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978-1-108-02414-3 - The History of the Maroons, Volume 1

Robert Charles Dallas

Excerpt

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THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
MAROONS.

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LETTER I.

*Subjects proposed.—Brief Account of the State of Jamaica at the Commencement of the French Revolution.—Prosperity.—Agriculture.—Trade.—Population.—Military Force.—Slavery.—Consolidated Act.—Affairs of St. Domingo.—Emigrations from that Island.—A Tribute of Gratitude and Admiration.—Overtures of the St. Domingo Planters to the British Ministry.—Expedition in Consequence, and Force detached from Jamaica.—All Manner of Slavery abolished by the French.—General Williamson, Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, succeeded by Earl Balcarres.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE task you impose upon me is not more interesting to you than it would be agreeable to me, could I persuade myself that I should execute it in a manner that

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would

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would render it as acceptable to the Public as I know your partiality will render it to you. I have, however, taken up the pen in compliance with your wish; the subject is important, I will pursue it through the scope you have proposed, and when I have performed the task, we will consider whether it be worthy the attention of the world. Should we decide in the negative, it will at all events serve one pleasing purpose, that of convincing you that I was ready to make an attempt even beyond my power, to gratify your desire of information.

All that relates to the West Indies, and particularly to the island of Jamaica, cannot but prove interesting to the inhabitants of this kingdom, and must be peculiarly so to you who have so large a stake in that country. The situation of Jamaica at the breaking out of the French Revolution, its agriculture, commerce, population, force, and the state of slavery at that

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that period; a history of the Maroons from their origin to the expulsion of the greatest part of them, their banishment to Nova Scotia, and subsequent removal to the coast of Africa; the situation of Jamaica at the conclusion of the war between Great Britain and France, and the consideration of a plan for the future protection, security, and prosperity of the island, are the subjects for our consideration.

I will not at present detain you with comments on the Revolution in France: little remains to be observed on the horrors it has spread over the world; in no quarter of which has it been more destructive than in the West Indies. At the time of its commencement, Jamaica, after having been devastated for a succession of years by hurricanes, those scourges of the American Archipelago, was enjoying tranquillity and a degree of prosperity it had never before attained. Abundant crops and great demands in Europe for West-Indian produce,

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caused

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caused the island to flourish, enriching the Planter and the Merchant. Every thing was favourable to the country. Great improvements had been made in every point. In agriculture the plough was introduced, and, in situations where it could be used, saved much of the labour required for the usual mode of turning the ground to receive the cane-joints, which, as you have seen, is digging by hand with the hoe. The practice of manuring was more attended to than formerly, when the only attempt of recovering the soil was to suffer it to lie fallow; by which the finest lands in the world were exhausted, and old estates of the highest value gradually ruined. Keen and sagacious Planters foresaw in time the destruction that awaited them, and disposed of their property at a seeming undervalue: in the purchase of new lands they amassed incredible fortunes, leaving the inexperienced to enjoy their ambition in the name of an old estate; and to beggar their families, if they outlived their own ruin.

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The making of sugar and rum had been scientifically studied for years, and had almost attained the point of perfection. For the improvement of the former, great rewards had been offered and given.

The cultivation of cotton had greatly increased, men of small capitals finding their advantage in it; whereas they must have been ruined, had their ambition led them to the cultivation of the cane, which requires a large capital.

Indigo was formerly a staple of Jamaica, but the successive failures of the speculators caused the culture of it to be entirely abandoned; at least so much, as no longer to deserve the name of staple. Coffee had nearly undergone a similar fate, by the heavy duties upon it; but the British Government having reduced those a shilling in the pound, a rapid change in its favour took place; and it now became a considerable commodity among the returns from

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Jamaica

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Jamaica to Great Britain, notwithstanding the avowed superiority of the Mocha-coffee. The cocoa, from which chocolate is made, has not been so fortunate. It was once cultivated to a considerable extent; but the planters, oppressed by the weight of taxation, gradually neglected it, and it finally shared the fate of the indigo. There are two other commodities, which form articles of the native exports of Jamaica; ginger and pimento or allspice: but to no great extent, and the latter began to decrease long before the period of which I am treating. It has, however, been the rise of many a man, whose son or grandson is willing that Sabeian odours and a spicy shore should sink into oblivion under the luxurious streams of the more dignifying *Arundo Saccharifera*; and to forget that,

Chear'd with the grateful smell, old Ocean smil'd.

I will enable you to judge of the extent of the Jamaica-Trade at the commencement of the French Revolution, by laying before you an account of the shipping and seamen

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seamen employed in it, with the nature and quantity of its exports and imports, a little previous to that period. The statement exclusive of coasting sloops, wherries, &c. is as follows :

		<i>Number of Vessels.</i>	<i>Tonnage.</i>	<i>Men.</i>
For Great Britain	-	242	63,471	7,748
Ireland	-	10	1,231	91
American States	-	133	13,041	893
British American Colonies		66	6,133	449
Foreign West Indies	-	22	1,903	155
Africa	-	1	109	8
		<hr/> 474	<hr/> 85,888	<hr/> 9,344

But many of the vessels for America and the foreign West-Indies making two or more voyages in the year, a third is usually deducted in computing the real number of vessels, their tonnage and men ; which, on the above statement, will leave the total 400 vessels, 78,862 tons, 8,845 men.

The EXPORTS of Jamaica between the 5th of January 1787 and the 5th of January 1788, with the value at the time in Sterling money, are as follows \* :

\* These statements are on the authority of the books of the Inspector-General.—I have taken them from Edwards.

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Markets	Sugar.		Rum.		Melasses.		Coffee.		Cotton W ol.		Indigo.	
	Cwt.	qrs. lbs.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	lbs.	Cwt. qrs. lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.
Great Britain -	824,706	2 25	1,890,540	2,316	606,994	3,706 3 27	1,899,967	27,223				
Ireland -	6,829		106,700		2,800	10 -	5,500	400				
American States -	6,167		327,325	1,800	6,450	2,566 -						
Brit. Amer. Colonies	2,822		207,660	2,300	200	110 3 8	1,000					
Foreign West Indies	24		2,200			2 -						
Africa -	-		8,600									
Total \$	840,548	2 25	2,543,025	6,416	616,444	6,395 3 9	1,906,467	27,623				

  

Markets.	Ginger.		Cocoa.		Tobacco.		Mahogany		Logwood.		M fcd. Articles.		Total Value.	
	Cwt.	qrs. lbs.	Cwt.	qrs. lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	Tons. Cw.	Tons.	Tons.	Value.	L. s. d.	L. s. d.	L. s. d.	L. s. d.
Great Britain -	3,553	2 15	82 3 15	18,140	5,783 4	6,701	95 -				147,286 3 4	2,022,814 7 10	25,778 10	60,095 18
Ireland -	918												26,538 2 5	355 19
American States	339												860 -	
Brit. American Colonies	4													
Foreign West Indies	2													
Africa -	-													
Totals	4,816	2 15	82 3 15	18,140	5,783 4	6,701						2,136,442 17 5		

Note.—A considerable part of the cotton, indigo, tobacco, mahogany, dye-woods, and miscellaneous articles, included in the preceding account, is the produce of the foreign West Indies imported into Jamaica, partly under the freport law, and partly in small British vessels employed in a contraband traffic with the Spanish American territories, payment of which is made chiefly in British manufactures and negroes; and considerable quantities of culture, obtained by the same means, are annually remitted to Great Britain, of which no precise accounts can be procured.

EDWARDS.



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The IMPORTS into Jamaica, for the same period, were as follows :

From Great Britain direct, according to a return of the Inspector-General's for 1787.

	L.	s.	d.	L.	s.	d.
British Manufactures	686,657	2	3			
Foreign Merchandize	72,257	3	1			
	<hr/>			758,932	5	4
From Ireland, allowing a moiety of the whole import to the British West-Indies, consisting of manufactures and solid provisions, to the amount of L. 350,000				175,000	0	0
From Africa, 5,345 negroes at L. 40 sterling each, being wholly a British trade carried on in ships from England				213,800	0	0
From the British colonies in America, including about 20,000 quintals of salted cod from Newfoundland				30,000	0	0
From the United States, India-corn, wheat-flour, rice, lumber, slaves, &c. imported in British ships	-	-	-	90,000	0	0
From Madeira and Teneriffe in ships trading circuitously from Great Britain, 500 pipes of wine (exclusive of wines for re-exportation) at L. 30 sterling the pipe				15,000	0	0
From the foreign West-Indies under the free-port law, &c. calculated on an average of three years	-	-	-	150,000	0	0
Total	<hr/>			L. 1,432,732	5	4

The population of Jamaica, in the end of the year 1788, was computed to be 291,400;  
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of which 30,000 were whites, 10,000 free negroes and people of colour, 1400 Maroons, and 250,000 slaves. The militia consisted of about 7 or 8 thousand effective men; and there were in the island about 2000 regular troops.

Thus have I given you a brief, but accurate, sketch of the state of Jamaica; relative to its cultivation, commerce, population, and force, at the beginning of the French Revolution. For particular information respecting the previous state of the country on these subjects, I refer you to the history of the island, which accompanies these letters; and shall at present turn your attention to the subject of slavery, and the condition of the negroes at the time we are speaking of. The education of the Planters' children had for many years been attended to as carefully as that of the best families in England, of which the consequence was a change of manners; and the old Creole habits were succeeded by European elegance