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Thomas Southey

Excerpt

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A

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

OF THE

WEST INDIES.

1784.

IN January, the island of Dominica was restored to the English. Some weeks before the restoration of it, an English regiment arrived from St. Lucia, at Roseau, to take possession of the island, which Du Beaupé, the French governor, refused to deliver up, and ordered the British troops to depart. This their commander refused to do; and he was at last permitted to land at Point Michael, to wait until the French governor had further instructions. Upon this Point the English fortified themselves; and in answer to orders from Beaupé, to haul down the English colours, their commander replied, that the country was his master's, whose flag he would defend to the last moment.

On the morning of the evacuation, the English entered the town amidst rejoicing multitudes. Between one and two o'clock, the artillery took possession of the principal fort, marching in as the French marched out, who immediately embarked in boats that were waiting for them. The standard of England was hoisted, and the new governor, John Ord, Esq. landed under a salute from the vessel and fort, amidst shouts of joy and congratulation.

During the government of Duchilleau, sixty out of every hundred head of cattle were destroyed. He established an ordinance, that every English planter should send a beast in his turn to the military hospital; and if, from bad weather, and the distance, the cattle were not there in time, a party of soldiers were sent out to kill the first beast that fell in their way. Many of the inhabitants' milch

Atwood's History of Dominica, pp. 160, 161. 164. 167, 168.

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cows were thus destroyed; for which they were, after a long interval, paid as ordinary beasts. The French destroyed all the fortifications they had built; and, contrary to the eighth article of the treaty of peace, blew up several that were there before they took the island.

No trade had been permitted, except to the island of St. Eustatia; and no less than thirty sugar plantations were abandoned by the proprietors.

Mr. Joshua Steele, of Barbadoes, succeeded in obtaining the labour of his Negroes thus:—He gave premiums to any twenty-five Negroes who would undertake to “hole for canes” an acre per day, at about 96½ holes for each Negro to the acre. All were glad to undertake it, at about three-halfpence sterling a day, and the system of task-work, or the voluntary system, became the general practice of the estate.

France entered into a convention with Sweden, in virtue of which the French were to be admitted to the rights and privileges of the natives in the city and port of Gottenburg, being permitted to build and establish warehouses, for the storing of all manner of goods imported, either from France or America, in the bottoms of either nation, without their being subject to any duties or impositions whatever; with the farther liberty to the merchants or proprietors, to export all such goods at pleasure, either in French or Swedish bottoms, and upon the same free terms. In return for the advantages expected from these favourable stipulations, France ceded to Sweden, in perpetuity, the full propriety and sovereignty of the island of St. Bartholemew, in the West Indies. The King of Sweden, in order to convert this island to the best account, declared it a free port.

A Liverpool merchant, of the name of Dawson, contracted with the Spanish government to deliver from 3000 to 4000 slaves at Trinidad, La Guira, and the Havaña, at 150 dollars a head. There was no stipulated proportion of males, females, or children.

Upon the 11th of March, some gentlemen in London, interested in the West India islands which had been taken by the French, voted an address of thanks and a piece of plate to the Marquis de Bouille, as a public testimony of their “veneration and esteem,” for the “humanity, justice, and generosity so exemplarily displayed by him, in his several conquests and chief command” of the conquered islands.

The exports from Essequibo and Demerary employed twenty-four ships, and consisted of 3980 hhds. of sugar, 703 tierces and 28,078 bags of coffee, and 1883 bales of cotton.

Atwood's History of Dominica, p. 167. Colquhoun's British Empire, p. 361.

Clarkson's Thoughts on Emancipation, 1823.

Annual Register, 1784, p. 183. — 1786, p. 28.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789, Part VI. Spain.

Bolinbroke's Voyage to Demerary. Appendix.

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The French government, by a decree of the 30th of August, 1784, expressly forbade any payment to be made for such things as were permitted to be imported from foreign markets, except in syrups, taffia (rum), and commodities brought from France. Spain alone granted to its colonies the power of carrying all their productions, excepting cacao, to foreign markets.

“Civil, social, and religious order was established in Grenada. Stipends were granted, by an act of the Assembly, to five clergymen of the Church of England, of £330 currency, and £60 for house-rent. One of the clergymen was for the town and its environs, in the parish of St. George—three to do duty, by rotation, in the five out parishes, and one at Cariacow. The glebe lands which had belonged to the Roman Catholic priests, while their religion constituted a part of the government, became the property of the crown, and were granted by his Majesty to the legislature of the island, for the better support of the Protestant churches; deducting an allowance for the maintenance of the Roman Catholic priests, who were still paid,” for the pastoral care of the Papists.

A perpetual tax, of eighteen-pence currency per head, was laid upon all slaves in Grenada, to support the clergy.

The number of slaves in Barbadoes, as given in on oath by Mr. Agent Brathwaite, was 61,808.

The number of slaves imported into the Grenades was 1688.

In Grenada, an act was passed, October 18th, 1784, “for regulating the fees of the clerk of the market, and authorising him to take eighteen pence for every slave he shall flog, whether it be ordered by the magistrate or owner.”

The inhabitants voted £20,000 to join the Lagoon to the harbour of St. George’s.

On the 29th of June, 150 houses, in the most opulent part of Port-au-Prince, St. Domingo, were destroyed by fire, and the royal magazine reduced to ashes. The damage was estimated at 30,000,000 of francs.

On the three first days in August the island suffered severely from a storm.

Jamaica suffered from a hurricane. Upon the night of July the 30th, every vessel in the harbour, except four, was either sunk, dismasted, or driven on shore, and numerous lives lost; the barracks at Up Park Camp were blown down, and five soldiers killed; the workhouse was destroyed, and ten of its inmates killed or wounded. The storm began at half-past eight P.M., and continued till past eleven P.M. Two severe shocks of an earthquake were felt.

Depon’s South America, vol. ii. p. 41.

Coke’s West Indies, vol. ii. p. 58.

Parliamentary Papers, 1789, Campbell’s Evidence.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789, Supplement to No. 15.

Parliamentary Papers, 1790, Lieutenant H. H. Dalrymple’s Evidence.

Westminster Magazine, 1784, pp. 499. 501. 555, 556.

His Majesty's ship Janus, Commodore Pakenham, rode out the storm.

The legislature of the Bahama islands, in the twenty-second section of an act passed this year, enacted, "That the oath of Negroes, Mulattoes, Mustees, or Indians, shall not be good or valid in law against any white person, excepting in matters of debt; and then any free Negro, Mulatto, Mustee, or Indian Christian, shall be allowed to prove her or his account, and sue for the same, in any court in these islands, where the same shall be cognizable."

Thus these people are allowed to be witnesses, and are to be believed *only when they swear for their own advantage*. And the rule of exclusion is extended from slaves to the testimony of free persons, if they happen to be Negroes or Mulattoes! except in respect of freed Negroes, Mulattoes, Mustees, and Indians. Then by the same act, "the evidence of a slave against them shall be good and valid to all intents and purposes."

Thus the credibility of evidence is made to depend on the colour of the defendant against whom it is given, and white criminals must escape, when Blacks and Mulattoes would be hanged!

It further states — "Whereas many heinous and grievous crimes, such as murder, poisoning, burglaries, robberies, rapes, burning and breaking open houses, and other felonies, are many times committed by Negro, Mulatto, Mustee, or Indian slaves, or are many times maliciously attempted by them to be committed; in which, though by divers accidents they are prevented, yet are their crimes nevertheless heinous, and therefore deserve punishment; and whereas Negro, Mulatto, Mustee, and Indian slaves do many times steal, wilfully maim, kill and destroy horses, cattle, sheep, or other things of the value of six shillings, or above, or are accessory to the committing of such crimes as are before mentioned, which several offenders, for danger of escape, ought not to be long imprisoned, and deserve not, for *the baseness* of their condition, to be tried by the established laws of England, nor is execution to be delayed in case of their committing such horrid crimes," therefore, the justices are commanded "to cause immediate execution to be done."

"The average maintenance of a slave, for food and cloathing, in health and sickness, cannot be estimated at less than four pounds sterling per annum."

Part of an estate called Crab Hole, under Hackleton's Cliff, Barbadoes, slipped in the direction from north to south, several hundred yards. The ground was intersected by fissures, and in places swelled into tumours. Most of the buildings upon Mr. Philip's plantations were thrown down, or almost ingulphed. A large piece of edoes occupied the site of the house, and brought with it

Stephen on West Indian Slavery, pp. 180. 280.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789, Council and Assembly of Antigua.

Annual Register, p. 6, Occurrences.

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a long slip of the road, as entire as if nothing had happened. The face of the country was so changed, that the inhabitants were unable to determine where many familiar objects had stood before.

An act of the Bahamas, this year, enacted, "That when any slave shall suffer death," inquiry shall be made "what treatment such slave had received from his or her owner;" and if it shall appear "that the owner of such slave *had inhumanly used him or her, and that necessity or cruel usage might have compelled such slave to run away, or to the commission of the offence for which he or she shall have suffered*, the owner shall not be entitled to, or receive, any allowance for such slave." Thus it appears the slave was to be executed first, and the necessity that led to his crime be inquired into afterwards.

"Who can conscientiously say of assemblies by which such opprobrious laws have been made, that they are fit to be trusted with the sacred functions of legislation? Parliament might be embarrassed with the details of a slave code; but the delegation of the work to such bodies as the colonial assemblies, was an expedient in the last degree unjust. The very worst of legislators for a community of slaves, is a popular assembly composed of and elected by their masters: and in abandoning them entirely to such lawgivers, England has stood alone among the colonizing powers."

By an act passed this year in Antigua, a jury of six white inhabitants were ordered for the trial of capital offences. This was probably the first institution of the kind in the West Indies, and its operation was limited to three years. Previous to this, the justices decided in all cases, both on the law and fact; and, without the intervention of any other authority, awarded execution, which was done in obedience to their warrant by the marshal (sheriff) or his officers.

The evidence of one slave against another was ordered to be admitted, but not against a free person.

In some colonies, on the trial of capital charges, the justices are now (1823) required to associate with themselves three or more house-keepers, who, jointly with them, decide questions of law, as well as of fact, and have an equal authority with them in adjusting the punishment, when of a discretionary kind: a majority of votes being sufficient for either purpose, provided one justice of peace be concurrent.

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The number of Negroes in Barbadoes, according to the return upon oath of Mr. Agent Brathwaite, was 62,775.

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The number of Slaves in the Grenades was 23,926, of whom 3,012 were imported this year.

Captain Gardner was appointed commander-in-chief on the Jamaica station, the 8th of September, 1785; hoisted his broad pendant on board the *Europa*, fifty guns, and kept the command three years.

On the 9th of November, 1785, the conseil souverain of Martinico issued an arrêt concerning the capture of runaway slaves, and the declaration of Negroes killed.

“When slaves are killed as runaways, by detachments duly authorized, declaration to be made at the greffe of the sénéchaussée, by those who killed them, or were at the head of the detachment; and the orders given to that effect to be there deposited, copies of which will be joined to the requêtes presented for payment of the slaves so killed.”

The gains of the Danish West India Company, during the war of Great Britain with her rebellious colonies, amounted frequently to a hundred per cent. in one year. But the prosperity of the institution ended with that war, and this year the shares or actions were given up to the Danish government.

The value of the goods imported by Sweden, this year, from the West Indies, did not exceed £13,400.

The exports from Essequibo and Demerary employed fifteen ships, and consisted of 4995½ hhds. of sugar, 440 tierces and 12,383 bags of coffee, and 1039 bales of cotton.

The quantity of British colonial sugar imported, exported, and consumed, upon an average of five years ending in 1785, was as follows:—Imported, 131,628; exported, 13,120; consumption, 118,502 hhds. of 12 cwt. each.

From the custom-house returns made to the House of Commons, it appears, that in 1785 Great Britain imported from her West India colonies 1,782,431 cwt. of sugar, from which she derived a revenue of £984,221, exclusive of the monies paid for drawback upon the sugars re-exported.

In July, Benjamin Johnson was hung at Jamaica, for piracy and murder, on board the schooner *Friendship*: his plea, of being born in the United States, was overruled.

The Caribs and runaway Negroes in Dominica had committed numerous depredations. The legislature of that island, to reduce them to obedience, raised a corps of about 500 free people of colour and able Negroes, and placing them under the command of officers

Memoirs of Lord Gardner, *Naval Chronicle*, vol. viii. p. 1802.

Parliamentary “Further Papers,” 1826, p. 59.

Brougham’s *Colonial Policy*, book i. sect. 3. pp. 493. 500.

Bolinbroke’s *Voyage to Demerary*, Appendix.

Quarterly Review, vol. ii. p. 10, quoting Parliamentary Papers.

Sir W. Young’s *Common-place Book*, p. 56. *Annual Register*, 1785, p. 67.

Atwood’s *History of Dominica*, p. 242.

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of the 30th regiment of foot, they were encamped in the woods, and called legions. These preparations made the fugitives more desperate: they attacked a plantation at Rosalie in the night, and murdered four white persons and the chief Negro driver. They continued two days upon the plantation, rioting in their plunder, and escaped unmolested.

John Richardson, a carpenter, was employed to rebuild the works on the Rosalie estate; while at that place a party of the legions, in their way to the camp, called for refreshment, and Mr. Richardson prevailed on them to accompany him, and attack Balla, the principal runaway, in his retreat upon the mountains. They set off in the evening, and travelled all night through the woods. By noon the next day, they were at the foot of the mountain whereon Balla was encamped. The runaways had cut steps, at a great distance apart, up the mountain, and this was the only road up. These steps the party mounted one by one, handing their muskets up from one to the other. Mr. Richardson was the first on the top: he hid himself till the whole party were up, and then they attacked the runaways (who were preparing their dinner) so vigorously and unexpectedly, that they fled in dismay, several throwing themselves down the sides of the mountain. Among the prisoners was Balla's son. From an opposite mountain a sharp firing was kept up on Mr. Richardson's party; whose presence of mind, in calling out the names of the different commanding officers directing them to the right or left, made their opponents believe they were surrounded, and induced them to abandon the place with precipitation.

Many valuable articles, stolen from the plantations, were found in the huts. The survivors were disheartened, and dared not afterwards assemble in any great number; but flying from place to place, were either killed or taken. Balla was taken, gibbeted alive, and a week in dying, and about 150 others either killed or taken.

These were the men whom the Marquis Duchilleau supplied with arms, and acknowledged as his friends, forbidding any attempt to be made to destroy them.

Upon the 27th of August, Jamaica suffered from a hurricane.

At St. Christopher's Mr. Jordan Burke was indicted for cutting off one ear, and slitting the other, of his female slave, Clarissa. Upon the 8th of March, 1785, he was fined £50 currency for the offence.

Upon the same island, August the 24th, Mr. Wadham Strode was indicted for cutting off one ear, and slitting the other, of his Negro-man, Peter, May the 11th, 1785. He was fined £100 currency for the offence.

Atwood's History of Dominica, pp. 230. 245, 246. 248, 249.

Edwards, vol. i. p. 234.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789.

Stephen on West Indian Slavery, p. 299. 439.

These two masters were convicted of cutting off the ears of their Negroes, and fined, the one £100 currency, the other £50 — not on the notion of any civil rights in the sufferer, but that unusual and shocking cruelty, even to brute animals, if of a nature offensive to the public eye, was indictable as a misdemeanour in England; and the principles of the common law of England, when unaltered by statute or act of Assembly, is in force in the colonies.

1786.

At the close of the session in the House of Lords, Lord Rodney stated, that at the capture of St. Eustatia, he seized some papers, which he lodged in the office of the secretary of state, as proofs of the treason of some of the principal merchants on that island. Having called for them, in justification of his conduct before the court of appeal from the High Court of Admiralty, he had learnt, to his utter astonishment, that the books and papers had been carried away, and were not to be found. Mr. Knox, who had been under-secretary in the office of Lord George Germaine, was called as a witness to the bar of the House of Lords, and from his evidence, it appeared that the papers had been safely lodged in the custody of government, and that early in 1782, soon after the appointment of the Marquis of Lansdown to the office of secretary of state, the criminals were enlarged, and the papers were in some manner withdrawn and secreted.

“ This was a subject of much speculation and conjecture.”

The number of Negroes in Barbadoes was returned, on oath, at 62,115.

The number imported into the Grenades was 2253.

A merchant of Basse Terre, St. Christopher's, a Mr. William Herbert, was found guilty of cruelly wounding a Negro child called Billy, of the age of six years, and sentenced to pay a fine of forty shillings currency. Among other injuries, there was such a contusion in the shoulder of the little boy, that it was not till after exact examination that it could be pronounced by the surgeons that the joint was not dislocated. The bruises about the head and under part of this infant, and of his sister, were numerous and shocking, and the wool was in some places stripped away from the scalp; and the edges of the hoop with which they had been gagged had, either from the tightness of the ligature, or their efforts to call out, cut into their cheeks on each side of their mouths. This West India merchant, when the magistrates proceeded to send the children for

Annual Register, 1786, p. 128.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789, Supplement to No. 15.

Stephen on West Indian Slavery, p. 442.

Parliamentary Papers, Report, Lords, 1789.

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safe custody to the deputy provost marshal, threatened them with prosecutions for dispossessing him of his property. He acknowledged himself to be the author of the cruelties, but denied their authority to interfere. And after the children had been cured of their wounds, and returned to him, he brought an action against the deputy provost marshal, and laid his damages at £300. The jury, after deliberating forty-eight hours, reported that they could not agree, and at their earnest request were discharged. Mr. Herbert brought his action again to trial, before a new special jury, who refused, notwithstanding the express words of the act, and a clear direction from the bench, to find for the defendant. Their verdict was for the plaintiff, but with only nominal damages. He therefore moved for a new trial, which was granted; but the controversy had bred so much animosity in the island, and threatened so much further mischief, that some of the more respectable part of the community prevailed upon Mr. H. and his friends to desist.

This case was reasonably considered as fatal to every hope of repressing the cruelty of masters by law.

On the 15th of October, 1786, the French King issued an ordinance concerning attorneys and managers of estates in the Windward Islands.

“ Art. 4. Attorneys and managers of estates to keep six registers on the estate, to be signed by a neighbouring inhabitant, proprietor of the same description of estate, and having no interest therein.

“ *First.* A journal, in which are to be no blanks, giving an account, day by day, of births and deaths of slaves and animals, the number of field slaves, and all accidents or changes relative to the administration.

“ *Second.* A register to contain the nature of produce and crops raised.

“ *Third.* An account-book to be kept of all produce sold and disposed of out of the colony, containing the quantities, weights, price, names and residence of the buyers, and the name of the captain and vessel.

“ *Fourth.* A register, on one side containing the state of all the Negroes and animals, and the purchases; and on the other, the names of the white or coloured workmen employed on the estates, and the agreement made with them.

“ *Fifth.* A register of receipt and expenditure.

“ *Sixth.* The hospital journal, containing a nominal list of Negroes sick, and the number of days in hospital.

“ Art. 5. Attorneys or managers to send in, every three months, to proprietors who do not reside on their estates, or oftener if necessary, an exact copy, duly certified by them, of the journals kept, on which to be inserted the name of the captain and vessel by which sent.”

The Swedish government established a West India company, with the exclusive privilege of trading to the West Indies, including their new colony of St. Bartholemew. All Swedish subjects were permitted to become subscribers, which entitled them to use the company's warehouses. The directors of the company were chosen by the crown, and all the vessels engaged in the trade must both sail from and return to Stockholm or Gottenburg.

Mr. Dawson, a Liverpool merchant, contracted again with the Spanish government to supply La Guira and the Havaña annually with from 4000 to 5000 slaves. They refused to take females, until an order was obtained that they should take two-thirds males and one-third females, at 150 dollars ahead.

There were not more than 40,000 Negroes in the colonies of Essequibo and Demerary, although 75,000 had been imported in the last forty-two years, exclusive of those brought into the colonies previous to an office being established for entering the number imported, and the Negroes imported by the English settlers, without taking into consideration the number of children which would naturally be born within that period. Mr. Bolinbroke says, "I can only account for it thus: Negroes were sold in the years alluded to, from £20 to £40 sterling, at fifteen months credit. From their bearing such a trifling value, I fear they were too frequently sacrificed by hard work and ill-treatment, under an idea that twelve or eighteen months' labour was sufficient to pay the first cost. It is an absolute fact, that the comfort and health of the Negroes was never much considered, until their value, like that of a blood-horse when put in competition with a cart horse, entitled them to better treatment, for fear they should die, as the loss would then be so much the greater."

Reader, this same Mr. Henry Bolinbroke, from whom the above extract is taken, says, in the same work, p. 116, "The slave-trade is a universal benefit;" and at p. 107, he says, "I assert, with confidence and satisfaction, that there is not so much flogging on a West India plantation, as there is obliged to be on board a man-of-war, with the cat-of-nine-tails, to preserve order." As though enforcing discipline among men for whose exertions an officer is responsible to his country, and overworking men and *women* from avaricious motives, were similar cases, or the power equally abused. The healthiness of our seamen, and the mortality among the slaves, render the mischievous comparison absurd.

On the 27th of January, the brig Basil, Captain Raphael, arrived at Liverpool from Dominica. In her passage she saved the crew of the Charming Molly, bound from Bermudas to

Brougham's Colonial Policy, book i. sect. 3. p. 498.

Report of the Lords of the Committee, 1789, Spain.

Bolinbroke's Voyage to Demerary, Appendix.

Annual Register, 1786, p. 195.