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EMANCIPATION

IN THE

WEST INDIES.

BY

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THE substance of the following Essay was given in the form of a Lecture at Concord, and afterwards in Boston, where it was printed in *The Pine and Palm*. The writer has likewise furnished eight articles for the *Springfield Republican*, embodying the same views, but presented in a different form. He wishes, in this way, to contribute to the public information concerning a matter unhappily but little understood even in New England. Doubtless there are errors in these pages, but they are not those of intention.

Concord, March 27th, 1862.

Sidney Smith mentions a critic who would never read a book till after he had reviewed it; "because," he said, "reading is apt to bias the mind." King James I. used to wonder that his judges could decide any case after they had heard both sides; "for if I hear but the one party," said he, "my judgment is clear; but when they have both told their story, by my saul! I canna tell what to say." Something like the wisdom of these two sages seems to have taken possession of the American mind on the question of Emancipation. There are people enough to advance the theory; there are more than enough to denounce it, and cry out on its dangers and horrors; but few of either party have taken the trouble to inform themselves of the facts. For the abolition of Slavery is not a mere theory, like the hypothesis of an open sea at the North Pole, which they say Lieut. Maury believed in, because he heard there were whales in Baffin's Bay, with their noses pointing to the north,—no, it is a great historical fact, and we are to judge of it as we do of other facts, less by the arguments advanced in its favor than by the results which have attended it. Let us consider, then, this most important topic—Emancipation as a Fact, not as a Theory,—confining the inquiry to Negro Emancipation in the West Indies.

What should we think of a man who

should today gravely raise the question whether the Atlantic can be crossed by steamships,—whether a Sharpe's rifle is better than a crossbow, or a power press than a monk's inkhorn and sheepskin? Should we not imagine he had strayed away from Kentucky or the office of the Boston Courier? Yet the facts which prove the safety and profit of Emancipation are less recent than the success of ocean steamships, against which Lardner prophesied in vain; nay, they are older than the bold contrivances of Fulton, which, within half a century, have revolutionized commerce and maritime warfare. They lie at our very door; we have only to look at them to be convinced.

Yet, so inveterate are the prejudices which our unfortunate political and commercial sins have brought upon us, that not one person in a hundred, it is safe to say, is acquainted with the truth of the West Indian experiment of freedom. In the British, French, and Danish West Indies, and in Hayti, together with the South African colonies of Bourbon, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope, about 1600 000 slaves of the African race, have been set free since 1792, or within seventy years. Of these, half a million were liberated in Hayti, in 1793; 100 000 more in the same island a few years later; 770 300 by England, in 1834-5; and about 260 000 by

France, Denmark, and Sweden, in 1848. It is, then, 14 years since the last act of liberation, 28 since the most important one, and 69 since the first. There still remain in Slavery, about 6750 000 Africans on the continent and islands of America; that is to say, nearly 4000 000 in the United States, nearly 2000 000 in Brazil, 750 000 in Cuba, and Porto Rico, and 50 000 in the Dutch possessions.

The slaves of St. Domingo were set free under martial law, amid the disorders of the first French Revolution; those of Great Britain were led into liberty in time of profound peace, by carefully prepared statutes; those of France and Denmark during the Revolutionary year of 1848, but without the interposition of martial law. We have here, then, all the possible conditions of a community,—peace, war, and that intermediate state which we call Revolution. If the experiment had failed in any of these cases, we might think it owing to peculiar circumstances; if it had failed in all we might think the policy a mistaken one, at least, so far as these Islands are concerned; if it has succeeded in all, shall we not say it will also succeed every where? Let it be noticed that the number of slaves set free is about two-fifths of those in this country; or, to be more exact, as many as are now in the States of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. But while the 1 600-000 freedmen occupied an area of less than 300 000 square miles, these ten States have an area of 600 000 square miles,—a circumstance very favorable to Emancipation; while the climate of none of them is such as to exclude the white man from active labors, as in the West Indies.

At the period of emancipation, St. Domingo presented a condition of things somewhat like our own at this moment, but much more like what ours may be a year hence if we do not avail ourselves of the teachings of experience. For three years the colony had been torn by civil wars between the whites and mulattoes, in which the negroes had taken little part. The Spaniards, in alliance with the revolted slaves of 1791, and in the interest of the exiled Bourbons, had invaded the country, and occupied several important places. The English, then as now eager to destroy a commercial rival, were in treaty with the planters to invade the island also. The French Republic, represented in St. Do-

mingo by two commissioners, Sonthonax and Polverel, was on the point of losing the rich colony. The commissioners had but a thousand French soldiers, a few hundred mulattoes, and the fragment of loyal slaveholders, to oppose so many enemies. At this crisis, by a bold act of justice, the very thought of which they had repelled four months before, they brought to the French cause the powerful aid of 500 000 negroes. On the 29th of August, 1793, they declared all the slaves free. Just three weeks after, the English troops landed, but it was too late. On the 4th of February, 1794, the National Convention confirmed the proclamation of the Commissioners, and abolished slavery in the other colonies. In June of the same year, Toussaint L'Ouverture, with 5000 men, who till then had fought under the Spanish flag, forced himself into the chief city, released the French General, and put himself and his negro soldiers at the orders of the Republic. From that hour the fortune of the war was changed. The English were driven out, (1798) the Spanish retired, and early in 1801, Toussaint proclaimed the French Republic in the Spanish portion of the Island, already ceded to France by the treaty of 1795, thus confirming the liberation of 100 000 more slaves who had been owned by the Spaniards.

In the meantime, war alone had not occupied the great genius of this negro warrior and statesman. Having become virtually Governor of the colony, in 1796 he had set himself to the task of organizing free labor,—a work begun by the French Commissioners in 1794. Sonthonax, returning from an absence in France, in 1796, was astonished at the prosperity which he saw. After the expulsion of the English, in 1798, Toussaint recalled the fugitive planters, gave them their former slaves for hired laborers, and opened the ports to free trade. To direct and enforce his regulations, he put the whole Island under military government, and supported his system of labor, when resisted, by the bayonet. The fruits of this sagacious policy were instantly visible. Commerce returned to the unfortunate Island; labor flourished; the planters grew rich; the condition of the laborers was wonderfully improved; the Government was respected, and every thing promised well for the future.

Suddenly, all this prosperity was again destroyed—not by the negroes, who had created it—but by the stupendous folly of Na-

There was a derangement of commerce and agriculture for a few years. The trade of the colonies fell off 40 per cent. in 1848, as compared with 1847, which was a very prosperous year. At the same time, the trade of France fell off 25 per cent. From 1848-53 there is a falling off of 10 per cent., as compared with the five years before Emancipation; but in the five subsequent years, from 1852-57, there is a gain of nearly 50 per cent., and the four colonies are steadily gaining in wealth and numbers. We have already spoken of the effect of slavery to diminish population in the West Indies. Since emancipation, this tendency has been checked in the French colonies, though it still continues in some of the English islands. The population of the French possessions, in 1836, was 376 296; in 1846, it had fallen to 374 548; in 1856, it had risen to 387-821, exclusive of immigration. §

The Dutch colony of Guiana, where slaves are still held, gives a most atrocious example of this loss of population. || About 1800 there were 80 000 slaves there, producing an annual value of \$7 000 000; in 1845 there were but 43,285 slaves and 9712 free blacks; a decrease of 46 per cent. in 45 years, or, if we include the free blacks, of 34 per cent. But these 43 000 slaves only produced in 1845 a value of \$700 000. ¶ Of 917 plantations 636 have been abandoned. ¶ and the production has fallen away nine-tenths; yet Emancipation has never troubled the Dutch sugar growers.

From the Danish colonies since Emancipation we have few statistics, but those are all favorable to freedom. We know that St. Thomas is a rich emporium, and that Santa Cruz flourishes. Some disorders, by which the negroes were the greatest sufferers, attended emancipation; but they were occasioned by the ill temper of the planters, and were soon quieted by the excellent government. For the past ten years we hear no tidings of tumult or distress from them.

In 1859 when Theodore Parker visited Santa Cruz and St. Thomas, a member of his family wrote thus of the freed slaves: |||

"I often think how delighted you would be with the results of Emancipation, as we see them all around us, and have abundant opportunity to examine them; twenty thousand

people raised at once from the condition of cattle to that of responsible beings,—protected and assisted, if need be, by the Government. The thrifty and industrious already succeed in laying up enough to put them forward in the world, build a comfortable little home in town, and bring their children up to trades. They have great pride in being independent. . . . They are gradually acquiring a pride of matrimony. A noble young man here, an Episcopal minister, has established a day school for the colored children of his parish, and I was never so pleased with any school I have ever visited. The progress has been surprising indeed."

"Here, as elsewhere," says Cochin, "Slavery did no good, and Emancipation no harm. A hurricane, or the change of a single degree in the thermometer, would have had an influence more hurtful and more lasting, than the fortunate release of 25 000 or 30 000 men, unjustly enslaved."

In the single Swedish island of St. Bartholomew, there were in 1846, 531 slaves, out of a population of 1700. These have all since been freed by purchase gradually made by King Oscar, \$10 000 a year having been voted for this purpose by the Swedish Parliament. We have no information about the effects; if they had been bad, we should, no doubt, have heard of it.

We have now spoken of the condition of all the West India Islands where Emancipation has taken place. It has been shown that all from which we have statistics, except Jamaica and Hayti, are more wealthy than during slavery, and that all, without exception, are increasing their trade and production; that the ruin of Hayti and Jamaica, so far as it exists, is owing to many other causes than Emancipation,—chiefly in the one case, to the cruel policy of Napoleon, and the ungenerous course of France, Spain, and the United States,—and in the other, to the folly of the planters, and the evils begotten by slavery. It has been shown, too, how delusive is the assumed prosperity of Cuba and Porto Rico—lands now passing through the hot fit of the slaveholding fever, but which must soon be let blood by Emancipation, as in Hayti, or pass into the ague fit and melancholy decline of the Dutch colonies, which slavery still curses. It has been shown that the negro is not bloodthirsty, that he is not idle, that he is capable of civilization. Let us add that he is not a pauper,—contrary to

§ Cochin, Tome I., p. 276.

|| See Cochin, II., p. 267.

¶ Edinburgh Review, April, 1859.

¶ 27th Report of the Am. A. S. Society, N. Y., 1861—p. 309-10.

the theories of many Americans, who fear to do an act of justice, lest we of the North shall be overrun by black paupers from the South. No, the paupers of the South are clothed in soft raiment, and live delicately, and are, or would be, in Kings' houses. It is a curious, but well attested fact, that among the free colored people of the British West Indies, in 1826, the proportion of paupers was one in 370, while among the whites it was one in 40.* In many places, the proportion was still more surprising. In Barbadoes, there were 14 500 whites, and 4500 free blacks; there were 996 white paupers, and one black one! In Berbice, there were two colored paupers out of 900, and seventeen white ones out of 600. In Jamaica, the free colored were to the whites as two to one, while the white paupers were to the colored, as two to one. In Massachusetts, in 1855, the number of paupers was one in 148. No return was made of colored paupers, but we are told that the returns of Philadelphia, where there were in 1850, about 20 000 colored persons, show a much greater proportion of white, than of colored paupers.

Many authorities have already been quoted to show the happy results of Emancipation, and we have been careful to take the testimony of enemies as well as friends. Let us add a few more to the list.

In 1839, De Tocqueville wrote thus; † "Many persons, preoccupied by the recollections of St. Domingo, are led to believe that the Emancipation of the slaves will occasion bloody collisions between the two races, whence the expulsion or the massacre of the whites may soon follow. *Everything leads to the belief that these fears are imaginary, or at least, much exaggerated.* Nothing which has taken place in the English colonies leaves room to suppose that Emancipation would be accompanied with the disasters which are dreaded."

In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, a work of the highest authority, occurs this passage in the article on Slavery, published in 1859:

"There can be but one opinion regarding the results of Emancipation entertained by any man who will dispassionately investigate the condition of the colored populations in the West Indies; and that opinion will redound, in the highest degree, to the sa-

gacity of those who then advocated the deliverance of the slave. England, by freeing her slaves, performed a politic, as well as a very just act."

Mr. Sewell, who has already been quoted, says, at the close of his book, written in 1860: "The act of British Emancipation has been widely abused; but its detractors must live among the people it disenthralled, if they would learn the value at which it can be estimated. Time, which develops the freedom that act created, adds continually to its lustre. Freedom, when allowed fair play, injured the prosperity of none of these West Indian colonies. It saved them from a far deeper and more lasting depression than any they have yet known. It was a boon conferred upon all classes of society; upon planter and upon laborer; upon commerce and agriculture; upon industry and education; upon morality and religion. And if a perfect measure of success remains to be achieved, let not freedom be condemned; for the obstacles to be overcome were great, and the workers few and unwilling."

The Hon. Charles Francis Adams, in a letter written July 21st, 1860, says:

"West India Emancipation is gravely pronounced a failure. I have heard it so described on the floor of the House of Representatives. The only reason given, is that the British Islands do not produce so many pounds of coffee and sugar as they did when they could force them out of the bones and muscles of slaves. Now mankind may, by possibility, be tolerably well off, and yet do entirely without coffee and sugar. But how can they be happy without good security for their right to seek happiness in their own way? . . . Yet they tell us, because coffee and sugar fail there is no good in Emancipation. If, by reason, of this failure, it could be shown that there was misery and famine in the land, that starvation was in a fair way to turn the garden into a wilderness, I should be ready to concede something to the argument. *But I hear of no such thing as that.*"

The Hon. Charles Sumner, in a letter of July 30th, 1860, says:

"Well-proved facts vindicate completely the policy of Emancipation, even if it were not commanded by the simplest rules of morality. . . . Two different Governors of this island (Jamaica) ‡ have assured me that, with

* Blue Book, May 9, 1826. Quoted in *The Tourist* 1832.
† Report on the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies. By Alexis De Tocqueville. (Translation) Boston, 1840.
p. 26. This is a pamphlet of 54 pages.

‡ See New York Independent of March 20, for an important letter of Gov. Hinks on this point.

all their experience there, they looked upon Emancipation as a blessing."

Here ends our chapter on the West Indies. What inference can be drawn from all this?

We answer—First: *That Emancipation in the United States is safe.* If it was so in Jamaica, where the whites were as one to fifteen, will it not be in Maryland, where they are more than three to one, in Kentucky, where they are nearly four to one, in Missouri, where they are nearly ten to one?

Second: *It will be politic.* If the freeing of half a million of slaves in 1793, saved St. Domingo from falling into the hands of England, the freeing of four millions, in 1862, may save the Cotton States from a like fate, which even our recent and brilliant victories perhaps may hasten.

Third: *It must not be attended by forced colonization.* If the great want of the West Indies is labor, with what expectation can we ship out of our Southern States two-thirds of the laboring population? Immigration is the demand in the West Indies, it would be folly for us to try emigration.

Fourth. *It must not be gradual, but immediate and complete.* If the experience of Antigua and Jamaica teaches anything, it teaches that simultaneous and entire emancipation is the safest, the cheapest, and the wisest course.

Fifth. *It will attract more white men to the South than it will send black men to the North.* This is the opinion of a sensible fugitive, to whom we owe the statement; but the history of immigration to the West Indies, and to Mauritius and Bourbon proves it true. Why should the negroes come here after emancipation? On the contrary, reasons both of climate and of political economy will carry them South in great numbers, not only from the border States, but from the North and from Canada.

Finally, these facts prove, what no man of lofty virtue ever can doubt,—*That justice is always expedient.*

The Greeks had a story which devout old Herodotus has preserved, that Glaucus, the

Spartan, wishing to commit an injustice, and to confirm it by an oath, asked of the oracle if he might do so. "Glaucus, son of Epicydes!" answered the priestess, in her solemn chant, "for the present perjury is profitable, and theft; swear, then, for death lies in wait for the just and the unjust. But there is a nameless child of perjury, without hands, without feet, yet swiftly she pursues till she clutches and destroys thy race, and all thy house. But the race of the just man flourishes forever."

Thus the oracle. "And now," adds the narrator, "there is no descendant of Glaucus at all, nor any branch of the stock of Glaucus; but he has been cast forth from Sparta, root and branch."

Centuries earlier, the wise Athenian law-giver, in grave verse, which Demosthenes loved to quote, had warned his countrymen of the same truth.*

My soul, Athenians, prompts me to relate
What miseries upon injustice wait.
Riches by theft, and cozenage to possess,
The sacred bounds of Justice ye transgress;
Who silent sees the present, knows the past,
And will revenge these injuries at last.
But Justice all things orderly designs,
And in strict fetters the unjust confines.
What's sour she sweetens, and allays what cloy.
Wrong she repels, ill in the growth destroys,
Softens the stubborn, the unjust reforms,
And in the State calms all seditious storms.
Bitter dissensions by her rule suppress,
Who wisely governs all things for the best.

And earlier yet, the stern warnings of the Hebrew sage, who led forth his despised people from the oppression of Egypt, had announced the eternal law with no doubtful voice:

"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments and his judgments, and his statutes which I command this day; lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

And when thy flocks and thy herds multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God. . . . And thou say in thine heart, my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish.

As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God."—[Deuteronomy viii. 11-20.

*Demosthenes. False Legation, 255. Stanley's Translation in the History of Philosophy.

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