, who was six weeks in this colony in the spring of 1841, gave a most favourable account of its industrial condition. He said that he had visited almost every estate without hearing "a single serious complaint from any one planter against the labourers," and was "credibly informed" that they worked quite as well as at any time previous to emancipation.[3] It is probable that he found the planters in tolerably good humour, as they had succeeded in keeping up their production; but the utmost diversity of conditions prevailed in St. Lucia, where the roads

[1] P.P., 1842, vol. xxix.; West Indies Committee, evidence of H. Barkly.

[2] M. Durennel, who had been commissioned by the Governor of Martinique to report on the effects of emancipation in St. Lucia, wrote: "En effet, sauf drapeau et quelques fonctionnaires, propriétaires ou négociants, tout est encore, je ne dirai pas Français, mais Martinicain." —P.P., 1849, vol. xxxiv.

[3] W. H. Burnley, *The Island of Trinidad*, 1842, pp. 95, 96.

were " abominable " and the bridges unsafe; and we may be sure that so uniform a description was more imaginative than true. There had always been " the greatest difference and irregularity " in regard to wages,[1] which began by being in general " high, even very high," and in April 1842, when they had been reduced, varied locally from 8*d.* a day to 1*s.* 3*d.* As in some other colonies, non-resident were paid more than resident labourers; and this gave rise to much jealousy and competition amongst employers, who, according to the bishop, were on the best of terms. A magistrate reported that he knew of two adjoining planters, each of whom had enticed and was actually employing the labourers of the other. Nor were the negroes satisfied with their lot. They complained of a Trespass Act so severe that it made havoc of their live-stock, a proprietor being empowered to kill any pigs, goats or poultry which had strayed on to his ground; of a " mischievous truck system " which reduced their wages in order to liquidate debts contracted at the estate store; and of all the annoyances inseparable from the system of so-called " gratuitous rent."

A remedy for the last of these evils was thought by some to have been found in a sort of co-operative farming, which attracted the attention both of the Colonial Office and of the West Indies Committee. According to this plan, a proprietor divided about a third of his estate among the negroes, each of whom on Saturday and in spare hours was to grow sugar on his allotment, and was to receive half the net value of the produce. It differed from the system we have considered in Barbados only in that it included a large part of the estate, instead of being confined to the provision grounds. A district of

[1] The same remark applies in some measure to all the colonies, and especially to the other two Crown colonies, Trinidad and British Guiana. In dealing with wages one can only give what seems to have been the most general rate.

St. Lucia, not well adapted to the growing of provisions, except manioc, and with no market near enough to facilitate their sale, was the original scene of this experiment, and it spread to other parts; but opinion was divided as to its merits. A proprietor who had not been able to cultivate the whole of his estate would no doubt find it to his advantage, in so far as canes would be grown without expense to him on what had previously been waste land, and he would receive half of the profit. For this reason, and because it tended to secure resident labour, the scheme was strongly advocated by the magistrate in whose district it had originated; but we find another magistrate reporting that it merely aggravated the conflict of claims between estates and allotments, and gave rise, as in Barbados, to disputes in which he was constantly being called upon to act as arbiter. Another argument against the shares system was that in Haiti, where the head of every third family was a proprietor, it had been tried and was falling into disfavour.[1] The West Indies Committee were evidently not convinced by the testimony of a British planter who had adopted it for coffee in Grenada and advocated its suitability to sugar.

That the negroes should advance morally and mentally was hardly to be expected in a colony where churches were few and the first school had been opened only in 1834; but increased wealth was indicated by rather more than the usual extravagance in holiday costume—silk dresses and silk parasols amongst the women, "the superfine coat and Bond-street hat" amongst the men. With the more industrious, the desire to possess land amounted, we are told, to "a *grande passion*." Many had been able to purchase allotments, and several acres were held on lease individually by "a very large number." Stock of every description was reared by such settlers, and it was "no uncommon thing" for a peasant proprietor

[1] J. Candler, *Brief Notices of Hayti*, 1842, pp. 122–6.

to ride his own horse to church or to the estate on which "he bestows his extra labour." [1]

We come now to Trinidad, which, like St. Lucia, was a Crown colony. The most fertile of the British Antilles and the largest after Jamaica, it was the only one of our later acquisitions which had been wrested, not from France, but from Spain. Its laws and institutions were Spanish, and there were Spanish as well as British proprietors, but the majority were French; for sugar-growing had been introduced by refugees from St. Domingue at the time of the French Revolution. Of the whole number, only about a third, and these mainly British, were thought to be non-resident. The soil was so rich that the sugar-cane, which in the older colonies had to be replanted every second or third year, continued to throw up shoots or "ratoons" for twenty or thirty years; and a planter told the West Indies Committee that, if land were left fallow for twelve months, trees would grow up in it "almost as high as the ceiling of this room." Of about 1,400,000 acres, it was estimated that only one-thirtieth part was unfit for cultivation; but not more than 209,000 acres had been appropriated, and of these less than 44,000 were under tillage. Sugar-planting had been only a few years in operation when the island came into our possession in 1802. Five years later, the African slave trade was abolished, and the extension of agriculture had ever since been retarded by want of labour. So long as the inter-colonial slave trade remained open, the proprietors could obtain negroes to some extent from the other islands, but that trade was closed in 1825 and could not be replaced by the immigration of free labourers [2] till the abolition of the apprenticeship in 1838. There was thus a scarcity of labour in Trinidad

[1] P.P., 1842, vol. xxix.; West Indies Committee, Appendix IV.

[2] Except for peons from South America, who, with native Indians and a few free blacks, were said to do half the work on some of the estates.—J. Jeremie, *Four Essays on Colonial Slavery*, 1831, p. 37.

which emancipation in itself ought rather to have diminished than increased.

We have seen that not more than forty-five hours a week of unpaid labour could be exacted from the negroes during the apprenticeship, and that this restriction was imposed in order to give them time for working on their own account or for wages. In most of the colonies the hours of labour had been so arranged that they should have Saturday to themselves and also in many cases Friday afternoon. In Trinidad the planters had exacted six days' work in the week and seven and a half hours a day; but it was task-work, and it was reckoned that any able-bodied negro, if he chose to exert himself, could get through his task in four to five hours. After emancipation this system, reduced by the omission of Saturday to five days a week, was continued; and though wages varied to some extent locally and with the nature of the work, it would appear that the usual rate began at 1*s.* 3*d.* per task, was raised in five months to 1*s.* 8*d.*, and soon afterwards, in spite of immigration, to 2*s.* 1*d.* or half a dollar;[1] but there were allowances of flour, pork, fish and rum, equivalent to at least 5*d.* more per task; and houses, provision grounds and in some cases medical attendance were free. This was the highest remuneration for labour paid anywhere in the West Indies, and seems to have been gained through a want of unity and firmness on the part of the planters, who were, as we have seen, a far from homogeneous body.

There was a law to regulate agreements between masters and workmen, but there were no such contracts.[2] No attempt was ever made to charge rent, which was seen from the first to be "entirely hopeless"; and even eject-

[1] This was for field work; but work at the mill, though it involved a whole day's labour, was paid at the same rate per day, being much more popular.

[2] Anything that had to be signed was looked on with suspicion by most of the negroes. One of them remained out of money due to him for three or four weeks "from sheer apprehension of signing a receipt."

ment was almost unknown, except as a threat which was soon taken at its worth. One proprietor did eject two of his tenants. They went peaceably under the supervision of a constable ; but such was " the race of competition " amongst employers that " their effects had no sooner been carted to the public road than a cart from the next estate was loaded with them, and along with the labourers they were conveyed away." There was, however, an amicable understanding that, if a labourer proved to be incorrigibly idle, he should retain his cottage only till a substitute presented himself. " One labourer has walked out and the other has walked in." Some planters sought to attract labour by erecting substantial wooden houses ; but even in that forest-clad island it was found cheaper to import timber from South America than to pay wages for cutting it ; and high wages were also an obstacle to the upkeep of the roads, which were " execrable and frequently impassable," although large sums of money were laid out on them. It was possible for the negroes to earn a dollar a day by doing two tasks, and a good many did so, especially women, who in this colony not only worked in the field, but usually worked better than the men. On the other hand, there were negroes who did only two tasks in a week. Labour, in fact, was as irregular as elsewhere, but its character as such did not arise in this case from the desire to give more attention to the provision grounds than to the estate. Indeed, the former were in general so neglected or so badly cultivated that the town population was dependent for food on Grenada and the Spanish Main. The imports of yams, plantains and live-stock had more than doubled since 1835.

The explanation would seem to be that the majority of the negroes, in addition to providing for their own subsistence, contented themselves with their daily or occasional two shillings for half a day's work,[1] whilst the

[1] A clergyman said that in his pastoral visits to the estates he generally met them returning from their work between eleven and

minority used up their energy in earning about a pound a week. In the latter case they usually sought to acquire land, of which abundance was available, both Crown land outside the bounds of the estates and uncultivated land inside, which the proprietors were unwilling, but might be induced, to sell. Squatting went on to a great extent, even within sight of Port of Spain, though the occupation of Crown land was technically illegal.[1] But convenience of situation was a luxury for which many of those who bought land could well afford to pay. In April 1840 a planter learned that two of his labourers had purchased allotments from a neighbouring proprietor, for which they had paid at the rate of nearly 2000 dollars per acre. Fifteen months later he was approached by some of his negroes who wished to form a village on the estate; and, having put up sixteen lots for public sale, he disposed of them at an average of 116 dollars each, this being at the rate of over 1000 dollars an acre. The purchasers could have had land at 30 dollars an acre only five miles distant; but they had plenty of money and preferred a place in easy communication by water with Port of Spain, near the town of San Fernando, and at the junction of four roads, "constituting a considerable thoroughfare, where they will always have abundance of news and company." The negroes who in 1840–42 settled on these "little independent locations" were supposed to be about equal in number to the immigrants, mainly from Grenada and Barbados; and, as the former worked occasionally on the estates and were supplemented as jobbers by peons from South America, the labour-force of the planters, even when we allow for those who had drifted into the towns, was probably not less than it had been before 1838; but

twelve o'clock. He also said that they raised only enough poultry and vegetables for their own consumption, "and their wages are so ample that they find no necessity for any further exertion."—Burnley, *The Island of Trinidad*, p. 60.

[1] Crown land could not be sold for less than £1 an acre or in parcels of less than 100 acres.

they complained much of its unreliability and bad quality, especially in the boiling-house, where, if work was done carelessly, it could not be done over again, as in the field.

In the autumn of 1841, when there was a sudden break in the high price of sugar, the planters resolved to reduce the money wages, as had been done in St. Lucia, and to withdraw the allowances. They succeeded only in the latter attempt, but had reason to congratulate themselves on the result, for the negroes not only worked harder in order to maintain their former standard of living, but improved in health as well as sobriety when deprived of their ration of rum.

Education had made greater progress in Trinidad than in St. Lucia; but the adult negroes, with few exceptions, must have been wholly illiterate, and their moral condition, though improving, was considered by a clergyman who had come from the Leeward Islands to be still "at a very low ebb." There was a good deal of gambling, with which in private houses the magistrates were unable to interfere. "You can hear the dollars clinking," said one of them, "and see the parties playing as you pass along." A tendency to thieving and brawling could not easily be checked, where a bad character was no bar to employment, and imprisonment for minor offences could be awarded only in lieu of a fine, which the culprit was always able to pay. There was much evidence of material well-being. Many of the ex-apprentices had taken to huckstering on the estates, and did a large trade in "wearing apparel of the best quality," porter, wine, brandy, and fowling-pieces, "which are in very general use amongst the labourers." [1]

It remains to consider British Guiana, also a Crown colony, which in those days was usually spoken of as one

[1] West Indies Committee, evidence of Church, Burnley and Bushe; reports of magistrates, and evidence taken by the Sub-Committee of the Agricultural and Immigration Society, in P.P., 1842, vol. xxix. The latter is also in Burnley's work already referred to, *The Island of Trinidad*.

of the West Indies, and had been associated with them in all the measures for the amelioration and abolition of slavery. Indeed, but for a revolt of the negroes in 1823, it would have staged the experiment in amelioration which was afterwards carried out by the British Government in Trinidad. Most of its vast area continued to be claimed by Venezuela and Brazil till the beginning of the present century, but the undisputed portion amounted to as much as 12,000 square miles. This was nearly thrice the extent of Jamaica, in which, however, there were 600 sugar estates, whilst in British Guiana in 1839 there were only 222. Agriculture was confined to the rich alluvial soil at and around the mouths of the three great rivers, the Essequibo, the Demerara, and the Berbice, and extending about thirty miles along their banks. The intervening sections of the coast, where the soil was not so rich, had been allowed, since the abolition of the slave trade, to go out of cultivation. All the coast lands were level with the sea, or rather, as the result of draining, were quite a foot lower. No small capital was needed to make and keep in order dams, sluices, embankments and canals; and large and well-equipped estates were more common in this colony than in most of the islands. Many of the proprietors had laid out the compensation money they had received as slave-owners [1] in the purchase of machinery —steam-mills, elevators and carriers; and, considering the labour involved in digging and maintaining canals and "punt-trenches," [2] which were invaluable as a means of transport as well as of drainage, one is not surprised to find that one of the latest recommendations was that of a steam-excavator.

The scarcity of labour was almost as great in British Guiana as in Trinidad, its nearest neighbour amongst the

[1] One of the largest awards, £83,500, was made to James Blair, a proprietor in this colony.

[2] So called because they were used to convey bundles of canes in punts.

islands; for, though the former had had four times the number of apprentices, it produced nearly thrice the quantity of sugar; and emancipation opened in this colony under conditions similar to those which we have reviewed in the other. Here, too, the negroes had worked by the task for six days a week during the apprenticeship and continued—or were expected—to do so for five days a week when the apprenticeship had been abolished. They had also the same allowances, but their wages were lower, the half-dollar that could be earned in half a day's work being rather the maximum than the usual rate.

Emancipation was regarded by the slave-owners everywhere as pretty much a leap in the dark; but in Guiana their trepidation amounted almost to panic, as may be seen from a retrospect of the crisis written by Governor Light in his own justification nearly seven years later.[1] "The planters scarcely credited the possibility of being able to retain the labourers in the bounds of civilisation; they expected nothing less than the abandonment of industry." Consequently they plunged into a cut-throat competition for labour, each bent on having "a large pay-list" at the expense of his neighbours. The negroes were allowed to work at irregular hours, to finish the day's task in three or four hours, though the best of them could not do it properly in less than five or six, and even to offer themselves for half a day's work. The Governor may have aggravated the initial alarm by telling the planters that they were now so entirely dependent on the labourers that they must check their "ebullitions of temper" or be ruined; but he soon sought to restrain them from condoning the idleness of which they complained—"an idle labourer ought not to be kept on any estate; he ought not to be received on any." This advice was "ill-received," presumably as a reckless defiance of the negroes; but at last in 1841 the planters resolved to

[1] Governor Light to Lord Stanley, February 26, 1845.

emulate the stand made by their brethren in St. Lucia and Trinidad; and their action was then discountenanced by the Governor as needlessly harsh and extreme.

At the end of 1841 notices were posted on almost all the estates in Demerara and Essequibo announcing such rules and regulations as these: work to begin at seven o'clock, and any labourer not in the field at eight to be deemed absent; no pay for less than the stipulated task; no allowances; wages to be reduced from 1*s.* 8*d.* to 1*s.* 4*d.*; half of this to be forfeited for every day's absence; labourers on estates not to have provision grounds,[1] except "on sufferance and at their own risk," and to keep only feathered stock. The proposed reduction in wages was not unreasonable, as they had been raised in Demerara and Essequibo, but not in Berbice, during the recent boom in sugar; but Sir Michael M'Turk, one of the largest of the proprietors and the chairman at their meetings, dissented from the other demands, and some of these were subsequently found to be illegal by the law officers of the colony. In Trinidad the planters had succeeded only in withdrawing the allowances. Here they succeeded also in reducing wages, and might have done so without provoking a strike if they had not persisted—vainly as it proved—in trying to enforce the new rules. The strike lasted for a month, and the Governor commented in his despatches on the good order, and even good manners, maintained by the negroes at a time when they were going about idle or at least unemployed. "Not only is their conduct extremely civil, but the absence of complaints against them is remarkable." After this trial of strength the relations of capital and labour were re-established on a more satisfactory footing. Concessions had been made on both sides, and the value of industry

[1] In Trinidad and Guiana the system of alloting provision grounds had begun after emancipation, as is shown by the fact that during the apprenticeship the planters in these colonies had exacted the full 45 hours of labour, instead of only 40½ hours, as in Jamaica, where the negroes grew their own food.

was brought home to the negroes by the loss of wages and the consequent depletion of their savings.

The negro could support himself and a moderate-sized family on the wages he received for half a day's labour; and the more energetic could thus both make and save money by supplying the market with stock and provisions. Conscious of the precariousness of their position as tenants at will, they were "straining every nerve to extricate themselves" by acquiring land, and in this colony their ambition could be adequately realised only under conditions which called for co-operation as well as individual effort. Unreclaimed land on the lower levels of Guiana was habitable only by Indians till it had been drained and embanked; and, though land reclaimed but uncultivated might possibly be purchased, united efforts were needed, even in that case, to keep up the dykes and canals. The culture of coffee and cotton had been declining for ten years before the abolition of the apprenticeship, and there were estates, once used for these purposes, which had not been converted to sugar. How this opportunity could be turned to account was shown as early as November 1839, when an estate, which for some years had been out of cultivation, was purchased by 83 ex-apprentices[1] for £2142. Part of it adjoining the public road was re-sold in small lots to form a village; but in the middle of the estate each of the proprietors had an allotment of 2½ acres, and here was another village, the land around which was soon as "thickly planted with plantains, yams, eddoes, corn, cassava, arrow-root, ginger and the ordinary table vegetables as it is possible to be." In 1841 we find 61 labourers combining to buy for £4714 a derelict coffee estate. It was entirely overrun with brush, the drainage choked in every direction, and the embankments, front and back, so nearly ruinous

[1] The subscriber was in many cases disposing of funds entrusted to him by relatives, so that ten or twenty persons might represent a hundred.

as to threaten an inundation from both the sea and the interior. Fourteen months later, the damage had been repaired, and plantains were being grown on a scale which promised to yield an income of £2500. In these and other cases the peasant proprietors continued to earn their living by working on the estates, and hired inferior and cheaper labourers to cultivate the portion of land which had been reserved, apart from their own holdings, to defray expenses and for the common profit. The work undertaken was almost invariably that of growing provisions; but we read of a cotton estate purchased by negroes, put into canes, equipped with sugar works, and so flourishing that the joint owners had made an offer to buy more land.

All the estates comprised portions of less fertile soil which it was the interest of the proprietor to sell and of the negro to buy, because under the intensive cultivation of the latter it would be more profitable to him than it had been to the original owner. Moreover, as the desire for independence could not be suppressed, the planters could be safeguarded only by seeing that it was gratified within reach of their demands for labour. It was not, however, till the latter part of 1842 that they began to act on these views, and by that time hundreds had left the estates "to become freeholders on abandoned lands up the rivers [1] and in distant locations, where neither magistrates, ministers of religion, or medical practitioners are likely, at least for some time, to follow them." From this period the negroes had less difficulty in obtaining land, especially in the neighbourhood of Georgetown, where it fetched a good price. The Governor, in a despatch of April 12, 1842, said that a new quarter of Georgetown had been laid out on an estate which adjoined the present outskirts, that another large tract to the south was now being sold in lots, and that the town would soon

[1] Cultivation under Dutch rule had extended some 70 miles further up the Essequibo.

extend a mile and a half eastward. He added that all over Demerara and Essequibo lots were being put up for sale; and we learn from the journal of a magistrate who had made a tour of the new settlements that the total funds raised and invested in about eighteen months amounted to over £21,000. Nearly half of this sum (£10,416) had been subscribed in four instalments by 128 negroes for the purchase of one estate—an estate in actual cultivation.[1]

It may be well to point out that in none of the other colonies were the planters in so strong a position as they had gained in Antigua in 1834 and still retained. There, under the amended Contract Act [2] which was reluctantly accepted by the Home Government, the negro worked nine hours a day, with one day a week for his own use on some estates and on others only one day a fortnight; and the total income of a family of four, including wages at ninepence a day and the fruits of independent labour, was estimated by a Stipendiary Magistrate in 1841 at £50 a year—a sum just about the same as could be made, in addition to higher wages, by many negro families in Jamaica from their provision grounds alone. Nevertheless, the writer of the report says, "I do not know that the condition of the peasantry could be in any essential respect better than it is, if we except the uncertain tenure on which the estates' labourers hold their domiciles."

This survey would be incomplete if one did not refer in conclusion to an aspect of the subject which was thus indicated by Bishop Phillpotts, himself a West Indian proprietor, when he said of the slaves, "If indeed they had been subjected to a despotism so unmitigated as that

[1] P.P., 1839, vol. xxxv.; 1841, vol. iii.; 1842, vol. xxix.; West Indies Committee, evidence of Campbell, Barkly, Allen and Scoble, and Appendix III.; R. H. Schomburgk, *A Description of British Guiana*, 1840; M'Culloch, *Geographical Dictionary*, 1846.

[2] Dr. Nugent informed the West Indies Committee that the "no great difficulty experienced by the planters in obtaining continuous labour was very much owing to the peculiarity of our contract law."

which they have been described to have borne through so lengthened a period of misery, is it, my Lords, I ask, in human nature that they could have been so soon qualified to receive their emancipation?" [1] The despotism must be admitted. The British system of slavery was in one respect the worst of any established by Europeans, because it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the slaves were outside the protection of the law, and their treatment consequently depended entirely on the humanity or inhumanity of individual owners. There was no *Code Noir*, as in the French colonies, and no Protector of Slaves, as in the Spanish and even in the Dutch colonies; and it was just because they had never been accustomed to supervision that our planters were so hostile to the scheme of amelioration pressed or imposed upon them by the Home Government. It was the same in the North American colonies both before and after they became independent; but, if we wish to compare the average American with the average British slave-owner, we have only to read the impressions recorded by travellers in the United States and in the British West Indies. In the former case they tell us of "the cowering humility, the expressions of servile respect with which the negro approaches a white man." In the latter case they fully confirm the statement of Long, written as far back as 1774, that the slaves addressed their master with "freedom and confidence, not with the abject prostration of real slaves, but as their common friend and father." When "Monk" Lewis visited his estates in Jamaica in 1816, he found that the negroes accosted him with much greater familiarity than would have been shown by an English farmer to his squire; and a planter told the Commons' Committee on slavery, 1832, "The slaves will come up with a degree of frankness and boldness that would astonish you." [2] Wellington was no doubt un-

[1] Hansard (1838), xlii. 1.

[2] *British Slavery and its Abolition*, pp. 91, 95, 100, 107.

aware of this contrast when in 1833 he referred to the deportation of freed blacks from the Southern States of the Union as proof that the two races would never be able to live harmoniously in the same islands.[1] That they had no difficulty in doing so, after " sixteen years of freedom," in Jamaica was thus noted by an American visitor : " One accustomed to the proscribed condition of the free blacks in the United States will constantly be startled at the diminished importance attached here to the matter of complexion. Intermarriages are constantly occurring between the white and colored people, their families associate together within the ranks to which by wealth and culture they respectively belong, and public opinion does not recognise any social distinctions based exclusively upon color." [2]

[1] Hansard (1833), xx. 520.

[2] J. Bigelow, *Jamaica in 1850*, p. 20. See also Norman Leys, *A Last Chance in Kenya*, 1931, pp. 104, 134.

CHAPTER IV

THE LABOUR PROBLEM

WE have now seen enough of emancipation to be aware that it had been inaugurated in a manner more satisfactory to friends of the negro than to those who were associated in sympathy or interest with his employer. Sooner or later, there must have been an inquiry in Parliament; but the planters, whom Peel had befriended on the question of the proposed suspension of the Jamaica Assembly, must have congratulated themselves when he came into power in September 1841; and early in the following year they obtained the Select Committee of the Commons which as a source of information has been so often cited.

Lord Stanley, under whose auspices slavery in 1834 had given place to the apprenticeship, was now again at the Colonial Office—this time as a Conservative under Peel; and on March 22, in moving the appointment of the Committee, he said that emancipation had succeeded beyond the highest hopes of its most ardent advocates. On the Continent a different opinion prevailed, and he quoted from a despatch which he had written to the Foreign Office in reply to a note from the Spanish Government in which the measure was alluded to as a failure. "It will be found that the British emancipation took place without the occurrence of a single instance of tumult or disturbance; that the joy of the negroes on the 1st of August was orderly, sober and religious; that since emancipation the negroes have been thriving and con-

tented; that they have varied their manner of living and multiplied their comforts and enjoyments; that their offences against the laws have become more and more light and infrequent; that their morals have improved; that marriage has become more and more substituted for concubinage; that they are eager for education, rapidly advancing in knowledge, and powerfully influenced by the ministers of religion. Such are amongst the results of emancipation which are plain and indisputable, and these results constitute, in the estimation of Her Majesty's Government and the people of England, the complete success of the British emancipation in so far as relates to the primary and paramount objects of that Act."[1] We have seen what Sir Charles Metcalfe had to say on this subject. Stanley quoted his statement of March 30, 1840, and also an extract from the despatch of November 1, 1841, in which he tendered his resignation. "With respect to the labouring population, formerly slaves, but now perfectly free, and more independent than the same class in other free countries, I venture to say that in no country in the world can the labouring population be more abundantly provided with the necessaries and comforts of life, more at their ease or more secure from oppression, than in Jamaica."

In so far as emancipation had attained its "primary and paramount objects," there could, of course, be no occasion for a Committee; but the negroes were said to have benefited at the expense of the planters, and Stanley went on to show that the situation of the latter was such as to call for inquiry. During the six years preceding the abolition of slavery the average importation of sugar had been 3,900,000 cwt.; in the four years of the apprenticeship it had declined by more than 400,000 cwt.; and in 1840, the second year of full freedom, it had fallen to 2,800,000 cwt. It was true that the gross income of the planters had not been diminished, because the decrease

[1] Stanley to Lord Aberdeen, February 2, 1842.

in the quantity of sugar imported had been compensated by a proportionate rise in its market value; but their profits or net income had been reduced by "exorbitant and enormous wages." The labourer's remuneration was, as we have seen, anything but uniform, and readers of the preceding pages will be able to judge for themselves in what cases and to what extent it could justly be so described. The grievance, where it existed, could be remedied only in two ways—by economies in production which would reduce the demand for labour or by immigration as a means of increasing the supply; and, in order to ascertain what could be done in the latter direction, Stanley proposed another Select Committee to inquire into the state of our settlements on the west coast of Africa.[1]

The effect of emancipation on the production of sugar could hardly be estimated in so short a period as two years, particularly as 1840 was a year of drought; but a later return which carries the record of imports to the end of 1843 does not much alter the case, at all events if we allow for an improvement in the seasons. Antigua, Barbados and St. Kitts had kept up their output, as one would expect, and so, on the whole, had Dominica, St. Lucia and Trinidad; but large decreases are shown in all the other colonies—very large in Demerara, and largest of all in Jamaica. The comparative success of Dominica and St. Lucia was probably due to the fact that many of the estates were in the hands of small and economical French or coloured planters; and Trinidad had prospered mainly because it was the only colony which, in proportion to its population, had been able to obtain a considerable supply of good immigrants.[2]

The Abolitionists had predicted that free labour would prove to be cheaper than slave labour; but they had not always remembered that, if the slave-owner had

[1] Hansard (1842), lxi. 1092–1105.

[2] See *Memorial of the West India Body*, October 19, 1843.

had more labourers than he could profitably use, only one-third of a gang being reckoned as effective, the employer was likely to have too few. Sugar-growing was not so light and agreeable an occupation that all who had been bound to it as slaves could be relied on to keep to it when they became free ; and in any case we have to allow for the formation of a class of middlemen, such as shopkeepers and pedlars. Moreover, the Abolitionists had themselves aggravated the scarcity of labour by insisting that the women should now devote themselves more to household duties, and that the children should attend school. But not only were there fewer labourers. There was also less labour. In slavery the working day, exclusive of intervals for meals, had been at least ten hours. In the apprenticeship it had been equivalent to nine hours, with a whole Saturday free, instead of half a Saturday every fortnight. In freedom it ranged from nine hours in Antigua to about five hours in Trinidad ; and in the undeveloped colonies the negroes not only worked irregularly, but by refusing to begin work till seven in the morning abridged the time during which they could be kept under white supervision. But the greatest reduction of all had taken place during the crop season, when those employed in the mill had worked as slaves sixteen hours, and by the offer of wages had usually been induced to do so even in the apprenticeship. Now they worked only from nine to eleven hours, night-work being almost out of the question. " They will not do that for anything," was the remark of a Jamaica planter.

The employer was at another disadvantage, which was thus described to the Select Committee by a witness from Barbados : " Under the former system, though the machinery was cumbrous, yet you could bring a large portion of force, at any time you liked, for work which is critical, inasmuch as it must be done at a particular time, according to the weather. You could command your force and apply it with effect to any one given object

upon any pressing emergency, but you cannot do it now." In fact, as a planter said some years later, the difference between slave labour and free labour was the same as that between a steam-mill and a wind-mill. On the other hand, employers must have found it difficult to avoid the extravagance which had been engendered by the summary and wasteful methods of slavery. Governor Light of British Guiana said that a planter and his partner had informed him that they had calculated the outlay on a cane-field, which produced fifteen hogsheads of sugar, and found a clear balance of 3200 guilders.[1] "It was added that, notwithstanding this, they were losers by other outlays which passed their calculation, as indeed it does mine." Task-work had always been the trump card of the Abolitionists, but in practice it too often both demonstrated and nullified the superiority of free labour. The task set was what had been considered a fair day's work under slavery. The negro might do it in six hours instead of ten ;[2] but, if he preferred leisure to extra pay or thought it unreasonable to work as long as a freeman as he had done as a slave, the gain to his employer was nil. When we add to all this that task-work was sometimes impracticable and often scamped, and that the negro could now "bestow" his labour at pleasure either on his own grounds or on the estate, it will be seen that self-interest might be a much stronger incentive to exertion than compulsion and yet not do as much for the production of sugar.

The Select Committee met under the chairmanship of Pakington, Conservative member for Droitwich and afterwards Lord Hampton, on April 25, 1842, and held their twenty-fourth and last meeting on July 14. The evidence they received had reference to eight colonies—

[1] The guilder was about one-third of a dollar.

[2] This disposes of the idea that the slaves as a body could be made to work hard, though the driving system might be torture to the weaker members of a gang.—See *British Slavery and its Abolition*, p. 69.

St. Vincent, Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana, Grenada, Antigua, St. Kitts and Jamaica, and was brought before them by twenty-seven witnesses, all but seven of whom were proprietors or attorneys. With one exception, the proprietors were either resident or had recently visited their estates; but first-hand knowledge is no security against bias, and the only witnesses who could be regarded as speaking for the negroes were two Abolitionists, Scoble and Candler, who had recently been in the West Indies, Allen, a Stipendiary Magistrate, Knibb, the missionary, and, as representing both parties, Sir Charles Metcalfe; and the evidence of these witnesses was confined to Jamaica and British Guiana.

The planter-witnesses could not all complain of the scarcity of labour and its extravagant remuneration, but, with the exception of Dr. Nugent, they were agreed as to its discontinuity and waywardness, and were more or less convinced that emancipation was financially a failure, or at least a change for the worse; but they usually admitted that the situation was improving; and, if these ex-owners and ex-managers of slaves were a fair sample of their class, one cannot but recognise that the system they had been forced to abandon had done less than might have been expected to pervert their judgment and harden their hearts. Of the negroes in every capacity but that of labourers, they almost all spoke in the highest terms; and one of them minimised even this qualification, saying that there were some who toiled so hard and so steadily that it was "impossible to have better workmen." Again and again we meet with such statements as these—that they were "very peaceable and very well conducted"; that they had "behaved admirably in everything but their work"; that there had scarcely been time as yet to judge of their moral improvement, but that "they were always a good, orderly, sober race of people." A planter, who had left Jamaica in May 1841 after living there for twenty-two years, said that the negroes in that

island had made " a more rapid advance in the scale of humanity than probably any set of persons ever did in a similar period." The only witness who questioned the moral improvement of the negroes was Burnley, the largest proprietor in Trinidad, and he was emphatic enough in testifying to their material progress. " I hardly think that any individual going to the West Indies now, who had been in the West Indies during slavery, would know or believe the labouring population to be the same class of persons."

Occasionally, but not often, we catch a glimpse of the horrors from which the negroes had emerged. Thus Robert Bushe, a Trinidad proprietor, having remarked rather casually that the planters now got only nine hours' work during the crop season, whereas formerly they had got eighteen hours, was asked to be more explicit. He then stated that the negroes when slaves seldom, if ever, during this season retired to eat their meals, but took them wherever they were, and rarely had upwards of six hours' sleep, though they might get a little more in the intervals of their work, and that this lasted till 1834, and for five months in the year. Asked again whether such a strain was not very injurious to the negroes, he admitted that they decreased in number " decidedly." He also said that the hours of labour were not regulated in the Crown colonies till " the latter days of slavery," meaning 1831, when they were fixed at nine hours ; but " we had great influence over the negroes during slavery, and for a small sum we induced them to work eighteen hours ; and we put the additional nine hours against the small compensation we gave them," which, he thought, was about 5*d.* a day. By way of correction, he added that eighteen hours was the maximum and sixteen hours the average.[1]

[1] The crop season had its compensations and, strangely enough, was the most popular time of the year on sugar estates. See *British Slavery and its Abolition*, p. 65.

Lord Howick was a member of the Committee and was obviously surprised to find that his proposal to tax the provision grounds and freeholds of the negroes in order to make them more dependent on wages was not favourably received even by the people whom it was intended to benefit. It was in vain that this suggestion was pressed upon Dr. Spalding, a medical man, a proprietor and practical planter, who had just returned from Jamaica, where he had been resident since 1816. The witness was not disposed to put any obstacle in the way of the negroes buying land, and thought it would be unfair to tax the land they occupied as tenants in a manner contrary to the common rights of freemen. He could not of course deny that they would benefit ultimately from such taxation if there was no other way of keeping up the supply of exportable produce and so of preventing the whites throwing up their estates and leaving the island, but only " in that point of view " could he be induced to sanction an infringement of " just rights." The same suggestion was made to Barkly, a Guiana planter, who repelled it on the ground that it would cause " a general shifting " among occupiers, and would disabuse them of their " veneration " for the British Government as holding the scale between them and their employers.

Though this inquiry embraced every aspect of emancipation, it was directed mainly to that in which it was alleged to be injurious to the planters. Nobody blamed the negroes for thinking only of their own interest. Indeed Burnley said that they had conducted themselves and worked as well as any labourers would have done in any part of the world if subjected to the same influences and temptations. And Metcalfe, when asked whether the thriving condition of the negro had not been attained at the expense of the fair rights of the planter as his employer, said, " No, it was the consequence of the fair rights of the negro himself." Wages must find their level in the market and must be high where labour was

scarce. The negro, he agreed, would have worked better if his provision grounds had been taken from him or restricted; but the planters had never attempted this, and were still extending the system, though it was commonly said that the occupier of two acres, which was no unusual amount, could, after providing for his family, make an income of £50 or £60. Their reasons were not mentioned by Metcalfe, but can easily be conjectured. They dreaded the effect that would have been produced on the negro if the first result of freedom had been to deprive him of the means of working independently for his own profit which had been his chief consolation under slavery; and, land being abundant, it was easier for them to supplement his earnings in this way than to pay—what would otherwise have been unavoidable—a higher money wage.

Allen, the Stipendiary Magistrate, had just returned on furlough from Guiana, where he had held office since 1834. He proved to be an unsatisfactory witness, making statements which neither he nor the Committee could reconcile. Thus he said that the negroes "do full justice to their employers to the extent of the remuneration they receive." If this meant that the remuneration was inadequate, it was inconsistent with what he said elsewhere, that the planters, provided they obtained the same quantity of sugar as formerly, could afford to pay the present wages; and this again conflicted with his statement that they could afford to pay these wages now, when by his own admission the production of sugar was down by one third.[1] Moreover, there had been a great fall in the price of sugar since 1840, the year to which his first statement referred.

No less unsatisfactory was the evidence of Scoble,

[1] 40,000 as compared with 60,000 hogsheads. The diminution was not really as much as this, because the average weight of the hogshead in Guiana had increased since emancipation from 12 to 16 cwt. or more. In all the colonies the hundredweight was the only invariable measure.

who had accompanied Sturge to the West Indies in 1836 and, having then inquired into the working of the apprenticeship [1] in British Guiana, had returned thither in 1838 to study the effects of emancipation. As this colony was second only to Trinidad in the scale of wages, he was asked what he meant by "the low rate." His reply was that he had referred only to money wages, which were low in proportion to the high prices of provisions and imported goods. He maintained, however, that the total remuneration was barely adequate; and, when confronted with the rise in revenue from articles of comfort and luxury imported for the emancipated population,[2] he said that this did not prove the labourer's reward to be "amply sufficient," because, though he could buy a certain number of such articles, there might be others which he desired, but could not afford to purchase. Scoble was not pressed further on this point, the Committee no doubt thinking that a rate of wages adjusted not to the needs but to the wishes of the recipient was no more relevant to the discussion than would have been a similar rate of profits.

Knibb had a less difficult task, because wages were lower in Jamaica than in British Guiana, and also because the provision grounds in his parish of Trelawney were the least productive in the island, a good deal of food in bad seasons being imported by water from the more fertile grounds of St. George's and Hanover. But against this were to be placed his admissions that it was "very common" for the negroes to buy and ride horses, that wine was kept, though not generally, in their houses, that his three congregations in five or six years had raised a sum of £11,000 for chapel building and education, and that in the area served by his mission £96,000 had been

[1] Of his fitness for such an inquiry, a sample is given in *British Slavery and its Abolition*, p. 273, note.

[2] The value of British exports to the West Indies in 1839 was nearly £400,000 higher than in 1838.—Hansard (1841), lviii. 50.

spent in less than four years on the purchase of land.[1] Having stated, as we have seen,[2] that much of the money required for these purposes had accumulated in previous years, he was asked whether he meant that the negroes had been more able to save during the apprenticeship than they were now; and, when he argued against immigration on the ground that, if wages were reduced, the negroes who had land of their own would cease to work on the estates, he was naturally reminded that they could do so only if they were independent of wages. Despite his reputation as a firebrand, Knibb gave his evidence in a spirit consonant with that which prevailed at all the meetings of the Committee, declaring more than once that there was now a much better feeling between the planters and the negroes, and that he himself had received much kindness from the former.

Candler, one of the "self-appointed investigators of the new social system," was the last witness. He had spent the whole of the year 1840 in Jamaica, had gone into every parish, and had frequently heard complaints of the scarcity and irregularity of labour. He had inquired into these complaints, and, whilst he could "scarcely fix a want of labourers on any single estate," had discovered that the complaint of irregularity was well founded to this extent, that the labourer had a natural love of independence, making him unwilling to be "tied down," but nevertheless had generally given continuous labour where wisely and fairly treated, that is, where he was paid, and paid weekly, the average wage, and was not harassed by demands for labour in name of rent. It may well have been that much of the discontent in Jamaica was due to the fact that attorneys had not always the ready money required for weekly

[1] Speaking a few weeks earlier in Exeter Hall, Knibb had exclaimed, "O that in my own country the labouring population were half as well off as they are in my adopted country—I mean Jamaica."—Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, p. 428.

[2] See p. 69.

payments, that on many estates the labourers were paid only once a month, and perhaps not even so often ; [1] but some of the assertions of this witness were so improbable as to remind us of his admission that he had visited " not one tenth of the estates." Thus, when asked whether the violation of agreements to which he attributed so much harm was entirely on the part of the masters, the witness replied, " So far as it fell under my notice." Again, the most disturbed parish of Jamaica was notoriously that of St. Thomas-in-the-East. The Committee had been informed by Knibb that most of the complaints of a want of labour had originated in that parish, and by a planter who had just returned from it that there was a deficiency of half the labour and half the work. Candler claimed to be " quite well " acquainted with the district, yet, when asked whether he had not heard *there* " any special complaints," said, " Far from it ; the attorneys generally spoke well of the produce of the estates and the work done on them." But the climax of audacity was reached when he declined to accept the assertion made by " a succession of witnesses " that they allowed their labourers to work where they pleased.

It may be recalled that Metcalfe undertook a tour of the island in the same year as Candler, and, much as they differed in their impressions and conclusions, they agreed as to the disastrous results of the labour-rent conflict. The former, however, thought that land must rise greatly in value before rent in itself, apart from labour, could be an object of importance to the landlord, whereas the latter considered that rent at the rate of a shilling a week for two acres was a very high rent—much higher than was obtained by proprietors in this country. He meant, of course, in relation to the market price of land ; but land, though far cheaper in Jamaica than in England, was also far more productive ; house as well

[1] See on this point the evidence of Captain Philip Browne, R.N.

as land was included in the rent; and could an English farm labourer have obtained an allotment of two acres yielding him at least £40 a year for a rent of fifty-two shillings? In reality he paid four or five pounds for a cottage without land—a fact which Lord John Russell had desired Metcalfe to make widely known to the negroes.[1]

When the Committee met on July 19 to consider their Report, they had before them two sets of resolutions, one of which had been drawn up by Pakington, the chairman, and the other by Hawes, the Liberal member for Lambeth and Under-Secretary for the Colonies in the late Government; and the former was adopted without a division, but with some omissions and alterations intended to bring it more into line with the latter. The Report began by stating that, whilst the majority of persons examined had been proprietors or managers, there were other witnesses who not only doubted the extent of the present distress, but believed that the great advantages of emancipation were unalloyed by any consequent evils; and it proceeded in substance as follows: (1) that emancipation had fully justified itself in regard to the character and condition of the negroes; (2) that the latter were becoming more moral and religious and rapidly advancing in civilisation; (3) that, nevertheless, the staple productions of the colonies had fallen off to an extent which had caused serious and in some cases ruinous injury to the proprietors; (4) that

[1] Russell to Metcalfe, May 30, 1840. Before the rise of capitalist farming, the agricultural labourers in England had been in a position not unlike that of the negroes in Jamaica. In one of the attacks on the unenclosed system of husbandry as rendering the cottagers on whom the farmer relied for labour too independent, it was said that, when offered work, "they will tell you that they must go to look up their sheep, cut furze, get their cow out of the pound, or perhaps say they must take their horse to be shod that he may carry them to a horse race or a cricket match." Arthur Young wrote in 1799 of a district in Lincolnshire, "A man will keep a pair of horses that has but three or four acres by means of vast commons and working for hire."—A. F. Freemantle, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, 1929, i. 19.

the distress was much less in some of the smaller and more populous islands, but so great in Jamaica, Guiana and Trinidad that many estates had been cultivated for the last two or three years at a considerable loss, and others had been abandoned; (5) that the chief causes of the distress were the great difficulty in getting steady and continuous labour and the high rate of wages for broken and indifferent work; (6) that the diminution of labour was caused partly by some of the former slaves having gone into other occupations more profitable than field-labour, but the more general cause was that the labourers could live in comfort and acquire wealth without, for the most part, working on the estates for more than three or four days a week and only from five to seven hours a day; (7) that this arose partly from the high [1] wages which the insufficiency of labour and competition with each other compelled the planters to pay, but was chiefly due to the easy terms on which the use of land was obtainable by the negroes; (8) that many of the former slaves had been enabled to purchase land, that the labourers generally were allowed to occupy provision grounds subject to no rent or a very low one, and that the land thus held by them as owners or occupiers yielded not only an ample supply of food, but in many cases a considerable "overplus" in money; (9) that the cheapness of good land, arising from its excess over the needs of the population, was thus a main cause of the distress; [2] (10) that the planters might do much for themselves by improving their system of management; (11) that one obvious and most desirable remedy was to promote immigration, so as to create competition for employment; (12) that immigration

[1] Howick moved to leave out "high," and its retention was carried by the chairman's casting vote.

[2] In reference to this resolution, Howick proposed no fewer than six motions intended to further his scheme for taxing land in order to make it necessary for the negroes to "give more time to regular industry"; but they were all negatived.

should be conducted under the control of responsible officers; and (13) that the relations of employers and labourers should undergo early and careful revision.

Hawes's resolutions had been less favourable to the planters, their purport being to show that the distress was no greater than it had been at various times during slavery, and even before the abolition of the slave trade; that it arose from hitches and mistakes inevitable at a time of transition, such as irregularity in the payment of wages and disputes as to rent, and also from the prevalence of unusually dry seasons; that these evils, lessened by more favourable seasons, were already being remedied; that any further assistance from Parliament could only be in the direction of promoting trade by "the removal of every unnecessary impediment"; that there was no obstacle to any reasonable supply of labour except that which arose from the want of capital on the part of individual proprietors; that to furnish funds from Imperial sources for immigration would be contrary to sound policy and unjust to the people of this country; and that in any case, if such assistance were contemplated, it could only be on condition that the duties on sugar, colonial and foreign, were equalised and greatly reduced.[1]

It will be seen that the Committee had confined themselves to the mention of immigration as an obvious and desirable remedy; but the chairman's draft had gone much further, recommending that "every possible assistance and encouragement" should be given by Parliament to the introduction of African labourers. There may have been several reasons for the refusal to adopt this suggestion, and one may well have been that the question whether labourers could be obtained from Africa was then being investigated by the other Select Committee which had been appointed on the motion of Stanley. The difficulty in all such inquiries, even in the case of British settlements, was to find materials

[1] P.P., 1842, vol. ix.

for "a perfectly free emigration." On the Gold Coast the West Africa Committee found that, with the exception of a few traders, all the inhabitants were slaves. Further west, in the neighbourhood of Cape Palmas, there were indeed the people known as Kroomen, who were indubitably free and by no means wedded to their homes, being found as sailors on all British vessels frequenting the coast, and as labourers at Sierra Leone and even at Ascension; but they migrated only for short periods and without their families, and it was doubtful whether many of them would consent to become permanent settlers. Only a handful of emigrants could at most be expected from the Gambia; and, if the hopes of the planters were to be realised anywhere, except among the Kroomen, it could only be in Sierra Leone, the colony formed and still being peopled by "captured Africans"—that is, by the slaves rescued on their way to Cuba and Brazil by British cruisers—and already too small for its population of some 45,000. The Committee believed that these materials for emigration to the West Indies "would probably prove to be considerable," and that all fear of a disguised slave trade would be avoided if they were utilised under the direction of the Government. "In that way only can perfect confidence be given, whether to the African himself or to the public opinion of England and the civilised world that nothing shall be done which shall even bring suspicion upon a reputation of which we are justly jealous, of which we can still be proud, and which it is of the highest importance that we should sustain." [1]

It may be doubted whether anything "considerable" was likely to be accomplished out of the materials indicated in this Report. At all events, they could hardly prove adequate; for the requirements of Jamaica alone, as stated to the West Indies Committee, were put at from 25,000 to 30,000 immigrants in addition to their families;

[1] P.P., 1842, vol. xi.

and Metcalfe said in his evidence that the influx "might take place to any extent and for any length of time, that is, within the bounds of probability as to its practical results."

Here we must look back in order to see what little had yet been done to supply the deficiency of labour. The abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834 had made it possible to use them as an asylum for negroes released from slave-ships at Havana and Rio de Janeiro. The Bahamas, being the colony nearest to Havana, got the most of these, but some were disposed of in Jamaica and Trinidad. A few immigrants were introduced during the apprenticeship at the expense of individual or associated planters; but it was not till the period of complete emancipation that the task was undertaken by any of the colonial governments. Trinidad led the way, an ordinance being passed as early as November 1838, and similar measures were taken in 1840 in Jamaica and Guiana. At that time the British Government would not allow Africa to be drawn upon for labour; and the importing colonies had, therefore, to content themselves with a varied assortment of recruits—West Indian negroes, Portuguese, Maltese, Germans, Americans and British. The negroes were desirable immigrants, but most of the remainder proved to be totally unfit. About 1300 of our countrymen were induced to go to Jamaica during the apprenticeship, and as many more in 1841, and Knibb gave the Committee a harrowing account of their fate: "Of all the misery I have ever beheld or heard of, I have known nothing that has equalled this atrocious system of European emigration." Between March and July 1841 some twenty English peasants were brought to an estate in Trelawney, and on November 2 twelve were dead and five of the survivors were in hospital. A proprietor said that whites might work in the early part of the morning and half an hour late in the evening, "but for an European to hold the

plough or to work in a cane-field, you may as well shoot him." We have seen that Metcalfe was of opinion that British and Irish labourers might do well on the "coffee mountains" of Jamaica; but he remarked that European immigrants were fond of resorting to the coast towns, which were very unhealthy, and generally took to drink.

Guiana was the adopted home of the Portuguese, who came in large numbers from Madeira, where there was "an overflowing, from abundance of unemployed hands, almost in a state of starvation." They were zealous workers—in fact, "imprudently laborious"—but suffered "a fearful mortality," which was thus accounted for by Governor Light: "They are so dirty, so filthy in their habits, so careless of themselves either in sickness or in health, that medical skill has no chance in repelling disease." It would have been easy to keep up the supply of immigrants from Madeira as they showed "absolute indifference to each other's fate," and some went home with large earnings; but it was stopped as both inhuman and unprofitable in March 1842. The Maltese, who were tried to a small extent in Grenada, where the climate suited them, and also in Guiana, were found to be unskilled and unmanageable.

Slave-ships yielded only a meagre and uncertain supply of Africans; and hopes rose high when in December 1840 permission to import labourers from Sierra Leone was granted to Trinidad, and soon afterwards to Jamaica and Guiana. The three colonies appointed agents at Freetown; ships were sent thither from this country as transports, and these efforts met with an encouraging response. Emigrants to the number of 170 were landed at Trinidad in May 1841; a vessel with 199 reached Guiana in the same month, and another with 225 in September; and two vessels brought 592 to Jamaica in June. If the movement had continued as it had begun, it would have accomplished all that could be expected from its limited scope; but it did not so

continue. Indeed as early as November 24 of this year it was said by a missionary to have proved a complete failure. "Several fine stately vessels" had made their appearance, but had had to leave without emigrants, and one with only nine had just left for Jamaica. Competition may have had something to do with this result, Guiana, for example, being represented by its rivals as a land of "snow, ice and pestilence," and so many vessels arriving at the same time that "the people got alarmed at the appearance of such a fleet." But the disappointment can be more satisfactorily explained.

Wages in Sierra Leone were no more than fourpence a day. "One wonders indeed," wrote an agent for Jamaica, "how such a mass of creatures as throng the streets of Freetown, going almost naked as they are, can even manage, upon any sort of food, to obtain the means of subsistence." Employers, anxious to keep down wages, were opposed to emigration; and they had some security against it, as almost all the lower-class negroes were in debt to native pedlars, and the emigration agents were naturally reluctant to advance money to people who might immediately decamp. The missionaries were suspected as unfavourable, being unwilling to lose the assistance of their converts; and a very bad impression was produced when the first vessel that had gone to Trinidad returned without the six delegates whom Hamilton,[1] the superintendent, had promised to bring back. His own account of the matter was that the emigrants on arrival were so "amazed at their good fortune" that he could not get any of them to return—at least on terms which he thought reasonable. They demanded the same wages during their absence as they would have had in Trinidad; but even this bargain would have been cheap as compared with the complete

[1] Hamilton was formerly in charge of the Liberated African Department in Sierra Leone. He had been commissioned by some of the Trinidad non-resident proprietors to manage the emigration scheme.

failure of his second trip. The delegates who *did* return from Guiana would no doubt report the absence of snow and ice, but also the less pleasing intelligence that wages had been reduced and the allowances withdrawn ; [1] and the splendour of their attire, far from demonstrating the generosity of their employers, engendered a suspicion that the latter had suborned them as decoys. " They landed in a uniform of fine blue cloth with scarlet cuffs and collar, elegant forage caps, a scarlet waistband and fine cloth trousers." Great efforts were made to undo the effects of this reverse, and they succeeded to some extent, especially in the case of Trinidad, " the favourite island," which in 1842 managed to obtain 514 immigrants.[2]

The West Africa Committee reported in August of that year. They were fully aware of the check to emigration from Sierra Leone, for Hamilton had been one of their witnesses ; and in recommending the Government to assume control of the movement they had his assurance that this would be the best means of restoring confidence. The Government acted on this advice ; and in a despatch of February 6, 1843, the Governor of Sierra Leone was informed that three vessels, calculated to carry annually one-third more emigrants than had been obtained in the previous year, had been chartered for the use of Jamaica, Guiana and Trinidad. Each of them would be under the charge of a naval lieutenant and a naval surgeon, and, if necessary, additional vessels might be licensed on which a surgeon would act as the Government agent. It soon appeared that the traffic was much below the capacity even of the " regular packets," one of which on its way to Sierra Leone had made a fruitless call at the Gambia ; and Stanley in October, in view of " the small number hitherto obtained," authorised the colonial agents to pay sums not exceeding £3 either for debt or the expense of

[1] See p. 96.

[2] P.P., 1842, vols. xi., xii., xxix. ; W. H. Burnley, *The Island of Trinidad*, 1842, p. 67.

outfit. This cannot have had much effect; for in February 1844 he sent out instructions that liberated Africans, if they did not emigrate, should be deprived of the allowances which were costing the colony about £10,000 a year. Finally, in May he removed the two important restrictions, that emigrants must have resided in the colony for six weeks, and that at least one-third of them must be women.[1] The first restriction had been intended to guard against kidnapping from the interior; and the second had been very unpopular in a community which was recruited from slave-ships and in which women were consequently scarce. We are told that their departure was strongly opposed by the men, "who almost use violence."

The proprietors and merchants in London, who formed the "West India Body," thought it extremely doubtful whether any considerable supply of labour could be obtained from Sierra Leone soon enough to be of use; and in July 1843 their "Acting Committee" began to interview and memorialise the Colonial Secretary in prosecution of their claim to hire free labourers wherever they may be found."[2] The "wherever" had special reference to Africa; but, pending the fruition of their hopes in that quarter, they were ready to pick up any sops that might be thrown to them in the shape of Indian or Chinese labour. We shall find that Indian coolies were being tried in Guiana; and, the Government having sanctioned their importation or rather re-importation into Mauritius, some 10,000 of them had gone thither within the last few months. The petitioners wanted Indians, if they could not get Africans; but they were also interested in a fact which a Guiana proprietor had reported in the course of his travels. He had found that a considerable number of Chinese left their country every

[1] P.P., 1844, vol. xxxv.

[2] A memorial with the same object (August 9) was presented from the West Indian planters and merchants of Liverpool.

year to seek employment under British auspices in the Straits Settlements. About 10,000 were already settled at Singapore, Malacca and Prince Edward's Island, where they formed the "labouring part" of the population; and the traveller had seen them at work in the cane-fields under conditions of land and climate similar to those of Guiana. Mauritius had already obtained a thousand of these labourers; and the West Indians wished to be empowered to make contracts with them for three or five years.

Stanley replied on September 4. Beginning with Africa, he said that he could not but regret that persons having the means of information which must be possessed by his correspondents should appear to be so little impressed with the difficulty of getting emigrants who were not slaves, or with the consideration that, if slaves, they could be obtained only from the chiefs [1]—a method which, if it did not involve actual slave-trading, would at least expose us to the suspicion of those Powers whose attempts to procure negroes by such means we were trying to suppress. With regard to Indian coolies, the Government could not sanction their introduction into the West Indies till it had seen more of the experiment now being made in Mauritius, a colony so much nearer India; but it had not the same hesitation as to the Chinese in the Straits Settlements. The fact that these people had already found employment at a great distance from their homes was a guarantee that they would understand the proposals made to them and would not suffer from the

[1] "What will these petty chiefs do when the ships arrive upon their coast? They will send out kidnappers through the country, or they will go in a body to burn villages in the night and seize the inhabitants, men, women and children, as they are escaping from the flames, or they will sell their own slaves, such as they have on hand, and supply the deficiency by the same cruel means. Nor can the British Parliament regulate the trade, so that none but they who are willing should be received as labourers. The African chief knows nothing of willing emigrants. All his emigrants go in chains to the ships, and he knows nothing of our Parliament. He wants our money only, and we must take such labourers as he brings us."—Thomas Clarkson, *Not a Labourer Wanted in Jamaica*, 1842, p. 14.

voyage; and the planters would, therefore, be allowed to hire them on contract.

This opening in the Far East was far from consoling the West Indians for the continued refusal to give them access to India and Africa; and their disappointment gave rise to another long memorial, October 19, in which they set forth the little that had yet been done to relax "the grievous restriction" of September 7, 1838,[1] which prohibited contracts for labour with persons not already settled in the colonies, and "by conferring exclusive employment on those disposed to work for wages was tantamount to a transfer in their favour of the produce of the estates." This was rather a wild assertion; for contracts were not essential to immigration, and, without them, a large number of labourers had been introduced, as we have seen, from Madeira and Sierra Leone. Nor would the permission to make contracts in Africa have been of much use to the planters as long as they were debarred from resorting to it generally for labour; and this was still their main grievance. They refused to concur in the assumption that free labourers could not be found in the independent countries of Africa, or that constraint could be practised under an emigration scheme which would be controlled by Government; and they expressed their "deepest regret and disappointment" that the fear of forcible or fraudulent deportation should still be alleged as a reason for keeping them out of India. Stanley wrote again, November 6, to explain and justify his decision; but this only exasperated his correspondents, who now declared that it looked as if nothing short of "the actual abandonment of their properties" would bring home to Ministers the intensity of their distress, and said, "If it could have been believed that Her Majesty's Government would persist in the prohibitory policy hitherto pursued towards the West India colonies, the capital and credit which have actually sustained them

[1] The Order in Council which has frequently been mentioned.

would at once have been withdrawn and the truth rendered manifest." They also complained that the permission which had been granted to enlist Chinese labourers in the Straits Settlements might prove to be nugatory, as the regulations were such that contracts could not be made without considerable expense and risk. Stanley merely acknowledged this communication, and, when the West Indians wrote to ask whether this was all they had to expect, replied that he had intended by that letter to decline a continuance of the correspondence.

The new scheme was so far operative that licences were issued to eight firms or individuals to ship 2850 Chinese labourers from the Straits Settlements with a bounty of 65 dollars a head—300 for Trinidad, 400 for Jamaica, and the rest for Guiana; but the licensees proposed to dispense with contracts, and were no more inclined to enter into such agreements when the regulations had been somewhat relaxed. They seem to have thought that they might obtain a hold on the emigrant under conditions less onerous than those prescribed for a contract if they were allowed to make advances for the expense of his outfit. Chinese labourers, it was said, would be anything but reliable debtors; but "the sad necessities of the West Indian proprietor prompt him to jeopardise yet a little more in the hopes of saving a wreck out of his fast fleeting property." Stanley intimated on December 20 that he could not agree to this suggestion; but it was afterwards stated in Parliament that the real reason why the Chinese emigration scheme could not be put into operation was that the licensees did not send out ships from this country and that their agents were unable to procure them at Singapore. Another and later explanation was that the ships were actually despatched, but, finding better freights on their way out, never arrived.[1]

[1] P.P., 1844, vol. xxxv.; Hansard (1845), lxxviii. 933; Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting, 1848, Qs. 16, 268.

The transport of labourers from India had been tried on a small scale some years earlier, and was now to be revived. We have seen that the slave-owners in British Guiana were more alarmed than elsewhere at the prospect of complete emancipation, and "expected nothing less than the abandonment of industry." With a view to averting or mitigating this disaster, an ordinance was passed in 1836 by the Court of Policy to authorise and regulate the introduction of indentured labourers. It was confirmed by the Colonial Office in a form which excluded Africa and reduced the term of contract from seven to five years; and two large proprietors—John Gladstone, father of the statesman, and a Mr. Moss—then made arrangements for bringing over some 450 Indian coolies. At that time public opinion was not disposed to tolerate anything that could be regarded as a disguised slave trade. The scheme was vehemently denounced by Brougham; severe restrictions were imposed upon it by Parliament; and its further prosecution was forbidden by the Indian Government. In May 1838, about two months after Brougham's outburst in the Lords, the coolies who had already been engaged arrived in Guiana—two-thirds of them for Gladstone and the remainder for Moss. They suffered seriously for a time from the effects of the voyage; but proved to be good enough labourers; and the Home Government kept a watchful eye on their health and conduct.[1]

In May 1843, on the expiration of their indentures, 191 of the coolies re-embarked for India; and on November 29, when the Chinese scheme seemed likely to fail, Stanley wrote to inquire whether the Indian authorities, if they were satisfied with the condition of the returned coolies, would withdraw the embargo on emigration to the West Indies. The reply was favourable; and in 1844 the Colonial Office undertook to supply Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica with coolies in proportion

[1] P.P., 1839, vol. xxxix.; Hansard (1838), xli. 416.

to the expenditure which each of them should authorise. Part of the shipping, and at first the larger part, was, however, to be provided at Calcutta and Madras; and this was an obstacle, though not so insuperable as it had proved at Singapore. There was always a great difference between the number of emigrants authorised and the number "assumed" to have been despatched; and even that was rather more than the number that actually arrived. An official return shows that the total importation for the three years 1845–47 was 17,375, of whom 4550 had gone to Jamaica, 4431 to Trinidad, and the rest to Guiana.[1]

Coolies cost from £15 to £18 a head, and were not all worth the expense of their passage, many being "far too old," and some "beggars by profession"; and in 1845 Guiana fell back on the "imprudently laborious" Portuguese, who could be brought from Madeira at about a third of the outlay. It was thought that the heavy losses which had put an end to this immigration in 1842 would be avoided if it was restricted to the dry months from November to March; but five-sixths of the newcomers arrived in the wet season, and the mortality nearly reached its former level of 12½ per cent. Like their predecessors, they were "exceedingly penurious," often living on mere garbage in order to save money, and consequently were unable to resist disease. Though they tended to drift into the towns, their loss to the planters was more than made good. They soon monopolised "the small shopkeeping and huckstering"; and the negroes who were driven out of these trades had to go back to the plantations.[2]

[1] Sugar and Coffee Committee, 1848, Third Report, Appendix I.

[2] P.P., 1847, vol. xxxix.; 1847–48, vol. xliv.; Sugar and Coffee Committee, 1848, Q. 9846.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THE preceding account of immigration as a means of supplying the deficiency of labour in the colonies has carried us beyond the narrative of their industrial development, which terminated with the West Indies Committee of 1842. There were disquieting features in the working of emancipation during the next four years; but it continued to evolve on much the same lines; and anyone who has read the statements which were submitted every six months by the Stipendiary Magistrates will probably agree with Stanley in his circular despatch of June 28, 1845, that these officials might "more conveniently limit their reports either to new results or to specific indications, newly arising, of the progress and development of the old."

That nothing had occurred to alter the conditions of industry could not, however, be said of all the colonies, and least of all could it be said of Antigua. We have seen that the legislature of this island had contrived to circumvent the negro's objection to contracts by providing that the occupation of a cottage on an estate should be evidence of a "yearly hiring," and that Dr. Nugent had informed the West Indies Committee that the success of the planters in securing continuous labour had been "very much owing to the peculiarity of our contract law"—a peculiarity rather tolerated than approved by the Home Government. The cottagers had another grievance which was not at all peculiar—that of

being liable to eviction if they did not work to the satisfaction of their landlords; and their desire for independence was shown in the purchase of freeholds and in the rise of those "free villages" which began to be formed as early as 1836.[1] In this way a good many of them escaped from their legal trammels, and the number largely increased after the earthquake of February 8, 1843, which was described by the Governor, Sir Charles FitzRoy, as "the most awful convulsion of nature ever recorded in the history of this portion of the West Indies." Few lives were lost, as it occurred during the day; but one-fourth of the houses in St. John's were completely demolished; nearly all the sugar-mills and boiling-houses throughout the island were either wrecked or seriously damaged; and—what specially concerned the labourers—there was "an almost total destruction" of the stone cottages on the estates, and very few of them, owing to the losses of their owners, were rebuilt.

Thus amongst the many edifices overthrown by the earthquake was that of the coercive power which the planters had established over their liberated slaves. In a despatch written two and a half years later we find it stated that where tenancies still existed they were regulated by the Contract Act, but that "the domiciliation of the peasantry upon the estates" was daily becoming less common; that three-fourths at least of the labourers were engaged by the job [2] and had cottages of their own; that hamlets were increasing in number and size every month; and that there was "the greatest avidity for the acquisition of these petty freeholds." No sooner was it known that a tract of land was to be disposed of in allotments than "numbers flock forward as candidates for preference."

Unfortunately for the planters, the earthquake both increased the demand for labour and diminished the

[1] See p. 42.

[2] In St. Vincent monthly contracts still prevailed.

supply. It occurred when the sugar crop was almost ready for cutting, and, whilst great difficulty was experienced in reaping and replanting the fields, many of the hands had found employment as carpenters and masons. In reviewing the last six months of 1844 a magistrate stated that till very recently the negroes had been remarkable for their "courteous and in many cases even graceful demeanour," but now, owing to the facility in finding employment, they took offence at mere trifles, and the master was afraid to find fault. So long as the planter retained a considerable number of "domiciled farm-servants," he had found it convenient, as we have seen, to procure the additional aid of jobbers; but he found them less satisfactory now that he was almost dependent on their labour. The task-gangs were no doubt recruited from a superior class; but the frugality and industry which had enabled them to acquire freeholds had been impaired by their unsettled habits. They had had, of course, to buy land wherever it suited the proprietors to sell it; and, their holdings being usually at a distance from the plantations, they were continually on the move: so much so that when they found themselves in prison—usually for theft—they called it "sitting down." A planter complained that he got little satisfaction out of these jobbers—"You have this set one week and another set another week," and added, "The people are all vagrants, you may say, and wander up and down the country." Those who had sought to foster the home life of the negroes must have regretted this development, especially as the great majority of the field workers in Antigua were women.

In the neighbouring island of St. Kitts, the planters had never forgiven the Home Government for having upset their contract system when its prototype was allowed to continue in Antigua; but, as they exacted labour from their tenants, they would have been unable, even with this safeguard, to prevent them leaving the

plantations. They still refused to sell land, but could usually be induced to let it. In 1845 the labour-rent tenure was said to be going out of fashion, and most of the labourers were either renting cottages with the right to work where they pleased or had obtained leaseholds on which they built cottages—entirely of wood and easily removed. This was one of the very few colonies which were increasing their output of sugar, but the quality had deteriorated. The reason was said to be that most of the estates had passed into the hands of mortgagees, who were Liverpool shipowners; and these being anxious for the prompt despatch of cargoes, the canes were often cut before they were ripe. It may have been due to the same change in management that the planters of St. Kitts had distinguished themselves by their readiness to introduce implements and machinery,[1] for which indeed there was much scope. One of them said that before emancipation everything was done by "the thews and sinews" of the slaves. "If lands were to be opened, instead of being ploughed, they were opened by means of the cane hoe; if a mountain was to be removed, it was all carried away upon the head, piecemeal."[2]

In Barbados the chief subject of interest continued to be the conflict between the old and the new system of tenancy—the "labour-renting" and the "free-renting." The former as late as 1844 was described in one parish as very general and pernicious, and in another as almost universal. Sometimes, but rarely, labour was demanded not only of the tenant but of every other adult in his house—a claim vexatious enough in Jamaica where the allotments were large,[3] but here repelled by the courts as "preposterous and absurd." We are told that the estate

[1] On this point see J. Davy, *The West Indies before and since Slave Emancipation*, 1854, p. 448. For example, a weeding machine, with one horse, a man and a boy, had displaced sixteen persons in the weeding of canes.

[2] In Antigua in 1846 there were neither pitchforks nor wheelbarrows.

[3] See p. 66.

workers were making "mighty efforts" to free themselves, and that a good many had succeeded by getting land on lease, and even by purchase, "and this under the most exorbitant terms." Freeholds were the exception, but were common enough in a district where a good deal of the land was not adapted to sugar. In so far as the task-gangs were "a desultory and disaffected class," their rise must no doubt be attributed to the coercion of labour; but the discontinuance of task-work on the estates, from whatever motive it proceeded,[1] must have been a grievance to the young and energetic. In Barbados, as in Antigua and St. Kitts, labour-renting was, however, becoming less and less common; and the number of proprietors who were willing to accept rent without reference to work is said to have greatly increased about 1845. But the labourers who had obtained this concession were still merely tenants at will; and the wooden huts, which they carried with them on removing from one plantation to another, had "no appearance of neatness and comfort." It could no longer be said, as in 1839, that boys and girls were being brought up in idleness. They worked, as soon as they were old enough, in the fields; but their mothers worked too, and were thus prevented from giving due attention to their homes and young children.

Barbados, which called itself "Little England," had always claimed to be superior in civilisation to the other colonies; but its slave code had been exceptionally harsh, and nowhere after emancipation do we find the negroes so much given to brawling and litigation. "The propensity the lower classes have to vilify and scandalise each other" led to many assaults; and both men and women resorted, on the smallest provocation, to "biting, cutting and wounding." For this the planters were largely to blame; for they persisted in supplementing wages by a gill to half a pint of rum long after the practice

[1] See p. 54.

had been given up in Trinidad and Guiana.[1] In 1845 it still prevailed in six of the eleven parishes; and not only was all the rum made in the island consumed in it, but more was imported. The licensing laws, if there were any, must have been lax. We are told that everybody who could muster a few dollars at once opened a shop, and "a liquor licence follows as a matter of course." But the magistrate who wrote thus in his report said that drunkenness was not so common as might have been expected, and that those who did get drunk usually kept within their own houses.

Something may be said here of the thieving which, with the possible exception of lying, was the commonest fault of the negroes. In one important respect the conditions of their servitude had encouraged this vice. They had always been allowed to take sugar-canes for their own consumption during harvest; but their pilfering, apart from this privilege, was reckoned at a tenth of the crop; and the planters were really the authors of their own loss, for, being unable or unwilling to deprive their fellow colonists of sugar, though their whole output was intended for exportation, they permitted it to be exposed for sale in the negro market. Thieving was bound to increase after the abolition of slavery, because the discipline formerly enforced on the estates could now be exercised only by a magistrate; and in those colonies where the labourer had little property of his own his depredations were patent. It was said of St. Kitts, "The negroes are seen walking into the town with articles which we know cannot belong to them; they supply the inhabitants with wood and grass and milk; and they possess no land,[2] and own no forests, and have no cows." Grass was sold at 6*d.* a bundle, and three

[1] It still continued in 1846 in St. Vincent, "and the planters firmly resist any attempt to interfere by a legislative enactment with this pernicious system."

[2] That is, no grass land.

bundles were the night supply of a horse. The taking of grass was seldom, however, actually forbidden, as the planters feared "by offending to lose their labourers altogether." The stealing of canes was more serious, and in Jamaica was carried on to such an extent that its suppression was demanded in a pro-negro journal as "an offence of great moral turpitude." It was not a case of "promiscuous wayfarers" taking one or two canes. "Immense heaps" were made away with by marauders, who broke into the fields at night. Many of the small freeholders were suspected of growing canes as "blinds," their real business being the reception of stolen property. In some cases they were the actual thieves.[1]

Knibb, being in England in 1845, was one of the speakers at the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, and must have startled his hearers by saying of the negroes in Jamaica, "They are trodden down and an attempt is made again to enslave them."[2] This, however, was merely Knibb's way of calling attention to a fall in wages. The planters had succeeded in bringing down the average rate from about eighteenpence a day to a little more than a shilling;[3] and their success was due to the long and severe drought of 1844, which, whilst reducing the demand for labour in the weeding season, had also increased the supply, because the negroes, owing to the failure of their provision crops, were forced in much greater numbers to present themselves for hire. The worst sufferers were, of course, the aged and infirm, several of whom were "picked up dead and dying upon the roads." Jamaica, like Antigua, had left worn-out slaves to the charity of their former owners; but, when

[1] Sugar and Coffee Committee, Qs. 12908, 13533, 13791.

[2] Knibb died, soon after his return to Jamaica, in November 1845. In his latter days he had had to contend with "that slimy semi-popery, so hard to catch and so subtle in its operations—Puseyism." Negroes who had found salvation in Baptist chapels were being taught the guilt of schism.—Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, pp. 492, 503.

[3] An attempt to reduce wages in St. Kitts was foiled by a strike.

Stanley on this occasion urged the necessity of a legislative provision for the poor, a sufficient but by no means satisfactory explanation of the distress was furnished on September 2, 1845, by the Earl of Elgin, who had succeeded Metcalfe as Governor. The multiplication of small freeholds had hitherto been accepted as evidence that the negro, though he might refuse to work regularly for the planters under the coercion of a labour rent, was not wanting in industry; but the early promise of the movement was not sustained by its results. Elgin declared that the majority of the peasant proprietors were content to extract a bare subsistence from the soil. Seven years of complete freedom had not convinced them that they ought in common prudence to provide against bad seasons either by working and saving money on the estates or by producing for sale a surplus of provisions. "Farinaceous roots," owing to this lack of enterprise, were very scarce and dear, and the population was becoming more and more dependent on corn meal and flour imported from the United States. This was the origin of much suffering in the late drought, and a system of parish relief might foster the evil by counteracting its effects.

The small freeholders are referred to in Elgin's despatch as "the mountain peasantry." This may remind us that they were often hampered by indifferent soil, bad roads and the remoteness of markets, and also by ill-health; for the climate of the mountains was much less congenial to the negroes than that of the plains. The roads were certainly much worse in Trinidad and Guiana,[1] where also emancipation was disappointing its friends. We have seen that the estate-workers of Trinidad showed little energy in cultivating their provision grounds,[2] and they do not seem to have improved

[1] In Trinidad there was a saying that the sun is "the best road-maker." In some parts of Guiana the roads were so bad that it was "difficult to drive even cattle along them in the wet season to market."

[2] See p. 91.

in this respect when they had grounds of their own. The Governor, Lord Harris, wrote on February 21, 1848, that there was a marked inclination on the part of the negroes to retire from wage-labour to any spot of land they could purchase, but that, however small, it was considered as an independence. "This description of settler" had lately become very numerous, yet the larger sort of provisions, such as yams, plantains and sweet potatoes, could hardly be had for sale and were almost all imported.[1]

The emancipated labourers had shown more initiative in Guiana, but there were the same facilities for indolence in that colony as in Trinidad. Working no more than six or seven hours a day and only two or three days a week, a negro could earn enough for his wants, and often spent the rest of the week shooting, fishing or "leading a wandering life." But if all the estate-workers had conducted themselves in this way they could not have been passing over, as they still were, into the class of peasant proprietors. Many of them, in fact, did two tasks a day, that is, they finished their task in four or five hours, and so had time to perform another; or they left the estates and joined one of the roving task-gangs. It was only in one or other of these ways that they could save enough money to buy land; but the question arose whether their industry persisted after it had achieved its purpose. One has to remember how strong a motive they had had to escape from the routine of field labour, which they associated with slavery;[2] how greatly this motive had been stimulated by the exaction of a labour rent and the refusal of leases; and how few of them can yet have developed the tastes and habits essential to a higher standard of living. Gladstone did not show his

[1] P.P., 1847–48, vol. xlvi.

[2] It was said of the negro by a planter in another colony, "He looks upon the wages system, which compels him to turn out continually at the ringing of the bell at a certain hour, to be the same as slavery, and he detests it, and escapes from it whenever he can."

usual perspicacity when he said that " one great cause of the scarcity of labour in the West Indies was not the idleness but the diligence of the negroes," who were working hard, saving money and buying land—" the most satisfactory state of things that can be imagined." [1] Satisfactory no doubt as far as it went ; but if the peasant proprietor caused " a scarcity of labour " by confining himself to the cultivation of his two-acre lot, what had become of his " diligence " ?

In a report for the first half of 1845 one of the district magistrates in Guiana warmly defended the small freeholders,[2] partly on the admitted ground that it was " by their industry alone they have acquired their present independence," but also from " daily experience " that they were still industrious. " There is no idleness in these settlements ; from the young to the aged, all are usefully employed in one way or other." It is difficult, however, to reconcile this with the report of another magistrate, who remarked that the great variety of vegetables grown in the colony sold at a higher price than carrots or turnips from North America, or even potatoes from Europe, and yet " this great encouragement " had no effect in extending their cultivation, though the fact might " in some degree " be accounted for by the badness of the roads. Governor Light might have been expected to agree with the former of these authorities ; for, a few months earlier, in reference to certain queries sent out by the Anti-Slavery Society, he had said that the cottages of the independent settlers were all well furnished, having sideboards, tables and chairs or settees, and good four-post bedsteads in a separate apartment. Some of them kept gigs. He himself had met a " huckstress " carrying a tray with nothing but perfumeries and essences, and

[1] Hansard (1840), lv. 104.

[2] Their number was estimated on September 30, 1844, at over 17,000.—Sugar and Coffee Committee, Fourth Report, Appendix No. 3.

had been present at the opening of a new church, when the collection, chiefly from labourers, amounted to 500 dollars. Nevertheless in his valedictory despatch of May 3, 1848, he wrote that, much as he had once approved of the combination of labourers to purchase estates, he was now of a different opinion. The estates thus disposed of were deteriorating, owing mainly to the neglect of drainage. They had been sub-sold, sub-let and parcelled out amongst gangs of newcomers; and all the proprietors and tenants seemed to aim at nothing better than "mere subsistence." Education had not been diffused in proportion to the "independent possession of property"—so far from it that the children attending school were actually fewer than in 1838; and they were withdrawn by their parents, to be apprenticed to trades or employed at home, as soon as they had acquired "some smattering of reading and writing." The Governor may have attached too much importance to the small number of negroes who were able, "in some sort," to sign their names, as the great majority must still have been illiterate; but, ten years after complete emancipation, it might have been supposed that, when they wished to present a petition, they would find one of themselves competent to draw it up; yet we are told that petitions written, and not merely signed, by negroes were "the most extraordinary jumble of bad orthography, grammar, penmanship and composition that ever emanated from a human being under the influence of education."

If the possession of land was doing little for the elevation of the negroes, nothing better could be expected from their "love of roaming about in task-gangs." In Guiana this practice must have led to more unsettlement than in the restricted areas of Antigua or Barbados. "The itinerant task-gangs," wrote Light in 1844, "demoralise themselves and excite discontent among the resident labourers"; and in one of the district reports for 1845 we find it stated that they put themselves under "the

entire guidance and control" of one of themselves, not by any means their superior in morals; that they thought nothing of going off for long periods to wander in distant parts of the country, leaving the mothers of their children to provide as best they could; and that many of both sexes were thus "made strangers to the endearments of home." Some anxiety seems to have been felt at the Colonial Office as to results of the practice, discontinued since 1841, of distributing rum; but the information given to the Governor by one of his officials was that the young were less addicted to spirit-drinking than their elders, and "as regards the women particularly, I do not think that in any part of the world there is a more sober race of people."

Lord Belmore had underrated the industry of the negroes when he predicted, as we have seen, that they would never be got to work for wages; and probably not many of the planters would have admitted the existence of "Black Quashee," for whom Carlyle recommended a fresh application of the "beneficent whip."[1] That type existed, but, with few exceptions, only in the towns. One of the first things Gurney remarked on landing in Jamaica in 1840 was that the scum of the population had found its way into Kingston; and Lord Harris wrote in reference to the census of 1851 in Trinidad that, of nearly 70,000 persons over ten years of age, there were more than 10,000 who had no visible occupation, "and of those, 8000 turn out to be inhabitants of Port of Spain."[2] But the nearest approximation to Carlyle's "beautiful Blacks sitting there up to the ears in pumpkins" seems to have

[1] "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" in *Fraser's Magazine*, December 1849. One notes with surprise in this "true work of the devil," as J. S. Mill called it, that "it was not Black Quashee or those he represents that made those West India Islands what they are." Those of us who are not ashamed of having enslaved the negro might at least acknowledge the work he did for us as a slave.

[2] Earl Grey, *The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration*, 1853, i. 137.

been found in Castries, the capital of St. Lucia, by a Frenchman who has already been mentioned[1]: "J'étais désagréablement affecté de voir autour de moi des hommes robustes, des femmes vigoureuses, couchés toute la journée sur le seuil de leur case, suçant une canne ou un mango pendant des heures entières."

[1] See p. 86.

CHAPTER VI

THE COLONIAL MONOPOLY

WE have seen that the planters complained of the dearness as well as of the scarcity and irregularity of labour; but what they could afford or might be induced to pay in wages depended on prices; and we have now to consider how prices were affected by the commercial policy of the mother country. Here at the outset we are confronted with the development of a crisis almost as disturbing to the West Indies as that from which they were struggling to emerge. The sugar industry had been built up on a twofold basis—slave labour and the fiscal system which secured to its products a monopoly of the home market; and no sooner had the former of these supports been completely withdrawn in 1838 than attempts were made to withdraw the latter. This was not a mere coincidence, though the agitation for free trade in corn dates from the same period; for we shall find that the monopoly was not felt to be a grievance till slavery had been abolished.

The planters were now deploring the effects of emancipation; but enemies and candid friends did not fail to remind them that on many occasions before the abolition of slavery and even of the slave trade their lamentations had been quite as loud. In 1804, for example, a committee of the Jamaica Assembly reported, in reference to the distress then prevalent, that "a faithful detail would have the character of a frightful caricature." Twenty years later, it was said in Parliament of the West Indian colonies that their state was "more deplorable than that

of the most wretched and inhospitable parts of the world. Everywhere else, even in Lapland, prosperity was the rule and distress the exception"; and a similar statement was made in 1841: "The West India interest during the last fifty years had always been complaining of their sufferings. They had been ruined every year during that period." One may account in several ways for this phenomenon;[1] but the point that concerns us here is that the exclusive right to supply sugar, whilst it incited the planters to over-production, did not by any means assure them of a remunerative price. It had indeed become a truism to say that they had the shadow without the substance—"the name of possessing a monopoly which they did not really enjoy." More sugar was always imported than could be sold by the refiners for home consumption. The latter had consequently a surplus—usually about 45,000 tons, or from a third to a fourth of the supply;[2] and, this having to be disposed of abroad, prices could be kept above the continental level only to the extent of the drawback—from 3*s.* to 5*s.* a cwt.—which was allowed as a bounty on re-exportation.

It may be objected that the surplus must have diminished with the growth of population; but this was prevented by the import duty which, though no more than 6*s.* 3*d.* per cwt. in 1776, had been doubled during the American War, and more than redoubled during and after the Napoleonic War. In 1813 and again in 1818 it was 30*s.* In 1826 it was reduced to 27*s.*, and in 1830 to 24*s.* The average consumption of sugar in the United Kingdom in 1811 was 23¼ lb. per head. In 1842 it had fallen to 15⅞ lb.,[3] whilst the population during this period had increased from 18 millions to 27 millions; but, sugar being rather a luxury

[1] See *British Slavery and its Abolition*, pp. 3–14.

[2] Sugar and Coffee Committee, Q. 5307.

[3] The *Economist*, quoted by J. E. Ritchie, *Thoughts on Slavery and Cheap Sugar*, 1844, p. 34. The present consumption is about 100 lb. per head.

than a necessity to the poor, the extent of its use depended on the state of trade as well as on the price. Huskisson said in 1829 that two-thirds of the poorer consumers of coffee drank it unsweetened.[1]

The sugar monopoly must have succumbed sooner or later to the forces set in motion by Cobden, Bright and Villiers, when in 1839 they founded the Anti-Corn Law League; and emancipation, which converted it from a nominal into a real monopoly, did no more than precipitate its fall. In the six years which followed the abolition of slavery in 1834 the average importation of sugar from the West Indies decreased by more than a million cwt. The bounty was withdrawn in 1838;[2] and this year, the date of complete emancipation, was the first year in which there was no surplus. Still greater scarcity prevailed in 1840. The price in bond—that is, exclusive of duty—rose at one time to 58*s.* 3*d.*, the highest since 1799;[3] and even the prohibitive duty of 63*s.* on foreign sugar was not sufficient to achieve its purpose.

The industrial depression, which in 1839 had given rise to the excesses of Chartism, was still acute, especially in Lancashire and the Midlands; and it was natural that a proposal for making sugar more accessible to the masses should be brought forward by Ewart, the member for Wigan, and seconded by Thorneley, the member for Wolverhampton. Speaking on June 25, 1840, the former said that the British artisan was paying 7½*d.* a pound for the worst unrefined sugar, whilst the foreign artisan got a much better article for 4½*d.*; that many

[1] Hansard (1829), xxi. 1569, 1574; (1840) lv. 102; (1841) lviii. 68, 145, 165, 176, 202.

[2] Hansard (1839), xlviii. 1024, 1025.

[3] The highest prices on record were in the three years 1796–98, when they were 62*s.* 5*d.*, 75*s.* 8*d.*, and 64*s.* 11*d.* See the Table of Duties in P.P., 1826, vol. xxii. In those years sugar was at famine prices owing to the destruction in the French Revolution of the great sugar colony of St. Domingue.

of the poor were using treacle as a substitute, and even for that had to pay a penny more than the foreigner paid for sugar. The current price of colonial sugar was 49*s.* a cwt.; but sugar grown by free labour in foreign countries might have been had for 22*s.*; and, taking the average consumption at 200,000 tons, he maintained that the public was being taxed for the benefit of the planters to the amount of about four and a half millions a year. Ewart would have liked to discriminate between foreign free-grown and foreign slave-grown sugar;[1] but this was impossible, for the present, owing to treaties with Brazil and other sugar-producing countries, entitling them to the most-favoured-nation treatment; and he therefore proposed to admit all foreign sugar[2] at a duty of 34*s.*, which would leave the planter with a margin in his favour of 10*s.* He would have liked also to lower the colonial duty, but was afraid that the revenue might not "come round all at once," or in other words that the increased consumption at a lower rate might not for some time compensate the Exchequer. Labouchere, the President of the Board of Trade, replied for the Melbourne Government. Admitting that the want of a surplus had brought about "a great revolution" in the sugar trade, the planters' monopoly having become "real and positive," and that the supply was "unusually and extremely small," he refused to countenance a proposal which would encourage slavery and the slave trade, and expose the planters to competition at a time when they had barely established a system of free labour; and Ewart's motion was defeated by 122 votes to 27.[3]

The term "West Indian" was no longer strictly applicable to the sugar monopoly, which had been extended in 1825 to Mauritius, now the largest colonial

[1] It was pointed out by his opponents that the petitions were only for foreign free-grown sugar.

[2] Here and elsewhere the reference is to Muscovado sugar. Various rates were levied on refined sugars.

[3] Hansard (1840), lv. 77–88, 106.

exporter of cane-sugar, and in 1836 to India, which now *imports* sugar. An increased and increasing supply was expected from both quarters; but the Indian planter could not make a profitable use of his molasses owing to a discriminating duty of 15*s*. a gallon on the importation of Indian rum. In 1840 a Select Committee was appointed by the Lords and another by the Commons to consider a petition for relief which had been presented by the East India Company. The latter Committee made no recommendation; but the former resolved that, though it was desirable that "colonial possessions scattered over the four quarters of the globe" should all be treated alike, yet the colonies in which slavery had recently been abolished must be excepted from the rigorous application of this principle on account of "the state of transition in which those colonies now are." The Government concurred in the rule, but not in the exception, and in 1841 the 15*s*. duty was taken off.[1]

It might have been supposed that the proposal to admit slave-grown sugar, which had found only twenty-seven supporters in 1840, would not soon be revived. On the contrary, it was renewed in the very next year, and by the Government which had opposed it on grounds, not of expediency, but of principle. Finding that nearly two millions would be required to cover a deficit which had been caused mainly by the adoption of penny postage, the Cabinet decided that they must either increase direct taxation or substitute protective for prohibitive duties. They chose the latter alternative, and resolved to begin with the duties on corn, timber and sugar. The Tory landlords, it need hardly be said, were far stronger in Parliament than either the West Indians or the Abolitionists; but they knew that only on the sugar question could they be sure of a coalition against the Government, which they hoped to overthrow by the

[1] P.P. 1840, vol. vii.; Hansard (1841), lvi. 206; *Edinburgh Review* (1841), lxxii. 340.

unusual course of preventing a financial measure going into Committee. An amendment [1] was framed which, except for a parenthetical clause, expressed nothing but abhorrence of the slave trade and slavery. Though it thus appealed to "higher and holier sympathies," it was moved on May 18, 1841, by a West Indian, Lord Sandon, and seconded by an East India Director; and, in order to camouflage these too patent manœuvres, the public was treated to a grand display of oratorical fireworks, which continued for eight nights.

The Government hoped to raise £700,000 by reducing the duty on foreign sugar to 36*s*.—that is, to 12*s*. above the colonial rate. This, with a difference of only 2*s*., had been Ewart's proposal; but, instead of defending it on the sole and possibly sufficient ground that the financial situation left them no choice, they put forward the very arguments which, as urged by Ewart and Thorneley, they had endeavoured to refute. Russell declared that it was not incumbent on us "to force the cultivation of sugar in the West Indies" at the expense of the indigent at home, and cited the distress in Lancashire, where "the pawnbrokers' shops are stowed full of the clothing, furniture and even bedding of the destitute poor." These shops had been quite as well stocked last year, when the price of sugar was 49*s*. a cwt., as they were now when it was 36*s*. But the argument which the Ministerialists thought the most effective in their armoury was one which had been used by Thorneley, and henceforth was to be adopted by all such controversialists as their stock-in-trade. Why, it was asked, should you

[1] "That considering the efforts and sacrifices which Parliament and the country have made for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, with the earnest hope that their exertions and example might lead to the mitigation and final extinction of these evils in other countries, this House is not prepared (especially with the present prospects of the supply of sugar from British possessions) to adopt the measure proposed by Her Majesty's Government for the reduction of the duty on foreign sugar." It will be seen that the parenthesis kept the road open for retreat.

make such a fuss about admitting slave-grown sugar, when you are wearing slave-grown cotton, drinking slave-grown coffee, smoking or snuffing slave-grown tobacco,[1] and, even in regard to the abhorred commodity itself, admitting it into your refineries, though not for home consumption ?[2] Such was the question put to "incongruous sentimentalists." It was answered more seriously than it deserved; for our commercial relations with slave-holding states were necessarily in accord with the fact that no more than seven years ago we had ourselves held slaves. We could not now close our ports to American cotton and throw out of employment nearly two millions of our artisans; but it was a strange argument that, because we had gone a certain way in the consumption of slave-grown produce, we ought therefore to go further—unless indeed, as Gladstone suggested, it was thought desirable "to substitute an uniformity in wrong for an inconsistent acknowledgment of what is right." Macaulay and Grote contended that the refusal to admit slave-grown sugar, if it was to be of moral value, must be absolute. On that basis it could be of no moral significance to what extent we stimulated the slave trade—whether the victims of our policy were counted by hundreds or by thousands.

With regard to emancipation, the measure was debated by most of its opponents as if it would place the British planter on equal terms with his foreign rival; but he was still to have a fifty per cent. preference; and protection to this extent might be more to his advantage than prohibitive duties. He complained of high wages for irregular work, and with reason, where the negroes had independent resources and there was competition for

[1] All but one-twentieth of the tobacco imported was consumed by the working classes. The wealthier classes used it mainly in the form of snuff.

[2] This certainly was an anomaly; for it was slave-grown sugar, refined in Britain and re-exported, that was used by our own negro free labourers.

labour rather than for employment. Reduced protection would force the industry down to a lower and more natural level. Ward, an advanced Liberal, called it "absurd to teach the negro free labourers to keep gigs and drink champagne by a tax levied upon the industrious classes at home," and said that the surest way to injure emancipation was "to bolster and cocker up a system of high prices and high wages in the colonies by an absolute exclusion of competition." The same view was expressed by Vernon Smith, Under-Secretary for the Colonies, when he insisted that there ought to be a reciprocity of sacrifice between the British people and the negroes. We had a right to say to the latter, "Exert yourselves for us as we have done for you; cultivate the sugar which is necessary for us as we have granted" —he might have said, paid for—"emancipation which was necessary for you." But, whatever could be said for the measure from other points of view than that of the slave trade, the coalition against it was too strong; and the amendment was carried by 317 votes to 281. Eighteen Ministerialists were absent unpaired, but only one Conservative.[1]

The Melbourne Cabinet did not resign; but, when a vote of no confidence was carried by a majority of one on June 4, they procured a dissolution of Parliament; and the result of the general election was to bring the Conservatives into power under Sir Robert Peel.

Public opinion on the question of the slave trade was now undergoing its "lamentable and disgraceful change";[2] and those who believed that this traffic could not be put down so long as slavery existed were under a special obligation to work for the extirpation of the latter. That they were conscious of this duty, but interpreted it in a way which involved profit rather than sacrifice, had been made clear in the debate which

[1] Hansard (1841), lviii. 31, 134, 169, 189, 209, 564, 671.

[2] See p. 34.

has just been reviewed. They had then maintained that our exertions against slavery should be confined to example, argument and, at most, industrial competition, and that, in order to give the fullest scope to these influences, we should develop as much as possible our trade with slave-holding states, and especially with Brazil, which ranked as our fourth-best foreign market. Even the moral significance of the question was denied by Thorneley, who maintained that the United States would have as good a right to refuse commercial intercourse with us on account of the corn laws as we had to refuse such intercourse with foreign countries on account of slavery. "The intense feeling that once animated the people of England with regard to the abominations of slavery," said Peel in reference to this statement, "may have abated, but I am mistaken if there will not be great regret, great indignation, at our altered views and altered tone."[1] Speaking in the following year at the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society, Lushington said that in the House of Commons "the subject of slavery palled upon the taste"—a remark which fell on Knibb's ears with a "deadening sound."[2]

The Ministerialists in the debate of 1841 had been rather hard on "the new-born philanthropists opposite"; and the latter had found little to say in reply except that the Abolition Bill of 1833 had been introduced by Stanley, now indeed a Conservative, but then a Whig. A far more effective answer was now available; for Peel, the opponent of emancipation, and his Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, were excelling all their predecessors in the effort to discourage slavery and suppress the slave trade. They had procured an Act—which was opposed by Bright—to prohibit British companies abroad from employing slaves; they were offering commercial concessions to Brazil if she would take measures to ameliorate

[1] Hansard (1841), lviii. 626.
[2] Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, p. 441.

the condition of her slaves; and, above all, the naval squadron on the coast of Africa was soon to be almost doubled.

Peel's commercial legislation was based on the principle of his predecessors that protective should be substituted for prohibitive duties; and within nine months after he assumed office on September 3, 1841, the imposts on several hundred articles had been reduced. His policy kept alive the hopes of those who aimed at overthrowing the colonial monopoly; and the sugar duties, being voted from year to year, became "the sport and prize of an annual scuffle upon the floor of Parliament." [1] The Opposition was divided into two sections—one demanding free trade, the other, and much the larger, asking only for reduced protection; and each of them brought forward its proposal in 1842 and 1843. Ministers gave but scant attention to the free trade argument for the equalisation of duties; but they had to justify their refusal to lower the prohibitive duty on foreign sugar; and the question, already almost exhausted, was twice again debated at length.

That Peel was advancing steadily in the direction of free trade was seen with equal disfavour by the landlords and the "sugar lords." The latter were in the more immediate danger; and they soon discovered that a breach was to be made in their tariff-wall—"a wall, it may be feared, keeping off the sun as well as the storm." [2] Goulburn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was himself a West Indian proprietor; but on June 3, 1844, he announced that, in view of the revival of industry and the likelihood of an increased demand for sugar, it would be necessary to secure a larger supply, and that this would soon be possible, owing to the impending termination (November 10) of our treaty with Brazil, without compromising our attitude towards slavery and the slave

[1] *The Ministry and the Sugar Duties*. 1844, p. 20.
[2] *Ibid.*, 1844, p. 30.

trade. The Government believed that about 20,000 tons of free-labour sugar could be obtained from Java, Manilla and China ; [1] and they proposed to admit such sugar at a duty 10*s*. higher than the duty of 24*s*. on colonial sugar. The planters would be equal to this very limited competition, especially as they were to be allowed to import coolies from Singapore ; [2] and sugar would be cheapened to the consumer by a halfpenny per pound.

The amount of protection retained in this measure was that which the majority of the Liberals had advocated for the last two years ; but they had meant it to operate against all foreign sugar ; and Russell was very indignant with the Government for introducing a new and invidious principle into our commercial legislation. He said that, having hitherto traded with all nations irrespective of their institutions or morals, we were now going " to erect a pulpit in every custom-house and make our landing-waiters enforce anti-slavery doctrines " ; that the attempt to discriminate would be foiled by fraud and evasion, and in any case would be futile, because, in taking a certain quantity of free-labour sugar out of the market, we should merely create a vacuum, which the slave-owners of Brazil and Cuba would be called upon to fill.[3] Business men were also disposed to ridicule the scheme ; but the scrupulosity of Ministers was at least in accord with the great effort then being organised against the slave

[1] Ministers had excluded Siam from their scheme, not being satisfied that slavery did not exist there ; and they must have had some doubt as to Java, where the exportable produce was raised by labourers requisitioned and paid by the Dutch Government—four men in rotation for each 1½ acre.—Hansard (1844), lxxv. 1039.

[2] See p. 123.

[3] To assert that we should not encourage slave-grown sugar by this measure was said to be like taking a spoonful of water out of one side of a basin and not admitting that it would be filled up from the other. We should, however, encourage the slave-owners still more if we gave them *direct* access to our market ; and in one case we had to do even that. The American Government insisted that their sugar should not fare worse than that of the most favoured nation ; and some 3000 tons of sugar from Louisiana were actually imported.

trade ; [1] and they had no difficulty in defeating the two perennial motions on the subject—that of Russell on June 3 for the admission of foreign sugar, slave or free, at 34*s.*, and that of Ewart on June 10 for its admission at the same rate as British.

A few days later, however, they had an unpleasant surprise. The West Indians had now awakened to the fact that no solution of this question could be much worse for them than the uncertainty and suspense which made it equally difficult to apply or to borrow capital, and that their only hope of relief was to make an offer which might be accepted as a temporary, if not a permanent, settlement. Miles, a West Indian merchant and proprietor and member for Bristol, had given notice of a motion to reduce the duty on colonial sugar to 20*s.*, which, at the proposed rate of 34*s.* on foreign free-labour sugar, would give the planter a preference of 14*s.* ; but he had altered this rate to 30*s.*—no doubt with an eye to Liberal support —before submitting his motion on Friday, June 14 ; and he then made it clear that he would have dispensed with the distinction between free-grown and slave-grown sugar if it had not been adopted by the House, declaring that the question would never be settled till the latter had been admitted, and that it was " only a financial torture to the West Indian planter and merchant to prolong the struggle." Baillie, the seconder of the motion and also a West Indian, said that he would have preferred the admission of all foreign sugars at a higher differential duty, *e.g.* 15*s.*, to the admission of free-labour sugar at 10*s.* Russell supported Miles on the ground that the reduction of the colonial duty would give " an additional spring to consumption " ; and the motion was carried against the Government by 241 votes to 221. Neither Goulburn nor the Prime Minister was, however, prepared to give up half a million of revenue ; and on the following Monday,

[1] Denman's blockade scheme. See *Great Britain and the Slave Trade*, p. 66.

at the instance of the latter, the House resolved by a majority of twenty-one to reverse its decision. Disraeli said that Peel's "horror of slavery extends to every place except the benches behind him. There the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip sounds." But Peel owed his success on this occasion not to the subservience of his own followers, but to the support of thirteen free traders, who considered that 10*s*. on 34*s*. as proposed by the Government was a smaller protection than 10*s*. on 30*s*. as proposed by Miles.[1]

Peel's predecessors in office had left him a deficit, the accumulation of five years; and this he had extinguished in his first budget—which he introduced himself—by reviving the income tax, which had been in abeyance since the Napoleonic War. The tax, which yielded about five millions, expired in 1845. It was then continued in order to provide a surplus which could be used to stimulate trade by the reduction of duties; and in accordance with this policy the duties on both colonial and foreign free-grown sugar were lowered by about 10*s*., the new rates being respectively 14*s*. and 23*s*. 4*d*. This was a substantial boon to the consumer, who would get his sugar for $1\frac{3}{4}d$. less per pound;[2] and it was welcomed as a stimulus to production by the West and East Indians, though Miles declared that the utmost economy and good management would still be needed to secure a profit, and that, as the duties were granted only till July 1846, the planters would find it as difficult as ever to obtain capital for the improvement of their estates. There was nothing in this concession to appease the free traders or the advocates of a uniform tariff on all foreign sugars. Consequently they both renewed their demands; and the whole question in all its bearings, ethical, financial

[1] Hansard (1844), lxxv. 154, 170, 468, 907, 920, 966, 988, 1005, 1029, 1158.

[2] W. E. Gladstone, *Remarks upon Recent Commercial Legislation*, 1845, p. 11.

and commercial, was debated afresh—for the seventh time, as Gladstone remarked, in less than five years.[1]

We have now arrived at 1846, the memorable year in which the landlords were swept into the gulf of free trade, leaving their comrades of the "sister monopoly," who had not dared to support them, on the edge of the abyss. On June 25, the day on which the Corn Bill passed the House of Lords, Peel was defeated on an Irish question by a coalition of Whigs and protectionist Tories; and in July the Whigs came into power under Lord John Russell.

The new Ministry lost no time in proposing an alteration of the sugar duties; and, late as it was in a stormy and laborious session, there were reasons for haste. The effect of Peel's changes in the tariff had not fulfilled his expectations. There had been a large increase in the consumption of British sugar; but the foreign supply had fallen short,[2] the price had risen, and the revenue had decreased by £340,000. Russell was pledged to abolish the distinction between foreign free-grown and foreign slave-grown sugar; but it might have been supposed that he would uphold as Prime Minister the moderate protection which he had advocated in Opposition. It soon appeared, however, that he was disposed to give but short shrift to this exception to "the system which has prevailed during the last four or five years, but more decidedly in the present year, of allowing the people to buy in the cheapest market"; for on July 20 he announced that the Government had decided on a plan of equalisation which would accomplish its object in five years.[3]

[1] Hansard (1845), lxxvii. 1101, 1284.

[2] Due to drought and hurricane in Cuba, which caused a greater demand in Europe for foreign free-labour sugar. The probable importation of the latter into this country had been estimated at 20,000 tons, but only 4000 tons were actually imported.—Hansard (1848), xcvi. 52.

[3] In the case of the corn laws three years were to elapse before the import duty was entirely removed.

For the present year, 1846–47, all foreign sugars would pay a duty of 21*s.*; but in the following year there would be a reduction of a shilling, and the process would continue by annual reductions of 1*s.* 6*d.* till 1851–52, when a uniform duty of 14*s.* would be imposed on all sugars, British and foreign. As compensation for the withdrawal of protection, the colonists would be allowed free access to foreign markets for goods and, to some extent, for labour. The restrictions in the latter case had already been relaxed, and there was to be "only one material alteration"—the permission to make contracts in Africa, but only in British possessions.[1]

The reception of this measure was justly claimed by Ewart as a vindication of the policy he had advocated for the last six years. Its principal opponents were not the people whom it directly concerned, but the Die-Hard Protectionists who could not but renew the battle they had just lost on the question of the corn laws, and were consequently unable to avenge themselves on the planters for having failed to stand by them in what Disraeli called "the hour of death and the day of judgment"; and the amendment which was moved on July 27 by Lord George Bentinck, whilst it condemned the measure as tending to discourage British free labour and to stimulate the slave trade, did so only "in the present state of the sugar cultivation in the British East and West Indian Possessions," thus reviving the "prudential parenthesis"[2] which had appeared in the famous resolution of 1841. The amendment was opposed by Peel, mainly no doubt because it might lead to the overthrow of a Government, and in his opinion the only possible Government, which had been only four weeks in office, but also because it offered no security to the colonists, whereas the Ministerial

[1] Hansard (1846), lxxxvii. 1310, 1316–1320.

[2] So Disraeli called it; but what are we to make of his assertion that Bentinck's amendment did *not* contain the parenthesis?—Hansard (1846), lxxxviii. 166.

scheme did at least assure them of a qualified protection for five years. Uncertainty was a great evil; but he had been compelled, when in office, to continue the duties from year to year because, though opposed on principle to the admission of slave-grown sugar, he was convinced that only on this basis could there be a permanent settlement. "I think, then, the hour is come for a change in the law." Lord Sandon, who had moved the resolution of 1841, and Hogg, now Sir James Hogg and chairman of the East India Company, who had seconded it, both recanted the opinions they had then expressed. Miles and Baillie, who had been the first to see that prohibitive duties were no longer possible, still clung to protection; but, with these and only three other exceptions, the West Indians decided to sacrifice themselves on the altar of free trade and voted in the majority of 265 to 135, which Sir Robert Inglis described as "a combination of individuals and parties such as perhaps the wildest imagination of any man in the House could never have expected upon such a subject." They saw that the inevitable could be postponed only at the cost of further "stagnation and uncertainty"; and they could not disabuse themselves of the idea that they would be allowed to have the run of Africa for labour, though Russell, in replying on the 20th to criticisms of his scheme, had reiterated his determination not to allow emigration outside British settlements.[1]

"Were this a mere question of commercial competition," said Sturge, "I should feel perfectly satisfied to await the period when free labour would, under every disadvantage, assert its natural ascendancy; but, when the immolation of thousands of human beings must inevitably take place in the contest, I feel bound to protest against the course it has been proposed to adopt."[2]

[1] Hansard (1846), lxxxvii. 1333, 1337; lxxxviii. 53, 89, 98, 100–102, 115, 166, 168, 249.

[2] H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, 1864, p. 284.

This tragedy, inseparable from the measure, was overlooked and even denied by its more zealous friends. Looking forward to the ultimate triumph of free labour, they maintained that their policy was the only sure way to extinguish the slave trade, and refused to admit that an aggravation of that sordid butchery must be its immediate result. Lord Clarendon even commended the Bill to the Lords on the "ground of humanity."[1] This delusion was soon dispelled. Havana was illuminated when it was known there that the Bill had passed; the Brazilian importation of negroes, which had been about 20,000 in 1845, rose to 50,000 in 1846; and in 1848 a Committee of the House of Commons reported that the slave trade had been so stimulated as to make its suppression more difficult than ever. Still, when all allowance is made for the advantage to the slave-owners of direct access to the British market, one is inclined to think that the mischief was done when foreign free-grown sugar was admitted in 1844;[2] for, if the great increase in the Brazilian slave trade had been due to the Act of 1846, it could hardly have taken place in the same year.

Deacon Hume, the friend of Huskisson and Peel and an equally zealous free-trader, had held that we could not justly call upon our planters to compete in the world market so long as we prohibited them from going into the same market for labour.[3] In reality there was no such prohibition. What Deacon Hume must have mistaken for such was the rule which made it impossible for the planters to get labour from Africa where it could be obtained only by taking advantage of slavery or the slave trade; but such dealings, had they been permitted, would have been outside the world market; and our experience at Sierra Leone had shown that the African, where he was a free agent, had little or no desire to emigrate to the West Indies.

[1] Hansard (1846), lxxxviii. 478. [2] See p. 151.
[3] Hansard (1846), lxxxviii. 89.

The least defensible position in this controversy was that of those who accused the Government of inconsistency and hypocrisy, who said that we should now be encouraging the slave trade with one hand and trying to suppress it with the other, and that we could clear our reputation only by recalling our cruisers and leaving Africa to its fate. It was not hypocritical to say that, much as we had done and were still doing for the suppression of the slave trade, there were things which we could not afford to do—especially as other nations, in comparison, had done nothing. Nor, if we must violate humanity, was it inconsistent to make the only possible reparation. Spain and Brazil had not bound themselves by treaty to abolish slavery, but they had so bound themselves to abolish and suppress the slave trade; and, if more labour should be required on their plantations to meet the British demand for sugar, our right would be the same as before, and our obligation the greater, to see that that labour was what it professed to be—slave labour, but not slave-trade labour.

Very few petitions had been presented against a measure which, ten years earlier, would have evoked a storm of protest, and the Abolitionists had sustained very inadequately their accustomed rôle. Most of their leaders, with the exception of Earl Grey, the former Lord Howick, were still opposed to the admission of slave-grown sugar —Clarkson, Sturge, Lushington, Gurney, Denman, Brougham, Inglis and Acland; and Buxton and Knibb, who both died in the previous year, had been of the same opinion. The Anti-Slavery Society, in so far as it was represented by its Committee, also persisted in opposition; but many, if not most, of its members throughout the country, and especially in Lancashire, had been seduced from their allegiance by Cobden [1] and

[1] Cobden said that "the great body of the Anti-Slavery party suspected the Committee and regarded them as hypocrites."—Hansard (1845), lxxvii. 1128; and the effect he had produced on one of his converts may be seen in Ritchie's pamphlet, cited on p. 142, note.

Bright; and, as the Committee was judged mainly by its efforts to stop the forcible suppression of the slave trade, Milner Gibson could say with sufficient plausibility, "The slavery delusion had been discovered to be a hypocritical protest; the Anti-Slavery Society itself would not support it." The movement was in fact disintegrating under pressure of the new doctrine that it was folly to incur vast expense in pursuit of an object which could be compassed incidentally in the ordinary way of business, commerce being, as Ewart was fond of calling it, "the great emancipator." In a defence of Peel's decision to admit foreign free-labour sugar, it was shown that emancipation was costing the country £2,400,000 a year in the increased price of sugar; that the shortage of labour which had produced this result existed only in the West Indies; and that the public was consequently being taxed to provide "a large unnecessary bonus" for the sugar-growers of Mauritius and Bengal, who furnished 90,000 out of a total of 210,000 tons.[1] When we add to this twenty millions given as compensation to the slave-owners and at least seventeen millions already spent in combating the slave trade, it will be seen that the advocates of a free trade in sugar and sugar-slaves had a tolerably strong case; but there were elements in the national character on which they could make no impression; and one cannot but reflect with wonder as well as pride that the British taxpayer, who could easily have stopped the "blind and lavish expenditure on the coast of Africa," never failed to meet the bill till the last slaver, some twenty years later, had been driven from the Gulf of Guinea.

[1] *The Ministry and the Sugar Duties*, 1844, pp. 9–11. As some even of the West Indian colonies had sufficient labour, the bonus was really being paid on more than half the supply.

CHAPTER VII

THE FREE TRADE CRISIS

It cannot have happened often in the history of Parliament that a measure was carried by the votes of its professed opponents because they felt it to be inevitable and did not wish to be kept longer in suspense. One can hardly imagine the borough-owners coming forward in this way to welcome the Reform Bill; and who could have thought that all the West and East Indians in the House, except five, would vote for the Sugar Bill of 1846? In the colonies, where the political situation was naturally not so well understood, a more combative spirit prevailed, with the exception of Antigua, which tendered its submission in these dignified terms: "We do not presume to question the justice or wisdom of those commercial changes so vitally affecting the colonial possessions of the Crown, emanating as they do from the Imperial Parliament; it is for us, conscious of the fate which threatens us, to address ourselves to the contest with temper and determination."[1] One is at a loss to know how it could have occurred to the Jamaica Assembly that the Queen might be able to save them from the dire consequences of the Sugar Act; but in a memorial of December 18, 1846, they implored her "gracious interposition," and then proceeded to enumerate the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of Parliament, beginning with the abolition of the slave trade, which had been "most vigorously and profitably carried on for 150 years by British ships, British

[1] Address of the Assembly to the Governor, November 1846.

merchants and British capital." Other grievances followed—Canning's scheme for the amelioration of slavery, the apprenticeship and emancipation. "We believe the history of the world would be in vain searched for any parallel case of oppression perpetrated by a civilised Government upon any section of its own subjects." The memorialists were apparently too angry to be consistent. In one place they said that they desired only "a limited protection for a limited time," but in another place their idea of protection was defined as "moderate and permanent"; and they also asked for the removal of all restrictions on the introduction of African labourers. The same demand for "free labour wherever it may be found" was one of the resolutions passed at a meeting of planters in Trinidad; and Lord Harris was so callous or so blind to its significance that in his covering despatch he said that "probably, after a few years, importation from Africa will be carried on as a trade of itself."

Earl Grey, who had succeeded Gladstone at the Colonial Office,[1] was as much opposed as Stanley had been to any idea of general emigration from Africa;[2] but he intimated that, as the supply from British settlements was so meagre and uncertain, the Government was "about to try the experiment of inviting an emigration from the Kroo Coast, where the slave trade does not exist." The attempt would be initiated on a small scale, and, in order to guard against abuses, in one of the Queen's ships, and would be confined in the first instance to Guiana and Trinidad, the colonies nearest to Africa; but, if successful, it would be extended to Jamaica and to such other colonies as might provide for the expense.

The steam-frigate detailed for this purpose was the *Growler*, said to be about the worst in the service, but

[1] Stanley had resigned on December 5, 1846, when Peel proposed to repeal the corn laws, and Gladstone was Colonial Secretary for the next seven months.

[2] See p. 123.

appropriate enough in name, as the crew grumbled at the work assigned to them, and the planters at its results. The intention to employ this vessel was communicated to the Emigration Commissioners on January 30, 1847; but she did not leave England till May;[1] and her orders then were to go for emigrants to Sierra Leone, where there happened to be a glut of liberated Africans, and merely to get into touch with the Kroomen by anchoring off their coast. In July she arrived in the West Indies with 480 captured slaves, and more than three months elapsed before she returned to Sierra Leone. She went a good way north before crossing the Atlantic, and the reason was said to be that she could not steam against the trade winds. Her engines, at all events, broke down, and, though they were repaired at Bermuda, the captain, having been told to economise, made the rest of the voyage under sail. Lord Harris complained that at this rate the *Growler* would make only three or four trips a year instead of six. In December she returned with 404 blacks, 46 having died on the voyage, and was then recalled, leaving Harris in disgust with the emigrants brought to Trinidad. "A more miserable, debilitated, and I may add, loathsome set of creatures I never saw"—an unreasonable and unfeeling remark. Negroes who had been shipped as slaves and re-shipped as emigrants were not likely to arrive in good condition;[2] and Harris himself had said that he preferred liberated Africans to natives of Sierra Leone, "and, if they have never been on shore since their capture, so much the better."[3]

[1] Some of the delay may have been due to the fitting up of bunks, "like so many coffins," which were found merely to accumulate dirt and to obstruct the ventilation. "Putting the half-savage African into a berth is the greatest humbug I ever heard of," said Miles to the Sugar and Coffee Committee.

[2] The mortality in the African hospital at Sierra Leone was sometimes 200 a week out of 800 or 1000 patients.

[3] The story of the *Growler* crops up here and there in several Blue Books. M'Crae, the surgeon, and Commander Hall gave evidence

Guiana and Trinidad were charged £5000 apiece for the services of the *Growler*; but this was a trifle compared with the expense they and Jamaica had incurred in 1845–47 for the introduction of coolies.[1] Guiana was the largest and the only successful importer; and the state of things which this expedient remedied or mitigated was thus described by a proprietor in 1847; "When, three years ago, the authorities conceded to us immigration, every cane-field almost in the colony was a wilderness of weeds; labourers in many places could not be obtained for love or money; the arrogance of the native peasant was intolerable; the dependence of the planter upon him humiliating and disastrous in the extreme." [2] Trinidad had spent much too lavishly on immigration, and was said indeed to have subordinated to it every other interest. The planters had nothing left for improvements in agriculture; the needs of administration—schools, hospitals and prisons—were starved; and, after all, the money had been almost thrown away. Harris, who had no good opinion of the coolies, sought to fix them on the estates by establishing on his own authority a system of tickets of leave and certificates of discharge. He had no doubt exceeded his powers, and the system was abolished in October 1846 at the instance of Lord Grey, who thought it unduly harsh [3] as well as illegal. Milder regulations were prepared as an ordinance of the Governor and Council; but, for some reason, they did not come into force till June 1847; and by that time most of the coolies had deserted their employers and were roving about in a state of penury and disease. About 250 died in hospital in eight months; many more succumbed unaided

before the Sugar and Coffee Committee; but the latter took command only after her last trip to the West Indies. His predecessor had died.

[1] See p. 127.

[2] Letter quoted in Hansard (1848), xcvi. 92.

[3] Grey ought to have been a lenient critic of harshness. See p. 4.

to their sufferings; and almost every week bodies were being found in the cane-fields and woods.[1]

In Jamaica the coolie speculation had succeeded little better; and its failure was attributed to the poor quality of the immigrants, unusually wet seasons, bad management and the lack of competent interpreters. Under the original contract rations could not be withheld on account of idleness, and the coolies were always pretending to be ill. This was altered, and the planters were blamed because it could not be explained that the Government was responsible. Lord Howard de Walden found an interpreter who had failed to make himself understood pacing up and down "in great distress." The Bengal coolies were at least superior to those who had been shipped at Madras. A planter said that he never saw one of the latter "who was not either a beggar or a vagrant of some kind or in the Penitentiary"; and he tells us of some who sought to commend themselves to their employers by "walking on their hands and tumbling about in the courtyard, being jugglers and persons of that kind by profession."[2] After the Sugar Act had been passed, the Assembly decided that it could no longer afford to bring labourers from India, and even desired to be relieved of those who had been ordered, and most of whom had either arrived or were on their way. No such revulsion of feeling had taken place in Guiana or even in Trinidad, both of which gave fresh orders for 1847. The requisite amount of shipping was chartered by the Emigration Commissioners on the usual security of loan ordinances; but these colonial edicts, which had hitherto been accepted in the money market, were now worthless;

[1] P.P., 1847–48, vol. xlvi.; Sugar and Coffee Committee, Seventh Report, Appendix No. 2. Indian immigration continued in Trinidad almost to the outbreak of the Great War, but seems never to have achieved more than "the mere increase of a roving population of time-expired immigrants cast annually adrift to make way for fresh hordes of newcomers."—Sir Norman Lamont, *Problems of the Antilles*, 1912, pp. 79–80.

[2] Sugar and Coffee Committee, Qs. 4563, 6573, 12936.

and this brings us to the operation of the Sugar Act and to the commercial crisis which it intensified. Most of the sugar estates in the West Indies were financed from Mincing Lane—that is, they were dependent on capital advanced by the merchants on the security of their crops;[1] and nothing could have been more unfortunate for the planters than that their exposure to foreign competition should so soon have been followed by "the general prostration of commercial credit."

The germs of what Disraeli called "the monetary malady of 1847" were lurking in the body politic at the time of the Sugar Act, though they did not come to maturity till the following spring; and the disease had originated in speculation in corn and the extension of railways. The Irish potato famine of 1845, which had precipitated the repeal of the corn laws, was followed by a similar and much worse calamity in 1846. In Britain the potato crop also failed, and there was a bad harvest. Great efforts were made to supply the deficiency. Swelled by huge purchases of food, imports soon far exceeded exports; and the amount of gold that left the country about the end of 1846 and the beginning of 1847 was estimated at nine millions. At the same time about forty millions had been withdrawn from circulation to meet the calls on railway shares; and the combined effect of these causes was intensified because the trade boom which followed the depression of 1839–41 had given rise to excessive speculation. In April, when the Bank of England raised its rate of discount to 5 per cent. and was blamed for not

[1] "The very nature and composition of the body called the West Indian Body in London places it in some degree in a position antagonistic to that of the resident proprietors in the colonies and the absentee proprietors too. The merchant in the city of London is the representative of capital. Capital has neither humanity nor patriotism."—Sugar and Coffee Committee, Q. 12956. This explains why the attitude of the West Indians in Parliament towards the Sugar Act was so different from that of their friends in the colonies. The principal non-resident proprietors were members of the West Indian Body, but they were dominated by the merchants.

having raised it sooner, there was *pressure*, a word we find used in contradistinction to the subsequent panic. The drain of gold ceased or was greatly diminished, and the situation became easier till the corn trade was suddenly upset by the prospect of an early and unexpectedly good crop. The price of wheat fell from 120s. a quarter to 60s. Dealers who had bought largely at the former price were threatened with ruin, and the *Gazette* during September and October chronicled a train of disasters. In London alone at least twenty-four firms failed, including amongst their members the Governor of the Bank and three Directors, one of whom, Sir J. R. Reid, was an ex-Governor. The firm of the latter failed for a million and a half; and its liabilities were exceeded only by those of Sanderson and Co., bill-brokers and "one of the principal channels of discount between the country and London." Meanwhile Liverpool was suffering from a rapid fall in the price of raw cotton;[1] but the real trouble was not the miscarriage of speculations, which in normal times might not have been fatal, but the extreme disproportion of circulating to fixed capital, which culminated in a Bank rate of 9 per cent. and in advances limited successively to 90, 60 and 30 days. Shipping firms, trading to distant countries and on long credits, were particularly affected; and amongst their failures was that of Barton, Irlam and Higginson, the biggest West India house in Liverpool. Another failure at Liverpool, and the most serious of its kind, was that of the Royal Bank.[2]

[1] The manufacturers had been making large purchases of cotton, mainly on account of the greatly increased consumption natural at a time of full employment and good wages, but partly because they knew that Brazil would take more of their wares when she could obtain them *directly* for sugar. They overdid it in the case of Brazil. Cotton goods were sent out in such quantities that they could not be stored at Rio, and the ships themselves had to be used as warehouses.

[2] Evidence of James Morris, Governor of the Bank of England, before the Commons' Committee on the commercial distress; *Annual Register*, 1847; and J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, 1926. It was Morris's predecessor, W. R. Robinson, who had failed.

The Sugar Act had been on the statute book for about ten months before the crisis of 1847 began with the fall in the price of corn. By that time the average price of sugar had fallen from 35*s.* to 29*s.* a cwt. Free traders did not fail to point out that, even under the auspices of both slavery and protection, the price had sometimes been lower—for instance, in the three years 1830–32; but credit was more vital to the planters than profit; and their power to obtain capital was far less crippled by a temporary depression than by distrust arising from a change in the law. For the present, at least, their credit had collapsed. In Trinidad, and no doubt in other colonies, the merchants had been accustomed every autumn to advertise their willingness to make advances to planters who should give them the disposal of their crops. This year not one such advertisement had appeared; but the question arose whether assistance was being withheld because it was thought that sugar could no longer be grown at a profit or because at the moment nobody had money to lend. There was one respect, however, in which the crisis had an effect on the West Indies quite apart from that of the Sugar Act. We have seen that the shortage of labour had impelled the planters to give up growing provisions, that the negroes who did grow them were too often content to provide only for their own subsistence, and that the colonies were becoming more and more dependent for food on the United States. Sugar could be had cheaper at Havana, and the Americans would take none of the native British products, except a small quantity of dye-woods and pimento. Hence they had to be paid in cash; and the utmost embarrassment was caused when the failure of Barton's firm at Liverpool, who were "almost bankers themselves," was followed in December 1847 by that of the West India Bank, which had its head office in Barbados and branches in other colonies. Many of the American ships which used to bring cereals to the West Indies had recently been diverted, in

view of the shortage in Europe, to British and Irish ports. Their visits now became even less frequent owing to the dearth of specie; and Barbados, the chief sufferer by both failures, was on two occasions threatened with famine. The more advanced of the negroes had had deposits in the West India Bank; many more had hoarded its notes; and it was reported from Trinidad that the losses of the latter had prevented them from buying land.

The effect produced by the dearness of provisions and the impoverishment of the negroes was a benefit, and the only one, which the planters derived from the crisis. The high prices caused by their reduced output of sugar after emancipation had enabled them to bid against each other for labour;[1] and the higher the wages, the less work was done, because the ordinary negro with a low standard of comfort could earn all he wanted in fewer hours a day or fewer days a week. It may be said that this state of things arose from the restrictions imposed on immigration by the Home Government; but immigration on a scale sufficient seriously to affect wages was beyond the means of the planters, as could be seen in Guiana, where the immigrants were nearly half of the working population, and yet wages were almost at their highest; and the explanation is that, whilst high wages enabled some negroes to subsist on a minimum of employment, they enabled others to retire more or less from wage labour by the purchase of freeholds.

Wages must necessarily have fallen with the gradual approximation to free trade; but an attempt to reduce them was precipitated by the dearth of money and credit towards the end of 1847. In Barbados, where the crisis was at its worst, the paper currency was worthless and

[1] In St. Kitts the tricks of planters to obtain each other's labourers were said to be the chief topic of conversation. It was justly said, however, that the climate as well as the market favoured the negro. "Where the weeds increase with every shower, the planter must give the price necessary to keep them down."—Hansard (1847–48), xcvi. 213.

coins were practically unobtainable. The negroes were induced to continue working on the promise of future payment at a lower rate; and early in 1848 the average wage was reduced from 10*d.* a day to 7½*d.* Wages in St. Kitts were about a shilling a day. The planters made the most of their new machines,[1] "proclaiming that manual labour might profitably be dispensed with to an almost unlimited extent"; but a reduction of one-third was resisted in November and not accepted for about two months. There was some attempt at incendiarism, and an overseer got a bullet through his hat. The negroes in Antigua had rather overreached themselves by trying to make their own terms for an exceptionally good crop; for the planters got in their canes in good time with the help of a thousand Portuguese from Madeira; and this no doubt strengthened their position when money and food became scarce. In December wages fell from a shilling a day, first to 8*d.*, and then to 6*d.* We have seen that in Jamaica wages had been reduced, three years earlier, from eighteenpence to a shilling; and at this period, though some estates were more fortunate than others, there was no general reduction. In 1844, when the planters in Trinidad tried to follow the example of Jamaica, they had failed to bring down their much higher rate; but in 1847, probably after December 3, when the Port of Spain branch of the West India Bank suspended payment, wages were reduced in two stages from 50 cents, or 2*s.* 1*d.*, to 30 cents.[2]

A good deal less than this would have satisfied the planters in Guiana; but the opposition they encountered was determined, and, for a time at least, successful. In January 1848 the creole negroes in this colony refused to accept the reduction of 25 per cent. which had been

[1] See p. 131.

[2] Sugar and Coffee Committee, evidence of Tollemache, Shand, Pickwood, Greene, Dummett and Marryat; Third Report, Appendix; P.P., 1847–48, vols. xliv. and xlvi.

intimated before the Christmas holidays; and this was the beginning of a strike which continued, so far as they were concerned, for several months. The immigrants, who had nothing but their wages to live on, were willing to work at the lower rate; but in many cases they were intimidated by the creoles; and, unfortunately for the planters, it was a wet season and the young canes were liable to be smothered by weeds. Nor was this the only danger, for incendiarism soon showed itself. Six "megass logies"—the large sheds in which the dried canes were stored as fuel—were burned down in the first four weeks,[1] and one or two dwelling-houses were at least fired. Missionaries and Stipendiary Magistrates exerted themselves with little success to procure the submission of the labourers, between whom and their employers there was "a very bitter feeling" because in too many instances they had worked without being told beforehand that they could not be paid. Indeed the postponement of wages, due to the financial crisis, seems to have been a greater cause of trouble than their reduction. A missionary stated that just before he left the colony on March 12 a manager said to him that he was thankful the labourers had struck, "for we have not the money to pay them." In a letter from one of the largest resident proprietors we find it stated that there was "no money in the place to pay wages," that provisions were becoming scarce, that very few of the merchants had the means of importing food from America, and that, unless the banks resumed business, there was a danger of famine. Another planter wrote that he had got a number of Africans to work at a reduction of 4*d*., and that they continued till his money was exhausted, when, if a neighbouring planter had not sent him a supply of provisions, there would have been a total stoppage. One suspects that the planters may in some measure have been the victims of their own indiscretion; for in one of their petitions to

[1] This was the West Indian equivalent of rick-burning in England.

Parliament, dated January 17, 1848, it is mentioned that the negroes thought it unfair to ask them to compete with slaves; and this idea must have been imbibed from their masters. The strike had no definite conclusion. Apparently it petered out as the reduced wage became less unpopular with the greater certainty of payment; for in a despatch of May 3 Governor Light refers to "the diminution of wages now in progress." [1]

The West Indians looked upon the Sugar Act and its subsequent, but not consequent, disasters as the culmination of the misfortunes they had suffered since emancipation. Stanley said that they were "almost afraid to speak of their losses"—a timidity, however, which they managed to overcome. Those who had lost most were seldom the greatest sufferers, as they had usually more property in this country than in the West Indies—usually, but not always. "Several individuals with whom I have been acquainted formerly," said a West Indian merchant, "and who were extremely well off, are now reduced to the greatest poverty; people who were formerly in society in London, but who have sunk out of it now." [2] Still harder was the lot of the small proprietors who had little capital and less credit, and hardest of all the lot of their dependants at home—"not a few of them helpless widows and orphans, who had no means of support but the produce of estates." [3] Naturally, however, we hear most of those whose losses were on the biggest

[1] Evidence of Loxdale, Higgins, Naghten, Ranken and Barkly before the Sugar and Coffee Committee, 1848, and that of Barrett before the Slave Trade Committee, 1849.

[2] Sugar and Coffee Committee, Q. 6906.

[3] Hansard (1847–48), xcvi. 151, 178. The reports of negroes riding to chapel on their brood-mares and contributing their guinea "mites" to the collection must have caused some bitterness in these desolate homes. A planter who wrote under the name of "Jacob Omnium" said that he and his friends would have been spared their losses if the Sugar Act had been passed in 1833. Their losses would certainly have been less; but what the West Indians would have said if they had had to face the simultaneous abolition of both slavery and protection can be but faintly imagined.

scale—a scale in some cases almost colossal. Lord Howard de Walden stated in 1848 that the average income of his estates in Jamaica for the last eight years was £900, whilst in his father's time it had been £20,000. Even in Antigua, which had more than kept up its output of sugar, the proprietors were not satisfied; and Sir William Codrington, "one of those unfortunate individuals," stated that the income of his estates had fallen from about £30,000 before emancipation to £1300 in 1846. Peel said in Parliament in 1843 that he knew of an estate which had yielded £10,000 a year under slavery, and £6400 a year under the apprenticeship, but on which there had recently been a loss of £3000; and Miles in the following year instanced twelve estates, on nine of which there had been losses of £10,000 to £2000, and on three of £700 to £400.[1] It was no answer to such complaints to say that they had been common enough before emancipation; for sugar-planting had always sustained its reputation as "the West Indian lottery"; and it was said with reason that proprietors in former days who found themselves brought down from £10,000 to £2000 a year would probably complain quite as loudly as those who were now reduced from £2000 to nothing.

One can easily imagine the sort of petitions and protests which were being received at the Colonial Office in the autumn of 1847 when to the pressure of the Sugar Act had been added that of the commercial crisis. Nowhere was the feeling stronger than in Jamaica, and even so experienced an administrator as Sir Charles Grey[2] was betrayed into two indiscretions. On June 5 the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce had drawn up a memorial in which they urged that "every consideration, rational as well as moral and humane," pointed to Africa as the best recruiting ground for labour; and they developed their argument by suggesting that negotiations should be

[1] Hansard (1843), lxx. 267; (1844), lxxv. 912.

[2] He had been Governor of the Leeward Islands from 1841 to 1846.

opened with the chiefs for the purpose of ransoming the slaves who were brought down to the coast. That this proposal was neither moral nor humane must have been obvious to anyone acquainted with the mechanism of the slave trade; but the memorialists were able to cite the authority of the Governor, who, on visiting the part of Jamaica where most of the African immigrants were employed,[1] had made a speech in which he said that he would now have no hesitation in advising the Government to promote by all the means in their power "the free immigration of labourers from the coast of Africa." It was not likely that Ministers would be influenced in their attitude towards the slave trade by anything that could be seen in a Jamaica parish; and Lord Grey disposed of the memorialists by telling them that "the existence of interested motives for producing Africans on the coast has always been a provocation to war and outrage in the interior," and that no benefit to be conferred on the persons released could justify the subjection of others to "those barbarous courses."

The Governor's next blunder was more serious. Addressing the House of Assembly at the opening of the session on October 19, he said, sensibly enough, that prohibitive duties could not be reimposed on foreign sugar unless they were also revived in the case of foreign corn. Before that could happen, "the battle of the corn laws must be fought over again in the United Kingdom and gained by the party who lost it." But he went on to say that he thought they had "a strong claim to relief"—a claim which they themselves had advanced in their memorial to the Queen. The duty on colonial sugar might be reduced without any corresponding reduction of the duty on foreign sugar—a measure which would probably benefit the revenue, would neutralise

[1] Barclay, a prominent proprietor, had gone to Sierra Leone, and was said to have procured about 2000 labourers, most of whom were located in the parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East.

the effects of competition, and would place the planter in as good a position as he had occupied, not in 1846, but in 1844. It might surely have occurred to him—apart from his gratuitous advice to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—that what the free traders objected to was the principle of protection, and that this would not be less obnoxious to them merely because it was to operate on a lower scale of duties; and Lord Grey on December 22 administered to his cousin the inevitable rebuke: "It is unfortunate that you were led to indulge and express, in a manner thus public and formal, expectations of a species of relief being afforded which it will not be possible to grant." [1]

We have seen that the West Indians, with very few exceptions, had voted for the Sugar Act; and, if nothing had occurred to aggravate the results of that measure, it is doubtful whether those who had fought their battle for them in 1846 would have insisted on doing so again. At all events, little enough was said about the matter in 1847. All that the protectionists really cared about was home agriculture; but they had to attack their adversary at his weakest point; and the plight of sugar, when the usual financial accommodation could no longer be obtained, gave them an opportunity too good to be missed. At the opening of the session in February 1848, Lord George Bentinck [2] moved that a Select Committee should be appointed to inquire into the condition and prospects of the sugar colonies, and to consider what measures could be adopted for their relief. He said that

[1] Sugar and Coffee Committee, Third Report, Appendix No. I.; Seventh Report, Appendix No. II. Governor Reid of the Leeward Islands excepted only Barbados when he wrote, February 26, 1848, that "freedom should be nursed by protection for a considerable time to come."

[2] "Il avait une curieuse petite voix qu'il semblait arracher avec peine à ce corps puissant, des gestes bizarres, une incapacité à s'arrêter quand il avait commencé à parler, mais sa volonté était inébranlable. Par un patient travail, il accumulait les faits et les chiffres qu'il citait ensuite avec une violence inouïe."—A. Maurois, *La Vie de Disraëli*, 1927, p. 181.

the planters might perish whilst the Committee was sitting, but it was useless to ask for an immediate reversal of the present system, as only five members connected with the sugar industry had voted with him when he opposed its introduction in 1846. Most people found it difficult to determine how much of the distress was due to the operation of the Sugar Act and how much was the temporary effect of the commercial crisis; but Bentinck did not even mention the latter. He said that he held in his hand a list of forty-eight great houses in England which had been unable to meet their liabilities, amounting to £6,300,000, and that not one of them would have failed but for the change in the sugar duties.[1] Equally disingenuous was his treatment of the slave trade. When it was a question of admitting slave-grown produce, he lamented that "the desire for cheap sugar has overcome all regard for freedom and abhorrence of slavery"; but he showed himself equally insusceptible to such feelings when, in reference to the slave trade, he maintained that there could be no objection to labourers being obtained from the coast of Africa, "provided they go free on board with the security of being free on their arrival"; for he must have known quite as well as Lord Grey that to create a demand for slaves on the coast, even for the purpose of liberating them, would be to promote in the interior all the horrors of inter-tribal warfare. The most irresponsible part of his speech was its conclusion, in which, with a view to removing all difficulty about access to Africa for labour, he suggested that we should extinguish the Cuban slave trade by seizing the island as security for some 45 millions due to British investors by the Spanish Government—a measure which would have been almost as obnoxious to the United States as to Spain.

[1] We have seen that one cause of the disaster was the abnormal amount of capital withdrawn from circulation; but it would not have suited Lord George to admit this, as he had been an ardent promoter of the "railway mania."

Disraeli's speech was the most rhetorical in the debate, and even more extravagant than that of Bentinck. He declared that the new commercial system had been tried in regard to one great branch of industry and had been found wanting, and that competition had not saved the colonies by calling forth the energy which was to have been its beneficent result—as if the planters could have adapted themselves to the new conditions in eighteen months, during the last six of which they had been paralysed by the breakdown of credit. This statement was the more singular as he taxed his opponents with taking short views of agriculture, which had not yet been ruined, whilst he and his friends had "looked at the result through the vista of years." He also taunted them with their "mean pecuniary considerations," with being insensible to "any consideration which has not its growth in the prosperity of their ledgers." But such language did not accord very well with his own attitude towards the abolition of slavery, which he characterised as "the greatest blunder that was ever committed by the English people"—a blunder, because the work had been entered on "without sufficient knowledge" and prosecuted in violation of national interests, but also because a great party had used this "exciting topic" to inflame popular ignorance and to pave its own way to political power.[1] Nevertheless, it was reserved for the Sugar Act to bring about "the immediate and complete ruin" of the colonies, which, when it was passed, had not, as he ventured to assert, even been in difficulties.

[1] In *Lord George Bentinck: a Political Biography*, 1852, p. 325, Disraeli says, "The history of the abolition of slavery by the English and its consequences would be a narrative of ignorance, injustice, blundering, waste and havoc not easily paralleled in the history of mankind." How ignorant he himself was of the subject may be seen from his reference to a time "when the whole community shrank from the abomination of consuming the slave-grown sugar of our own colonies." Had there ever been such a time, the question of the abolition of slavery would have been solved by the extinction of the slave-owners. Resolutions to abstain from the use of slave-grown sugar were discouraged even by Wilberforce.

In view of the usual practice in such cases, the Government could not refuse the request for a Committee; but they did not think it advisable; and almost all the West Indians who took part in the debate urged their self-elected champion not to press his motion. They thought an inquiry would merely give rise to false hopes and thus impede that settlement of the question which had been their motive for accepting the Sugar Act. Bentinck replied that this, the only reason brought forward against his motion, was one which he could not accept. He again urged the Government to seize Cuba, and suggested that they might also undertake what he called "an easy blockade of the coast of Brazil"—a coast 3577 miles long.[1]

The Committee[2] sat from February 9 to May 29, examined 83 witnesses and put to them 16,833 questions.[3] The negroes who had been so prominent at the inquiry of 1842 were now in the background; and, though much light was thrown incidentally on the working of emancipation, the witnesses, with few exceptions, were planters and merchants. All the principal West Indian colonies were represented as well as Mauritius and India; but the colonies which received most attention were Jamaica and Guiana.

Lord George Bentinck is justly praised by his friend and biographer, Disraeli, for his zeal and ability as chairman; but the task he had to perform was more like the conducting of an orchestra than the management of a committee. Considerably more than three-fourths

[1] Hansard (1848), xcvi. 8–41, 119–138, 163, 166, 167.

[2] Disraeli in his *Life of Bentinck* calls it "a committee of free traders"; but Villiers said in the House that it was "impossible to state anything more distinctly inaccurate than that." Yet Villiers was one of two friends by whose impressions Disraeli professed to be "guided in his narrative." The other was Henry Hope, Under-Secretary for the Colonies under Peel, whom he describes as "a free trader not connected with any section," but who voted in the Committee invariably with Bentinck. The protectionists of all shades seem to have had a majority of one.

[3] The evidence is summarised in *The Sugar Question; being a Digest of the Evidence taken before the Sugar and Coffee Committee by one of the Witnesses*, 1848.

of the witnesses had been selected by himself; and there was scarcely one of the whole number who did not declare, when called upon, that he thought the only alternative was protection or ruin. Some of them did suggest that Barbados might be able to compete with slave labour; but this was not the opinion of the Barbadians themselves, one of whom declared that they had reaped their last crop of sugar and were "fast dying a sort of natural death." It was impossible, however, for Barbados to concur in the other demand put forward by most of the colonies—that of unrestricted access to Africa for labour. We have seen that in 1842 the planter-witnesses had spoken with remarkable appreciation of the negroes, and subsequent misfortunes had not embittered their tone. We do indeed meet with the assertion that the negroes were retrograding rather than advancing in civilisation; but it was generally admitted that they had behaved just as any other people would have done in the same circumstances; and even the delegate of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce had nothing worse to say of them than this, that they were the most thoughtless race of people in the world—"they will oblige you in anything they can, except in the matter of working."

Much of the evidence collected by the Committee has been worked up in the narrative; and there are only two cases in which it seems worth while to summarise the statements of a particular witness. One of these is that of Henry Barkly, a member of the House and a proprietor in Guiana, who showed himself exceptionally moderate, judicious and well-informed. Barkly agreed with all the other colonial witnesses in thinking it quite impossible that the cultivation of sugar should continue without a differential duty, and that this duty should be 10s. a cwt.; but he disputed their contention that it should be imposed for ten years. He believed that protection assured for so considerable a period would have the same immediate effect as if it were permanent;

that immigration would be resorted to, not to reduce wages by increasing competition for employment, but to extend cultivation; that the planters would resume their old practice of bidding against each other for labour; and that, just as after emancipation, when nominal became actual protection, so now the whole advantage of a rise in prices would be transferred from the planter to the negro. His proposal was that the 10s. duty should be imposed for only two years, and that the present descending scale of protection should then be resumed. He considered that, if this plan were adopted, no man would put in fresh canes because they would not be available as sugar within the two years, and that the whole effect of immigration would probably be directed to lowering wages and thus reducing the cost of production. It was possible that even this scheme might defeat its object, but it was a choice of evils.

The Abolitionists used to ask before 1834 how the slaves could be well treated except under the eye of their owner, and they were asking now, as they had also asked then, how sugar-planting could be expected to pay when burdened with the lack of personal supervision and the expense of agency. The answer was in both cases the same—that the presence of the owner, desirable as it was, did not compensate for the want of capital. The resident proprietor, who was usually poor, could not develop his estate as in former days he could not avoid over-working his slaves; and Barkly put the matter in a nutshell when he said that, if proprietors of practical experience could be found, they would not have capital, or, if they had, they would stay at home. The witnesses were practically unanimous in asserting that, with few exceptions, it was only the non-residents who could afford to make improvements.[1]

Barkly had much of interest to say on the condition

[1] It was said that in Guiana 98 estates were mortgaged by reside and only 16 by non-residents. Most of the so-called resident however, people who had purchased estates on speculation.

of the negroes. He thought they were rather falling off in industry, and that this was due in some measure to their rise in intelligence. In the early days of emancipation they had had a passion for luxuries, and indulged it in ways which were often ludicrous. "I have seen a boy cleaning my horse with a musical snuff-box playing in his pocket, which he had purchased by spending the wages of a week or ten days." So, too, a negress going to a wedding party had been accidentally drowned, and it was stated at the inquest that her dress was worth £50. Now they had become more alive to the value of money; extravagance had become the exception; and, creditable as this was to the negroes, it tended, with the growth of freeholds—also the result of economy—to make them less desirous of working for wages. Nevertheless, the increase of prosperity amongst them in Guiana was characterised by Barkly as amazing. When he arrived on the visit from which he had just returned, Governor Light "begged I would not hastily conclude that the colony was ruined. I assured him I never saw a country which, to a man landing there, presented such an astonishing appearance of prosperity; nothing like poverty was to be seen. But all we complain of is that that rests on a rotten foundation." What he meant was that the labourers were receiving higher wages than the planter could afford to pay, and that the money, not being made out of production, could be derived only "by a sort of process of exhaustion" from the non-residents and merchants.

The second of our two witnesses is Thomas Dickon, a Lincolnshire farmer. A company had been formed in Liverpool, called the Land Company, to acquire and develop estates in Jamaica, and Dickon was appointed manager on the understanding that he was to have the superintendence of some twenty estates and a salary of £1000.[1]

[1] It was no doubt this undertaking that Brougham referred to when that "a great company" was to be established in the centre ...a.—Hansard (1846), lxxxviii. 531.

He went out in 1845 and again in 1846. The scheme had probably originated with William Smith, one of the directors and a native of Jamaica. One property—a sugar estate—had been purchased and another rented, when Smith arrived and put a stop to further acquisitions. Borthwick, one of the largest resident proprietors, who gave evidence later on behalf of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, said that the company had been formed to prove that sugar-growing could be made to pay without protection, that Smith had great energy and the command of "almost unbounded capital," but had now admitted his failure by reinstating as his agents the "old-time planters." Dickon's account of the matter was that the company had no capital to speak of, though nominally it professed to have as much as £20,000, and that the implements taken out were useless because he could not buy enough cattle to utilise them. More cattle would have meant fewer labourers, but the former were about as expensive to buy as were the latter to hire.

It may be thought that a man who had succeeded as a farmer in England was not necessarily competent to grow sugar in Jamaica; but the experiment has this advantage for us, that it confirms through a rival of the planters all that they had said in regard to the scarcity and discontinuity of labour. Dickon found that the negroes worked about seven hours a day, sometimes for five or even six days a week, but on the average for not more than three or four. In general, they were freeholders, and could not easily be induced to work longer or more regularly because they supplied "the greengrocery of the provision market." He suggested—and others had given the same advice—that the planters should grow provisions, which, he thought, would pay them directly as well as by making the negroes more dependent on wages; but he had to admit that for such a purpose it would be difficult to obtain labour. A more useful suggestion was that capital might be diverted from sugar

to the breeding of stock in order to reduce the price of cattle.

The Committee met for deliberation on May 22, when a report and resolutions were submitted by the chairman as well as—from the free trade standpoint—by Moffat, and resolutions by Wilson, Goulburn, and Sir E. Buxton.[1] These are said in the minutes to have been read a first time, but they must have been taken as read, at least in the case of the chairman, whose report was a political pamphlet of 198 folio pages, and whose resolutions—several of them supported by statistics—numbered no fewer than 234. The most important of these was the 124th, which recommended that the present duty on foreign sugar should be maintained at 20*s*., but that the duty on colonial sugar should be reduced from 14*s*. to 10*s*. All the documents, on the motion that they be read a second time, were rejected, except Goulburn's resolutions, which were the only ground of approximation between the protectionists and the free traders because, whilst they affirmed the necessity for some temporary protection, they left its degree and duration to be determined by the Government. They were then discussed *seriatim*; some were amended, some were replaced by others, either new or taken from the rival drafts; and on May 29 the result of this process was adopted as the Report of the Committee.

The ten resolutions which constituted the Report[2] may be thus summarised: that emancipation, having been carried out without the provision needed in many of the colonies for an adequate supply of labour, had given rise in these cases to very high wages; that the late fall in the price of sugar had brought about a considerable reduction in wages, except in Guiana and perhaps also in Jamaica; that, as the British possessions had capacities

[1] Moffat had taken the place of Ewart, who resigned on February 15. Wilson was the editor of the *Economist*, which he had founded in 1843.

[2] There were eight reports, but all except the last consisted only of evidence.

for the production of sugar far beyond the probable consumption of the United Kingdom, no permanent protection in the home market could secure their prosperity if they should prove unable to compete with foreign producers; that the Sugar Act of 1846, by exposing them prematurely to this competition, had precipitated their ruin; that the falling off in production resulting from the abandonment of estates must extend the cultivation of sugar in slave countries and give renewed energy to the slave trade; that there was the most urgent necessity for immediate relief; and that, as a considerable time must elapse before measures for securing an ample supply of labour could be carried into effect, a differential duty of 10*s*. in favour of British sugar should be imposed for six years. The last of these resolutions was proposed by Sir Thomas Birch, a Ministerialist and a free trader, but also as member for Liverpool in close contact with the West Indies. Goulburn could not depart from his principle that the choice of remedies should be left to the Government; Cardwell, the other follower of Peel, agreed with him; and, as they both abstained from voting, there were six for and six against the resolution, which was carried by the chairman's casting vote. An "hour of rapture" was now enjoyed by the latter. Bentinck was a keen sportsman, but we are told that he was more delighted than he would have been had he not sold the horse which had just won the Derby. "We have saved the colonies—saved the colonies. I knew it must be so. It is the knell of free trade." [1]

The carrying of this resolution at the last moment on the motion of one of his own supporters seems to have upset the equanimity of the Prime Minister. When the Report was presented on May 29, the day of its adoption, he said in answer to a question that he understood it recommended the continuance of differential duties for a longer period than that fixed by the Act, but he could

[1] Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, pp. 539, 540.

state at once that it was not intended either to increase or to prolong the duties. After the Whitsuntide recess, however, he was found to be in a more conciliatory mood. On Friday, June 16, he said that he would make a statement on the subject, and proposed that its discussion should be deferred till the following Monday. At present the colonists had a preference of 6*s.*—the difference between 20*s.* and 14*s.*; but in a few weeks it would be only 4*s.* 6*d.*, and the duties on all sugars would be equalised at 14*s.* in July 1851. Russell proposed that the duty on British sugar should be reduced for the year beginning July 5 to 13*s.*, and by similar annual reductions to 10*s.* in July 1852. The duty on foreign sugar would be gradually reduced till in July 1854 it was 12*s.*, and, after that, equalisation would be reached at 10*s.* This would give the colonists a preference of 7*s.* instead of 4*s.* 6*d.*, three years more of dwindling protection, and permanently the benefit of a lower tax. It had, however, been found that foreigners, having to contend with a differential duty in our market, sent here their best sugars—sugars which, though they ranked as muscovado, were to some extent refined; and foreign sugars of this quality were to be taxed up to 1854 on a somewhat higher scale. Anything like the purchase of negroes from slave traders was dismissed as out of the question; but the Government would advance £500,000 to the colonies for immigration from British possessions in Africa or would guarantee their own loans.[1] These were valuable concessions, and it is not easy to see how Ministers could have done more; for permanent protection had been negatived without a division by the Committee; and the duties could hardly have been fixed for more than a year without exposing the planters to the process from which they had already suffered so much—that of competition for labour, a rise in wages, and the transference of profits from them to the negroes. It was true, as Goulburn pointed out later, that

[1] Hansard (1847–48), xcix. 730–740, 828.

the colonists would have the disadvantage of a falling market, whilst their rivals would be stimulated by a rising market; but this was inevitable if there was to be anything less than a precipitous descent to free trade.

Russell had probably rather hoped than expected that the opposition would repress what they thought of his proposals from Friday to Monday. It seems that a packet for the West Indies was to sail on the following day, and they were determined that the report of his speech should not go out without suitable comments. The first criticism came from Sir Robert Inglis, who said that "the question was whether there were not more important things in heaven and earth than cheap sugar."[1] Barkly condemned the concessions as "utterly insufficient"; and Baillie said that the planters would prefer immediate ruin to "being exterminated by a slow and tedious but no less sure and certain process." One can readily excuse some intemperance of language on the part of men whose income was in many cases "reduced to fewer hundreds per annum than it once was thousands"; but the most embittered speakers were, as usual, those detached but not disinterested friends of the West Indies —Bentinck and Disraeli. The latter, in reviewing the history of emancipation, said that, when slavery was abolished, there was "a specific contract" that the planters should retain their monopoly of the home market. The same assertion had been made by Stanley when the Sugar Bill was passing through the Lords in 1846, and had then been characterised by Lord Monteagle as the most extraordinary delusion "which he had ever heard of as existing in the mind of any man." If indeed a case can be imagined in which one Parliament was entitled to bind its successors, it could hardly be that of the sugar

[1] Inglis was a determined enemy of the slave trade, but not of slavery, which he conceived to be "sanctioned in the sacred writings."—Hansard (1848), xcix. 1341. His attitude had this merit, that it placed him at the opposite pole from those who preferred cheap propaganda against slavery to costly operations against the slave trade.

duties which down to 1846 were voted only from year to year.[1]

Bentinck was sanguine enough to predict that the Government solution of the question was not the one which would be adopted by the House; but a large part of his speech was occupied with a rancorous attack on Hawes, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies and one of the witnesses examined by the Committee. It was unfortunately the case that, whilst the Committee had been furnished by the Colonial Office with 1603 folio pages of despatches, there were three despatches which had been omitted; and one of these was a despatch from the Governor of Jamaica in which he advocated his proposal[2] that the duty on British sugar should be lowered to 10*s*., whilst that on foreign sugar should be left at 20*s*. The explanation was this. The despatch in question had been received on March 27. On that day it was minuted for transmission to the Committee by two officials as well as by Hawes, and on the 30th the minute was endorsed by Lord Grey; but a Mr. Cox had failed in his duty to see that the order was carried out. The charge at first was that Hawes had tried to conceal from the Committee the existence of the despatch; then it took the extraordinary form that Grey and his three subordinates had "concocted" the minute long after its alleged date in order to protect their reputation; and finally it became "a charge against the Administration of systematic suppression of information which told against the policy they upheld." The Prime Minister really disposed of the matter when he said that "these extremely dishonourable tricks" were not the faults of those in high office in this country; but Bentinck and Disraeli in the Commons, and Stanley in the Lords, persisted in revising and pressing their indictment till they had spoken, or caused to be spoken, 130 columns

[1] Hansard (1846), lxxxviii. 495, 524; (1847–48), xcix. 741, 743, 750, 778, 782.

[2] See p. 173.

of Hansard. It is not likely that any of the six members of the Committee who voted against the resolution in favour of protection would have voted for it if they had known that Sir Charles Grey had written to the Colonial Office in support of a differential duty, and still less likely that the Government, if they had done so, would have accepted the resolution; and the whole commotion is reduced to an absurdity when we find that the Governor's speech of October 19, 1847, to the Jamaica Assembly, in which he advocated the duty, had been published in the London newspapers, and that the Committee actually had amongst their documents a copy of the speech.[1]

Sir John Pakington, a member of the Committee, had given notice of an amendment to uphold its Report. He knew, however, that of those who were dissatisfied with Russell's proposals very few were agreed as to this or any other substitute; and when the House met on Monday he said that he had altered the form of his resolution in order to make it a direct censure on the Government. He was seconded by Sir Edward Buxton, a Ministerialist but also an Abolitionist of the old school, who would have had the Committee declare, not for protection against slave-grown sugar, but for its complete exclusion. Pakington's change of tactics had this result, that it removed all bounds to the scope of the discussion; and, as many of the speakers thought it necessary to go back to the beginning of emancipation, the debate went on for five nights. Bernal, a Jamaica proprietor, said on the fourth night that he was "almost sick of thinking upon the subject, much more of expressing any opinion upon it"; [2] and perhaps the only exception to the prevalence of dullness and repetition was Peel, who had not spoken on the question since 1846. He said that, if the Government proposals were rejected,

[1] It will be found in the Third Report, Appendix No. I, presented to the House on March 14.

[2] Bernal was a prominent Whig, for many years Chairman of Committees, and a collector of art treasures, which were sold, after his death in 1854, for nearly £71,000.

the West Indian colonists would no doubt rejoice, but that the least they would expect would be the amount of protection recommended by the Committee; that this 10s. preference would do them no good, or rather would add to their difficulties by raising wages, till they had increased their supply of labour, but that it would operate immediately as a stimulus in Mauritius and India, whose competition would be just as injurious to the West Indies as that of foreign producers; and that the latter would meanwhile be preparing for the open market, which presumably was to be allowed to them in six years. He also said that, though the planters might now be precluded from making improvements by the want of capital and credit, they had failed to take advantage of their opportunities before 1846—for example, the making of a "cut" or drain which at a cost of only £4000 would have brought into cultivation some very fine land in Jamaica between Kingston and Spanish Town; and that the reason for this lack of enterprise was their reliance on protection.[1]

Pakington's amendment was defeated by only fifteen votes; but the Government majorities soon mounted up when the House in Committee had to deal, not with general principles, but with their practical application. There was little abatement, however, in the flood of oratory. Bentinck undertook to prove that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Goulburn, Gladstone and Cardwell were all equally ignorant of the sugar question, and did so for three and a half hours in a speech which Russell described as entirely irrelevant, "except for a very few words at the beginning and perhaps at the end." The Ministerial resolutions were at last digested into a Bill, which passed the Commons on August 22 and provoked but little discussion in the Lords.[2]

[1] Hansard (1847–48), xcix. 825, 1225, 1361–1374.

[2] Earlier in the session the Commons had voted an advance of £200,000 to cover the loans for immigration which Guiana and Trinidad had been unable to raise.—Hansard (1847–48), xcviii. 538.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRISIS IN THE COLONIES

Now that the Government had said its last word on the sugar duties, it might have been supposed that those who longed for a settlement would at last obtain their desire; but this would not have suited the protectionists, who hoped to avenge, if not to retrieve, their defeat by fighting a rearguard action in Guiana and Jamaica. That the interests of emancipation would suffer in consequence was not a consideration to which they attached importance.

We have seen that Guiana was one of three colonies belonging to the West Indian group in which the Crown could legislate by Orders in Council; but there was a popular element in its original Dutch constitution which had subsequently been enlarged. The Court of Policy in which the Governor presided and had a double vote—that is, an ordinary vote and, if necessary, a casting vote—was composed of five official and five elective or "colonial" members. It made ordinances which, if not disallowed, had the force of law; but since 1812, though it still prepared the estimates, it could raise and appropriate the revenue only when sitting as the Combined Court, that is, with the addition of six Financial Representatives.[1] In a body thus composed of five official and eleven unofficial members, the latter were of course dominant; and the only check on their power was that

[1] The change was made under an interim governor and without the knowledge of the Colonial Office, which did not hear of it till several years later.

the Governor had the right as chairman to refuse to put any question of which he disapproved, and also to order a fresh election of "Financials."[1] This system worked so badly that the official and unofficial elements were "almost always in a state of collision." The supplies had often been refused—for example in 1839, 1840 and 1843; and on the second of these occasions the Governor of Trinidad had been called in to negotiate a settlement. Four or five factious individuals, whose leader was Rose, a banker in Georgetown, dominated the colony—"the old party opposed to every governor for the last 25 years," or, in other words, from 1823, the date of Canning's resolutions for the amelioration of slavery.

Governor Light was "so used to scenes in the Court of Policy," and he and Rose had so seldom "nothing now to quarrel about," that he must have been prepared for something more than usually unpleasant when the planters, towards the end of 1847, were cut off from the loan market. If so, he was not disappointed. The Court met on December 30. Three Colonials were present, but only two officials, and resolutions were carried that the exports, owing to the admission of slave sugar, had "diminished to an alarming extent"; that economy was imperative; and that, as a first step in this direction, the Civil List should be reduced by at least 25 per cent. It was Rose who in 1840 had increased the Civil List by "loading" it with the clergy, contrary to the wishes of the Governor, and he was now trying to embarrass the latter by cutting down both salaries and stipends. That his motive was entirely political is shown by the fact that

[1] The colonial members of the Court of Policy were chosen by the College of Keizers or Electors, which submitted two candidates for each vacancy—and one seat was vacated each year—to the choice of the Governor and the Court. The Electors were chosen for life or during residence in the colony by persons who had a taxed income of at least £140, and absentee proprietors could vote by proxy. The Financial Representatives were chosen by the same body as the Electors, but only for two years.—Select Committee on Ceylon and Guiana, 1849; First Report.

the Civil List constituted only six-sevenths of the revenue and was the only part of it not open to reduction. It was said later in Parliament that Guiana was more heavily taxed than Britain, the rate being 2*s.* 6*d.* a head; but this had no bearing on the reduced value of the exports. The 261 planters paid the only direct tax, but it had just been reduced from 3 to 1 per cent. The rest of the revenue, derived as it was from duties on articles of general consumption, was increasing, and the planters would benefit from its diminution, if this should result from the efforts now being made to reduce wages. It was said that the Civil List granted in 1841 would not have been renewed for seven years in 1844 if it could have been foreseen that "the ancient landmarks of Imperial commercial policy were so soon to be swept away." Disraeli might have written this, and perhaps he had, as it was known, and was soon to be avowed, that the protectionists in Guiana were acting in concert with their friends in London.[1]

The resolutions were sent to Lord Grey, and on February 29, 1848, the Governor consented that the estimates for the current year should be postponed to May 15. But on March 16 the English newspapers arrived with reports of the debate on Lord George Bentinck's motion for a Select Committee; and the planters were irritated and discouraged by the resolute tone of Ministers on the question of the Sugar Act. Meanwhile Grey had intimated his disapproval of the resolutions as not warranted by the financial condition of the colony and unjust to those whose salaries had been guaranteed. This despatch intensified the resentment of the Colonials when it was submitted to the Court of Policy on March 21; and Rose then threw off the mask of economy, declaring that he would not deal with the estimates or vote a shilling of supply "until the Government act fairly towards us by giving us that protection which is our right." He said

[1] The Governor had seen their letters, which were "shown all about the town."

also that at the next meeting he would move certain resolutions, which were the same as those of December 30, except that, in place of the last, referring to the Civil List, it was declared that in the present state of the colony the Court would not proceed to consider the estimates or to take any part in voting the supplies, that Ministers had placed the colony "in its present perilous position," and on them "must the responsibility rest."

As the Governor had consented to postpone the estimates on the assumption that they would be considered, he naturally now regarded himself as released from his promise, and resolved, in words which he used later, "to take time by the forelock and bring the evil to its crisis." He had another reason for this decision, as he had intimated his resignation and rather doubted the firmness of the Government Secretary, Walker, who was to act as Lieutenant-Governor till his successor arrived. At a meeting of the Court of Policy on April 11 he gave as his reason for proceeding with the estimates "the unwise intentions of the unofficial members happily prematurely made known"; and the Financial Representatives were summoned to make up the Combined Court on the 20th. The Combined Court met, but adjourned in order to allow time for the preparation of a reply to the Governor's speech. This was read on the 26th, and turned out to be a proposal that the estimates should not be considered till it was known what measures of relief were recommended by the Parliamentary Committee, and that the existing tax ordinance, which expired on June 30, should be extended for six weeks. The Governor, finding that there was no immediate prospect of obtaining the supplies, demanded an extension of three months. This was refused, and a settlement was as far off as ever when he embarked for Europe on May 19.[1]

[1] Evidence of Sir Henry Light before the Select Committee on Ceylon and Guiana, 1849, and P.P., 1847–48, vol. xlvi. Light had held his post for almost ten years, having assumed office a month before complete emancipation, and was created K.C.B.

On June 30 Lieutenant-Governor Walker succeeded in carrying the three months' extension with the help of four of Rose's friends; but soon afterwards a communication was received from Lord Grey in which he said that, if no tax ordinance had yet been passed, none should be accepted for less than the customary financial year. This despatch, which would make it impossible to play fast and loose with the taxes after September 30, was laid before the Combined Court on July 20. It was then proposed to reduce the Governor's salary from £5,000 to £3,500. Walker disallowed the motion, but permitted the substitution of another, stating, however, that he would not proceed with the estimates if it were adopted —a motion that the Civil List should be reduced, not by a fourth, as originally proposed, but by a third. This was carried by nine to five votes, and the Lieutenant-Governor adjourned the Court *sine die*.

Governor Light, but for his desire not to leave the Civil List controversy unsettled, would no doubt have gone home at the beginning of 1848; for Sir William Colebrooke on the preceding November 27 had been gazetted as his successor. Colebrooke was a tried administrator, having been Governor of New Brunswick as well as of the Bahamas and the Leeward Islands; but Light's failure to overcome the obstinacy of the Combined Court may have suggested that no one without his local experience was likely to succeed better. At all events, in August 1848 Colebrooke was sent to Barbados, and no provision was made for relieving Lieutenant-Governor Walker till in November Barkly was offered and accepted the governorship, though he was not appointed till January 9, 1849. Barkly had been "for free trade in sugar as I was for free trade in corn"; but he had rather compromised his consistency, first by advocating the 10*s*. duty for no more than two years, and then by warmly attacking the Government because they had not adopted the same duty as recommended by the

Committee for six years. Lord John Russell had referred to him as "one great authority on the subject," from whom he had not expected "such unmeasured attack and reproach." [1]

The last few weeks of Light's administration had been made more difficult by the appointment of Bentinck's Committee to inquire into the consequences of the Sugar Act; and Barkly entered on his duties under a similar disadvantage, inasmuch as Baillie had obtained a Committee to investigate the grievances complained of in Ceylon and Guiana, the object in the latter case being to justify the refusal of supplies. Rose and his friends as soon as they heard of it exerted themselves "to make things wear the most desperate aspect possible." Bentinck had been found dead—the victim of overwork—on September 21, 1848. Nobody questioned the time and labour he had expended in acquiring a knowledge of the West Indian question; but one can hardly imagine greater ignorance and perversion of the facts than were displayed by Baillie when he moved for his Committee on February 20, 1849. It was no doubt ignorance that caused him to represent the Court of Policy as consisting of eight and not ten members, and the Stipendiary Magistrates as having £1,200 a year when most of them had only £700 and some of them much less; [2] but he must have known that, if Guiana was more heavily taxed than this country, the burden fell mainly on the negroes, who were supposed to be only too well off; and, if he really believed that "a bread tax was the very largest source of income," he need not have taunted Lord Grey with condemning corn laws at home and upholding them in the colonies. The tax on bread-stuffs yielded less than £10,000; it was not protective, as the kinds of food imported were not grown in the colony; and bread was

[1] Hansard (1846), xxxviii. 138; (1847–48), xcix. 743, 787.

[2] There were fifteen Stipendiary Magistrates with £450 from the Home Government, but ten of them had £250 more from the colony.

a luxury to the negroes, whose staple food was plantains and other vegetables.[1]

It must have been assumed that the motive of the protectionists in inciting their allies in Guiana, first to demand a reduction of the Civil List and then to refuse the supplies, was their expectation that by this means they would or might upset the Whig Government by compelling it to supersede a more or less popular constitution, as had happened in the case of Jamaica in 1839; and if there was any doubt on the subject it was dispelled by the draft report submitted by Baillie, the proposer and consequently the chairman of the Committee, which concluded with the opinion that, if the Combined Court should persist in refusing to discharge its fiscal duties, the only mode in which taxes could lawfully be imposed in Guiana was "the interposition of the Imperial Parliament." The Committee, however, rejected this report and adopted that of Peel, which declared that the Crown was entitled to insist upon an adherence to the Civil List of 1844 for the full period of its duration, and that no attempt to set aside this arrangement by direct or indirect means could be justified. Disraeli proposed an amendment—that the change in the sugar duties and the consequent depression should have induced Ministers "not to stand too strictly on the legal rights of the Crown"; but it was lost by eight votes to four. It will be seen that the attitude of Peel on this occasion was the reverse of that which he had assumed in 1839.

On July 24 a motion was brought forward by Hume and seconded by Baillie, in which they appealed to the House against the Report of the Committee; but the arguments they adduced were of course just those which the Committee had rejected; and the whole matter was summed up by Hawes when he said: "The people of

[1] Hansard (1849), cii. 941, 956–958. Baillie's inaccuracies were exposed by Barkly in a despatch of April 18, 1849.

British Guiana had themselves a control over six-sevenths of their whole revenue. The revenue of the colony amounted in round numbers to £227,000, and the colonists would have done better in looking after the expenditure which was under their own control than in getting up a mischievous, reckless and injurious quarrel for the purpose of embarrassing the Government in revenge of the Act of 1846."[1]

When Barkly assumed office as Governor of British Guiana in February 1849, the executive and the legislature were still at variance, and the annual customs duties had not been levied for nearly five months; but on April 30 he was able to inform Lord Grey that, whereas at the time of his arrival all the three newspapers were afraid to say a word against the stoppage of supplies, now two of them openly condemned it; and the dispute, but for its repercussion in Parliament, would probably by this time have been settled. The Combined Court had resolved to enter on the estimates without following up its vote of July 20, 1848, for a reduction of the Civil List; but the four non-official members who had deserted Rose on this occasion rejoined him when it became known that the House of Commons had appointed a Committee to inquire into the grievances of the colony. A frivolous pretext was put forward to suspend the consideration of the estimates. When the Governor refused to put the question, his right of veto was challenged; and the deadlock continued, in spite of general impatience and disgust, till the beginning of July, when the hopes raised by the appointment of Baillie's Committee were extinguished by its Report. On July 13 the discussion of the estimates was resumed where it had been interrupted in April of the previous year; and on August 16 the tax ordinance of 1847, which had been extended for three months beyond its expiry on June 30, 1848, was revived; and its renewal, though only for a limited period, was

[1] Hansard (1849), xcvii. 946.

confirmed by Lord Grey. Of the eleven non-official members, Rose and five others resigned their seats; and this last obstructive effort was so far successful that the Combined Court was not fully constituted for the despatch of business till December 18. Meanwhile the point which served as a pretext for the whole dispute had been yielded on October 5, when it was resolved unanimously that the Civil List should be left intact.[1]

It had been possible for Barkly and his temporary predecessor to make up in some measure for the suspension of all the ordinary taxes for nearly eleven months; but the deficit incurred was about £40,000, and would have been much more if the expenditure outside the Civil List, which admitted of enormous reductions, had not been drastically curtailed.[2] The police establishment, for example, was reduced from 136,000 dollars to 83,000, and the grant of 100,000 dollars for immigration was practically withdrawn.

The pecuniary losses entailed by this controversy were not, however, its worst feature. We have seen that the merely political demand for a reduced Civil List was accompanied by a genuine demand for a reduction of wages;[3] and it was unfortunate that two movements, neither of them conducive to social tranquillity, should have been launched at the same time. The labourers showed the same pertinacity in resisting their employers as did the politicians in trying to coerce the Government, but were more unscrupulous in their methods. The incendiarism which showed itself in the early days of the

[1] This is a very condensed account of the controversy, the details of which are too unimportant and too technical to be of general interest. See P.P., 1847–48, vol. xlvi.; 1849, vols. xi. and xxxvii.; 1850, vol. xxxix.; and Earl Grey, *The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration*, 1853, i. 143–153.

[2] One has to remember that reduced estimates for 1849 were being prepared by the Court of Policy, whilst the same body, in its enlarged capacity as the Combined Court, was refusing to pass the estimates for 1848.

[3] See p. 170.

strike seems to have been kept tolerably well in check; but, as the savings of the negroes became exhausted, they resorted more and more to theft and violence—plunder of cane-fields and provision-grounds, killing of cattle, highway robbery, housebreaking, and even murder. The contest is said to have been decided by the arrival of 500 immigrants, and in May 1848, as we have seen, the strikers were forced "to give in, to a certain extent"; but there was a recrudescence of crime in the autumn, when twice the usual number of felonies were tried at the November sessions; and this was attributed to the expiry of the taxes on September 30. Goods were rushed in "to an enormous extent" in the expectation that the duties would soon be re-imposed; and, though the importers contrived, on the whole, to keep up prices, there was a lamentable exception in the case of foreign spirits, with which the colony was "almost literally flooded." Moreover, it had been part of the propaganda against the Government to depict in lurid colours what would happen when the revenue was cut off—courts closed, the police disbanded and the gaols thrown open. Fear as well as crime was promoted by such predictions; and so great was the sense of insecurity amongst the negro proprietors that they almost ceased to grow plantains on their freeholds.

The situation had not much improved when it was reviewed up to the end of 1848 by Walker—who had resumed his duties as Secretary—in the following March. The Governor, in transmitting this report to Lord Grey, said that desolate plantations, broken down bridges and impassable roads struck him "with far less apprehension for the future destiny of British Guiana" than the apparent retrogression of the negroes. "Who that recollects the bright dawn of freedom in this colony would expect to find among the religious, law-respecting people who then threw off the yoke of bondage without a single offence against society the very perpetrators of these crimes which strike at the root of all property?" In a

subsequent despatch, June 18, Barkly remarked that "crime was nearly twenty times more rife in Guiana, where penury and industry cannot co-exist, than in Great Britain, where the calendar is too often swollen by actual want." Most of the offences were, however, petty thefts. It was suggested that much of the law-breaking might be the work of immigrants, who were often the worst characters in the communities they had left; but more than two-thirds of the prison population were creoles. Perhaps too little allowance was made for the dislocation of industry and finance, and particularly for the fact that wages in many cases were months in arrear. The writer of the report did not forget that the negroes, less than eleven years earlier, had virtually been slaves; but he noted with concern that they still lived under the terror of witchcraft; that marriage, which had so attracted them in the early days of emancipation, was not becoming more general; that fewer of their children were attending school;[1] that their former love of finery and display had not developed into more wholesome tastes; and that, instead of working a little longer or more constantly for lower wages, they were content—if they worked at all—merely to earn less. But what disappointed him most of all was the decline of the numerous village settlements which might have proved "nurseries of labour for the plantations." Many of these consisted of one large estate in which individual rights had never been defined; and the question of ownership had frequently been complicated by sale. The line of the Demerara East Coast Railway passed through several such villages, and the Company, though prepared to pay for the land it appropriated, was for this reason unable to do so; and the dispossessed peasantry complained, naturally enough, that they had been deprived of their holdings without compensation.

[1] In the schools which received Government grants the number of children decreased from 8945 in June 1847 to 5807 in December 1848.

One of the measures taken by Barkly to restore order was the organisation of Rural Constables drawn from the estates to make up for a diminished police force; and on June 16, 1849, he was able to inform Lord Grey that the colony had been quieter during the last month than for a long time previously. He also wished to undermine the power of an "irresponsible clique" by extending the franchise; and an ordinance was passed which reconstituted the right of voting for members of the electoral college and Financial Representatives. Many of the peasant proprietors were qualified; but, as the person claiming to be registered had to declare a certain amount of property, they were deterred in most cases by the fear of taxation.[1]

As the Jamaica Assembly had been foremost in every attempt to obstruct and harass the Home Government since the abolition, or rather since the proposed amelioration, of slavery, it was to be expected that they would anticipate the question that was agitated in Guiana from December 30, 1847, to October 5, 1849. And so in fact they did. Just a year before the first of these dates, in the memorial which recalled the glories of the slave trade,[2] they announced their intention to reduce the salaries of public officials; and in September 1847 Sir Charles Grey reported that there were indications of a movement to support the protectionists in Parliament by delaying the annual revenue Bills. This design, if it had been entertained, was given up, apparently because the planters had hopes—which, as we have seen, had been sanctioned by the Governor[3]—of obtaining a reduction of duty on British as opposed to foreign sugar. They were disillusioned early in 1848; and, a few weeks later, encouraged by the appointment of Bentinck's Committee, they bestirred themselves in earnest. The agitation was

[1] Guiana and Ceylon Committee, Appendix to First Report; and P.P., 1849, vol. xxxiv.

[2] See p. 160. [3] See p. 173.

conducted with all the bombastic exuberance characteristic of such movements in Jamaica. Meetings were held to demand a meeting of the Assembly in order " to avert or ward off the baneful effects of Imperial legislation." Inflammatory speeches were followed by the adoption of addresses, some of which were so violent that the Colonial Office did not venture to print them ; on all hands there was " perpetual and virulent abuse of Her Majesty's Government " ; and the climax was reached about the end of June, when it was known that Ministers did not mean to accept the recommendation of the Committee. On July 4 the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce unanimously resolved that they had heard of this decision " with unspeakable regret " ; that it was " the undoubted right of an oppressed and injured people to adopt all constitutional means " for the redress of its grievances ; and that the Assembly should utilise for this purpose " the prerogative of supply."

Some irresponsible journalists in America at this period were expatiating on the distress of the colony and suggesting that it would benefit as much as Cuba from annexation to the United States ; and this way of escape from the difficulties of both emancipation and free trade was mentioned with approval in Jamaica at public meetings and in the press. One speaker was reported as saying that it would be better to be " American gentlemen " than English beggars. There was more in this than mere rhetoric ; for it was officially reported that a feeling was growing among some of the white and coloured classes that emancipation ought to have been more gradual, and that " even now it might not be too late to retrace our steps." And we learn from a subsequent statement of the Governor [1] that they " often and publicly " referred by way of contrast to the age-long extinction of villeinage in England. It would always have been imprudent in the planters to express such views, and

[1] W. J. Gardner, *History of Jamaica*, 1873, p. 433.

it was dangerous at a time when they were attempting to reduce wages and in many cases were unable to pay them.[1] Moreover, the last occasion on which they had talked of substituting the Stars and Stripes for the Union Jack was just before the negro rising of 1832 ; and the negroes had more reason to hate America now than when they were slaves. Early in July it was rumoured that there was likely to be trouble with the labourers during the August holidays. The first result of inquiries was " corroborative of something unsatisfactory and not easily defined " ; but it soon appeared that there was much ill-feeling, though no conspiracy or general combination ; and the Bishop was informed by one of his clergy that " the groundwork of the whole matter is the belief of the peasantry in Hanover and St. James that the United States of America are likely to take possession of this island and to reduce them to slavery." A proclamation to reassure the negroes was issued by the Governor, who also took effective, though unobtrusive, precautions, and there was no disturbance ; but the number of negroes, who used " very violent language," declaring that " the approaching 1st of August would try the comparative strength of the blacks and whites in Jamaica," was found to have been much larger than had been supposed.

In his speech at the opening of the legislature on August 3 the Governor said that, after the petitions for an early session which had reached him from so many quarters, he would not insult his hearers by supposing that they meant to do nothing or, still worse, " to indulge in the sport of entangling or locking the machinery of government at an hour when the freest action and the most decided progress are required." The Assembly did, however, devote themselves entirely to the first of these courses till they were prorogued for five weeks on September 20 ; and that they were not unlikely to adopt

[1] See p. 169.

the second is evident from a despatch of August 19 in which the Governor warned Ministers that they ought to be prepared "against the end of the year" to say how the local government was to be carried on if the supplies for 1849 were refused. Lord Grey replied that this was a responsibility which he and his colleagues could not accept. Recent events had shown "in a striking manner" the necessity to Jamaica of its public establishments, and especially of the police; but the colony had a popular constitution; and, if the Assembly should no longer provide the funds essential to its stability and welfare, they might dismiss from their minds any idea that Parliament would be called upon to come to their aid.

We have seen that it was the case of Guiana, and not that of Jamaica, which the protectionists in the House of Commons proposed for the consideration of a Select Committee. No doubt they were influenced by the fact that matters had come earlier to a crisis in the former colony; but another reason may have been that Jamaica had a constitution which was rather embarrassing to its friends. The initiative in financial legislation did not lie with the executive, as in Guiana and in Britain, but with the Assembly; and even the collection and appropriation of the revenue were managed by the same body, the members of which continued to act during a prorogation as Commissioners of Accounts.[1] "Nobody in particular," wrote Sir Charles Grey, "is charged with the estimates of expenditure and of ways and means, and they are consequently most imperfect and loose; sometimes there are none at all." Some of the public services were provided for by permanent enactments; but, though the salaries were often liberal enough, it depended entirely on the

[1] The Assembly of Barbados also exercised executive functions and was "always in session" at Bridgetown, where it acted as a sort of town council. The system was said to be "not ill adapted" to a small community.—Sir William Colebrooke to Earl Grey, April 27, 1849.

amount absorbed by other Acts, which were passed annually, whether they could be paid.[1] Sir Charles Metcalfe, when asked by the West Indies Committee of 1842 whether this system did not give rise to great abuses, answered, " I am not aware that practically in Jamaica it does so " ; but the present Governor was of a different opinion, declaring that it was noxious enough at all times, but that, when aggravated by other evils, it gave rise to " paroxysms of mischief."

When business was resumed on October 26, the Governor referred to " some unusual and extraordinary opposition " which, he believed, had been recommended—he did not say by whom—in order that a protective duty in favour of colonial produce " should be forced and wrung from the reluctance of the Imperial Legislature." The Assembly replied that they had no intention of adding to the distress of the colony by withholding the supplies for the ensuing year, but that in making the necessary provision it would be their " duty to do so with the strictest attention to the most rigid economy." As they had not departed from their resolution, avowed in December 1846, to reduce the salaries of public officials, this meant that " the sport of entangling or locking the machinery of government " was to be indulged in, unless the staff could be made to work for less pay. Such was the policy of obstruction, if not of sabotage, which had been recommended by the protectionists in London ; but it could not be carried out in the same way in Jamaica as in Guiana. In the latter colony money Bills were introduced by the Governor. In Jamaica they originated, as we have seen, in the Assembly, and were passed or rejected, though they could not be altered, by the Council, which consisted mainly of officials, so that the conflict

[1] The following announcement was made on June 26, 1848 : " The Receiver-General, being without funds to pay the public salaries falling due on 30th instant, will give public notice as soon as he has the means of paying a moiety—he hopes in the course of next month."

would be between the two branches of the legislature. On December 13 the Assembly resolved that they would not renew the current revenue Acts for more than six weeks after the end of the year until a measure of retrenchment—which had not yet taken shape—should have become law; and on February 2, 1849, they sent up a retrenchment Bill [1] to the Council, leaving that body and the Governor just thirteen days to decide between its acceptance and the stoppage of the supplies. The Bill was unanimously rejected; and the Assembly, whilst extending their financial legislation from February 15 to October 31, suspended the payment of salaries and clerical stipends by providing that the Act hitherto appropriated to that purpose should be applied to another object.

This measure—the Import Duties Bill—was also rejected by the Council, and the legislature was prorogued on March 3. It was summoned again in June in order to provide against the expiry of the taxes on October 31; and the Assembly, having refused to do this or any other business, was dissolved. Meanwhile the protectionists in Parliament had deserted or disappointed their friends; for on May 10, when the papers relating to the Jamaica crisis were submitted with the express object, according to Lord Grey, of provoking a discussion, they did not accept the challenge. In Jamaica as in Guiana the more enlightened planters were now beginning to realise that in fighting against "the baneful effects of Imperial legislation" they were merely sacrificing themselves to the interest of a political party at Westminster; and, some of the more extreme members having resigned or lost their seats, this feeling made itself felt in the new Assembly. Shortly before the taxes expired, they were continued to the end of the year and for the whole of

[1] The Bill proposed to save £14,000 a year at the expense of 220 persons, twelve of whom were to suffer half the loss; but it also almost wiped out the provision for public health and education.

1850; and the clause in the Import Duties Bill forbidding its application to the payment of officials was withdrawn.[1] A week or two earlier, as we have seen, the point involved in the latter concession had been yielded in Guiana.

[1] P.P., 1847–48, vol. xliv.; 1849, vols. xxxiv. and xxxvii.; 1850, vol. xxxix.; Earl Grey, *Colonial Policy*, i. 173–189, 409–413.

CHAPTER IX

MAURITIUS

OUR attention has hitherto been confined to the other side of the Atlantic; but a study of emancipation in the British sugar colonies would be incomplete if it did not include the only one of these communities which is situated in the eastern hemisphere. We turn, therefore, to Mauritius, an island which presents a complete contrast to the West Indies inasmuch as it greatly increased its output of sugar after emancipation.

Comprising an area of 720 square miles, Mauritius is thrice as large as St. Lucia, but socially and historically may be regarded as its counterpart in the east. Both are mountainous and picturesque and equally liable to hurricanes. Both were captured in the Napoleonic War and ceded in 1814, and both, twenty years later, were still almost exclusively French. Amongst the 884 slave-owners who obtained compensation in St. Lucia one finds very few English names, and proportionately even fewer amongst the 7038 in Mauritius. St. Lucia in the days of sail confronted the natural approach to the West Indies from Europe,[1] and, being also within twenty miles of Martinique, had changed hands so often in the Franco-British wars of the eighteenth century that it was known as the cockpit of the Antilles. Mauritius, then the *Île de France*,[2] was a base of supplies for our enemies on the

[1] Due to the trade wind and its accompanying current. See Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power on History*, eighth edition, p. 517.

[2] Mauritius was the original name of the island, and was given to it by the Dutch in honour of their stadtholder, Count Maurice of Nassau.

ocean route to India. Dupleix was armed and provisioned from this source, and here, too, was the rendezvous of De Suffren's fleet. In 1790 it declared for the French Revolution, but asserted and made good its independence when the National Convention, after the execution of Louis XVI, abolished slavery. Bonaparte rescinded this decree, but took advantage of the Peace of Amiens to send out an expedition which in 1803 restored absolutism and the sovereignty of France. The island, with two good harbours and protected by a coral reef, had always been a nest of privateers as well as a base for regular cruisers; and in the next war, assisted indirectly by American adventurers, it became a terror to British Indiamen, enriching itself by the capture of their cargoes, and even by the sale as slaves of their Malay and Lascar crews. The Indian Government was rather dilatory in dealing with this menace, but was spurred at last to an effort which left nothing to chance. In addition to all the troops that could be spared from India, a division was brought up from the Cape; and on December 3, 1810, the garrison capitulated to a force said to be "the most powerful that had ever been afloat in the Indian seas." The neighbouring island of Bourbon had been captured in the previous July, but, unlike Mauritius, was restored to France at the peace of 1814.

Privateering lost its attraction for the Mauritians when it could be prosecuted only against their own countrymen, and they now turned their attention to the slave trade which had long been carried on with Madagascar and Zanzibar, but had recently suffered, with other commerce, from a British blockade. They claimed the right to continue this traffic, though it was banned elsewhere throughout the Empire, because the colony had capitulated on terms which secured its laws and customs; and, strangely enough, their plea was endorsed by Governor Farquhar in a despatch of February 15, 1811, in which, in addition to the ground just mentioned,

he maintained that an Act of Parliament did not extend to a colony unless the latter was expressly or implicitly included; that a colony could not be bound by an Act passed before its acquisition; that the slave trade was permitted to Trinidad "or some other places in the West Indies"; and that, "without the slave trade or some other substitute or remedy, these colonies[1] promise to be shortly annihilated and the inhabitants are likely to be rendered desperate." Seldom has a despatch caused so much astonishment at the Colonial Office. "It would be improper for me," wrote Lord Liverpool, "to lose even a single day in taking notice of that part of your despatch which respects the slave trade." He could not "sufficiently express" his surprise that it should have been thought possible that Parliament, when abolishing this traffic in our "ancient colonies and established settlements," meant to preserve it in colonies that might yet be acquired; and in regard to the West Indies the Governor was, of course, "entirely misinformed."[2] Fifteen years later, when defending his attitude in Parliament, Farquhar said that he wished to avoid irritating the slave-traders, and thought it inexpedient to tell these "renegadoes and pirates," as he himself described them, that they were "mere felons."[3] Even the summary rejection of his scruples induced him only to temporise. He sought to cut off the supply of slaves by negotiating treaties with a chief in Madagascar and the Imaum of Muscat, but made no real attempt to put down the demand. Happily, a policy of rigorous suppression was adopted by Generals Hall and Darling, who successively occupied his place from 1818 to 1820; and, when he resumed office, the slave trade, though by no means extinct, had greatly diminished.

The persistence of this atrocity under British rule

[1] Farquhar was Governor of both Mauritius and Bourbon, the latter being then in British hands.

[2] P.P., 1826, vol. xxvii. [3] Hansard (1826), xv. 1045.

was naturally denounced by Buxton, who obtained a Select Committee in 1826, but so late in the session that it professed to have done no more than begin its task. A thorough investigation was, however, conducted on the spot in 1827–28 by two persons who were known as the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry because they had been sent out to report on the administration of the Cape, Mauritius and Ceylon. Their conclusion was that the number of slaves imported before 1818, though it might have been over-estimated, was considerable, that it had since decreased, and that probably no direct importation of an entire cargo had taken place since March 1821. They added, however, that slaves in small numbers might have been smuggled at a much later period, as Mauritian vessels were then still engaged in the slave trade at Bourbon.[1] It was for some time supposed that Sir George Murray, in consequence of this Report, sent out orders for the liberation of all slaves who could prove that they had been illicitly imported; but this was shown in Parliament to be a mistake. The Minister who did so was Murray's successor, Goderich, on January 14, 1831; and, though valuable time had been lost, about 1700 slaves were set free.[2]

In order to guard against the possibility of illicit importation, the Crown colonies in 1814 had been required to establish a triennial registration of slaves. This system worked perfectly in the West Indies where the planters had nothing to conceal, but it was stultified from the first in Mauritius. When the census was taken in 1816, it was found that the number of slaves in the island was 80,046; but in 1819 many of the returns had to be rejected because they could not be traced in the original records. It was evident that these had been falsified, and the chief culprit proved to be a clerk named Bataille, a slave-trader and himself the owner of two slave-ships, in one of which he escaped to Bourbon.

[1] P.P., 1829, vol. xxv. [2] Hansard (1836), xxxi. 403.

The law may not have allowed the slaves to be inspected in order to establish their identity, but the Eastern Commissioners reported in 1828 that, if this had been done, it would have been found that deaths had been suppressed, that fictitious returns had been made in view of expected importations, and that extracts from the register had been purchased in order to cover negroes already introduced. Triennial attempts to rectify the register only made it worse; and the Colonial Office in 1826 resolved to "commence again the whole process of registration from the beginning." Under the new system, which was to be biennial, the registrar and his assistants were no longer to accept as sufficient the sworn returns of owners, but were to muster the whole slave population, personal slaves being collected at certain points and plantation slaves assembled on the estates. This was a severe ordeal for those who had in their possession negroes imported since 1816; and one is not surprised to find that the number of slaves reported to have died "in 1826, a healthy year, exceeded the number declared in the year of the cholera morbus." The number registered in 1827 was 69,264.[1]

If the Eastern Commissioners were justified in their suspicion that the slave trade survived in some measure "at a much later period" than 1821, it may not have been extinct when in 1825 Mauritius as a sugar colony was detached from India and placed under the same fiscal regulations as the Antilles.[2] The Mauritius Trade Bill attracted little attention in Parliament, the members who voted on the second reading being little more than a quorum.[3] The West Indians dreaded the competition of rivals who had had—if they did not still have—the advantage of illicit supplies of labour; and the Abolitionists, though they did not take part in the debate, were

[1] P.P., 1826, vol. xxiv.; 1829, vol. xxv.
[2] That is, it was exempted from the differential duty on Indian sugar.
[3] Hansard (1825), xiii. 1039–1043.

afraid that the high mortality of the slaves in this colony would be aggravated by the increased demand for sugar. Mauritius was within the bounds of the East India Company's charter, and its situation gave it great advantages for commerce. The colonists had petitioned to be released from the Company's monopoly, and in 1816 they were granted freedom of trade. According to Farquhar, the boon was so clogged with restrictions as to be "a mere nullity." At all events, they soon began to think that their future lay rather in agriculture. Their cultivation had at one time been almost confined to coffee, cotton and indigo; but sugar was encroaching on these products before the British occupation, and since then had steadily advanced, one reason being that canes offered much less resistance than coffee-trees and cotton-trees to the frequent hurricanes. Huskisson had sought to console the West Indians by telling them that they would have to meet the competition of only 10,000 or 12,000 hogsheads; but the sugar exported from Mauritius to this country,[1] which in 1825 was no more than 4680 tons, increased to about 30,000 within the next fifteen years.

Here we must consider a division of temper and opinion which had long been manifest in the colony. On the one hand were those who had never been at home under the unsettled conditions which prevailed before 1810, and whose appreciation of the advantages they enjoyed under British rule was thus expressed by the local annalist who wrote under the designation "Un Vieux Colon":[2] "During the earlier years in which the new Government was established the transition through its agency from the extreme of despondency to a prosperity unexampled, the revival of commerce, the development of the agricultural resources of the island

[1] Some of the sugar went to the Cape and Australia.

[2] Extracts in English from this writer are given in Pridham's *England's Colonial Empire*, vol. i., *Mauritius*, 1846.

to a degree unknown before, the retention of the French language (for a long time even in official documents) and laws, and the moderation with which it aimed at assimilating the colony with British interests, had produced their effect on the whole community and gained for it the co-operation of the more respectable proprietors and merchants." [1] On the other hand were the turbulent spirits, characterised by the same writer as "the spawn of the French Revolution," who looked back with regret to insular independence and subsequent privateering, and had never ceased to resent the prohibition of the slave trade, which was still flourishing under French auspices at Bourbon. Mingling with these and recognised as their leaders were the "aliens"—mostly ex-soldiers of doubtful reputation who had quitted France when the monarchy was restored; and this was the faction by which one Governor after another allowed himself to be hoodwinked, cajoled and intimidated. The elements of disaffection existed all over the island, but were strongest at Port Louis, and especially in the law courts. In 1828 it was thought necessary at Paris to send out to Bourbon a whole staff of judges with express orders that they must not own estates or slaves or even marry in the colony; and things were no better in Mauritius, where the last French Governor had declared the corruption of bench and bar to be "la maladie honteuse de l'Île de France." [2] The abuse most complained of was a perversion of the law to protect bankrupts from their creditors; and it became worse after the

[1] Compare with this Farquhar's picture of a disillusioned and downtrodden colony.—Hansard (1825), xiii. 1042.

[2] Official corruption was not confined to the creoles. One of the prompt measures taken by the energetic General Hall was the midnight arrest of a Mr. Hook, the colonial treasurer, who was found to have appropriated some £12,000.—P.P., 1822, vol. xxii. Dick, the auditor of the accounts, was at the same time dismissed, but was afterwards appointed Secretary to the Government. Another similar case was that of Raymond, inspector of distilleries, who was dismissed for misconduct.

Sugar Act of 1825, which was followed by an orgy of extravagance and speculation. This measure ought to have made for conciliation; but its tendency in that direction was neutralised within a few months by the enforcement of regulations for the better treatment of the slaves.

The character of French slavery was everywhere the same—regulated with some approach to humanity in the *Code Noir*, occasionally indulgent, and systematically severe. Manumissions were commoner than in our colonies; but the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* had no difficulty in showing—and was threatened in consequence with a prosecution for libel—that no form of bondage under the British flag was so cruel as that which existed in Mauritius. For example, Sunday labour was exacted on many of the estates; and the practice of working slaves in irons, whether to prevent their escape or as a punishment, still prevailed here, though obsolete in the West Indies, except of course in St. Lucia. Writing on this point to Huskisson in May 1928, the Eastern Commissioners said that the *Code Noir*, though it prohibited torture, permitted the use of chains, "and it has been thought allowable, not only to put slaves in chains, but to load them with fetters of considerable weight attached by heavy rings to the ankles; to rivet branched iron collars round the neck, so as to render the recumbent posture nearly, and in some instances quite, impossible; and to couple two slaves together with a bar fastened by a ring also riveted round the neck of each." [1]

Little or nothing in the way of amelioration had yet been done. Farquhar professed to have made several humane regulations, but not one of them is to be found in

[1] P.P., 1829, vol. xxv. In the eighteenth century, if not later, spiked collars were often imposed as an added torment after a flogging. The negroes were occasionally baptised, "but it is not an easy matter to persuade them that the Europeans will ever prove their guides to heaven."—*History of Mauritius, chiefly from the Papers and Memoirs of Baron Grant*, 1801, p. 77.

a return of such enactments ordered by the House of Commons, and presented on July 10, 1828. Sir Lowry Cole, who succeeded him in 1823, issued an ordinance in December 1826, not forbidding the use of chains and fetters, but regulating their weight, and providing that the weight might in all cases be increased at the discretion of the *commissaries civiles*, these being the district magistrates, who were invariably slave-holders.

We have seen that the policy of amelioration, whilst merely recommended to the legislative colonies, was imposed on the Crown colonies as an Order in Council which, however, they were required to adapt in detail to their laws and customs. The Order was resisted, as it could not fail to be, by the Court of Policy in Demerara; and the anti-British feeling which prevailed in Mauritius must have made it more difficult to enforce there than in St. Lucia. But Cole had not the moral courage required for his task, and was not even in sympathy with its spirit. In October 1827 he sent home an emasculated draft of the Trinidad Order,[1] and Huskisson, having struck out most of the alterations, sent it back for revision. The planters were now more enraged than ever; and Sir Charles Colville, who succeeded Cole [2] in 1828, instead of stiffening the draft, made still further concessions. He prohibited the cart-whip for punishment, but not as a stimulus in the field, because in the latter case the planters had promised not to use it; and, though one of the Protectors of Slaves had warned him that the *bar de justice* or split bamboo might be almost a worse instrument of torture just because it did not incapacitate the victim for work, he doubted whether it was so objectionable as the Protector imagined. Again, he had proposed to allow only three lashes in the field, but was induced to grant nine. Finally, he delayed

[1] So called, as already mentioned, because it was established first as a model in Trinidad.

[2] Cole and Colville were both Peninsular veterans, and the former was a personal friend of Wellington.

publishing the Order in the hope that the planters would adopt it of their own accord—only to find, after all, that it was met with " the remonstrances of all quarters of the island," several of them " indecorous enough." All these attempts at compromise and conciliation were swept away when Sir George Murray sent out the Consolidated Order in Council of February 2, 1830, applicable to all the Crown colonies, and intimated that it must be published within six weeks of its arrival. Accordingly it came into force, nominally at least, at the end of September.

They must have thought at the Colonial Office that amelioration in Mauritius was at last assured; but Colville was to give them yet another surprise. Murray had written in May 1829 that he would long ago have commented on the chains ordinance of Sir Lowry Cole but for his impression that it had been superseded by the same Governor's draft of the Trinidad Order. He had just heard that it was still in force from the Eastern Commissioners, who had also sent him specimens of chains and fetters, and of collars with and without prongs; and Colville must as soon as possible pass a law for their total prohibition. All this was known to Murray's successor, Goderich; and great was his astonishment when he received from Colville a new version of the ordinance, permitting the chaining together of girls and boys up to the age of fifteen, and the chaining separately of boys without reference to age, and putting no restriction on collars, except that they must not have more than two prongs. Writing on February 28, 1831, he overrode the local authorities by transmitting a direct prohibition under severe penalties, and said, " It would be far better to encounter at once whatever obloquy or discontent you might incur by frank opposition to such measures than to subject yourself to the responsibility of adopting, and His Majesty to the painful duty of disallowing, them." [1]

[1] *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, First Series, ii. 335, 367; iii. 71; iv. 21, 331, 419.

Some of the principal planters and merchants were deputed to make representations to Cole in 1827, when he was called upon to frame an enactment embodying the Trinidad Order. The same course was followed in 1828, when the draft was returned for amendment to Colville; and the existence of a more or less permanent committee must have made it easy to organise resistance when in the summer of 1830 the Consolidated Order was known to be on its way. Arms were secretly imported, and a circular was issued for the formation of a political union, in which we read, "Every year, alas!—we may well say every month—some disastrous news arrives from the metropolis of the empire, which to us alone has shown herself a pitiless stepmother"—the metropolis which, five years earlier, had placed the colony on the same footing as the West Indies! In the autumn news arrived of the July Revolution in France. The colonists now demanded that the popular assembly they had established during their independence should be revived, and renewed their demand in April 1831, after the planters in Bourbon had "respectfully risen" and forced the Governor to grant them a constitution.

Mauritius stood alone in opposing the Consolidated Order. Elsewhere, though unpalatable in itself, it was rather welcomed by the planters as proof—if such were needed—that the Wellington Government had no intention of abolishing slavery. Even the announcement that it would have to be supplemented did not excite alarm; but a very different situation was created when, Grey having succeeded Wellington, the task was undertaken by a Ministry believed to be contemplating abolition.

The first of the Crown colonies to receive the revised Order was St. Lucia, where it was proclaimed on December 24, 1831, and proved so unpopular that the storekeepers closed their premises for a week; and opposition less serious was shown in Trinidad and Demerara. News reached Mauritius early in February 1832 that the Order

had been despatched; and a body known as the Colonial Committee then published a declaration that, if a law diminishing still further the authority of masters over their slaves should be received, they would refuse to execute any of the rules for registration or amelioration, or even to pay taxes, and "will hereafter consider what remains to be done if force should be employed to compel them to promote their own destruction." And there was another manifesto, appropriately entitled "The Delirious Cries of a Colonist," in which Englishmen were denounced as "ogres," resistance to whose aggression "becomes heroism, a sublime virtue; assassination, fire, poison, every means of conquering, good." The Order was received on March 25; and *Le Cerneen*, the opposition newspaper, signalised the event by appearing in mourning.

By the same packet it was announced that John Jeremie was being sent out to assume the office of Attorney-General.[1] Jeremie was a native of Guernsey, where he had practised as a barrister, and from 1825 to 1830 had been Chief Justice of St. Lucia. On his return to England he published "Four Essays on Colonial Slavery," in which the cruelties he had discovered in St. Lucia were effectively exposed. He did not fail to express his conviction that slavery was much the same in all the colonies, including those which had always been British, but added, "Of Mauritius there can be no doubt." The fact that he had written against slavery was enough to give rise to a rumour that he was coming to abolish it; and the planters on March 27, taking advantage of some real or alleged commotion among the slaves, obtained "a sort of sanction" to enrol themselves as volunteers.

Colville's way of dealing with the excitement, when it came to a climax, was to delay taking action in the hope that it would subside. Jeremie arrived on June 2, but was

[1] The French term was *Procureur-Général*, and the office was said to be more like that of the Scottish Lord Advocate, since it involved executive as well as legal functions.

kept on board for two days ; and the volunteers succeeded in enforcing a complete suspension of business [1] when he landed on the 4th under naval, military and police protection. On the same day he took his seat in the Council, but was advised meanwhile not to show himself in public ; and the Council decided, before admitting him to office on the 8th, that his predecessor should continue for a month—an offer which the latter refused. A meeting of the court was due almost immediately, but it was postponed, and Jeremie was not installed till the 22nd, when the only person present was the presiding judge. On leaving the court-house he was mobbed, and, despite the exertions of his escort, was " collared and struck." Next day the Governor issued an admonitory proclamation, but for the first time officially recognised the volunteers by directing that in future they should communicate with him through his adjutant-general. On the 27th meetings were held with the Governor's permission to discuss the situation, and resulted, of course, in addresses for the removal of Jeremie. Inflammatory speeches were delivered, and a manifesto was published in which the colonists were reminded of some 500 laws and proclamations " each of which consecrates an iniquity," and were exhorted, as a pious duty, " Allez au tombeau de Cuvillier " —the tomb of a slave-trader who had been caught in the act of landing 92 negroes and had died in prison. The addresses for his departure were shown to Jeremie, who said that in order to comply with them he must have a positive command. Sir Charles Colville, determined apparently not to act on his own responsibility, submitted this proposal, first to a meeting of officials and notables, and then to the Council, with, in both cases, the desired result. Jeremie received the *order* to go on July 16, but

[1] Their methods are described by " Un Vieux Colon," who says that they " occupied posts ; prevented the assembling of merchants ; shut the bazaar ; left negroes unemployed ; intimidated workmen from proceeding to labour ; forbade transactions in produce ; held out menaces, imprisonment and stoning to those who persisted."

deemed it too mild, and then had the satisfaction of drafting it himself. He embarked on the 28th, after further attentions from the mob, which he repelled with his pistol.

The Governor had hardly time to congratulate himself on having got rid of Jeremie when he was told to expect another ordeal of precisely the same kind. It appeared that John Reddie, a member of the Faculty of Advocates at Edinburgh, had been appointed president of the lower court,[1] and he arrived in December. Colville informed him that, a few months previously, he had been compelled to send back the last legal functionary nominated by the Home Government, that this new appointment would be equally obnoxious to many members of the colonial bar, and consequently it would be reserved for the decision of Sir William Nicolay, whom he expected as his successor. Then came a letter from Dick, the Secretary, requesting him not to mention the office to which he had been appointed, but to let it be supposed—a rather unlikely supposition—that he had been sent out to fill "any judicial situation" that might happen to be vacant. Whereupon Reddie expressed his "mortification and astonishment," and declined "the personal civilities" tendered to him by the Governor. It was instances such as this that "Un Vieux Colon" had in view when he referred to the success of a noisy faction in "working on the fears and imbecility of the Government."

Ministers had had enough of Colville,[2] and had recalled

[1] The upper or appeal court was presided over by a disreputable Englishman or Scotsman named Blackburne. It is significant that, of the two judges who sat with him, one (Remano) had been his clerk, and the other was not a lawyer. He and Remano were removed later by Lord Aberdeen. Several British merchants were associated with the "faction," which had its pro-slavery as well as its anti-British side. Indeed it was supported by Reid, of Reid, Irving & Co., who was the agent for Mauritius in London.

[2] Writing to Stanley, his successor at the Colonial Office, on March 12, 1834, Ripon said: "You are aware of the very meagre nature of the information transmitted by Sir C. Colville upon all subjects, and how constantly he omitted to call the attention of the

him before Jeremie arrived to astonish them with the news of his expulsion. Nicolay, the new Governor, was then on the eve of departure, and, having already been instructed to suppress the volunteers, was now ordered to reinstate Jeremie. There were three regiments in Mauritius, but another was sent out, and it was even provided that troops should be kept in readiness at Bombay. When Nicolay arrived on January 30, 1833, and found no difficulty in suppressing the volunteers, he thought these "precautions of no ordinary nature" had been rather overdone. Nevertheless he admitted Reddie to no more than the salary of his office, and the exclusion of the latter continued till Jeremie returned on April 29. The Attorney-General and the judge then combined to correct abuses, and were soon "making discoveries from day to day that would have staggered the most determined men."[1] Determined and courageous they both were, and disposed rather to precipitate than to await a contest with their enemies at the bar.

Though the volunteers had been officially suppressed, they were by no means extinct; and the legal hostilities opened in a small way when Jeremie caused some of them to be arrested for assaulting a sentry at his post. They were tried by Reddie, who sentenced one of them to several months' imprisonment. Soon afterwards, on the ground that they had not been admitted to bail for six days, they petitioned the Governor that Jeremie should be "charged capitally before a court of criminal assize."[2] This must have been merely an extravagant retort—a

Secretary of State to specific objects of importance in the numerous documents which were frequently transmitted *en masse* without one word of information or comment from him."—Hansard (1836), xxxi. 408. Precisely the same censure was to be incurred by Nicolay. See Glenelg's despatch of January 22, 1836, in P.P., 1836, vol. xxxix.

[1] Sixty-seven persons, illegally imprisoned, are said to have been liberated on one day, and twenty-five on another.

[2] These are the words of Jeremie, who was horrified at the "chasm yawning beneath his feet." Reddie does not say that the charge was capital.

reductio ad absurdum of Jeremie's conduct in treating so seriously what Stanley afterwards described as "the absurd attempt of some boys to disarm the guard." But Reddie was indignant at the insult to his friend, and opened a rather unseemly correspondence with the Governor by demanding that the counsel who had acted for the petitioners should be suspended from the exercise of his profession.

The next encounter was serious. It was discovered that a large number of muskets had been ordered from France and America; and on May 24, 1833, a proclamation was issued requiring all fire-arms to be brought in and given up. Protests were received from all the districts that nobody had fire-arms; but a document was secretly circulated, and in a few days obtained by the police, adjuring "tous ceux qui font partie pour la véritable cause" to hide, burn or "drown" their arms, and sergeant-majors to destroy the regimental papers. Inquiries were made, the alien chief of the volunteers was deported, and a local leader named Brodelet and four others were arrested on a charge of high treason. The point that now became important was this. The first steps for a reform of the criminal courts in the West Indies had already been taken, and a similar measure was even more needed in Mauritius. The Governor in his correspondence with Reddie had said, "My opinion as to the present state of judicial affairs and the necessity of a total change in the court is as strong as your own—perhaps stronger," and had referred to the "hourly anxiety with which I look for instructions for the amendment of the judicial system." Hence, whilst it was the interest of the defence to hasten the trial, it was as much the interest of the prosecution to delay it. In point of fact, the arrests were made in August 1833, but the prisoners were not tried—and acquitted—till the following March. Reddie, whose function was that of the Grand Jury in England, was held chiefly to blame; but Jeremie

was responsible for a serious delay by challenging the competency of the court on the ground that the president, Blackburne, had an interest in slave property. On these and other grounds the Home Government considered that they had shown "extreme want of judgment and temper," and both were recalled.

When Jeremie landed for the first time at Port Louis, the sailors of British merchantmen in the harbour offered to man the warships, the crews of which had been despatched in boats to guard the shore, "so enthusiastic was the general feeling among the English"; and, when he and Reddie embarked on October 28, 1834, all the British vessels had their flags at half-mast. It should, however, be mentioned that they had been loyally supported by Laborde, *Procureur du Roi* or Solicitor-General, who even resigned his office and accompanied them to England in order to plead for their reinstatement.

Notice of a motion to raise this question in Parliament was given in 1835, but withdrawn; and, when a Committee of Inquiry was proposed early in the following year, Jeremie had been appointed to the position of a judge in Ceylon, and Reddie to that of Chief Justice of St. Lucia. Their recall being thus "perfectly consistent with their subsequent employment elsewhere," neither they nor their friends in the House could associate themselves with the motion, which, after a full debate, was easily defeated by the Government on the rather doubtful ground that animosities in Mauritius had died down, that a "healthy current of affairs" had been restored, and that it would, therefore, be inadvisable to re-open old wounds.[1]

The Act for the abolition of slavery took effect in

[1] Hansard (1836), xxxi. 390–429; *Recent Events at Mauritius.* Printed for private circulation. By John Jeremie, attested also by John Reddie (London), 1835. This pamphlet of over 300 pages is, of course, an *ex parte* statement; but it contains many original documents, and these prove that the situation in Mauritius, when Jeremie returned thither in 1833, was more serious than the Government, three years later, thought it expedient to admit.

Mauritius, six months later than in the West Indies, on February 1, 1835. Here as elsewhere opposition was precluded by the necessity of qualifying for the indemnity; but no slave who had not been registered counted for compensation to his owner; and registration in this colony was, or ought to have been, a delicate subject. We have seen that the original system under which slaves were enrolled on the sworn testimony of their owners had broken down and been reconstituted on a basis of inspection; but inspection and alleged inspection turned out to be by no means the same thing; and a further complication had been introduced in 1832, when amongst the taxes which the planters refused to pay were the registration fees. One of the duties assigned to Jeremie when he went out in that year was to examine the register, and he found by his own account "every species of irregularity, fraud and falsification running through a series of years. Names, sexes, origin, all changed to suit a purpose—the original returns cut out, pasted over, made anew—some unsworn and unsigned; others, if sworn or signed, the signature and oath had been pasted on them from other documents." [1] To cover up the traces of a slave trade which had been extinct for some ten years cannot have been the only motive for such chicanery; and this may have been some comfort to the Compensation Commissioners when they were called upon to make their awards on so disgraceful a record. Protests were made in Parliament; but Ministers may have been justified in holding that illicit importations could not now be traced, and in suggesting that, even if discrimination were possible, it might not be legal, since all registered slaves had been admitted as such to the apprenticeship.[2] Nevertheless it is distressing to reflect that a large proportion of the £2,099,000 awarded to Mauritius must have gone either to slave-traders or to the receivers of their stolen

[1] *Recent Events at Mauritius*, p. 147.
[2] Hansard (1835), xxviii. 726.

goods. It is said that compensation for 2000 slaves was lost because they had not been registered in time, but the planters " do not complain much of that "—a becoming modesty on their part if they had pocketed any of the illicit gains.

Let us consider at this point the difficulty experienced by the Home Government in securing that the spirit as well as the letter of the new dispensation should be observed; for, just as Governors Cole and Colville had contrived to astonish them in regard to the amelioration of slavery, so Nicolay was equally successful in regard to its abolition. Lord Glenelg wrote on January 20, 1836, that it had been represented to him on the authority of newspaper reports in Mauritius that the Governor had proposed an ordinance to the Council which inflicted such restraints and penalties on the labouring population as almost to revive slavery under a new name. He hoped that the reports, if not entirely unfounded, were at least much exaggerated, but was " not entirely exempt from anxiety on the subject." Three days after this was written in London, Nicolay at Port Louis was cheerfully sending off a copy of the ordinance which had already come into force, was received with great approbation, and promised to produce a very good effect. On May 25 Glenelg intimated its disallowance and required this to be made known with the least possible delay. He did not know what to make of the necessity alleged in the preamble for measures " of a nature to *conciliate* the maintenance of good order," but found nothing conciliatory in the enactment itself, which he characterised as establishing " a compulsory system scarcely less rigid and in some respects even less equitable than that of slavery itself "; and the clause to which he most objected was the third, which provided that all persons under sixty years of age, without occupation or known means of subsistence, should be bound to " take employment " within a certain period, the penalties being, so long as they failed to do so, first

three months on the public works, and then three years, and, if necessary, another three years, on the plantations. "Thus every man and woman (for no distinction is made of sex) who cannot find work or may be disposed to indulge in temporary repose is to be subjected to participate in the labour hitherto reserved for convicts." There was also a clause which required children of eight years and over to be apprenticed to any kind of work with or without the consent of their parents. This despatch had not reached its destination when Nicolay wrote on July 25 to remove the anxiety from which Glenelg was "not entirely exempt" by suggesting to him that the restraints on labourers in England were in general as heavy as those imposed by the ordinance.[1]

The object of this law seems to have been to compel the blacks who had been free before 1835, and most of whom were independent artisans and not regularly employed, to take service with the planters; and its repeal, after it had been a year in operation, would no doubt have been more exasperating to the latter if they had not already supplied themselves with labour from India.

In the eighteenth century it had been usual for Indians to come to Mauritius in quest of business or employment. They came from Pondicherry, were mostly workmen or small tradesmen, and one of the three sections of Port Louis, in which they resided and frequently settled, became known as the Indian quarter. One may note also that the market place of Port Louis was called the bazaar. The planters looked to Madagascar and Africa for keeping up their supply of field-labourers; and, even after the slave trade had been extinguished, they did not think of getting free labour from India till the Abolition Act was passed in 1833. Soon afterwards they began to make contracts in India for coolies at about 10s. a month with food and the promise of a free passage home

[1] P.P., 1836, vol. xlix.; Hansard (1836), xxxi. 399, 417.

at the end of five years. The first batch of immigrants arrived in August 1834; and the traffic continued till March 1839, when it was suspended in consequence of an inquiry which had been ordered by the Indian Government. By that time no fewer than 25,468 coolies had been introduced.

An inquiry was much needed. The coolies were brought in ordinary trading vessels fully laden with rice and were crowded together on the upper deck, where they had no protection from the weather and were an encumbrance to the crew. If they had been shipped free of disease and the voyage was favourable, there might be few casualties; but 31 died out of 224 on one vessel, and 24 out of 72 on another. Some were genuine and suitable emigrants, though they had "never seen the sea or knew what an island was"; but many had never worked on the land, and the majority were fugitives for debt who could escape imprisonment only by accepting the usual advance of six months' wages—an advance which facilitated the exertions of crimps. Only 3 per cent. were women; and what this meant on the plantations may be imagined.[1] The women were almost all prostitutes, and the planters would gladly have had more of them, at all events, when they found that the wife of a coolie never accompanied him, being left behind to till his field. Indians were physically much inferior to negroes; and their pay, though good, was hardly earned. The clay soil of Mauritius is thickly strewn with a friable kind of stone, which adds to its fertility by decomposing to some extent under the influence of sun and rain and also by keeping it cool and moist. A British planter, who was the first to import coolies, described the stones as "much closer together than the plums I have seen in the puddings

[1] One of the lesser evils was euphemistically described by a planter as "some slight interruption to the domestic arrangements of the apprentices," *i.e.* the negroes, the recurrence of which was prevented by "immediate interference and expostulation."

of the midshipmen's mess." On such a surface no plough could be used, and the digging of 80 cane-holes—the task assigned to a coolie and usually on land not previously cultivated—was considered by an impartial observer "a long and hard day's work." That the scheme operated under the jurisdiction of district magistrates, who would seldom listen to complaints, was its worst feature; but it was probably a good enough service on the whole, at least for the able-bodied, as only a minority returned to India at the end of the five years, and of these not a few came back.[1]

The embargo on emigration from India to Mauritius was withdrawn in 1842, and next year sailings were resumed under the supervision of the Indian Government. Greater care was taken in the selection of labourers, and the women were a larger proportion, though no more than 16 per cent. The emigrant had still to work for five years if he wished to have a free passage home; but his contract was to be for only one year, and was not to be signed till after his arrival. The colonial Government assisted the planters by advancing a bounty of £6 for each adult, and made them annually a gift towards expenses of £25,000. This scheme was wrecked by its success. In fourteen months, 1843–4, no fewer than 34,121 coolies were introduced, exclusive of women and children. The officials in India were as little able to cope with this flood as was the colony to afford its expense; and in 1844 it was decided at Port Louis that immigration should thenceforth be conducted at the public cost, but should be limited to 6000 labourers a year.

The defects of the new plan became manifest as soon as it was put into practice. A five years' system of immigration, with contracts for only one year, could achieve its purpose only if the coolies consented to re-engage, and the likelihood of their doing so was diminished by the restriction of their number. The planters could

[1] P.P., 1838, vol. lii.; 1840, vol. xxxvi.

no longer send to India when they were in want of labour; and, the limitation of the supply being aggravated by the damming up of demand, an average of 63 applicants is said to have awaited the arrival of each ship. Consequently, on the day of distribution, there was bribery, disorder, and even violence. We have seen that wages under the original scheme were 10*s*. a month; but with the stress of competition they now rose to as much as 38*s*. Coolies who were both industrious and robust could thus earn enough to return to India at their own expense, and 564 did so at the end of their first year. Those who disliked the work or found it too hard went into other occupations or merely became vagrants; and it was estimated by the planters that they had lost in this way 8700 labourers, or one quarter of the number imported in 1843–4. To some extent they were themselves to blame, having in many cases offered rates of remuneration which were beyond their means. That wages were frequently in arrear was a charge which they denied; but it was confirmed by the Governor, who considered it the main cause of negligence and disorder; and a Stipendiary Magistrate reported that he had settled claims for wages amounting to between £800 and £1000 on one estate, and similar claims for a considerable amount, and long overdue, on another. The forcing up of wages was, however, largely caused by the sirdars or interpreters, who drove a regular traffic in the services of their gangs by disposing of them on their own terms to employers "in extremity for want of hands." These men were as idle as they were cunning and "the most inveterate opium-smokers." They often strengthened their influence over the labourers by lending them money at exorbitant interest; and the latter clung to their sirdar "with a tenacity really astonishing, although aware that he is actually selling them like sheep for his own sole and immediate gain." A counter-influence was exerted by the planters, or at least by their wives, who on two-thirds of the estates had

opened shops where they sold goods on credit at a profit, it is said, of 30 per cent. But the coolies in regular employment, whatever its drawbacks, were little to be pitied in comparison with the thousands who were roaming about in a condition no better than that of their fellow-countrymen in Trinidad,[1] though the facilities for rum-drinking were equally harmful to both. A licensing law of 1845 which required liquor to be sold in quart bottles, not exceeding a dozen or less than one, resulted in everybody who could—and the sirdars especially—buying a dozen bottles and retailing their contents by the glass. This law caused so much drunkenness that sale by bottle was prohibited in the following year; but the only result seems to have been that canteens were established all over the island.[2]

Such was the condition of immigrant labour in Mauritius when Earl Grey became Colonial Secretary in 1846, and contrived, if not to remedy its contingent evils, at all events to put it on a more satisfactory basis. Under his scheme, which was enacted by the Governor and Council and came into force on October 1, 1847, every person who had been brought into the colony at the public expense was registered and was then offered two alternatives, both of which were a security against idleness—either to engage in writing for a year's work on the plantations or to defray the cost of his passage by paying a monthly tax of 5*s*. He was not to leave without a passport, which would be granted—as well as a return passage—without charge if he had worked on annual contracts for five years or during that period had paid the monthly tax; but, if he wished to leave earlier, he could obtain a passport by paying £1 for every year short of the stipulated term. In order to promote the continuance of labourers with the same employer, a stamp duty of 40*s*.

[1] See p. 163.

[2] P.P., 1836, vol. xxviii.; 1847–48, vol. xliv.; Sugar and Coffee Committee, 1848, evidence of Raymond.

was imposed on an original contract, but only of 20s. on its renewal.[1]

The reader at this point may be disposed to ask, What had become of the emancipated negroes? If so, he will be surprised to learn that the Sugar and Coffee Committee of 1848 thought it necessary to ask a witness whether he knew anything about the condition of these people,[2] and received the following reply: "Yes, I know as much about them as anybody does, I think, and I believe that scarcely anybody knows very much what has become of them; they have been so thoroughly lost sight of in various ways that no good account of them is to be given by anybody." The witness had been sixteen years in Mauritius, and his answer was strictly accurate in reference to the state of things when he left the colony in 1846. Writing to Sir William Gomm [3] on July 16, 1845, Stanley expressed his satisfaction with the annual report in so far as it testified to the prosperous condition of the colony, but remarked that it was silent on the state of the emancipated population, and desired on this subject to be fully informed. It may have occurred to him later that the Colonial Office had been rather remiss in so long dispensing with information; for on September 5 he sent out copies of the periodical returns from the West Indies and explained their nature and purpose.

Gomm does not seem to have had the desired information—at all events he thought it advisable to spend about two months in making inquiries. One concludes from his despatch of January 7, 1846, that the reason why so little

[1] Earl Grey, *Colonial Policy*, i. 73. The late Great War put a stop—which has proved final—to the Indian immigration into all British colonies, except Mauritius, where it had been discontinued, as no longer necessary, in 1911.

[2] Q. 3740.

[3] Transferred in 1842 from Jamaica, where he had been commander of the troops, to become Governor of Mauritius, in succession to Sir Lionel Smith, who had succeeded Nicolay. Smith died on January 3, 1842, about eighteen months after his arrival in the colony. He was mainly occupied in trying to re-open immigration from India, but did not live to see the success of his efforts.

was known of the negroes was that, at least as field-labourers, they had vanished from the estates and that, owing to the immigration from India, they had not been much missed,[1] especially as there were no missionaries, or only one, to look after them, and they had even been deprived, as we shall find, of their appointed guardians. The most intelligent of the slaves had been, of course, the non-predials, and these either remained with the planters as mechanics, or in that capacity were working for other employers, or had set up for themselves. Many of the field labourers had continued to work as such for a time, and were now living on the land they had bought with their savings, being most numerous "within extreme market-range of Port Louis." Here, as in the West Indies, they were said to lapse into comparative idleness after they had built their houses and planted their grounds. Many more had quitted field labour as soon as they were freed—some to rent land where they could find a proprietor to let it for a share in the produce, but a far greater number to form the nucleus of that nomadic population which was to be largely increased by the Indians. The Mauritian negroes were East Africans, and Gomm, who had served in Jamaica, thought them much less robust than those of the western tribes who had peopled the Antilles; but this did not make it much easier for him to confess that they had declined in number from 61,000 to 40,000—a decrease, afterwards found to have been exaggerated,[2] which he ascribed to the large number of aged apprentices, a disparity between the sexes of nearly two to three, a "headlong rush into intemperance" as the first privilege of freedom, and the prevalence of epidemics, especially of small-pox.

It devolved on Gladstone as Stanley's successor to

[1] Immigration was suspended, as we have seen, from 1838 to 1842; but, the contract being then for five years, most of the coolies were still at work, and so also were a good many of the ex-apprentices.

[2] A census taken in August 1846 showed the number of ex-apprentices and their children to be 50,414.

reply to this despatch, and he did so on May 13. Gomm, he remarked, had been in office for four years, but had not till now furnished any account of the emancipated population; and "the most lamentable feature" of his report was the manner in which the negroes had been neglected by the wealthier classes—a neglect the more extraordinary as it extended even to the Stipendiary Magistrates, who were appointed and mainly paid by the Home Government for their protection. Of the three whose reports had been enclosed, one had made "as full a report as his means of observation permit"; another had offered "such observations as the very little which he sees of this part of the community in his office permits him to make"; and the third had apologised for the meagreness of his information. That these magistrates were neglecting their duty was manifestly an idea which had not occurred to them; and Gladstone does not seem to have been aware that one of his predecessors, with the best intentions, had been the cause of their delusion. Lord Glenelg, knowing that the Indians could obtain no redress from the Civil Commissaries, who were merely their employers under another name, had suggested on January 3, 1838, that they should be placed under the jurisdiction of the Special, now the Stipendiary, Magistrates, stipulating, however, that the latter must on no account neglect their original and primary object. Nicolay either failed to make known this proviso or did nothing to enforce it; and the result was that thenceforth the Stipendiaries confined themselves exclusively to the Indians.

We have now come to the last of our governors, and one must admit that their services to emancipation left a good deal to be desired. First, we have had Farquhar, who proposed to tolerate the slave trade; then Cole, whose idea of improving the condition of the slaves was to regulate the weight of their chains; then Colville, whose conception of the same process was that iron collars

should have two prongs, but not three; then Nicolay, whose labour ordinance would have enslaved the free or non-apprenticed blacks; and finally we have Gomm, who, when asked what had become of the emancipated negroes, did not know but would inquire. In some respects Gomm was the best of these five governors, because, being a man of culture and refinement, he kept aloof from the corrupt clique at Port Louis, and confined himself as much as possible to the seclusion of his country house. But in these circumstances, however willing he might be to correct abuses, they were not unlikely to escape his notice.

The planters were now protesting against the limitation of immigrants to 6000 a year, and were thus led to show how it was that they were so dependent on imported labour. Their explanation is to be found in the second report of a committee appointed to inquire into the causes of the insufficiency of the labouring population, and is far from being a convincing statement. They begin by asserting that, after emancipation, in spite of all their exertions to conciliate the negroes, they were threatened with such a reduction of labour as to endanger the cultivation of estates; that, not being content merely to "fold their arms," they had had recourse to India, and in 1834–1839 had introduced, as already stated on the authority of this report, 25,468 coolies. Now, what they call "emancipation," being the period of the apprenticeship, when the negroes were compelled to work, and are stated in the punishment-books to have received thousands of lashes, it cannot have been the introduction of these coolies that "saved the colony from ruin." And, looking at the matter in another way, we arrive at the same conclusion. All the authorities agree in stating that the coolies were employed mainly on land hitherto uncultivated, which means that the proprietors were extending the cultivation of sugar in order to take advantage of the high prices which had resulted from the shortage of labour in the West

Indies. A legitimate enough object; but, if the planters could thus misrepresent their position during the apprenticeship, can we believe them when they said that after complete emancipation they did their utmost to work with negro as opposed to Indian labour?

The neglect of the ex-slaves in Mauritius, especially as contrasted with the ceaseless attention bestowed upon them in the West Indies, had deeply impressed Gladstone, connected as he was personally as well as officially with the latter; and his feelings were expressed in a second long despatch dated only one day later than the first. He said that in the West Indies, "from the difficulty or even impossibility of introducing such masses of labour from other parts," the planters had been impelled by "the most urgent reasons of self-interest" to secure the co-operation of the negroes in cultivating their estates, with the result that in these colonies "those who once were slaves are now their free and happy labouring population." But he was "struck and saddened with the contrast" when he turned to Mauritius. Here Indians had been introduced and two-thirds of them were at work in the cane-fields, but "where are the former cultivators—the emancipated population?" It was only too evident that "they have disappeared from agricultural labour, from the precincts of the plantations; from any contact with the whites; that they are left to make their own way in this world, and to another world." [1]

Within a few weeks Grey succeeded Gladstone. Apparently he was less interested in the negroes—at all events, he does not refer to them in his book; but he was furnished with an address from the planters, and a report from a committee of the Council, in which it was asserted both that the ex-apprentices could not be

[1] P.P., 1846, vol. xxviii. Even Sir Lionel Smith seems to have acquiesced in the displacement of the negroes; for he wrote on December 29, 1840, "Mauritius must essentially become rather an Asiatic than African colony."

induced to work and that they had not suffered much in consequence of their refusal. The number on sugar estates in 1844 was said to be 3725, but three years later only 1890, and even these came and went as they pleased. For a year or two after emancipation agriculture was the only considerable means of employment; but this had been altered by the growth of population and wealth; and now almost all the negroes, not settled on the land, had been absorbed into such occupations as those of shopkeepers, fishermen, artisans, tailors, gardeners and domestic servants.[1] One hopes there was some truth in this statement; but Raymond, a witness before the Sugar and Coffee Committee, who had left the colony in 1847, estimated that 16,000 of the emancipated were fishermen by day and thieves and vagabonds at night.

It remains only to show how Mauritius was affected by the commercial crisis of 1847. We need not concern ourselves in this connexion with the change-over from protection to free trade, for no colony had less reason to fear the competition of slave labour. The production of sugar greatly increased during the apprenticeship, and, after immigration had been resumed, the quantity imported into this country rose from 700,000 cwt. in 1845 to over 1,000,000 cwt. in 1850. Resources had been both used up and forestalled in thus forcing the pace. The first immigration scheme, which the planters had conducted at their own expense, cost them about £280,000; and the colonial Government could not have defrayed its share in the second scheme had there not been a surplus of revenue for several preceding years. The mainspring of the whole development was, of course, in London. In the West Indies, where production had fallen off since emancipation, the planters had great

[1] P.P., 1847–48, vol. xliv. Gardening was certainly popular with the negroes, who are said to have "numerously resorted" to a district where such work was plentiful.

difficulty in financing their estates; but there was a perpetual boom in Mauritius; and the City atoned for its caution in the one case by over-confidence in the other, and that, too, on a quite unbusinesslike basis. The West Indians kept their books in London; but the Mauritians kept theirs in the island, where most of them resided, or in France; and it was admitted to the Sugar and Coffee Committee by a merchant who acted for twenty estates that he made advances on the gross produce consigned to his firm, without any means of knowing whether his correspondents were working at a profit or at a loss. Moreover, many of the estates were not only run on credit, but had been purchased by the same means at much more than their value. It was this profusion of borrowed capital which had enabled the planters to outbid each other for labour when the annual quota of coolies was fixed at 6000. On August 24, 1846, the Governor indicated the probability of widespread distress " should a dark day arrive in succession to three consecutive seasons in which the colony has been wonderfully favoured by Providence "; and on May 8 of the following year he referred to " parties who would as soon think of erecting palaces on the surface of their purchases upon credit as of extracting sugar from beneath it but for (I fear I must call it) not the aid, but the temptation in such cases of agency funds." A few months later the " dark day " came and caused " the prostration of nearly every merchant in London connected with Mauritius." There were five " great agency houses " so connected, and only one survived.

Arrangements were made by the Home Government to obviate the effects of this financial disaster. The immigrants were threatened with unemployment and even with famine, for it was doubtful whether the 500,000 bags of rice required annually for their subsistence could be obtained at Calcutta or paid for on their arrival. The Indian Government was therefore instructed to make up

any deficiency in the supply; and the Governor of the colony was empowered to make advances to the planters, not exceeding £150,000, on the security of their shipments of sugar.[1]

If Jamaica, Trinidad and Guiana had been as near India as was Mauritius, the industrial problem of emancipation would no doubt have been solved in the one case as in the other by the elimination of the negroes; but, as immigration in these colonies could be no more than a palliative, they were unable to escape from the task of converting slaves into free labourers. We have seen that the prohibitive duty on foreign sugar did not injure the consumer so long as the price was determined in the open market—in other words, so long as there was a surplus for re-exportation. It was a misfortune, if not a tragedy, for the planters that slave labour nullified their monopoly of the home market by producing too much sugar, that free labour deprived them of it by producing too little, and that they did not even benefit, at all events in the undeveloped colonies, from the high prices which preceded and brought about this loss. Stanley, the legislative author of emancipation, said that from 1823 to 1834 the average price of sugar was 29*s.* 5*d.* per cwt., that from 1835 to 1847, owing to the falling off in production, it was 38*s.*, and that the difference had gone "from the pockets of the planters to those of the labourers." Lord Grey, writing to Governor Light, commented on "the tendency of wages, from the very limited supply of labour in proportion to the demand, always to rise to the very maximum which the planter can afford to pay"—or even higher; and the Governor, just before receiving this despatch, had written: "Labourers were seduced from one estate to another; higher wages were the result, which in the end have absorbed the resources of the employers." Nor could the

[1] P.P., 1847–48, vol. xliv.; Hansard (1848), xcvi. 21, 22, 46; Earl Grey, *Colonial Policy*, i. 104, 106.

gains of the labourer be retained, as we have seen from the inevitable protest that the negroes should not be enabled "to keep gigs and drink champagne by a tax levied upon the industrious classes at home."

When emancipation had been followed by the introduction of free trade, the planters usually substituted the latter as the cause of their ruin; but the Sugar Act merely precipitated a state of things which had been inevitable ever since the colonial monopoly was extended from the west, where labour was scarce, to the east, where it was abundant. The value of the sugar exported from India—not to mention Mauritius—had risen from about £134,000 in 1835 to £1,690,000 in 1847; and, when we consider that in the latter year the total British importation into this country was only 10,000 tons less than the consumption, there can be no doubt that, if protection had not been withdrawn, it would soon again have "worn itself out." To raise the protecting duty or even to retard its fall would merely have accelerated this process by stimulating production in the east, and immigration, for which a respite was demanded in the west, would have been forestalled by a rise in wages. The anonymous writer who said that he and his fellow-planters would have been spared their losses if the Sugar Act of 1846 had been passed in 1833 had forgotten the difficulties inherent in emancipation; but he was so far right that these difficulties would not have been aggravated by the necessity of re-adjusting wages to their economic level.

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