

THE
*Black
Jacobins*

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE AND
THE SAN DOMINGO REVOLUTION

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

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PROLOGUE

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS landed first in the New World at the island of San Salvador, and after praising God enquired urgently for gold. The natives, Red Indians, were peaceable and friendly and directed him to Haiti, a large island (nearly as large as Ireland), rich, they said, in the yellow metal. He sailed to Haiti. One of his ships being wrecked, the Haitian Indians helped him so willingly that very little was lost and of the articles which they brought on shore not one was stolen.

The Spaniards, the most advanced Europeans of their

day, annexed the island, called it Hispaniola, and took the backward natives under their protection. They introduced Christianity, forced labour in mines, murder, rape, blood-hounds, strange diseases, and artificial famine (by the destruction of cultivation to starve the rebellious). These and other requirements of the higher civilisation reduced the native population from an estimated half-a-million, perhaps a million, to 60,000 in 15 years.

Las Casas, a Dominican priest with a conscience, travelled to Spain to plead for the abolition of native slavery. But without coercion of the natives how could the colony exist? All the natives received as wages was Christianity and they could be good Christians without working in the mines.

The Spanish Government compromised. It abolished the *repartimientos*, or forced labour, in law while its agents in the colony maintained it in fact. Las Casas, haunted at the prospect of seeing before his eyes the total destruction of a population within one generation, hit on the expedient of importing the more robust Negroes from a populous Africa; in 1517, Charles V. authorised the export of 15,000 slaves to San Domingo, and thus priest and King launched on the world the American slave-trade and slavery.

The Spanish settlement founded by Columbus was on the south-east of the island. In 1629 some wandering Frenchmen sought a home in the little island of Tortuga, six miles off the north coast of San Domingo, to be followed by Englishmen, and Dutchmen from Santa Cruz. Tortuga was healthy and in the forests of western San Domingo roamed millions of wild cattle which could be hunted for food and hides. To Tortuga came fugitives from justice, escaped galley-slaves, debtors unable to pay their bills, adventurers seeking adventure or quick fortunes, men of all crimes and all nationalities. French, British and Spaniards slaughtered one another for nearly 30 years, and the British were actually in possession of Tortuga at one time, but by 1659 the French buccaneers prevailed. They sought the suzerainty of France and demanded a chief and some women. From Tortuga they laid a firm basis in San Do-

mingo and moved there. To drive away these persistent intruders the Spaniards organised a great hunt and killed all the bulls they could find in order to ruin the cattle business. The French retaliated by the cultivation of cocoa; then indigo and cotton. Already they knew the sugar-cane. Lacking capital they raided the English island of Jamaica and stole money and 2,000 Negroes. French, British and Spaniards raided and counter-raided and burnt to the ground, but in 1695 the Treaty of Ryswick between France and Spain gave the French a legal right to the western part of the island. In 1734 the colonists began to cultivate coffee. The land was fertile, France offered a good market. But they wanted labour. In addition to Negroes, they brought whites, the *engagés*, who would be freed after a period of years. So little did they bring the Negroes because these were barbarous or black, that the early laws prescribed similar regulations for both black slaves and white *engagés*. But under the regimen of those days the whites could not stand the climate. So the slavers brought more and more Negroes, in numbers that leapt by thousands every year, until the drain from Africa ran into millions.

the slave traffic, the African slave in America was happier than in his own African civilisation. Ours, too, is an age of propaganda. We excel our ancestors only in system and organisation: they lied as fluently and as brazenly. In the sixteenth century, Central Africa was a territory of peace and happy civilisation.¹ Traders travelled thousands of miles from one side of the continent to another without molestation. The tribal wars from which the European pirates claimed to deliver the people were mere sham-fights; it was a great battle when half-a-dozen men were killed. It was on a peasantry in many respects superior to the serfs in large areas of Europe, that the slave-trade fell. Tribal life was broken up and millions of debilitated Africans were let loose upon each other. The unceasing destruction of crops led to cannibalism; the captive women became concubines and degraded the status of the wife. Tribes had to supply slaves or be sold as slaves themselves. Violence and ferocity became the necessities for survival, and violence and ferocity survived.² The stockades of grinning skulls, the human sacrifices, the selling of their own children as slaves, these horrors were the product of an intolerable pressure on the African peoples, which became fiercer through the centuries as the demands of industry increased and the methods of coercion were perfected.

The slaves were collected in the interior, fastened one to the other in columns, loaded with heavy stones of 40 or 50 pounds in weight to prevent attempts at escape, and then marched the long journey to the sea, sometimes hundreds of miles, the weakly and sick dropping to die in the African jungle. Some were brought to the coast by canoe, lying in the bottom of boats for days on end, their hands bound, their faces exposed to the tropical sun and the tropical rain, their backs in the water which was never bailed out. At the slave ports they were penned into "trunks" for the inspection of the buyers. Night and day

¹ See the works of Professor Emil Torday, one of the greatest African scholars of his time, particularly a lecture delivered at Geneva in 1931 to a society for the Protection of Children in Africa.

² See Professor Torday's lecture mentioned above.

I

The Property

THE SLAVERS scoured the coasts of Guinea. As they devastated an area they moved westward and then south, decade after decade, past the Niger, down the Congo coast, past Loango and Angola, round the Cape of Good Hope, and, by 1789, even as far as Mozambique on the eastern side of Africa. Guinea remained their chief hunting ground. From the coast they organised expeditions far into the interior. They set the simple tribesmen fighting against each other with modern weapons over thousands of square miles. The propagandists of the time claimed that however cruel was

thousands of human beings were packed in these "dens of putrefaction" so that no European could stay in them for longer than a quarter of an hour without fainting. The Africans fainted and recovered or fainted and died, the mortality in the "trunks" being over 20 per cent. Outside in the harbour, waiting to empty the "trunks" as they filled, was the captain of the slave-ship, with so clear a conscience that one of them, in the intervals of waiting to enrich British capitalism with the profits of another valuable cargo, enriched British religion by composing the hymn "How Sweet the Name of Jesus sounds!"

On the ships the slaves were packed in the hold on galleries one above the other. Each was given only four or five feet in length and two or three feet in height, so that they could neither lie at full length nor sit upright. Contrary to the lies that have been spread so pertinaciously about Negro docility, the revolts at the port of embarkation and on board were incessant, so that the slaves had to be chained, right hand to right leg, left hand to left leg, and attached in rows to long iron bars. In this position they lived for the voyage, coming up once a day for exercise and to allow the sailors to "clean the pails." But when the cargo was rebellious or the weather bad, then they stayed below for weeks at a time. The close proximity of so many naked human beings, their bruised and festering flesh, the foetid air, the prevailing dysentery, the accumulation of filth, turned these holds into a hell. During the storms the hatches were battened down, and in the close and loathsome darkness they were hurled from one side to another by the heaving vessel, held in position by the chains on their bleeding flesh. No place on earth, observed one writer of the time, concentrated so much misery as the hold of a slave-ship.

Twice a day, at nine and at four, they received their food. To the slave-traders they were articles of trade and no more. A captain held up by calms or adverse winds was known to have poisoned his cargo.³ Another killed some of

³ See Pierre de Vaisière, *Saint-Domingue* (1629-1789). Paris, 1000. This contains an admirable summary.

his slaves to feed the others with the flesh. They died not only from the régime but from grief and rage and despair. They undertook vast hunger strikes; undid their chains and hurled themselves on the crew in futile attempts at insurrection. What could these inland tribesmen do on the open sea, in a complicated sailing vessel? To brighten their spirits it became the custom to have them up on the deck once a day and force them to dance. Some took the opportunity to jump overboard, uttering cries of triumph as they cleared the vessel and disappeared below the surface.

Fear of their cargo bred a savage cruelty in the crew. One captain, to strike terror into the rest, killed a slave and dividing heart, liver and entrails into 300 pieces made each of the slaves eat one, threatening those who refused with the same torture.⁴ Such incidents were not rare. Given the circumstances such things were (and are) inevitable. Nor did the system spare the slavers. Every year one-fifth of all who took part in the African trade died.

All America and the West Indies took slaves. When the ship reached the harbour, the cargo came up on deck to be bought. The purchasers examined them for defects, looked at the teeth, pinched the skin, sometimes tasted the perspiration to see if the slave's blood was pure and his health as good as his appearance. Some of the women affected a curiosity, the indulgence of which, with a horse, would have caused them to be kicked 20 yards across the deck. But the slave had to stand it. Then in order to restore the dignity which might have been lost by too intimate an examination, the purchaser spat in the face of the slave. Having become the property of his owner, he was branded on both sides of the breast with a hot iron. His duties were explained to him by an interpreter, and a priest instructed him in the first principles of Christianity.⁵

The stranger in San Domingo was awakened by the cracks of the whip, the stifled cries, and the heavy groans

⁴ De Vaisière, *Saint-Domingue*, p. 162.

⁵ This was the beginning and end of his education.

of the Negroes who saw the sun rise only to curse it for its renewal of their labours and their pains. Their work began at day-break: at eight they stopped for a short break-fast and worked again till midday. They began again at two o'clock and worked until evening, sometimes till ten or eleven. A Swiss traveller⁶ has left a famous description of a gang of slaves at work. "They were about a hundred men and women of different ages, all occupied in digging ditches in a cane-field, the majority of them naked or covered with rags. The sun shone down with full force on their heads. Sweat rolled from all parts of their bodies. Their limbs, weighed down by the heat, fatigued with the weight of their picks and by the resistance of the clayey soil baked hard enough to break their implements, strained themselves to overcome every obstacle. A mournful silence reigned. Exhaustion was stamped on every face, but the hour of rest had not yet come. The pitiless eye of the Manager patrolled the gang and several foremen armed with long whips moved periodically between them, giving stinging blows to all who, worn out by fatigue, were compelled to take a rest—men or women, young or old." This was no isolated picture. The sugar plantations demanded an exacting and ceaseless labour. The tropical earth is baked hard by the sun. Round every "carry" of land intended for cane it was necessary to dig a large ditch to ensure circulation of air. Young canes required attention for the first three or four months and grew to maturity in 14 or 18 months. Cane could be planted and would grow at any time of the year, and the reaping of one crop was the signal for the immediate digging of ditches and the planting of another. Once cut they had to be rushed to the mill lest the juice became acid by fermentation. The extraction of the juice and manufacture of the raw sugar went on for three weeks a month, 16 or 18 hours a day, for seven or eight months in the year.

Worked like animals, the slaves were housed like animals, in huts built around a square planted with provisions

⁶ Giroud-Chantrens, *Voyage d'un Suisse en différentes colonies*, Neuchâtel, 1785, p. 137.

and fruits. These huts were about 20 to 25 feet long, 12 feet wide and about 15 feet in height, divided by partitions into two or three rooms. They were windowless and light entered only by the door. The floor was beaten earth; the bed was of straw, hides or a rude contrivance of cords tied on posts. On these slept indiscriminately mother, father and children. Defenceless against their masters, they struggled with overwork and its usual complement—underfeeding. The Negro Code, Louis XIV's attempt to ensure them humane treatment, ordered that they should be given, every week, two pots and a half of manioc, three cassavas, two pounds of salt beef or three pounds of salted fish—about food enough to last a healthy man for three days. Instead their masters gave them half-a-dozen pints of coarse flour, rice, or pease, and half-a-dozen herrings. Worn out by their labours all through the day and far into the night, many neglected to cook and ate the food raw. The ration was so small and given to them so irregularly that often the last half of the week found them with nothing.

Even the two hours they were given in the middle of the day, and the holidays on Sundays and feast-days, were not for rest, but in order that they might cultivate a small piece of land to supplement their regular rations. Hard-working slaves cultivated vegetables and raised chickens to sell in the towns to make a little in order to buy rum and tobacco; and here and there a Napoleon of finance, by luck and industry, could make enough to purchase his freedom. Their masters encouraged them in this practice of cultivation, for in years of scarcity the Negroes died in thousands, epidemics broke out, the slaves fled into the woods and plantations were ruined.

The difficulty was that though one could trap them like animals, transport them in pens, work them alongside an ass or a horse and beat both with the same stick, stable them and starve them, they remained, despite their black skins and curly hair, quite invincibly human beings, with

the intelligence and resentments of human beings. To cow them into the necessary docility and acceptance necessitated a régime of calculated brutality and terrorism, and it is this that explains the unusual spectacle of property-owners apparently careless of preserving their property: they had first to ensure their own safety.

For the least fault the slaves received the harshest punishment. In 1685 the Negro Code authorised whipping, and in 1702 one colonist, a Marquis, thought any punishment which demanded more than 100 blows of the whip was serious enough to be handed over to the authorities. Later the number was fixed at 39, then raised to 50. But the colonists paid no attention to these regulations and slaves were not unfrequently whipped to death. The whip was not always an ordinary cane or woven cord, as the Code demanded. Sometimes it was replaced by the *rigoise* or thick thong of cow-hide, or by the *lignes*—local growths of reeds, supple and pliant like whalebone. The slaves received the whip with more certainty and regularity than they received their food. It was the incentive to work and the guardian of discipline. But there was no ingenuity that fear or a depraved imagination could devise which was not employed to break their spirit and satisfy the lusts and resentment of their owners and guardians—irons on the hands and feet, blocks of wood that the slaves had to drag behind them wherever they went, the tin-plate mask designed to prevent the slaves eating the sugar-cane, the iron collar. Whipping was interrupted in order to pass a piece of hot wood on the buttocks of the victim; salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common, limbs, ears, and sometimes the private parts, to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match; buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them near

to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves. One colonist was known in moments of anger to throw himself on his slaves and stick his teeth into their flesh.⁷

Were these tortures, so well authenticated, habitual or were they merely isolated incidents, the extravagances of a few half-crazed colonists? Impossible as it is to substantiate hundreds of cases, yet all the evidence shows that these bestial practices were normal features of slave life. The torture of the whip, for instance, had "a thousand refinements," but there were regular varieties that had special names, so common were they. When the hands and arms were tied to four posts on the ground, the slave was said to undergo "the four post." If the slave was tied to a ladder it was "the torture of the ladder"; if he was suspended by four limbs it was "the hammock," etc. The pregnant woman was not spared her "four-post." A hole was dug in the earth to accommodate the unborn child. The torture of the collar was specially reserved for women who were suspected of abortion, and the collar never left their necks until they had produced a child. The blowing up of a slave had its own name—"to burn a little powder in the arse of a nigger"; obviously this was no freak but a recognised practice.

After an exhaustive examination, the best that de Vaisière can say is that there were good masters and there were bad, and his impression, "but only an impression," is that the former were more numerous than the latter.

There are and always will be some who, ashamed of the behaviour of their ancestors, try to prove that slavery was not so bad after all, that its evils and its cruelty were the exaggerations of propagandists and not the habitual lot of the slaves. Men will say (and accept) anything in order to foster national pride or soothe a troubled conscience. Undoubtedly there were kind masters who did not indulge in these refinements of cruelty and whose slaves

⁷ *Saint-Domingue*, p. 153-194. De Vaisière uses chiefly official reports in the French Colonial archives, and other documents of the period, giving specific references in each case.

merely suffered over-work, under-nourishment and the whip. But the slaves in San Domingo could not replenish their number by reproduction. After that dreaded journey across the ocean a woman was usually sterile for two years. The life in San Domingo killed them off fast. The planters deliberately worked them to death rather than wait for children to grow up. But the professional white-washers are assisted by the writings of a few contemporary observers who described scenes of idyllic beauty. One of these is Vaublanc, whom we shall meet again, and whose testimony we will understand better when we know more of him. In his memoirs⁸ he shows us a plantation on which there were no prisons, no dungeons, no punishments to speak of. If the slaves were naked the climate was such as not to render this an evil, and those who complained forgot the perfectly disgusting rags that were so often seen in France. The slaves were exempt from unhealthy, fatiguing, dangerous work such as was performed by the workers in Europe. They did not have to descend into the bowels of the earth nor dig deep pits; they did not construct subterranean galleries; they did not work in the factories where French workers breathed a deadly and infected air; they did not mount elevated roofs; they did not carry enormous burdens. The slaves, he concluded, had light work to do and were happy to do it. Vaublanc, in San Domingo so sympathetic to the sorrows of labour in France, had to fly from Paris in August, 1792, to escape the wrath of the French workers.

Malouet, who was an official in the colonies and fellow-reactionary of Vaublanc against all change in the colonies, also sought to give some ideas of the privileges of slavery. The first he notes is that the slave, on attaining his majority, begins to enjoy "the pleasures of love," and his master has no interest in preventing the indulgence of his tastes.⁹ To such impertinent follies can the defence of property drive even an intelligent man, supposed in his time to be sympathetic towards the blacks.

⁸ Quoted extensively in de Vaisière, pp. 198-202.
⁹ De Vaisière, p. 196.

The majority of the slaves accommodated themselves to this unceasing brutality by a profound fatalism and a wooden stupidity before their masters. "Why do you ill-treat your mule in that way?" asked a colonist of a carter. "But when I do not work, I am beaten, when he does not work, I beat him—he is my Negro." One old Negro, having lost one of his ears and condemned to lose another, begged the Governor to spare it, for if that too was cut off he would have nowhere to put his stump of cigarette. A slave sent by his master into his neighbour's garden to steal, is caught and brought back to the man who had only a few minutes before despatched him on the errand. The master orders him a punishment of 100 lashes to which the slave submits without a murmur. When caught in error they persisted in denial with the same fatalistic stupidity. A slave is accused of stealing a pigeon. He denies it. The pigeon is discovered hidden in his shirt. "Well, well, look at that pigeon. It take my shirt for a nest." Through the shirt of another, a master can feel the potatoes which he denies he has stolen. They are not potatoes, he says, they are stones. He is undressed and the potatoes fall to the ground. "Eh! master. The devil is wicked. Put stones, and look, you find potatoes."

On holidays when not working on their private plots, or dancing, they sat for hours in front of their huts giving no sign of life. Wives and husbands, children and parents, were separated at the will of the master, and a father and son would meet after many years and give no greeting or any sign of emotion. Many slaves could never be got to stir at all unless they were whipped.¹⁰ Suicide was a common habit, and such was their disregard for life that they often killed themselves, not for personal reasons, but in order to spite their owner. Life was hard and death, they

¹⁰ Incredible as this may sound Baron de Wimpffen gives it as the evidence of his own eyes. His record of his visit to San Domingo in 1790 is a standard work. A good selection, with very full notes, is published, under the title, *Saint-Domingue à la veille de la Révolution*, by Albert Savine, Paris, 1911.

believed, meant not only release but a return to Africa. Those who wished to believe and to convince the world that the slaves were half-human brutes, fit for nothing else but slavery, could find ample evidence for their faith, and in nothing so much as in this homicidal mania of the slaves.

Poison was their method. A mistress would poison a rival to retain the valuable affections of her inconstant owner. A discarded mistress would poison master, wife, children and slaves. A slave robbed of his wife by one of his masters would poison him, and this was one of the most frequent causes of poisoning.¹¹ If a planter conceived a passion for a young slave, her mother would poison his wife with the idea of placing her daughter at the head of the household. The slaves would poison the younger children of a master in order to ensure the plantation succeeding to one son. By this means they prevented the plantation being broken up and the gang dispersed. On certain plantations the slaves decimated their number by poison so as to keep the number of slaves small and prevent their masters embarking on larger schemes which would increase the work. For this reason a slave would poison his wife, another would poison his children, and a Negro nurse declared in court that for years she had poisoned every child that she brought into the world. Nurses employed in hospitals poisoned sick soldiers to rid themselves of unpleasant work. The slaves would even poison the property of a master whom they loved. He was going away; they poisoned cows, horses and mules, the plantation was thrown into disorder, and the beloved master was compelled to remain. The most dreadful of all this cold-blooded murder was, however, the jaw-sickness—a disease which attacked children only, in the first few days of their existence. Their jaws were closed to such an extent that it was impossible to open them and to get anything down, with the result that they died of hunger. It was not a natural disease and

never attacked children delivered by white women. The Negro midwives alone could cause it, and it is believed that they performed some simple operation on the newly-born child which resulted in the jaw-sickness. Whatever the method this disease caused the death of nearly one-third of the children born on the plantations.

What was the intellectual level of these slaves? The planters, hating them, called them by every opprobrious name. "The Negroes," says a memoir published in 1789, "are unjust, cruel, barbarous, half-human, treacherous, deceitful, thieves, drunkards, proud, lazy, unclean, shameless, jealous to fury, and cowards." It was by sentiments such as these that they strove to justify the abominable cruelties they practised. And they took great pains that the Negro should remain the brute beast they wanted him to be. "The safety of the whites demands that we keep the Negroes in the most profound ignorance. I have reached the stage of believing firmly that one must treat the Negroes as one treats beasts." Such is the opinion of the Governor of Martinique in a letter addressed to the Minister and such was the opinion of all colonists. Except for the Jews, who spared no energy in making Israelites of their slaves, the majority of the colonists religiously kept all instruction, religious or otherwise, away from the slaves.

Naturally there were all types of men among them, ranging from native chieftains, as was the father of Toussaint L'Ouverture, to men who had been slaves in their own country. The creole Negro was more docile than the slave who had been born in Africa. Some said he was more intelligent. Others doubted that there was much difference though the creole slave knew the language and was more familiar with his surroundings and his work. Yet those who took the trouble to observe them away from their masters and in their intercourse with each other did not fail to see that remarkable liveliness of intellect and vivacity of spirit which so distinguish their descendants in the West Indies to-day. Father du Tertre, who knew them

¹¹ See *Kenya* by Dr. Norman Leys, London, 1926, p. 184. "Some rivalry for a native woman is probably the explanation of most crimes of violence committed by Africans against Europeans in Kenya."

well, noted their secret pride and feeling of superiority to their masters, the difference between their behaviour before their masters and when they were by themselves. De Wimpfen, an exceptionally observant and able traveller, was also astonished at this dual personality of the slaves. "One has to hear with what warmth and what volubility, and at the same time with what precision of ideas and accuracy of judgment, this creature, heavy and taciturn all day, now squatting before his fire, tells stories, talks, gesticulates, argues, passes opinions, approves or condemns both his master and everyone who surrounds him." It was this intelligence which refused to be crushed, these latent possibilities, that frightened the colonists, as it frightens the whites in Africa to-day. "No species of men has more intelligence," wrote Hilliard d'Auberteuil, a colonist, in 1784, and had his book banned.

But one does not need education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom. At their midnight celebrations of Voodoo, their African cult, they danced and sang, usually this favourite song:

Eh ! Eh ! Bomba ! Heu ! Heu !
Canga, bafo té !
Canga, mouné de lé !
Canga, do ki la !
Canga, li !

"We swear to destroy the whites and all that they possess; let us die rather than fail to keep this vow."

The colonists knew this song and tried to stamp it out, and the Voodoo cult with which it was linked. In vain. For over two hundred years the slaves sang it at their meetings, as the Jews in Babylon sang of Zion, and the Bantu to-day sing in secret the national anthem of Africa.¹²

¹² Such observations, written in 1938, were intended to use the San Domingo revolution as a forecast of the future of colonial Africa.

All the slaves, however, did not undergo this régime. There was a small privileged caste, the foremen of the gangs, coachmen, cooks, butlers, maids, nurses, female companions, and other house-servants. These repaid their kind treatment and comparatively easy life with a strong attachment to their masters, and have thus enabled Tory historians, regius professors and sentimentalists to represent plantation slavery as a patriarchal relation between master and slave. Permeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses, these upper servants gave themselves airs and despised the slaves in the fields. Dressed in cast-off silks and brocades, they gave balls in which, like trained monkeys, they danced minuets and quadrilles, and bowed and curtseyed in the fashion of Versailles. But a few of these used their position to cultivate themselves, to gain a little education, to learn all they could. The leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking, and the San Domingo revolution was no exception to this rule.

Christophe, afterwards Emperor of Haiti, was a slave—a waiter in a public hotel at Cap François, where he made use of his opportunities to gain a knowledge of men and of the world. Toussaint L'Ouverture¹³ also belonged to this small and privileged caste. His father, son of a petty chieftain in Africa, was captured in war, sold as a slave and made the journey in a slave-ship. He was bought by a colonist of some sensibility, who, recognising that this Negro was an unusual person, allowed him a certain liberty on the plantation and the use of five slaves to cultivate a plot of land. He became a Catholic, married a woman who was both beautiful and good, and Toussaint was the eldest of his eight children. Near to the household lived an old Negro, Pierre Baptiste, remarkable for his integrity of character and a smattering of knowledge. The Negroes spoke a debased French known as creole. But Pierre knew French, also a little Latin and a little geometry, which he had learned from a missionary. Pierre Baptiste became Toussaint's godfather and taught his godson the rudiments

¹³ As a slave he was called Toussaint Bréda.

of French; using the services of the Catholic Church he instructed him also in the rudiments of Latin; Toussaint learned also to draw. The young slaves had the care of the flocks and herds, and this was Toussaint's early occupation. But his father, like many other Africans, had some knowledge of medicinal plants and taught Toussaint what he knew. The elements of an education, his knowledge of herbs, his unusual intelligence, singled him out, and he was made coachman to his master. This brought him further means of comfort and self-education. Ultimately he was made steward of all the live-stock on the estate—a responsible post which was usually held by a white man. If Toussaint's genius came from where genius comes, yet circumstances conspired to give him exceptional parents and friends and a kind master.

But the number of slaves who occupied positions with such opportunities was infinitely small in comparison with the hundreds of thousands who bore on their bent backs the whole structure of San Domingo society. All of them did not submit to it. Those whose boldness of spirit found slavery intolerable and refused to evade it by committing suicide, would fly to the woods and mountains and form bands of free men—maroons. They fortified their fastnesses with palisades and ditches. Women followed them. They reproduced themselves. And for a hundred years before 1789 the maroons were a source of danger to the colony. In 1720, 1,000 slaves fled to the mountains. In 1751 there were at least 3,000 of them. Usually they formed separate bands, but periodically they found a chief who was strong enough to unite the different sections. Many of these rebel leaders struck terror into the hearts of the colonists by their raids on the plantations and the strength and determination of the resistance they organised against attempts to exterminate them. The greatest of these chiefs was Mackandal.

He conceived the bold design of uniting all the Negroes and driving the whites out of the colony. He was a

Negro from Guinea who had been a slave in the district of Limbé, later to become one of the great centres of the revolution. Mackandal was an orator, in the opinion of a white contemporary equal in eloquence to the European orators of the day, and different only in his superior strength and vigour. He was fearless and, though one-handed from an accident, had a fortitude of spirit which he knew how to preserve in the midst of the most cruel tortures. He claimed to predict the future; like Mahomet he had revelations; he persuaded his followers that he was immortal and exercised such a hold over them that they considered it an honour to serve him on their knees; the handsomest women fought for the privilege of being admitted to his bed. Not only did his band raid and pillage plantations far and wide, but he himself ranged from plantation to plantation to make converts, stimulate his followers, and perfect his great plan for the destruction of white civilisation in San Domingo. An uninstructed mass, feeling its way to revolution, usually begins by terrorism, and Mackandal aimed at delivering his people by means of poison. For six years he built up his organisation, he and his followers poisoning not only whites but disobedient members of their own band. Then he arranged that on a particular day the water of every house in the capital of the province was to be poisoned, and the general attack made on the whites while they were in the convulsions and anguish of death. He had lists of all members of his party in each slave gang; appointed captains, lieutenants and other officers; arranged for bands of Negroes to leave the town and spread over the plains to massacre the whites. His temerity was the cause of his downfall. He went one day to a plantation, got drunk and was betrayed, and being captured was burnt alive.

The Mackandal rebellion never reached fruition and it was the only hint of an organised attempt at revolt during the hundred years preceding the French Revolution. The slaves seemed eternally resigned, though here and there a slave was manumitted or purchased his freedom from his owner. From their masters came no talk of future

emancipation. The San Domingo colonists said that slavery was necessary, and for them that finished the argument. Legislation passed for the protection of the slaves remained on paper in face of the dictum that a man could do as he liked with his own. "All laws, however just and humane they may be, in favour of Negroes will always be a violation of the rights of property if they are not sponsored by the colonists. . . . All laws on property are just only if they are supported by the opinion of those who are interested in them as proprietors." This was still white opinion at the beginning of the French Revolution. Not only planters but officials made it quite clear that whatever the penalties for the ill-treatment of slaves, these could never be enforced. The slaves might understand that they had rights, which would be fatal to the peace and well-being of the colony. That was why a colonist never hesitated at the mutilation, the torture or the murder of a slave who had cost him thousands of francs. "The Ivory Coast is a good mother" was a colonial proverb. Slaves could always be bought, and profits were always high.

The Negro Code was enacted in 1685. A century after, in 1788, the Le Jeune case¹⁴ laid bare the realities of slave law and slave justice in San Domingo.

Le Jeune was a coffee planter of Plaisance. Suspecting that the mortality among his Negroes was due to poison, he murdered four of them and attempted to extort confessions from two women by torture. He roasted their feet, legs and elbows, while alternately gagging them thoroughly and then withdrawing the gag. He extorted nothing and threatened all his French-speaking slaves that he would kill them without mercy if they dared to denounce him. But Plaisance, in the thickly-populated North Province, was always a centre of the more advanced slaves, and 14 of them went to Le Cap and charged Le Jeune before the law. The judges could do no less than accept the charges. They appointed a commission which made an investigation

¹⁴ De Vaissière, pp. 186-188.

at Le Jeune's plantation and confirmed the testimony of the slaves. The commission actually found the two women barred and chained, with elbows and legs decomposing, but still alive; one of them had her neck so lacerated by an iron collar that she could not swallow. Le Jeune insisted that they were guilty of the poisonings which for so long had ravaged his plantation and gave in evidence a box taken in the women's possession. This, he said, contained poison. But when the box was opened it was found to contain nothing more than ordinary tobacco and rat dung. Defence was impossible, and when the two women died, Le Jeune disappeared just in time to escape arrest. The case was clear. At the preliminary hearing the 14 Negroes repeated their accusations word for word. But seven white witnesses testified in favour of Le Jeune and two of his stewards formally absolved him of all guilt. The planters of Plaisance petitioned the Governor and the Intendant on behalf of Le Jeune, and demanded that each of his slaves be given 50 lashes for having denounced him. The Chamber of Agriculture of Le Cap asked that Le Jeune should merely be banished from the colony. Seventy planters from the north made a similar petition, and the Philadelphian Circle, a centre of San Domingo culture, was asked to make representations on Le Jeune's behalf. Le Jeune's father asked for a writ of intervention against one of the official investigators whose evidence he impugned. "To put it shortly," wrote the Governor and the Intendant to the Minister, "it seems that the safety of the colony depends on the acquittal of Le Jeune." It did, if the slaves were to be kept in their place. The judges, after a thousand delays, returned a negative verdict, the charges were declared null and void and the case dismissed. The public prosecutor demanded an appeal before the Superior Council of Port-au-Prince, the official capital of the island. All white San Domingo was up in arms. The Intendant appointed the oldest member of the Council to be the *rappporteur*, thinking that he could be depended upon to ensure justice. But on the day of the trial, fearing that he would not be able to secure a conviction he absented himself, and the Coun-

ed once more acquitted Le Jeune. The Home Government could pass what laws it liked. White San Domingo would not tolerate any interference with the methods by which they kept their slaves in order.¹⁵

This was the problem to be solved.

Hope from the planters there was none. In France Liberalism was still an aspiration and "trusteeship," its fig-leaf, was as yet unknown. But on the tide of humanitarianism rising on the bourgeois revolt against feudalism, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists had attacked slavery. "Let the colonies be destroyed rather than be the cause of so much evil," said the Encyclopaedia in its article on the slave-trade. But such outbursts neither then nor now have carried weight. And wordy attacks against slavery drew sneers from observers which were not altogether undeserved. The authors were compared to doctors who offered to a patient nothing more than invectives against the disease which consumed him.

But among these literary opponents of slavery was one who, nine years before the fall of the Bastille, called boldly for a slave revolution with a passionate conviction that it was bound to come some day and relieve Africa and Africans. He was a priest, the Abbé Raynal, and he preached his revolutionary doctrine in the *Philosophical and Political History of the Establishments and Commerce of the Europeans in the Two Indies*. It was a book famous

¹⁵ The French colonists were not freaks. For murders of two Kenya natives by the sons of a bishop and a peer respectively and the absence of any serious punishment, see *Kenya*, by Dr. Norman Leys, pp. 176-180. In a footnote on p. 180 Dr. Leys quotes the British Colonial Secretary in 1924: "Cases of this kind are of rare occurrence in the history of the colony," and adds, "a far from accurate statement." This does not by any means imply that all the bestialities of San Domingo are practised in Africa. But the régimes are strictly parallel, otherwise the conditions noted by Dr. Leys could not exist.

in its time and it came into the hands of the slave most fitted to make use of it, Toussaint L'Ouverture.

"Natural liberty is the right which nature has given to every one to dispose of himself according to his will. . . ."

"The slave, an instrument in the hands of wickedness, is below the dog which the Spaniard let loose against the American. . . ."

"These are memorable and eternal truths—the foundation of all morality, the basis of all government; will they be contested? Yes! . . ."

And the most famous passage:

"If self-interest alone prevails with nations and their masters, there is another power. Nature speaks in louder tones than philosophy or self-interest. Already are there established two colonies of fugitive negroes, whom treaties and power protect from assault. These lightnings announce the thunder. A courageous chief only is wanted. Where is he, that great man whom Nature owes to her vexed, oppressed and tormented children? Where is he? He will appear, doubt it not; he will come forth and raise the sacred standard of liberty. This venerable signal will gather around him the companions of his misfortune. More impetuous than the torrents, they will everywhere leave the indelible traces of their just resentment. Everywhere people will bless the name of the hero who shall have reestablished the rights of the human race; everywhere will they raise trophies in his honour."

Over and over again Toussaint read this passage: "A courageous chief only is wanted. Where is he? A courageous chief was wanted. It is the tragedy of mass movements that they need and can only too rarely find adequate leadership. But much else was wanted."

Men make their own history, and the black Jacobins of San Domingo were to make history which would alter the fate of millions of men and shift the economic currents of three continents. But if they could seize opportunity they could not create it. The slave-trade and slavery

were woven tight into the economics of the eighteenth century. Three forces, the proprietors of San Domingo, the French bourgeoisie and the British bourgeoisie, threw on this devastation of a continent and on the brutal exploitation of millions. As long as these maintained an equilibrium the infernal traffic would go on, and for that matter would have gone on until the present day. But nothing, however profitable, goes on forever. From the very momentum of their own development, colonial planters, French and British bourgeois, were generating internal stresses and intensifying external rivalries, moving blindly to explosions and conflicts which would shatter the basis of their dominance and create the possibility of emancipation.

II

The Owners

OF THE THREE, San Domingo planters, British bourgeoisie and French bourgeoisie, the first and most important were the planters of San Domingo.

On such a soil as San Domingo slavery, only a vicious society could flourish. Nor were the incidental circumstances such as to mitigate the demoralisation inherent in such a method of production.

San Domingo is an island of mountain ranges rising in places to 6,000 feet above sea-level. From these flow innumerable streams coalescing into rivers which water

the valleys and not inconsiderable plains lying between the hills. Its distance from the equator gives an unusual lushness and variety to the natural exuberance of the tropics, and the artificial vegetation was not inferior to the natural. Field upon field, the light green sugar-cane, low and continually rippled in the breeze, enclosed the factory and the dwelling houses like a sea; a few feet above the cane-stalks waved the five-foot leaves of the banana-trees; near the dwelling-houses the branches of the palm, crowning a perfectly rounded and leafless column of 60 or 70 feet, gave forth, like huge feathers, a continuous soothing murmur; while groups of them in the distance, always visible in the unclouded tropical air, looked like clusters of giant umbrellas waiting for the parched and sun-baked traveller. In the season, mango and orange trees, solitary or in groves, were a mass of green leaves and red or golden fruit. Thousands of small, scrupulously tidy coffee-trees rose on the slopes of the hills, and the abrupt and precipitous mountain-sides were covered to the summits with the luxuriant tropical undergrowth and precious hardwood forests of San Domingo. The traveller from Europe was enchanted at his first glimpse of this paradise, in which the ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature competed equally for his surprise and admiration.

But it was monotonous. Year in year out, day after day, it was the same, a little greener in the wet season, a little browner in the dry. The wilder scenery was constantly magnificent, but in the colonist who had seen the same domestic landscape from his earliest hour, it awakened little response. To the emigrant who was at first charmed and exhilarated, monotony bred indifference, which could develop into active dislike, and longing for the seasons returning with the year.

The climate was harsh, and for the Europeans of the eighteenth century without modern knowledge of tropical hygiene almost intolerable. The burning sun and humid atmosphere took heavy toll of all newcomers, European and African alike. The African died, but the European ailments were dreaded by the planters whose knowledge and

habits were powerless to combat them. Fever and dysentery in the hot season; cold, rheumatism, nasal catarrhs and diarrhoea in the wet; at all times a disinclination for sustained labour, fostered by the gluttony and lasciviousness bred by abundance and scores of slaves waiting to perform any duty, from pulling off shoes to spending the night.

Indulgence had the white colonial in its grip from childhood. "I want an egg," said a colonial child. "There are none." "Then I want two." This notorious anecdote was characteristic. To the unhealthiness of the climate and the indulgence of every wish were added the open licentiousness and habitual ferocity of his parents, the degradation of human life which surrounded the child on every side.

The ignorance inherent in rural life prior to the industrial revolution was reinforced by the irascibility and the conceit of isolation allied to undisputed domination over hundreds of human beings. The plantations were often miles apart and, in those days of horse-traffic and few or bad roads in a mountainous country, communication with neighbours was difficult and rare. The planters hated the life and sought only to make enough money to retire to France or at least spend a few months in Paris, luxuriating in the amenities of civilisation. With so much to eat and drink, there was a lavish hospitality which has remained a tradition, but the majority of the great houses, contrary to the legend, were poorly furnished, and their owners looked on them as rest-houses in the intervals of trips to Paris. Seeking to overcome their abundant leisure and boredom with food, drink, dice and black women, they had long before 1789 lost the simplicity of life and rude energy of those nameless men who laid the foundation of the colony. A manager and an overseer, and the more intelligent of their slaves were more than sufficient to run their plantations. As soon as they could afford it they left the island, if possible never to return, though they never formed in France so rich and powerful a social and political force as the West Indian interest in England.

The women were subjected to the same evil influ-

ences. In the early years of the colony they had been imported like slaves and machinery. Most of the first arrivals were the sweepings of the Paris gutter, bringing to the island "bodies as corrupt as their manners and serving only to infect the colony."¹ Another official, asking for women, begged the authorities not to send the "ugliest they could find in the hospitals." As late as 1743 official San Domingo was complaining that France still sent girls whose "aptitude for generation was for the most part destroyed by too great usage." Projects for some educational system never came to fruition. With increasing wealth the daughters of the richer planters went to Paris where, after a year or two at a finishing-school, they made distinguished matches with the impoverished French nobility. But in the colony they passed their time attiring themselves, singing stupid songs, and listening to the gossip and adulation of their slave attendants. Passion was their chief occupation, stimulated by over-feeding, idleness, and an undying jealousy of the black and Mulatto women who competed so successfully for the favours of their husbands and lovers.

To the men of divers races, classes and types who formed the early population of San Domingo had been added as the years passed a more unified and cohesive element, the offshoots of the French aristocracy. Deprived of political power by Richelieu and converted by Louis XIV into a decorative and administrative appendage of the absolute monarchy, the younger sons of French noblemen found in San Domingo some opportunity to rebuild their shattered fortunes and live the life of the country magnate now denied them in France. They came as officers in the army and officials, and stayed to found fortunes and families. They commanded the militia, administered a rude justice. Arrogant and spendthrift, yet they were a valuable section of white San Domingo society and knit together more firmly a society composed of such diverse and disintegrating elements. But even their education, traditions and pride were not proof against the prevailing corruption, and one could see a "relation of the

¹ De Vaisière, pp. 77-79.

de Vaudreils, a Châteauneuf, or Boucicauf, last descendant of the famous marshal of France, passing his life between a bowl of rum and a Negro concubine."²

Town life is the nurse of civilisation. But apart from Port-au-Prince, the capital, and Cap François, the towns of San Domingo at the height of its prosperity were little more than villages. In 1789 St Marc had only 150 houses, Môle St Nicholas, the Gibraltar of the Caribbean Sea, had only 250; Léogane, one of the most important towns in the West Province, consisted of between 300 and 400 houses laid out in 15 streets; Jacmel, one of the key towns in the South, had only 40. Even Cap François, the Paris of the Antilles, and the entrepôt of the European trade had a population of only 20,000, of whom half were slaves. Yet Le Cap, as it was familiarly called, was a town famous in its time and in its way unique. An incessant activity reigned there, with its harbour always filled with ships and its streets with merchandise. But it too bore the imprint of savagery which seemed inseparable from everything connected with San Domingo. One of the most distinguished colonial historians, Moreau de Saint-Méry, admits that the streets were sewers and that people threw all their garbage into them. The Government begged people in vain not to commit nuisances in the street, to be careful of the disposition of "faecal matter," not to let sheep, pigs and goats wander loose. No one paid any attention to these injunctions.

In Port-au-Prince, the official capital of the colony, the population washed their dirty linen, made indigo and soaked manioc in the water of the only spring which supplied the town. Despite repeated prohibitions they continued to beat their slaves in the public streets. Nor were the authorities themselves more careful. If it rained at night, one could not walk in the town the next day, and streams of water filled the ditches at the side of the street in which one could hear the croaking of toads. De

² De Vaisière, p. 217.

Wimffien called Port-au-Prince a Tartar camp, and Moreau de Saint-Méry, himself a colonial, deprecates the sharpness of the expression but admits that it was not entirely inapplicable.

Such culture as there was centred in these towns. In Le Cap there were various masonic and other societies, the most famous of which was the Philadelphia Circle, a body devoting itself to politics, philosophy and literature. But the chief reading of the population consisted of lascivious novels. For amusement there were theatres, not only in Le Cap and Port-au-Prince, but in such small towns as Léogane and St Marc, where the melodramas and the thrillers of the day were played to packed houses. In 1787 there were three companies in Port-au-Prince alone.

What the towns lacked in intellectual fare they made up for in opportunities of debauchery—gambling-dens (for everyone in San Domingo played and great fortunes were won and lost in a few days), dance-halls, and private brothels whereby the Mulatto women lived in such comfort and luxury that in 1789, of 7,000 Mulatto women in San Domingo, 5,000 were either prostitutes or the kept mistresses of white men.

The regular clergy of San Domingo instead of being a moderating influence were notorious for their irreverence and degeneracy. In the early years they consisted chiefly of unfrocked monks. Later came a better class of priests, but in that turgid, overheated society few were able to withstand the temptations of easy money, easy living, and easy women; many of them lived openly with their concubines. Their greed for money led them to exploit the Negroes with the same ruthlessness as the rest of white San Domingo. About the middle of the eighteenth century one of them used to baptise the same Negroes seven or eight times, for the ceremony amused the slaves and they were willing to pay a small sum for each baptism. As late as 1790 another was competing with the Negro obeah-men for the coppers of the slaves, by selling charms against illness and talismans to insure the success of their petty ventures.

In the towns the great merchants and the wealthy agents of the maritime bourgeoisie were included with the planters as big whites. On the plantations the managers and the stewards were either agents of the absentee owner, or were under the eye of the planter himself and, therefore, subordinate to him. These in the country, and in the towns the small lawyers, the notaries, the clerks, the artisans, the grocers, were known as the small whites.³ Included among the small whites was a crowd of city vagabonds, fugitives from justice, escaped galley slaves, debtors unable to pay their bills, adventurers seeking adventure or quick fortunes, men of all crimes and all nationalities. From the underworld of two continents they came, Frenchmen and Spaniards, Maltese, Italians, Portuguese and Americans. For whatever a man's origin, record or character, here his white skin made him a person of quality and rejected or failures in their own country flocked to San Domingo, where consideration was achieved at so cheap a price, money flowed and opportunities of debauchery abounded.

No small white was a servant, no white man did any work that he could get a Negro to do for him. A barber summoned to attend to a customer appeared in silk attire, hat under his arm, sword at his side, cane under his elbow, followed by four Negroes. One of them combed the hair, another dressed it, a third curled it and the fourth finished. While they worked the employer presided over the various operations. At the slightest slackness, at the slightest mistake, he boxed the cheek of the unfortunate slave so hard that often he knocked him over. The slave picked himself up without any sign of resentment, and resumed. The same hand which had knocked over the slave closed on an enormous fee, and the barber took his exit with the same insolence and elegance as before.

³ These should not be confused with the modern "poor whites" in America or South Africa. Some of these, especially in America, live at a standard almost as low as that of the Negroes in their community.

This was the type for whom race prejudice was more important than even the possession of slaves, of which they held few. The distinction between a white man and a man of colour was for them fundamental. It was their all. In defence of it they would bring down the whole of their world.

Big whites and small whites did not exhaust the white population of San Domingo. Over them both was the bureaucracy, composed almost entirely of Frenchmen from France, who governed the island. The heads of the bureaucracy were the Governor and the Intendant. The Governor was the official representative of the King, with all that this implies even to this day in the administration of distant colonies. His official salary might be as much as 100,000 livres⁴ a year, besides the profits common to such posts in the twentieth as well as in the eighteenth century: the granting of concessions, the acting on the quiet as agent for European merchandise in the colonies and for colonial merchandise in Europe. A French nobleman was as greedy for a governorship of San Domingo as his British counterpart for a viceroyalty of India. In 1787 the Governor was a brother to the French Ambassador in London, and he left the post of Governor to become Minister of Marine.

Next to the Governor was the Intendant, who was responsible for justice, finance and general administration, and sometimes drew a salary of 80,000 livres a year. The Governor was a soldier and aristocrat, the Intendant was a bureaucrat, and the military and the civil were constantly at variance. But against the local whites they and their staff, the commandants in the districts and the senior officials, represented the King's authority and the commercial privileges of the French bourgeoisie. They could arrest without warrant, they could refuse to carry out the instructions of the Minister, they could force the members of the local advisory councils to resign, could grant favours, pronounce confiscations, increase taxes, in fact their

⁴ About $\frac{2}{3}$ of a franc.

arbitrariness had no legal bounds. "God was too high and the King too far."

The colonists hated them. In addition to their absolute power they were wasteful and extravagant, their malversations were constant and enormous, and they treated the local whites with an arrogance and superciliousness that galled these little potentates with their two or three hundred slaves. There were good and bad Governors, good and bad Intendants, as there were good and bad slave-owners. But this was a matter of pure chance. It was the system that was bad.

There was some pretence at local self-government. Both at Le Cap and at Port-au-Prince there were local councils which registered the royal edicts and the decisions of the local government. Shortly before the revolution there was also appointed a council of the richest and most powerful of the whites who were supposed to represent local opinion. But the Intendant, like the Governor in the British Legislative Councils of to-day, could accept or reject their advice as he pleased.

The bureaucracy, with the source of its power so many thousands of miles away, could not depend only on the two French regiments in the colony. In 1789 the functionaries in San Domingo, where the white population was about 30,000, numbered only 513. Without some mass support government would have been impossible. Bringing with them from France the traditional hostility of the absolute monarchy to the political power of the feudal nobility, the bureaucrats sought a counterweight to the power of the planters in the small whites of town and country. The chief complaint of the small whites was against the militia which policed the districts and frequently encroached on the Intendant's administration of justice and finance. To these complaints the Intendant was always sympathetic. In 1760 one Intendant went so far as to dissolve the militia altogether and appointed syndics to carry on the local government. The colony was thrown into disorder, the Home Government had to re-establish the militia and restore its former powers to the military. Straight-

way an insurrection broke out in the island, led by the local justices of the peace, lawyers, notaries and prosecutors. The planters complained that the supporters of this rebellion were the lowest sections of the population, in one district three Portuguese Jews, a notary, a steward, a tailor, a shoemaker, a butcher's assistant and a former soldier of the ranks. The scorn of the planters is overwhelming for "these rascals who have occasioned these troubles and of whom we can say with justice that they are the vilest of *canaille*, whose fathers and mothers have been lackeys or domestic servants, or even of an origin still lower."⁵ It was not their low origin which justified the attack of the planters upon the small whites. Tailors, butchers and soldiers from the ranks were to play the decisive part in the French Revolution—and by their spontaneous efforts save Paris from the counter-revolution at home and abroad. But most of the small whites were a rabble and filled no important function in the economy of the colony. If every single one of them had been deported from the country, such work as they did could have been done by free Mulattoes, free blacks, or even slaves. They were not an integral part of San Domingo society, either by function, birth or tradition. But they were white, and as such of use to the bureaucracy. In 1771 we find the Intendant again complaining of military tyranny. "Since the militia are re-established," he complains, "the officers are every day depriving the ordinary judges of all their prerogatives."

Here then was the first great division, that between great whites and small whites, with the bureaucracy balancing between and encouraging the small whites. Nothing could assuage or solve this conflict. The moment the revolution begins in France these two will spring at each other and fight to a finish.

There was another class of free men in San Domingo, the free Mulattoes and free blacks. Neither legislation, nor the growth of race prejudice, could destroy the attraction

⁵ De Vaisière, pp. 145-147.

of the black women for the white men of San Domingo. It was characteristic of all classes; the rabble on the shore-front, the planter or overseer who chose a slave to pass the night with him and drove her from his bed to the lash of the slave-driver next morning; a Governor of the colony, newly arrived from France, who was disturbed at finding himself seized with a passion for the handsomest of his four black maids.

In the early days every Mulatto was free up to the age of 24, not by law, but because white men were so few in comparison with the slaves that the masters sought to bind these intermediates to themselves rather than let them swell the ranks of their enemies. In those early years race prejudice was not strong. The Negro Code in 1685 authorised marriage between the white and the slave who had children by him, the ceremony freeing herself and her children. The Code gave the free Mulattoes and the free Negroes equal rights with the whites. But as the white population grew larger, white San Domingo discarded the convention, and enslaved or sold their numerous children like any king in the African jungle. All efforts to prevent concubinage failed, and the Mulatto children multiplied, to be freed or to remain slaves at the caprice of their fathers. Many were freed, becoming artisans and household servants. They began to amass property, and the whites, while adding unceasingly to the number of Mulattoes, began to restrict and harass them with malicious legislation. The whites threw as much as possible of the burdens of the country upon them. On attaining their majority they were compelled to join the *maréchassée*, a police organisation for arresting fugitive Negroes, protecting travellers on the high road, capturing dangerous Negroes, fighting against the maroons, all the difficult and dangerous tasks which the local whites might command. After three years' service in the *maréchassée*, they had to join the local militia, provide their own arms, ammunition and accoutrements, and, without pay or allowance of any kind, serve at the discretion of the white commanding officer. Such duties as the forced upkeep of the roads were made to fall on them with

extra severity. They were excluded from the naval and military departments, from the practice of law, medicine, and divinity, and all public offices or places of trust. A white man could trespass on a Mulatto's property, seduce his wife or daughter, insult him in any way he chose, certain that at any hint of resentment or revenge all the whites and the Government would rush out ready to lynch. In legal actions the decision nearly always went against the Mulattoes, and to terrorise them into submission a free man of colour who struck a white man, whatever his station in life, was to have his right arm cut off.

But by some fortunate chance, the amount of property that they could hold was not, as in the English islands, limited. Of fine physique and intelligent, administering their enterprises themselves without exhausting their fortunes in extravagant trips to Paris, they began to acquire wealth as master-artisans and then as proprietors. As they began to establish themselves, the jealousy and envy of the white colonists were transformed into ferocious hatred and fear. They divided the offspring of white and black and intermediate shades into 128 divisions. The true Mulatto was the child of the pure black and the pure white. The child of the white and the Mulatto woman was a quarteron with 96 parts white and 32 parts black. But the quarteron could be produced by the white and the marabou in the proportion of 88 to 40, or by the white and the sacatra, in the proportion of 72 to 56 and so on all through the 128 varieties. But the sang-mêlé with 127 white parts and 1 black part was still a man of colour.

In a slave society the mere possession of personal freedom is a valuable privilege, and the laws of Greece and Rome testify that severe legislation against slaves and freedmen have nothing to do with the race question. Behind all this elaborate tom-foolery of quarteron, sacatra and marabou, was the one dominating fact of San Domingo society—fear of the slaves. The mothers of the Mulattoes were in the slave-gangs, they had half-brothers there, and how ever much the Mulatto himself might despise this half of his origin, he was at home among the slaves and, in addi-

tion to his wealth and education, could have an influence among them which a white man could never have. Furthermore, apart from physical terror, the slaves were to be kept in subjection by associating inferiority and degradation with the most obvious distinguishing mark of the slave—the black skin. Few of the slaves being able to read, the colonists did not hesitate to say openly: "It is essential to maintain a great distance between those who obey and those who command. One of the surest means of doing this is the perpetuation of the imprint that slavery has once given." No Mulatto, therefore, whatever his number of white parts, was allowed to assume the name of his white father.

But despite these restrictions the Mulattoes continued to make progress. By 1755, little more than three generations after the Negro Code, they were beginning to fill the colony, and their growing numbers and riches were causing alarm to the whites.

They lived (ran a report)⁶ like their forebears, on the local vegetables, drinking no wine, confining themselves to the local liquors brewed from the sugar cane. Thus their personal consumption contributed nothing to the maintenance of the important trade with France. Their sober ways of living and their small expenditure enabled them to put away most of their income every year, they accumulated immense capital, and grew more arrogant as their wealth increased. They bid for all properties on sale in the various districts, and raised prices to such fantastic heights that the whites who were not wealthy could not buy, or ruined themselves by attempting to keep pace with them.

Thus, in some districts, the finest properties were in the possession of the half-castes, and yet they were everywhere the least ready to submit to statute labour and the public dues. Their plantations were the sanctuary and asylum of the freedmen who had neither work nor profession and of numerous fugitive slaves who had run away from their gangs. Being so rich they imitated the style of the whites and sought to drown all traces of their origin. They were

⁶ De Vaisière, p. 222.

trying to get high commands in the militia. Those who had ability enough to make them forget the vice of their origin were even seeking places in the judiciary. If this sort of thing went on, they would soon be making marriages with distinguished families, which would bind these families in alliance with the slaves in the gangs, whence the mothers of these upstarts came.

This was no cantankerous croak from a jealous colonist. It was an official memorandum from the bureaucracy to the Minister. Increasing numbers, increasing wealth were giving the Mulattoes greater pride and sharpening their resentment against their humiliations. Some of them were sending their children to France to be educated, and in France, even a hundred years before the revolution, there was little colour prejudice. Up to 1716 every Negro slave who touched French soil was free, and after an interval of fifty years another decree in 1762 reaffirmed this. In 1739 a slave served as trumpeter in the royal regiment of Carabineers; young Mulattoes were received in the military corps reserved to the young nobility and in the offices of the magistracy; they served as pages at court.⁷ Yet these men had to go back to San Domingo and submit to the discriminations and brutality of the San Domingo whites. And as the Mulattoes began to press against the barriers, white San Domingo passed a series of laws which for maniacal savagery are unique in the modern world, and (we would have said up to 1933) not likely to be paralleled again in history. The Council of Port-au-Prince, holding up the race question as a screen, wanted to exterminate them. Thus the whites could purge their system of a growing menace, get rid of men from whom they had borrowed money, and seize much fine property. The Council proposed to banish all the half-castes up to the degree of quarteron to the mountains ("which they would bring into cultivation"), to forbid the sale of all property on the plains to half-castes, to deny them the right of acquiring any house-property, to force all those up to the degree of quarteron and all those

⁷ Lebeau, *De la Condition des Gens de Couleur Libres sous l'Ancien Régime*, Poitiers, 1903.

whites who had married people of colour to that degree, to sell all their slaves within a year. "For," said the Council, "these are dangerous people, more friendly to the slaves, to whom they are still attached, than to us who oppress them by the subordination which we demand and the scorn with which we treat them. In a revolution, in a moment of tension, they would be the first to break the yoke which weighed on them, the more because they are richer and are now accustomed to have white debtors, since when they no longer have sufficient respect for us." But the colonists could not carry out these sweeping plans. The Mulattoes, unlike the German Jews, were already too numerous, and the revolution would have begun there and then.

The colonists had to content themselves with throwing on these rivals every humiliation that ingenuity and malice could devise. Between 1758 and the revolution the persecutions mounted.⁸ The Mulattoes were forbidden to wear swords and sabres and European dress. They were forbidden to buy ammunition except by special permission with the exact quantity stated. They were forbidden to meet together "on the pretext" of weddings, feasts or dances, under penalty of a fine for the first offence, imprisonment for the next, and worse to follow. They were forbidden to stay in France. They were forbidden to play European games. The priests were forbidden to draw up any documents for them. In 1781, eight years before the revolution, they were forbidden to take the titles of Monsieur and Madame. Up to 1791, if a white man ate in their house, they could not sit at table with him. The only privilege the whites allowed them was the privilege of lending white men money.

Short of insurrection, there was no way out of this. And until the Bastille fell the efforts of the Mulattoes to emancipate themselves assumed strange forms. De Vaisière has unearthed a story, which we can understand better after Hitlerism than we could have done before. In

⁸ Lebeau, *De la Condition . . .*; De Vaisière, Chapter III, *Saint-Domingue à la veille de la Révolution. Souvenirs du Baron de Wimpffen*, Edited by Savine, pp. 36-38 etc.

1771 the Sieur Chapuzet had obtained from the Council of Le Cap a decree which gave him the privileges of a white man, his obscure career preventing any questions begin raised about his origin. A little later he attempted to become an officer in the militia. Four lieutenants in the militia of the North Plain made minute researches into the records and presented an exact genealogy of the Chapuzet family, proving that a maternal ancestor, 150 years back, was a Negro from St. Kitts. De Chapuzet defended himself, "in law and in fact," in law because the power of deciding on the status of a citizen was the prerogative of the Government and not of private individuals, in fact because in 1624 there were no Negroes in St Kitts. Colonial history was now the terrain. With extracts from the historians the whites proved that there were slaves in St Kitts in 1624. Chapuzet admitted defeat and left for France.

Three years after, he returned, calling himself M. Chapuzet de Guérin, or familiarly M. le Guérin. Aristocrat at least in name, by means of a sponsor he again brought his case for being considered a white man before the courts. Once more he was defeated. But Chapuzet was a man of resource. He claimed that this ancestor, "the St Kitts Negro", was no Negro, but a Carib, a free-born Carib, a member of "that noble race on whom the French and Spaniards had imposed the law of conquest." Chapuzet triumphed. In 1779 two decrees of the Council declared that his claims were justified. But he did not get his rank. The local officials dared not appoint him. Following the publication of the decrees, the people of colour abandoned themselves to such demonstrations of joy and foolish hopes that the consequences of Chapuzet's appointment might have been very dangerous. The doors of Chapuzet's lawyer were besieged with quarterons and other fair-skinned Mulattoes seeking to have their remote slave ancestors transformed into free and noble Caribs.

The advantages of being white were so obvious that race prejudice against the Negroes permeated the minds of

the Mulattoes who so bitterly resented the same thing from the whites. Black slaves and Mulattoes hated each other. Even while in words and, by their success in life, in many of their actions, Mulattoes demonstrated the falseness of the white claim to inherent superiority, yet the man of colour who was nearly white despised the man of colour who was only half-white, who in turn despised the man of colour who was only quarter white, and so on through all the shades.

The free blacks, comparatively speaking, were not many, and so despised was the black skin that even a Mulatto slave felt himself superior to the free black man. The Mulatto, rather than be slave to a black, would have killed himself.

It all reads like a cross between a nightmare and a bad joke. But these distinctions still exercise their influence in the West Indies to-day.⁹ While whites in Britain dislike the half-caste more than the full-blooded Negro, whites in the West Indies favour the half-caste against the blacks. These, however, are matters of social prestige. But the racial discriminations in Africa to-day are, as they were in San Domingo, matters of Government policy, enforced by bullets and bayonets, and we have lived to see the rulers of a European nation make the Aryan grandmother as precious for their fellow-countrymen as the Carib ancestor was to the Mulatto. The cause in each case is the same—the justification of plunder by any obvious differentiation from those holding power. It is as well to remind the reader that a trained observer travelling in the West Indies in 1935 says of the coloured men there, "A few at the top, judges, barristers, doctors, whatever their shade of colour, could hold their own in any circle. A great many more are the intellectual equals or superiors of their own white contemporaries."¹⁰ Many of the Mulattoes and free blacks were backward in comparison to the whites but their capacity was perfectly obvious in San Domingo in the years before

⁹ Still true, in 1961.

¹⁰ Macmillan, *Warning from the West Indies*, London, 1936, p. 49.

1789. It took gunpowder and cold steel to convince the San Domingo whites. And if, as we have seen, the most intelligent of them did not delude themselves about the materialist origins of their prejudice against the Mulattoes, we yet will make a great mistake if we think that they were hypocrites when they claimed that a white skin guaranteed to the owner superior abilities and entitled him to a monopoly of the best that the colony afforded.

"Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence as foundation, there is built a superstructure of diversified and characteristic sentiments, illusions, habits of thought, and outlooks on life in general. The class as a whole creates and shapes them out of its material foundation, and out of the corresponding social relationships. The individual in whom they arise, through tradition and education, may fancy them to be the true determinants, the real origin of his activities."¹¹ On this common derivation of prejudice, small whites, big whites and bureaucracy were united against Mulattoes. It had been so for one hundred and fifty years, and therefore it would always be so. But would it? The higher bureaucrats, cultivated Frenchmen, arrived in the island without prejudice, and looking for mass support used to help the Mulattoes a little. And Mulattoes and big whites had a common bond—property. Once the revolution was well under way the big whites would have to choose between their allies of race and their allies of property. They would not hesitate long.

Such was the society of this famous colony. These were the people, and this the life, for whom in part so much blood was shed and so much suffering borne. The best minds of the time had no illusions about it. Baron de Wimpffen, who saw the colony in 1790 at the very summit of its prosperity, one day saw a slave leaning on the handle of his hoe, looking sadly into the sunset. "What are you doing, Nazimbo?" he asked. "What are you looking at?"

¹¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.

Nazimbo extended his hand towards the setting sun. "I see my own country," he replied, and tears rolled from his eyes. "I saw my own country there also," said de Wimpffen to himself, "and I have the hope of seeing it again one day, but you, poor Negro, will never see yours again." Educated Liberal and common slave alike detested the place. A few months later de Wimpffen left and put his opinion on record. It is a fitting epitaph of that society which within three years was to be destroyed. "Do you wish to know my final word on this country? It is that the more I get to know the men who inhabit it, the more I congratulate myself on leaving it. . . . When one is what the greater part of the planters are, one is born to own slaves. When one is what the greater part of the slaves are, one is born to be a slave. In this country everybody is in his place."

Prosperity is not a moral question and the justification of San Domingo was its prosperity. Never for centuries had the western world known such economic progress. By 1754, two years before the beginning of the Seven Years' War, there were 599 plantations of sugar and 3,379 of indigo. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) the French marine, swept off the sea by the British Navy, could not bring the supplies on which the colony depended, the extensive smuggling trade could not supply the deficiency, thousands of slaves died from starvation and the upward rise of production, though not halted, was diminished. But after the Treaty of Paris in 1763 the colony made a great stride forward. In 1767 it exported 72 million pounds' weight of raw sugar and 51 million pounds of white, a million pounds of indigo and two million pounds of cotton, and quantities of hides, molasses, cocoa and rum. Smuggling, which was winked at by the authorities, raised the official figures by at least 25 per cent. Nor was it only in quantity that San Domingo excelled but in quality. Each coffee tree produced on an average a pound weight, equal sometimes to that of Mocha. Cotton grew naturally, even without care, in stony ground and in the crevices of the

rocks. Indigo also grew spontaneously. Tobacco had a larger leaf there than in any other part of the Americas and sometimes equalled in quality the produce of Havana. The kernel of San Domingo cocoa was more acidulated than that of Venezuela and was not inferior in other respects, experience proving that the chocolate made of the two cocoas in combination had a more delicate flavour than that made from the cocoa of Venezuela alone.

If on no earthly spot was so much misery concentrated as on a slave-ship, then on no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth as the colony of San Domingo.

And yet it was this very prosperity which would lead to the revolution.

From the beginning the colonists were at variance with the French Government and the interests it represented. The French, like every other Government in those days, looked upon colonies as existing exclusively for the profit of the metropolis. Known as the Mercantile system in England, the French called this economic tyranny by a more honest name, the Exclusive. Whatever manufactured goods the colonists needed they were compelled to buy from France. They could sell their produce only to France. The goods were to be transported only in French ships. Even the raw sugar produced in the colonies was to be refined in the mother-country, and the French imposed heavy duties on refined sugar of colonial origin. "The colonies," said Colbert, "are founded by and for the metropolis." This was not true. The colonists had founded San Domingo themselves, and the falsehood of the claim made the exploitation all the harder to bear.

In 1664 the French Government, in accordance with the custom of those days, handed over the rights of trade with San Domingo to a private company. But the monopolists either could not or would not send out all the goods that the colonists wanted, and charged them nearly twice as much as they were accustomed to pay. The colonists re-

volted and the Governor was compelled to ease the restrictions. In 1722 the same thing happened. Agents received from the company the exclusive grant of the African trade, in return for supplying San Domingo with 2,000 Negroes every year. But by 1720 the colonists were needing 8,000 slaves a year, and they knew that in addition to supplying them with only one-quarter of their needs, the company would raise the price. There was another insurrection. The colonists arrested the Governor and put him in prison, and the Government had to modify the privileges of the company. The colonists saw themselves held in check by the Exclusive for the benefit of the metropolis, and as their prosperity grew they found the restrictions more and more intolerable. Political dependence on the mother-country was now retarding the economic growth of San Domingo. The colonists wished to shake off these shackles as Britain's American colonies were to shake off theirs. Thus if big whites and small whites were in permanent conflict with each other, they were united against the Mulattoes on the one hand and against the French bourgeoisie on the other. They could persecute the Mulattoes, but against the French bourgeoisie they could do nothing but rage. Long before 1789 the French bourgeoisie was the most powerful economic force in France, and the slave-trade and the colonies were the basis of its wealth and power.

The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution. "Sad irony of human history," comments Jaurès. "The fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slave-trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation." Nantes was the centre of the slave-trade.

As early as 1666, 108 ships went to the coast of Guinea and took on board 37,430 slaves,¹² to a total value of more than 37 millions, giving the Nantes bourgeoisie 15 to 20 per cent on their money. In 1700 Nantes was sending 50 ships

¹² This section is based on the work of Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste de la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1922, pp. 62-84.

a year to the West Indies with Irish salt beef, linen for the household and for clothing the slaves, and machinery for sugar-mills. Nearly all the industries which developed in France during the eighteenth century had their origin in goods or commodities destined either for the coast of Guinea or for America. The capital from the slave-trade fertilized them; though the bourgeoisie traded in other things than slaves, upon the success or failure of the traffic everything else depended.¹³

Some ships took on the way wine from Madeira for the colonists and dried turtle from Cape Verde for the slaves. In return they brought back colonial produce to Nantes whence Dutch vessels took it to Northern Europe. Some made the return journey by way of Spain and Portugal, exchanging their colonial cargo for the products of those countries. Sixty ships from Rochelle and Oron brought their salted cod to Nantes, to go to the inland market or out to the colonies to feed the slaves. The year 1758 saw the first manufactory of Indian cloth, to weave the raw cotton of India and the West Indian islands.

The planters and small manufacturers of San Domingo were able to establish themselves only by means of the capital advanced by the maritime bourgeoisie. By 1789 the Nantes merchants alone had 50 millions invested in the West Indies.

Bordeaux had begun with the wine industry which gave its ship-builders and navigators an opportunity to trade all over the world; then came brandy, also to all ports, but above all to the colonies. By the middle of the eighteenth century, 16 factories refined 10,000 tons of raw sugar from San Domingo every year, using nearly 4,000 tons of charcoal. Local factories supplied the town with jars, dishes and bottles. The trade was cosmopolitan—Flemings, Germans, Dutchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen came to live in Bordeaux, contributing to the general expansion and amassing riches for themselves. Bordeaux traded with Holland, Germany, Portugal, Venice, and Ire-

¹³ Gaston-Martin, *L'Ère des Négociers (1714-1774)*, Paris, 1931, p. 424.

land, but slavery and the colonial trade were the fount and origin and sustenance of this thriving industry and far-flung commerce.

Marseilles was the great centre for the Mediterranean and Eastern trade, and a royal decree at the beginning of the century had attempted to exclude it from the trade with the colonies. The attempt failed. San Domingo was the special centre of the Marseilles trade. Marseilles sent there not only the wines of Provence: in 1789 there were in Marseilles 12 sugar refineries, nearly as many as in Bordeaux.

In the early years most of this trade had been carried in foreign-built or foreign-owned ships. But by 1730 the maritime bourgeoisie began to build themselves. In 1778 Bordeaux ship-owners constructed seven vessels, in 1784 they constructed 32, with a total of 115 for the six years. A Marseilles ship-owner, Georges Roux, could fit out a fleet on his own account in order to take vengeance on the English fleet for the prizes it had taken.

Nantes, Bordeaux and Marseilles were the chief centres of the maritime bourgeoisie, but Orleans, Dieppe, Bercy-Paris, a dozen great towns, refined raw sugar and shared in the subsidiary industries.¹⁴ A large part of the hides worked in France came from San Domingo. The flourishing cotton industry of Normandy drew its raw cotton in part from the West Indies, and in all its ramifications the cotton trade occupied the population of more than a hundred French towns. In 1789 exchanges with the American colonies were 296 millions. France exported to the islands 78 millions of flour, salted meats, wines and stuffs. The colonies sent to France 218 millions of sugar, coffee, cocoa, wood, indigo and hides. Of the 218 millions imported only 71 millions were consumed in France. The rest was exported after preparation. The total value of the colonies represented 3,000 millions, and on them depended the livelihood of a number of Frenchmen variously estimated at between two and six millions. By 1789 San Domingo

¹⁴ Deschamps, *Les Colonies pendant la Révolution*, Paris, 1898, pp. 3-8.

was the market of the new world. It received in its ports 1,587 ships, a greater number than Marseilles, and France used for the San Domingo trade alone 750 great vessels employing 24,000 sailors. In 1789 Britain's export trade would be 27 million pounds, that of France 17 million pounds, of which the trade of San Domingo would account for nearly 11 million pounds. The whole of Britain's colonial trade in that year amounted to only five million pounds.¹⁵

The maritime bourgeoisie would not hear of any change in the Exclusive. They had the ear of the Minister and the Government, and not only were the colonists refused permission to trade with foreign countries, but the circulation of all French currency, except the very lowest, was forbidden in the islands, lest the colonists use it to purchase foreign goods. In such a method of trade they were at the mercy of the bourgeoisie. In 1774 their indebtedness was 200 millions, and by 1789 it was estimated at between 300 and 500 millions.¹⁶ If the colonists complained of the Exclusive, the bourgeoisie complained that the colonists would not pay their debts, and agitated for stricter measures against the contraband.

Rich as was the French bourgeoisie, the colonial trade was too big for it. The British bourgeois, most successful of slave-traders, sold thousands of smuggled slaves every year to the French colonists and particularly to San Domingo. But even while they sold the slaves to San Domingo, the British were watching the progress of this colony with alarm and with envy. After the independence of America in 1783, this amazing French colony suddenly made such a leap as almost to double its production between 1783 and 1789. In those years Bordeaux alone invested 100 millions in San Domingo. The British bourgeois were the great rivals of the French. All through the eighteenth century

¹⁵ Brougham, *The Colonial Policy of the European Powers*, Edinburgh, 1803, vol. II, pp. 538-540.

¹⁶ Deschamps, *Les Colonies pendant . . .*, p. 25.

they fought in every part of the world. The French had jumped gleefully in to help drive them out of America. San Domingo was now incomparably the finest colony in the world and its possibilities seemed limitless. The British bourgeoisie investigated the new situation in the West Indies, and on the basis of what it saw, prepared a bombshell for its rivals. Without slaves San Domingo was doomed. The British colonies had enough slaves for all the trade they were ever likely to do. With the tears rolling down their cheeks for the poor suffering blacks, those British bourgeois who had no West Indian interests set up a great howl for the abolition of the slave-trade.

A venal race of scholars, profiteering panders to national vanity, have conspired to obscure the truth about abolition. Up to 1783 the British bourgeoisie had taken the slave-trade for granted. In 1773 and again in 1774, the Jamaica Assembly, afraid of insurrection and seeking to raise revenue, taxed the importation of slaves. In great wrath the British Board of Trade disallowed the measures and told the Governor that he would be sacked if he gave his sanction to any similar Bill.¹⁷ Well-meaning persons talked of the inquiry of slavery and the slave-trade, as well-meaning persons in 1938 talked about the native question in Africa or the misery of the Indian peasant. Dr. Johnson toasted the next slave insurrection in the West Indies. Stray members of parliament introduced Bills for the abolition of the slave-trade which the House rejected without much bother. In 1783 Lord North turned down a petition against the trade;¹⁸ the petition did credit to the Christian feelings, and to the humane breast, etc., etc., but the trade was necessary. With the loss of America, however, a new situation arose.

The British found that by the abolition of the mercantile system with America, they gained instead of losing. It

¹⁷ *House of Commons: Accounts and Papers*, 1795-1796, vol. 100.

¹⁸ *Parliamentary History*, XXIII, pp. 1026-1027.

was the first great lesson in the advantages of free trade. But if Britain gained the British West Indies suffered. The rising industrial bourgeoisie, feeling its way to free trade and a greater exploitation of India, began to abuse the West Indies, called them "sterile rocks,"¹⁹ and asked if the interest and independence of the nation should be sacrificed to 72,000 masters and 400,000 slaves.²⁰

The industrial bourgeois were beginning their victorious attack upon the agricultural monopoly which was to culminate in the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The West Indian sugar-producers were monopolists whose methods of production afforded an easy target, and Adam Smith²¹ and Arthur Young,²² the forerunners of the new era, condemned the whole principle of slave-labour as the most expensive in the world. Besides, why not get sugar from India? India, after the loss of America, assumed a new importance. The British experimented with sugar in Bengal, received glowing reports and in 1791 the first shipments arrived.²³ In 1793 Mr. Randle Jackson would preach to the company's shareholders a little sermon on the new orientation. "It seemed as if Providence, when it took from us America, would not leave its favourite people without an ample substitute; or who should say that Providence had not taken from us one member, more seriously to impress us with the value of another."²⁴ It might not be good theology, but it was very good economics. Pitt and Dundas

¹⁹ *The Right in the West Indian Merchants to a Double Monopoly of the Sugar Market of Great Britain, and the expedience of all monopolies examined.* (n.d.)

²⁰ Chalmers, *Opinions on Interesting Subjects of Law and Commercial Policy arising from American Independence*, London, 1784, p. 60.

²¹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, vol. I, p. 123. "It appears from the experience of all ages and nations . . . that the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves."

²² Young, *Annals of Agriculture*, 1788, Vol. IX, pp. 88-96. "The culture of sugar by slaves is the dearest species of labour in the world."

²³ *East India Sugar*, 1822, appendix I, p. 3.

²⁴ *Debate on the Expediency of cultivating sugar in the territories of the East India Company*, East India House, 1793

saw a chance of capturing the continental market from France by East India sugar. There was cotton and indigo. The production of cotton in India doubled in a few years. Indian free labour cost a penny a day.

But the West Indian vested interests were strong, statesmen do not act merely on speculation, and these possibilities by themselves would not have accounted for any sudden change in British policy. It was the miraculous growth of San Domingo that was decisive. Pitt found that some 50 per cent of the slaves imported into the British islands were sold to the French colonies.²⁵ It was the British slave-trade, therefore, which was increasing French colonial produce and putting the European market into French hands. Britain was cutting its own throat. And even the profits from this export were not likely to last. Already a few years before the slave merchants had failed for £700,000 in a year.²⁶ The French, seeking to provide their own slaves, were encroaching in Africa and increasing their share of the trade every year. Why should they continue to buy from Britain? Holland and Spain were doing the same. By 1786 Pitt, a disciple of Adam Smith, had seen the light clearly. He asked Wilberforce to undertake the campaign.²⁷ Wilberforce represented the important division of Yorkshire, he had a great reputation, all the humanity, justice, stain on national character, etc., etc., would sound well coming from him. Pitt was in a hurry—it was important to bring the trade to a complete stop quickly and suddenly. The French had neither the capital nor the organisation to make good the deficiency at once and he would ruin San Domingo at a stroke. In 1787 he warned Wilberforce that if he did not bring the motion in, somebody else would,²⁸ and in 1788 he informed the Cabinet that he

²⁵ *Report of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and Plantations*, 1789, Part IV, Tables for Dominica and Jamaica. See also Dundas' statistics, April 18, 1792.

²⁶ Clarkson, *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade*, London, 1784, p. 29.

²⁷ Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, London, 1933, p. 74.

²⁸ Coupland, *Wilberforce*, Oxford, 1923, p. 93

would not stay in it with those who opposed.²⁹ Pitt was fairly certain of success in England. With truly British nerve he tried to persuade the European Governments to abolish the trade on the score of inhumanity. The French Government discussed the proposal amicably, but by May, 1789, the British Ambassador wrote sadly that it seemed as if all the French Government's negotiations had been to "compliment us and to keep us quiet and in good humour."³⁰ The Dutch, less polite, gave a more abrupt negative. But here a great stroke of luck befell Pitt. France was then stirring with pre-revolutionary attacks on all obvious abuses, and one year after the Abolitionist Society had been formed in Britain, a group of Liberals in France, Brissot, Mirabeau, Rétion, Condorcet, Abbé Grégoire, all the great names of the first years of the revolution, followed the British example and formed a society, the Friends of the Negro. The leading spirit was Brissot, a journalist who had seen slavery in the United States. The society aimed at the abolition of slavery, published a journal, agitated. This suited the British down to the ground. Clarkson went to Paris, to stimulate "the slumbering energies"³¹ of the society, gave it money, supplied France with British anti-slavery propaganda.³² Despite the names that were to become so famous and a large membership, we must beware of thinking that the Friends of the Negro represented a force. The colonists took them seriously, the maritime bourgeoisie did not. It was the French Revolution which, with unexpected swiftness, would drag these eloquent Frenchmen out of the stimulating excitement of philanthropic propaganda and put them face to face with economic reality.

²⁹ Fortescue MSS. (Historical Manuscripts Commission, British Museum). Pitt to Grenville, June 29, 1788. Vol. I, p. 342.

³⁰ *Liverpool Papers* (Additional Manuscripts, British Museum). Lord Dorset to Lord Hawkesbury. Vol. 38224, p. 118.

³¹ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce*, London, 1838, vol. I, p. 228.

³² *Cahiers de la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1935, No. III, p. 25.

These then were the forces which in the decade preceding the French Revolution linked San Domingo to the economic destiny of three continents and the social and political conflicts of that pregnant age. A trade and method of production so cruel and so immoral that it would wilt before the publicity which a great revolution throws upon the sources of wealth; the powerful British Government determined to wreck French commerce in the Antilles, agitating at home and intriguing in France among men who, unbeknown to themselves, would soon have power in their hands; the colonial world (itself divided) and the French bourgeoisie, each intent on its own purposes and, unaware of the approaching danger, drawing apart instead of closer together. Not one courageous leader, many courageous leaders were needed, but the science of history was not what it is to-day and no man living then could foresee, as we can foresee to-day, the coming upheavals.³³ Mirabeau indeed said that the colonists slept on the edge of Vesuvius, but for centuries the same thing had been said and the slaves had never done anything.

How could anyone seriously fear for such a wonderful colony? Slavery seemed eternal and the profits mounted. Never before, and perhaps never since, has the world seen anything proportionately so dazzling as the last years of pre-revolutionary San Domingo. Between 1783 and 1789 production nearly doubled. Between 1764 and 1771 the average importation of slaves varied between ten and fifteen thousand. In 1786 it was 27,000, and from 1787 onwards the colony was taking more than 40,000 slaves a year. But economic prosperity is no guarantee of social stability. That rests on the constantly shifting equilibrium between the classes. It was the prosperity of the bourgeoisie that started the English revolution of the seventeenth century. With every stride in production the colony was marching to its doom.

The enormous increase of slaves was filling the colony with native Africans, more resentful, more intractable,

³³ Written in 1938.

more ready for rebellion than the creole Negro. Of the half-a-million slaves in the colony in 1789, more than two-thirds had been born in Africa.

These slaves were being used for the opening up of new lands. There was no time to allow for the period of acclimatisation, known as the seasoning, and they died like flies. From the earliest days of the colony towards the middle of the eighteenth century, there had been some improvement in the treatment of the slaves, but this enormous number of newcomers who had to be broken and terrorised into labour and submission caused an increase in fear and severity. In 1784 the administrators, who visited one of the slave shops which sometimes served as a market-place instead of the deck of the slaver, reported a revolting picture of dead and dying thrown pell-mell into the filth. The Le Jeune case took place in 1788. In 1790 de Wimpffen states that not one article of the Negro Code was obeyed. He himself had sat at table with a woman, beautiful, rich and very much admired, who had had a careless cook thrown into the oven.

The problem of feeding this enormous increase in the slave population was making the struggle between the planters and the maritime bourgeoisie over the Exclusive more bitter than ever, and the planters after 1783 had forced a slight breach in the strait jacket which clasped them. Having tasted blood, they wanted more.

Mulattoes educated in Paris during the Seven Years' War had come home, and their education and accomplishments filled the colonists with hatred and envy and fear. It was these last years that saw the fiercest legislation against them. Forbidden to go to France, where they learnt things that were not good for them, they stayed at home to increase the strength of the dissatisfied.

With the growth of trade and of profits, the number of planters who could afford to leave their estates in charge of managers grew, and by 1789, in addition to the maritime bourgeois, there was a large group of absentee proprietors in France linked to the aristocracy by marriage, for whom San Domingo was nothing else but a source of rev-

enue to be spent in the luxurious living of aristocratic Paris. So far had these parasites penetrated into the French aristocracy that a memoir from San Domingo to the King could say: "Sire, your court is creole," without too much stretching of the truth.

The prosperity affected even the slaves. More of them could save money, buy their freedom, and enter the promised land.

This was the San Domingo of 1789, the most profitable colony the world had ever known; to the casual eye the most flourishing and prosperous possession on the face of the globe; to the analyst a society torn by inner and outer contradictions which in four years would split that structure into so many pieces that they could never be put together again.

It was the French bourgeoisie which pressed the button. This strange San Domingo society was but a garish exaggeration, a crazy caricature, of the *ancien régime* in France. The royalist bureaucracy, incompetent and wasteful, could not manage the finances of France; the aristocracy and the clergy bled the peasantry dry, impeded the economic development of the country, gobbled up all the best places, and considered themselves almost as superior to the able and vigorous bourgeois as the white planters considered themselves superior to the Mulattoes.

But the French bourgeoisie too was proud and no members of it were prouder than the maritime bourgeois. We have seen their wealth. They knew that they were the foundation of the country's prosperity. They were buying up the land of the aristocracy. They built great schools and universities, they read Voltaire and Rousseau, they sent their linen to the colonies to be washed and to get the right colour and scent, they sent their wine for two or three voyages to the colonies and back to give it the right flavour. They, along with the other bourgeois, chafed at their social disadvantages; the chaotic state of French administration and finance handicapped them in their business. A hard

winter in 1788 brought matters to a head. The monarchy was already bankrupt, the aristocracy made a bid to recover its former power, the peasants began to revolt, and the bourgeoisie saw that the time had come for it to govern the country on the English model in collaboration with its allies, the radical aristocracy. In the agitation which began the French Revolution, the maritime bourgeoisie took the lead. The bourgeoisie of Dauphiné and Brittany, with their ports of Marseilles and Nantes, attacked the monarchy even before the official opening of the States-General, and Mirabeau, the first leader of the revolution, was the deputy for Marseilles.

From all over the country the cahiers, or lists of grievances, poured in. But the French people, like the vast majority of Europeans to-day, had too many grievances of their own to be concerned about the sufferings of Africans, and only a few cahiers, chiefly from clergymen, demanded the abolition of slavery. The States-General met. Mirabeau, Pétion, Mayor of Paris, Abbé Grégoire, Condorcet, all members of the Friends of the Negro, were deputies, all pledged to abolition. But abolition for the maritime bourgeois was ruin. For the moment, however, the States-General grappled with the King.

While the French bourgeoisie led the assault on the absolute monarchy at home, the planters followed suit in the colonies. And, as in France, the geographical divisions of San Domingo and their historical development shaped the revolutionary movement and the coming insurrection of the slaves.

The pride of the colony was the great North Plain of which Le Cap was the chief port. Bounded on the north by the ocean, and on the south by a ridge of mountains running almost the length of the island, it was about 50 miles in length and between 10 and 20 miles in breadth. Cultivated since 1670, it was covered with plantations within easy reach of each other. Le Cap was the centre of the island's economic, social and political life. In any revolution-

ary upheaval, the planters of the North Plain and the merchants and lawyers of Le Cap would take the lead. (But the slave-gangs of the North Plain, in close proximity to each other and the sooner aware of the various changes in the political situation, would be correspondingly ready for political action.)

Very different was the West Province, with its isolated plantations scattered over wide areas. In districts like the Artibonite, Verrettes, Mirabelais, and St Marc, there were many Mulatto proprietors, some of great wealth.

The South Province was a sort of pariah, somewhat sparsely populated, with a majority of Mulattoes. The eastern end, Cape Tiburon, was only some 50 miles from Jamaica and here the contraband trade was particularly strong.

Early in 1788 the North Province took the lead. It formed a secret committee to secure representation in the States-General. In Paris the group of wealthy absentee noblemen formed a committee for the same purpose, the two groups collaborated and the Paris noblemen refused to accept the veto of the King. At the end of 1788 the colonists summoned electoral assemblies and elected a delegation, some of whom consisted of their allies in Paris. In their cahier they claimed abolition of military justice and the institution of a civil judiciary; all legislation and taxes to be voted by provincial assemblies subject only to the approval of the King and a Colonial Committee sitting at Paris but elected by themselves. By restricting political rights to owners of land the planters effectively excluded the small whites who took little interest in all this agitation. Of the slaves and Mulattoes, they said not a word. Slaves did not count, and the Mulattoes secured permission from the frightened bureaucracy to send a deputation to Paris on their own account. But a number of the planters at home, and quite a few in Paris, the Club Massiac, viewed this desire to be represented in the States-General with distrust. The agitation for abolition of the slave-trade in England, the propaganda of the Friends of the Negro, the revolutionary temper of France, filled them with forebod-

ing. Representation in the States-General by a few deputies could effect nothing, and it would bring the full glare of publicity and awakening political interest on the state of society in San Domingo, which was exactly what they did not want. But while the pro-representation group were in a minority, having a positive aim they were bold and confident. Their opponents, with bad consciences and aiming only at avoiding trouble, could oppose no effective resistance. Colonial representation in a metropolitan assembly was an innovation unheard of at that time, but the San Domingo representatives, profiting by the revolutionary ferment in Paris, circumvented the objections of the King and Minister. They petitioned the nobility who cold-shouldered them. But when Louis tried to intimidate the Third Estate, and the deputies went to the tennis-court and swore that being the representatives of the people they would never adjourn, Gouy d'Arsy, leader of the colonists, boldly led his group of colonial noblemen into this historic meeting. Out of gratitude for this unexpected support, the bourgeoisie welcomed them, and thus France admitted the principle of colonial representation. Full of confidence these slave owners claimed 18 seats, but Mirabeau turned fiercely on them: "You claim representation proportionate to the number of the inhabitants. The free blacks are proprietors and tax-payers, and yet they have not been allowed to vote. And as for the slaves, either they are men or they are not; if the colonists consider them to be men, let them free them and make them electors and eligible for seats; if the contrary is the case, have we, in apportioning deputies according to the population of France, taken into consideration the number of our horses and our mules?"

San Domingo was allowed only six deputies. In less than five minutes the great Liberal orator had placed the case of the Friends of the Negro squarely before the whole of France in unforgettable words. The San Domingo representatives realised at last what they had done; they had tied the fortunes of San Domingo to the assembly of a people in revolution and thenceforth the history of liberty in

France and of slave emancipation in San Domingo is one and indivisible.

Unaware of these portentous developments the colonists in San Domingo were going from victory to victory. As in France, the last months of 1788 in San Domingo had been hard. France had had to prohibit the export of grain, and under these circumstances the Exclusive was a tyrannical imposition threatening the island with famine. The Governor opened certain ports to foreign ships; the Intendant, Barbé de Marbois, agreed to the first small breaches but refused to sanction their extension. The matter went to the King's Council who repudiated the Governor, recalled him, and appointed a new Governor, with the colonists calling for the blood of the Intendant. This was the situation when on a day in September a boat sailed into the harbour, and the captain, hurrying ashore, ran down the streets of Le Cap, shouting the news of July 14th. The King had been preparing to disperse the Constituent Assembly by force, and the Paris masses, arming themselves, had stormed the Bastille as the symbol of feudal reaction. The great French Revolution had begun.

fly on the Aubry Plantation . . . and in order that everybody should know about it had them fixed on pikes along the hedges of his plantation, palm-tree fashion." To such men the news of the May decree giving rights to 400 Mulattoes was a dangerous symptom and outrage unspeakable. They lynched Mulattoes, they stamped upon the French flag, they abjured France, they could not mention France or Frenchmen without oaths and curses. The new Assembly which was to replace the broken Assembly of St Marc met at Léogane in early August and passed a series of resolutions designed to ensure independence. In order to be nearer the centre of affairs the members decided to transfer to Le Cap where the Governor was. But some of the deputies never reached there, being killed on the way by the revolting Negroes of the North. These, luckily for themselves, had no deputies in Paris listening to parliamentary promises and weakening their will. Neglected and ignored by all the politicians of every brand and persuasion, they had organised on their own and struck for freedom at last.

IV

The San Domingo Masses Begin

Eh ! Eh ! Bomba ! Heu ! Heu !
Canga, bafo té !
Canga, inouné de lé !
Canga, do ki la !
Canga, do ki la !
Canga, li !

THE SLAVES worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs

of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organised mass movement. By hard experience they had learnt that isolated efforts were doomed to failure, and in the early months of 1791 in and around Le Cap they were organising for revolution. Voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy. In spite of all prohibitions, the slaves travelled miles to sing and dance and practise the rites and talk; and now, since the revolution, to hear the political news and make their plans. Boukman, a Papaloi or High Priest, a gigantic Negro, was the leader. He was headman of a plantation and followed the political situation both among the whites and among the Mulattoes. By the end of July 1791 the blacks in and around Le Cap were ready and waiting. The plan was conceived on a massive scale and they aimed at exterminating the whites and taking the colony for themselves. There were perhaps 12,000 slaves in Le Cap, 6,000 of them men. One night the slaves in the suburbs and outskirts of Le Cap were to fire the plantations. At this signal the slaves in the town would massacre the whites and the slaves on the plain would complete the destruction. They had travelled a long, long way since the grandiose poisoning schemes of Mackandal.

The plan did not succeed in its entirety. But it very nearly did, and the scope and organisation of this revolt shows Boukman to be the first of that line of great leaders whom the slaves were to throw up in such profusion and rapidly during the years which followed. That so vast a conspiracy was not discovered until it had actually broken out is a testimony to their solidarity. In early August the slaves in Limbé, then and to the end of the revolution one of the storm-centres, rose prematurely and were crushed. This Limbé rising showed that it was dangerous to delay. Three days after, representatives from parishes all over the plain assembled to fix the day. Deputies on their way to Le Cap for the first session of the Colonial Assembly, to begin on August 25th, met throngs of slaves on the road who

abused and even attacked them. On August 21st some prisoners were taken and de Blanchelande, the Governor, examined them himself the next day. He did not get much from them, but he understood vaguely that there was to be some sort of rising. He took precautions to safeguard the city from the slaves within and he ordered patrols to cover the outskirts. But these whites despised the slaves too much to believe them capable of organising a mass movement on a grand scale. They could not get from the prisoners the names of the leaders, and what precautions could they take against the thousands of slaves on the hundreds of plantations? Some of the white rabble in Le Cap, always ready for loot and pillage, were revealed as being connected with a plot of some sort. De Blanchelande was more concerned about these than about the Negroes.

On the night of the 22nd a tropical storm raged, with lightning and gusts of wind and heavy showers of rain. Carrying torches to light their way, the leaders of the revolt met in an open space in the thick forests of the Morne Rouge, a mountain overlooking Le Cap. There Boukman gave the last instructions and, after Voodoo incantations and the sucking of the blood of a stuck pig, he stimulated his followers by a prayer spoken in creole, which, like so much spoken on such occasions, has remained. "The god who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to do good works. Our god who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all."

The symbol of the god of the whites was the cross which, as Catholics, they wore round their necks.

That very night they began. The slaves on the Gallifet plantation were so well treated that "happy as the Negroes of Gallifet" was a slave proverb. Yet by a phenomenon noticed in all revolutions it was they who led the way.

Each slave-gang murdered its masters and burnt the plantation to the ground. The precautions that de Blanchelande had taken saved Le Cap, but the preparation otherwise had been thorough and complete, and in a few days one-half of the famous North Plain was a flaming ruin. From Le Cap the whole horizon was a wall of fire. From this wall continually rose thick black volumes of smoke, through which came tongues of flame leaping to the very sky. For nearly three weeks the people of Le Cap could barely distinguish day from night, while a rain of burning cane straw, driven before the wind like flakes of snow, flew over the city and the shipping in the harbour, threatening both with destruction.

The slaves destroyed tirelessly. Like the peasants in the Jacquerie or the Luddite wreckers, they were seeking their salvation in the most obvious way, the destruction of what they knew was the cause of their sufferings; and if they destroyed much it was because they had suffered much. They knew that as long as these plantations stood their lot would be to labour on them until they dropped. The only thing was to destroy them. From their masters they had known rape, torture, degradation, and, at the slightest provocation, death. They returned in kind. For two centuries the higher civilisation had shown them that power was used for wreaking your will on those whom you controlled. Now that they held power they did as they had been taught. In the frenzy of the first encounters they killed all, yet they spared the priests whom they feared and the surgeons who had been kind to them. They, whose women had undergone countless violations, violated all the women who fell into their hands, often on the bodies of their still bleeding husbands, fathers and brothers. "Vengeance! Vengeance!" was their war-cry, and one of them carried a white child on a pike as a standard.

And yet they were surprisingly moderate,¹ then and afterwards, far more humane than their masters had been or would ever be to them. They did not maintain this revengeful spirit for long. The cruelties of property and priv-

¹ This statement has been criticised. I stand by it. C.L.R.I.

lege are always more ferocious than the revenges of poverty and oppression. For the one aims at perpetuating resented injustice, the other is merely a momentary passion soon appeased. As the revolution gained territory they spared many of the men, women, and children whom they surprised on plantations. To prisoners of war alone they remained merciless. They tore out their flesh with red-hot pincers, they roasted them on slow fires, they sawed a carpenter between two of his boards. Yet in all the records of that time there is no single instance of such fiendish tortures as burying white men up to the neck and smearing the holes in their faces to attract insects, or blowing them up with gun-powder, or any of the thousand and one brutalities to which they had been subjected. Compared with what their masters had done to them in cold blood, what they did was negligible, and they were spurred on by the ferocity with which the whites in Le Cap treated all slave prisoners who fell into their hands.

As usual the strength of the mass movement dragged in its wake revolutionary sections of those classes nearest to it. Free blacks joined them. A planter of Port Magot had taught his black foreman to read and write, had made him free, had left him in his will 10,000 francs, had given to the foreman's mother land on which she had made a coffee plantation. But this black raised the slaves on the plantations of his master and his own mother, set them on fire, and joined the revolution, which gave him a high command. The Mulattoes hated the black slaves because they were slaves and because they were black. But when they actually saw the slaves taking action on such a grand scale, numbers of young Mulattoes from Le Cap and round about rushed to join the hitherto despised blacks and fight against the common enemy.

They were fortunate in that the troops in Le Cap were few, and de Blanchelande, afraid of the slaves and the white rabble in the town, preferred to act on the defensive. One attack was made by the regulars, who drove the slaves before them, but de Blanchelande, yielding to the nervous fears awakened in the city, recalled the detachment. This

left the revolution master of the countryside. Gaining courage the blacks extended their destruction over the plain. If they had had the slightest material interest in the plantations, they would not have destroyed so wantonly. But they had none. After a few weeks they stopped for a moment to organise themselves. It is at this period, one month after the revolt had begun, that Toussaint Bréda joined them, and made an unobtrusive entrance into history.

It seems certain that he had been in secret communication with the leaders, but like so many men of better education than the rank and file, he lacked their boldness at the moment of action and waited to see how things would go. Meanwhile, hating destruction, he kept his master's slaves in order and prevented the revolutionary labourers from setting fire to the plantation. While all the other whites in the neighbourhood made a dash for Le Cap, Madame Bayou de Libertas remained on the plantation, protected by Toussaint. Bayou de Libertas himself was with a camp of planters not far off, on guard against the slaves, but came every day to the plantation. Toussaint, then as always master of himself and of all near to him, maintained this untenable situation for over a month. But as the insurrection grew, worn out by the strain of defending the property, his master and his mistress, and learning that Madame de Libertas' life was now in danger, he decided that the old life was over and a new one had begun. He told Madame de Libertas that the time had come for her to go to Le Cap, packed her and some valuables in a carriage and sent her off under the care of his brother, Paul. He sent his own wife and the two children of the household into a safe spot in Spanish San Domingo. Then he slowly made his way to the camp of the revolted slaves.

The man who so deliberately decided to join the revolution was 45 years of age, an advanced age for those times, grey already, and known to everyone as Old Toussaint.

saint. Out of the chaos in San Domingo that existed then and for years to follow, he would lay the foundations of a Negro State that lasts to this day. From the moment he joined the revolution he was a leader, and moved without serious rivalry to the first rank. We have clearly stated the vast impersonal forces at work in the crisis of San Domingo. But men make history, and Toussaint made the history that he made because he was the man he was.

He had had exceptional opportunities, and both in mind and body was far beyond the average slave. Slavery dulls the intellect and degrades the character of the slave. There was nothing of that dullness or degradation in Toussaint.

His post as steward of the livestock had given him experience in administration, authority, and intercourse with those who ran the plantation. Men who, by sheer ability and character, find themselves occupying positions usually reserved for persons of a different upbringing, education and class, usually perform those duties with exceptional care and devoted labour. In addition to this practical education, he had, as we have seen, been able to read a little. He had read Caesar's Commentaries, which had given him some idea of politics and the military art and the connection between them. Having read and re-read the long volume by the Abbé Raynal on the East and West Indies, he had a thorough grounding in the economics and politics, not only of San Domingo, but of all the great empires of Europe which were engaged in colonial expansion and trade. Finally he had had the exceptional experience of the last three years of the revolution in San Domingo. The plantation was only two miles from Le Cap, and his duties took him often into the town. The masses of the people learn much during a revolution, far more a man like Toussaint. His superb intellect had therefore had some opportunity of cultivating itself in general affairs at home and abroad: from the very beginning he manoeuvred with an uncanny certainty not only between local parties in San Domingo but between the international forces at work.

An important thing for his future was that his character was quite unwarped. Since his childhood he had probably never been whipped as so many slaves had been whipped. He himself tells us that he and his wife were among the fortunate few who had acquired a modest competence and used to go hand in hand and very happy to work on the little plot of land which some of the slaves cultivated for themselves. Besides his knowledge and experience, through natural strength of character he had acquired a formidable mastery over himself, both mind and body. As a boy he was so frail and delicate that his parents had not expected him to live, and he was nicknamed "Little Stick." While still a child he determined to acquire not only knowledge but a strong body, and he strengthened himself by the severest exercises, so that by the time he was 12 he had surpassed all the boys of his age on the plantation in athletic feats. He could swim across a dangerous river, jump on a horse at full speed and do what he liked with it. When he was nearly 60 he was still the finest rider in San Domingo, habitually rode 125 miles a day, and sat his horse with such ease and grace that he was known as the Centaur of the Savannahs.

As a young man he had run after women. Then he decided to settle down. Refusing to live in the concubinage which was so widely prevalent among all classes in San Domingo, but particularly among the slaves, he married a woman who already had a son. She bore Toussaint one child, and he and his wife lived together in the greatest harmony and friendship, when he was master of all San Domingo just as in the days when he was an ordinary slave. For the life that so many lived in the colony, for the reputation that he had among the blacks and the opportunities that his position offered, this was an unusual thing for a man who had begun life as Toussaint had, and who, in the days of his greatness, was partial to the society of attractive women.

From childhood he had been taciturn, which singled him out among his countrymen, a talkative, argumentative people. He was very small, ugly and ill-shaped, but al-

though his general expression was one of benevolence, he had eyes like steel and no one ever laughed in his presence. His comparative learning, his success in life, his character and personality gave him an immense prestige among all the Negroes who knew him, and he was a man of some consequence among the slaves long before the revolution. Knowing his superiority he never had the slightest doubt that his destiny was to be their leader, nor would those with whom he came in contact take long to recognise it.

Nothing could be imagined more calculated to revolt his orderly mind than the spectacle which the slave camp presented. Many men were entirely naked; others wore filthy rags made out of bits and pieces of silks and satins pillaged from the plantations. Their weapons were a few guns and pistols that they had seized, old rusty swords, agricultural implements, sticks pointed with iron, pieces of iron hoop, in fact anything they could lay their hands on. They were destitute of ammunition and the cavalry were mounted on old horses and mules worn down by fatigue. They were divided into two large bands—one under Blassou, the other under Jean Francois, while a third leader was Jeannot. Jean Francois was a native of San Domingo, good-looking, very intelligent, and of a proud spirit which had made him run away from his master and become a maroon long before the revolution. In addition to his exceptional intelligence he was very brave, very sober, and of a tenacity that never admitted defeat. Blassou was a fire-eater, always drunk, always ready for the fiercest and most dangerous exploits. He also had had a life more easy than usual, having belonged to a religious establishment, the Fathers of Charity, not far from Le Cap. Jeannot was the slave who had led the foolish expedition of the San Domingo whites in the early days of the revolution, when, dressed up in their military uniforms, they had looked around for an enemy on whom to practise.

Like their more educated white masters, the slaves hastened to deck themselves with all the trappings and

titles of the military profession. The officers called themselves generals, colonels, marshals, commanders, and the leaders decorated themselves with scraps of uniforms, ribbons and orders which they found on the plantations or took from the enemy killed in battle. Biassou called himself a Brigadier. So did Jeannot. Later Jean François entitled himself (in the fashion of European colonial governors to this day) Admiral, Generalissimo and Chevalier of the Order of St. Louis, while Biassou, after a quarrel with Jean François, assumed the title of "Viceroy of the Conquered Territories."

Yet, despite these absurdities, which served the same purpose of impressing their inferiors as the trappings, gold epaulettes and multifarious commands of twentieth century royalty, Jean François and Biassou were men born to command. Nothing but an iron discipline could have kept order among that heterogeneous body of men just released from slavery, and Biassou and Jean François imposed it with an iron hand. Jeannot was a cruel monster who used to drink the blood of his white victims and commit abominable cruelties. Jean François arrested him, tried him, and had him shot, a conspicuous difference from the behaviour of the white colonists in the case of Le Jeune. Jean François soon foresaw a long war and ordered the planting of provisions. Thus early the slave leaders were showing a sense of order, discipline and capacity to govern. Many emissaries of the royalist counter-revolution found their way to the slaves. The priests, in large numbers, remained among them. But even the Mulattoes failed to oust these black leaders, and Jean François and Biassou who were in command at the beginning of the revolution remained masters of their respective bands to the end. Toussaint joined the band of Biassou. On account of his knowledge of herbs Biassou appointed him Physician to the Armies of the King, and from the very beginning Toussaint was high up in his councils.

Masses roused to the revolutionary pitch need above all a clear and vigorous direction. But the first coup had failed and Jean François and Biassou, though they could

keep order, had not the faintest idea what to do next. De Blanchelande sent them a proclamation demanding their submission. They refused, but in their reply called themselves the servants of God and the King, and naïvely invited the whites to take all their possessions and leave the island to those who had watered it with their sweat.

To these bewildered political leaders Toussaint brought his superior knowledge and the political vices which usually accompany it.

The slaves had revolted because they wanted to be free. But no ruling class ever admits such things. The white cockades accused the Patriots and the Friends of the Negro of stirring up the revolt, while the red cockades accused the royalists and the counter-revolution in France. The small whites accused the Mulattoes and massacred them at sight in the streets.²

The Assembly took charge of the colony. It would not ask France for assistance, but sent envoys to the British at Jamaica, to the Spaniards, and to the United States. It did not fear the revolution. It was more afraid of the slaves in Le Cap, and the city rabble, always ready to foment anarchy for the chance of plunder. These small whites refused to fight unless they were given two-thirds of what they found on the plantations as booty. But the majority of the Mulattoes, anxious about their property, volunteered to serve and offered their wives and children as hostages in token of good faith. The Assembly (knowing nothing as yet of the September 24th reversal) promised not only to enforce the decree of May 15th but to extend it to all Mulattoes whether their parents were free or not. But this could only be done, said the Assembly, after the decree had reached the colony and when the troubles were over.

To deceive the Mulattoes the planters were trying tricks, but against the slaves they knew only one weapon—terror. The blacks had their stockades covered with the heads of white victims. The Colonial Assembly stuck the

² Lacroix, *Mémoires pour Servir*. . . , Vol. 1, p. 91.

heads of Negroes on pikes placed all along the roads leading to Le Cap. When Boukman was killed (fighting bravely) the Assembly stuck up his head in Le Cap with a placard: "This is the head of Boukman, chief of the rebels." The whites built three scaffolds in Le Cap and broke 20 or 30 blacks on the wheel every day. With their usual disregard of the slave even as property they massacred all they met, even those on plantations which had not yet revolted. Masters denounced those who had helped them to escape. Slaves presenting themselves to their masters seeking refuge from the devastation of the countryside or merely because they were afraid or tired of revolution, were killed at sight. The result was that all, timid as well as bold, soon understood that there was no hope except with the revolution, and they flocked to join its ranks. In a few weeks the insurgents had grown to nearly 100,000.

To help the slaves and confuse the white planters came news of a Mulatto revolution in the West. Early in August, a body of Mulattoes, weary of being persecuted and lynched by the small whites, now lording it as officials in the revolutionary Municipalities, crept out of Port-au-Prince and assembled at La Croix-des-Bouquets, a district about five miles from the capital. From all parts of the West Province the Mulattoes began to send contingents there, and with their education, not so widespread as among the whites, but immensely superior to the half-wild blacks, they at once found admirable leadership. The most famous of them was Rigaud, a genuine Mulatto, that is to say the son of a white and a black. He had had a good education at Bordeaux and then learned the trade of a goldsmith. Unlike Toussaint, Jean François and Biassou, he was already a trained soldier. He had enlisted as a volunteer in the French Army which fought in the American War of Independence, became a non-commissioned officer, and had also seen service in Guadeloupe. He hated the whites, not only for the indignities which he, an educated and widely-travelled soldier, had to suffer, but also because

they were jealous of his goldsmith's business, in those days an important trade.

A very different type of man was Beauvais. He was a member of a Mulatto family which had long been free and rich. He also had been educated in France, had volunteered for service and fought as a non-commissioned officer in the American War of Independence. On his return home he had taken up teaching. He was not only a man of exceptional personal bravery. Tall, of a fine figure and distinguished presence, he was known as one of the handsomest men in San Domingo, and in that licentious age and country he was distinguished for the severity of his mode of life and the charm of his manners. His own people loved him and it would not be difficult for the whites (when in a corner) to forget his colour.

These were the two soldiers. The politician was Pinchinat, who had studied widely in France. In the first days of the revolution he came back to San Domingo to lead the Mulattoes. In 1791 he was already 60, a man loving play and loose living, and hating the whites with all the hatred of a vicious character. He was a most finished politician and well deserved the qualification of man of genius, given to him by Pamphile de Lacroix.³ "What a man to write and to make treaties," another Mulatto leader would write of him, "he is unique."

Under such leaders, and trained to fight in the *maréchaussée*, the Mulattoes were a formidable force. For this reason the royalist counter-revolution in the West at once sought to make use of them.

Humus-de-Jumécourt, Commandant of the district of La Croix-des-Bouquets and Cul-de-sac, proposed an alliance guaranteeing them all their rights in return for support of the counter-revolution, or, as he would call it, the lawful government of the island. Pinchinat refused, but offered instead a united front against their common enemy, the Municipality of Port-au-Prince and the Provincial Assembly of the West. De Jumécourt agreed, and the royalist commandants and the rich whites of the West began to join

³ *Mémoires pour Servir . . .*, Vol. I, p. 183.

colony continued. Sonthonax wrote secretly to the Directory that the blacks hated the whites, but he understood the reason for their hate. Three weeks after he landed he published a proclamation in creole which declared that everyone who was convicted of saying in the markets or elsewhere that the Negroes had not acquired their liberty for ever, or that a man could be the property of another man, was a traitor to his country and would be punished accordingly. To reassure a people so sensitive to freedom he abolished restraint for debt and put at liberty all those who were in prison for this offence.

He worked hard to instil into them the necessity for labour. Everybody is free in France, he said, but everybody works. Yet he stood firmly against coercion. Work hard, was his advice, but do not forget that no one has the right of forcing you to dispose of your time against your will. He rigorously forbade beating on the plantations. He instituted schools where blacks were given an elementary education and learnt Greek and Roman history. He sent the sons of the blacks and Mulattoes to France to be educated in a special school that the Republic opened for them. He announced that he would not deliver a commission to anyone who could not sign his name. And thus in every house in Le Cap could be seen blacks, men and women, some of 50 years of age, learning to read and write. In the country districts the labourers begged Sonthonax to send them as teachers even young European children who knew how to read and write. The blacks knew their ignorance and were willing to learn from the whites, to be guided by men from France, men like Laveaux and Sonthonax, to learn from the white children. All they asked was to be rid for ever of the fear of slavery. But the British were there spending millions to enslave them once more. They knew that the old slave-owners for whom they worked now as free men would make them slaves again at the first opportunity. Their hope was Toussaint, a black man, ex-slave, with his army of black men, ex-slaves. All the black labourers of San Domingo had their eyes on him.

~~Toussaint, when Sonthonax arrived, was second in~~

VIII

The White Slave-Owners Again

SONTHONAX, as dictatorial and self-willed as ever, dominated the Commission and began a pronounced pro-black policy. He loved the blacks, said that he wished he was a black man, and lived openly with a Mulatto woman.

If all the whites had been like Sonthonax, the labourers would have lost their anti-white feelings by which they meant only anti-slavery. For Laveaux and Sonthonax they would have done anything. But the blacks could not trust the old slave-owners; the British bribed, intrigued, and gave money and guns, and the insurrections all over the

prietors of San Domingo who are in France, those in the United States, and those who serve under the English banner. You will see there a resolution, unequivocal and carefully constructed, for the restoration of slavery; you will see there that their determination to succeed has led them to envelop themselves in the mantle of liberty in order to strike it more deadly blows. You will see that they are counting heavily on my complacency in lending myself to their perfidious views by my fear for my children. It is not astonishing that these men who sacrifice their country to their interests are unable to conceive how many sacrifices a true love of country can support in a better father than they, since I unhesitatingly base the happiness of my children on that of my country, which they and they alone wish to destroy.

"I shall never hesitate between the safety of San Domingo and my personal happiness; but I have nothing to fear. It is to the solicitude of the French Government that I have confided my children. . . . I would tremble with horror if it was into the hands of the colonists that I had sent them as hostages; but even if it were so, let them know that in punishing them for the fidelity of their father, they would only add one degree more to their barbarism, without any hope of ever making me fail in my duty. . . . Blind as they are! They cannot see how this odious conduct on their part can become the signal of new disasters and irreparable misfortunes, and that far from making them regain what in their eyes liberty for all has made them lose, they expose themselves to a total ruin and the colony to its inevitable destruction. Do they think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery. But to-day when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives they would sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again. But no, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew. France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits. She will protect

us against all our enemies; she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, those principles which do her most honour to be destroyed, her most beautiful achievement to be degraded, and her Decree of 16 Pluviose which so honours humanity to be revoked. But if ~~to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it.~~¹²

"This, Citizens Directors, is the morale of the people of San Domingo, those are the principles that they transmit to you by me.

"My own you know. It is sufficient to renew my hand in yours, the oath that I have made, to cease to live before gratitude dies in my heart, before I cease to be faithful to France, and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the libicides, before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms, which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those of humanity, for the triumph of liberty and equality."¹³

Pericles on Democracy, Paine on the Rights of Man, the Declaration of Independence, the Communist Manifesto, these are some of the political documents which, whatever the wisdom or weaknesses of their analysis, have moved men and will always move them, for the writers, some of them in spite of themselves, strike chords and awaken aspirations that sleep in the hearts of the majority in every age. But Pericles, Tom Paine, Jefferson, Marx and Engels, were men of a liberal education, formed in the traditions of ethics, philosophy and history. Toussaint was a slave, not six years out of slavery, bearing alone the unaccustomed burden of war and government, dictating his thoughts in the crude words of a broken dialect, written

¹² Toussaint's emphasis.

¹³ Probably a quotation from one of the Directory's letters to him.

and rewritten by his secretaries until their devotion and his will had hammered them into adequate shape. Superficial people have read his career in terms of personal ambition. This letter is their answer. Personal ambition he had. But he accomplished what he did because, superbly gifted, he incarnated the determination of his people never, never to be slaves again.

Soldier and administrator above all, yet his declaration is a masterpiece of prose excelled by no other writer of the revolution. Leader of a backward and ignorant mass, he was yet in the forefront of the great historical movement of his time. The blacks were taking their part in the destruction of European feudalism begun by the French Revolution, and liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than to any Frenchman. That was why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre, and Danton. And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify. Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation, and this gave to his declaration a strength and a single-mindedness rare in the great documents of the time. The French bourgeoisie could not understand it. Rivers of blood were to flow before they understood that elevated as was his tone Toussaint had written neither bombast nor rhetoric but the simple and sober truth.

IX

The Expulsion of the British

TOUSSAINT sent a white man, Colonel Vincent, an officer of Engineers and a close friend, to the Directory to explain his action against Sonthonax. Rigaud congratulated Toussaint on the expulsion of Sonthonax, and Toussaint, in undisputed command, prepared to sweep the British completely out of San Domingo.

Pitt and Dundas for years hung grimly on to their hope of getting the island. In November 1795, in an attempt most probably to win Rigaud, Dundas authorised Forbes to grant the same privileges to Mulattoes as to

and determination he was laying the foundations of an independent nation. But, too confident in his own powers, he was making one dreadful mistake. Not with Bonaparte nor with the French Government. In nothing does his genius stand out so much as in refusing to trust the liberties of the blacks to the promises of French or British Imperialism. His error was his neglect of his own people. They did not understand what he was doing or where he was going. He took no trouble to explain. It was dangerous to explain, but still more dangerous not to explain. His temperament, close and self-contained, was one that kept its own counsel. Thus the masses thought he had taken Spanish San Domingo to stop the slave traffic, and not as a safeguard against the French. His silence confused them and did not deceive Bonaparte. Dessalines' his fearless lieutenant, had no such scruples. After the war with Rigaud, Dessalines told his soldiers: "The war you have just won is a little war, but you have two more, bigger ones. One is against the Spaniards, who do not want to give up their land and who have insulted your brave Commander-in-Chief; the other is against France, who will try to make you slaves again as soon as she has finished with her enemies. We'll win those wars." That was and still is the way to speak to the masses, and it is no accident that Dessalines and not Toussaint finally led the island to independence. Toussaint, shut up within himself, immersed in diplomacy, went his tortuous way, overconfident that he had only to speak and the masses would follow.

XI

The Black Consul

SO LONG as the war lasted between France and Britain Toussaint was safe. But peace might come at any moment now, and with the peace would come Bonaparte's "special laws."

The colony was devastated by 12 years of civil and foreign war. Of the 30,000 whites in the colony in 1789, only 10,000 remained. The rest had been killed or had emigrated. Of the 40,000 free Mulattoes and free blacks there were still about 30,000, while of the 500,000 Negro

slaves perhaps one-third had perished. Plantations and cultivation had been destroyed far and wide. For nearly ten years the population, corrupt enough before, had been trained in bloodshed and soaked in violence. Bands of marauders roamed the countryside. The only disciplined force was the army, and Toussaint instituted a military dictatorship.

The ultimate guarantee of freedom was the prosperity of agriculture. This was Toussaint's slogan. The danger was that the blacks might slip into the practice of cultivating a small patch of land, producing just sufficient for their needs. He would not allow the old estates to be broken up, but bound the interests of the labourers to their work by giving them their keep and a fourth of the produce. The generals in command of the districts were responsible for the industry of the labourers and the prosperity of cultivation. He confined the blacks to the plantations under rigid penalties. He was battling with the colossal task of transforming a slave population, after years of licence, into a community of free labourers, and he was doing it in the only way he could see. On behalf of the labourers he saw to it that they were paid their quarter of the produce.¹ This alone was sufficient to mark the change from the old to the new despotism.

For behind this despotism the new order was vastly different from the old. The black labourers were free, and though there might be dissatisfaction with the new régime, as in the Paris of 1800, there was no regret for the old. Where formerly the labourers had worked from dawn until far into the night, now work began at five and ended at five. No employer dared to beat them. Dessalines whipped blacks in his province, and Toussaint threatened to take away his command at the least complaint.² It was not only humanity. Any régime which tolerated such practices was doomed, for the revolution had created a new race of men.

¹ This was admitted by General Leclerc in the decree of July 4th, 1802. *Les Archives du Ministère de la Guerre*, B¹5.

² Gragnon-Lacoste, *Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, Paris and Bordeaux, 1877, p. 194.

The change had first expressed itself in August 1791. Rouse, who knew the black labourers as well as any other Frenchman, has traced it in detail.³ In the North they came out to sustain royalty, nobility and religion against the poor whites and the Patriots. But they were soon formed into regiments and were hardened by fighting. They organised themselves into armed sections and into popular bodies, and even while fighting for royalty they adopted instinctively and rigidly observed all the forms of republican organisation. Slogans and rallying cries were established between the chiefs of the sections and divisions, and gave them points of contact from one extremity of the plains and towns of the North to the other. This guaranteed the leaders a means of calling out the labourers and sending them back at will. These forms were extended to the districts in the West Province, and were faithfully observed by the black labourers, whether fighting for Spain and royalty or for the republic. Rouse assured Bonaparte that he recognised these slogans, even during the insurrection which forced him to authorise the taking of Spanish San Domingo.

In 1911, Hilaire Belloc, writing of the French Revolution, claimed that this instinctive capacity of the masses for revolutionary organisation was something peculiarly French.⁴ It was an error. At the same time as the French, the half-savage slaves of San Domingo were showing themselves subject to the same historical laws as the advanced workers of revolutionary Paris; and over a century later the Russian masses were to prove once more that this innate power will display itself in all populations when deeply stirred and given a clear perspective by a strong and trusted leadership.

The people were strongly disciplined. Even when they crowded into Le Cap and threatened Rouse, their conduct was orderly, they destroyed nothing, merely pre-

³ Reports to the Minister, 19 and 22 Prairial, AN VIII. *Les Archives Nationales*, A.F. IV, 1187.

⁴ Hilaire Belloc, *The French Revolution*, Home University Library.

sented their demands that the slave traffic to Spanish San Domingo be stopped, and waited.⁵

At bottom the popular movement had acquired an immense self-confidence. The former slaves had defeated white colonists, Spaniards and British, and now they were free. They were aware of French politics, for it concerned them closely. Black men who had been slaves were deputies in the French Parliament, black men who had been slaves negotiated with the French and foreign governments. Black men who had been slaves filled the highest positions in the colony. There was Toussaint, the former slave, incredibly grand and powerful and incomparably the greatest man in San Domingo. There was no need to be ashamed of being a black. The revolution had awakened them, had given them the possibility of achievement, confidence and pride. That psychological weakness, that feeling of inferiority with which the imperialists poison colonial peoples everywhere, these were gone. Roume and the other Frenchmen who lived in San Domingo and knew the people created by the revolution never ceased to warn the French Government of the catastrophe that would follow any attempt to restore slavery, or indeed impose its will on these people in any way by force. The Mulattoes and the old free blacks resented Toussaint's despotism, but the masses at first gave him their fullest confidence.

Sure of himself, Toussaint reorganised the administration with boldness and skill. He divided the island into six departments, and the boundaries that he fixed remain to this day. He created ordinary courts of law and two courts of appeal, one in the French part of the island and one in the Spanish part, and a Supreme Court of Appeal in the capital. There were also special military courts to deal quickly with robberies and crimes on the high road, plentiful since the years of revolution and war.

⁵ Roume, Despatch of 19 and 22 Prairial, AN VIII. *Les Archives Nationales*, A.F. IV, 1187.

The finance of the old régime was complicated and inksome. Toussaint demanded first an "exact inventory of our resources";⁶ then abolished the numerous duties and taxes which were only a source of fraud and abuses. He gave the *gourde*, the local unit of money, a uniform value for the whole island. All merchandise and produce imported or exported paid a duty of 20 per cent. All fixed property paid the same. There was the same duty on everything manufactured for consumption in the colony. Thus he was able to get rid of the numerous officials whom the old system demanded; each taxpayer knew how much he had to pay, and the simplicity of the system and his strict supervision raised the standard of probity.

In his taxation he was feeling his way. He lowered the tax on fixed property from 20 to 10 per cent, and on the advice of Stevens, the United States Consul, abolished it altogether soon afterwards. The 20 per cent tax on imports acted as a check on the purchases of the merchants, and Toussaint lowered it to 10 per cent; later, to encourage the poor, he lowered the duty on articles of the first necessity to 6 per cent. He was learning quickly. All this was taking place in the course of the year 1801.

Contraband had been a feature of the old régime. Toussaint organised a maritime police. Merchants who traded abroad were carefully scrutinised; their names were placed on a list in the customs house, and they could be struck off for dishonesty. For a similar offence the customs officials could be sent to the military tribunals. Against all defaulting officials Toussaint was merciless.

Against Raimond, who had sided with Roume against him, Toussaint bore no grudge. Raimond had ability, and Toussaint appointed him Administrator of the National Estates, an important source of revenue.

⁶ Nemours, *Histoire Militaire de la Guerre d'Indépendance de Saint-Domingue*, Paris, 1925, Vol. I, pp. 67-93. A summary and analysis of the better known facts with some additional material

Spanish San Domingo presented a special problem. It was backward, and the Spaniards hated Toussaint and his black generals. He trusted to wise administration and his conciliatory policy to win them over. He gave them their own Appeal Court. He repaired the old roads and built a splendid new one from Santo Domingo to Laxavon, 200 miles long. There were only 22 sugar factories in the whole of the Spanish part, and little cultivation, the inhabitants depending on timber and cattle-breeding for their few wants. He invited them to embark on cultivation in the French style. He lowered their import and export duty to 6 per cent in consideration of the poverty of the country. To encourage cultivation he prohibited the export of timber, but modified this ruling later. He was struck with the potential wealth of Spanish San Domingo, and issued a glowing description of it inviting settlers and offering concessions.

Toussaint knew the backwardness of the labourers; he made them work, but he wanted to see them civilised and advanced in culture. He established such schools as he could. A sincere Catholic and believer in the softening effect of religion on manners, he encouraged the practice of the Catholic religion, and wrote to that old friend of the blacks, the Abbé Grégoire, for advice. He favoured legitimate children and soldiers who were married, and forbade his officials and commandants to have concubines in the houses of their wives, a legacy of the old disreputable white society. He was anxious to see the blacks acquire the social deportment of the better class whites with their Versailles manners. Struck by the carriage and bearing of a French officer, he said to those around him, "My sons will be like that."

Around himself as Governor he instituted social "circles," great and small. All who were invited to a "great circle" had to attend. He himself wore the undress uniform of a regimental officer, contrasting with the brilliance of the uniforms around him. When he appeared the whole com-

pany, men and women, rose. He went round the hall speaking to everyone, and then retired by the same door at which he had entered, bowing right and left to the company.

The "small circle" was in the nature of a public audience. All the citizens entered the grand hall of the governor's palace, and Toussaint spoke to them as was convenient. After a time he retired to a small apartment in front of his bedroom which he used as a study, inviting those persons with whom he wanted to talk. These were usually the more distinguished whites, men who had the knowledge and experience that he needed and that were so sadly lacking in the labourers and some of his generals. There they talked of France, which he had never seen, of religion, agriculture, commerce. When he wished to conclude this audience he rose and the company retired, Toussaint accompanying them to the door.

He erected fine buildings in Le Cap and built a huge monument to commemorate the abolition of slavery.

Personal industry, social morality, public education, religious toleration, free trade, civic pride, racial equality, this ex-slave strove according to his lights to lay their foundations in the new State. In all his proclamations, laws and decrees he insisted on moral principles, the necessity for work, respect for law and order, pride in San Domingo, veneration for France. He sought to lift the people to some understanding of the duties and responsibilities of freedom and citizenship. It was the propaganda of a dictatorship, but not for base personal ends or the narrow interests of one class oppressing another. His government, like the absolute monarchy in its progressive days, balanced between the classes, but his was rooted in the preservation of the interests of the labouring poor. With the growth of a black ruling class, complications were arising already. But for the period his form of government was the best.

Success crowned his labours. Cultivation prospered, and the new San Domingo began to shape itself with astonishing quickness. At Le Cap was built a hotel, the Hotel de la République, of a style which would compare

with the finest that existed in any part of the world. It was frequented by blacks, local whites, and Americans, all on a footing of equality. At the same table sat private individuals, the generals and officers of every rank, and high officials. Toussaint went there regularly, taking his place in any vacant seat like any of the rest; he said often that distinctions of rank had no place outside the public service.

Race prejudice, the curse of San Domingo for two hundred years, was vanishing fast. Some of the Americans were marrying Mulatto women. The stigma of colour could not flourish when so many Negroes and Mulattoes filled the highest positions in the country. Travellers who saw Le Cap during that wonderful year agreed that a new spirit was in the country.⁷ The theatres began to play again, and some of the Negro players showed a remarkable talent. No doubt the poor sweated and were backward so that the new ruling class might thrive. But at least they too were better off than they had been. While on the one hand the authority, social ease and culture of those who, a dozen years before, had been slaves, amazed all observers, the success of Toussaint's administration can be judged by the fact that in a year and a half he had restored cultivation to two-thirds of what it had been in the most flourishing days of the old régime.⁸

Those were the ideas and the methods of government of Toussaint. The revolution had made him; but it would be a vulgar error to suppose that the creation of a disciplined army, the defeat of the English and the Spaniards, the defeat of Rigaud, the establishment of a strong government all over the island, the growing harmony between the races, the enlightened aims of the administration—it would

⁷ Beard, *Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture*, p. 138.

⁸ Nemours, *Histoire Militaire de la Guerre* . . . , Vol. I, pp. 17-19. Nemours summarises the evidence. Idlinger the treasurer (white) of the island under Toussaint also states the same in a memoir written for the French Government in 1804. See *Les Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Fonds divers, Section Amérique*, No. 14, folio 202.

be a crude error to believe that all these were inevitable. At a certain stage, the middle of 1794, the potentialities in the chaos began to be shaped and soldered by his powerful personality, and thenceforth it is impossible to say where the social forces end and the impress of personality begins. It is sufficient that but for him this history would be something entirely different. It is therefore essential for us to consider what sort of man he was.

It was his prodigious activity which so astonished men. Nobody ever knew what he was doing: if he was leaving, if he was staying, whither he was going, whence he was coming. He had hundreds of thoroughbred horses scattered in stables all over the country, and he habitually covered 125 miles a day, riding far in advance of his guards and arriving at his destination alone or with one or two well-mounted attendants. The inspection of agriculture, commerce, fortifications, Municipalities, schools, even the distribution of prizes to successful scholars—he was tireless in performing these duties all over the country, and none knew when and where the Governor would appear. He deliberately cultivated this mysteriousness. He would leave a town in his carriage surrounded by his guards. Then some miles away he would step out of it and ride in the opposite direction. And after these lightning dashes across country he was able to go into his cabinet and dictate hundreds of letters until far into the early morning. He dictated to five secretaries at once,⁹ and as he told Hedouville during one of their quarrels, he took full responsibility for anything that bore his signature, signing nothing that he did not read himself. He carried into his correspondence the same methods that he used in his administration. One secretary would write down half of an important letter, Toussaint would then send him 60 miles away and conclude it by means of another.

He was as completely master of his body as of his mind. He slept but two hours every night, and for days would be satisfied with two bananas and a glass of water.¹⁰

⁹ Nemours, *Histoire Militaire de la Guerre* . . . , Vol. I, p. 126.

¹⁰ Lacroix, *Mémoires pour Servir* . . . , Vol. I, p. 406.

Physically without fear, he had to guard against being poisoned, and in the various villages where he stayed he had old black women prepare for him callaloes, a kind of vegetable broth. He could trust these old women. They had no ambitions and were too proud of him to do him any harm. In the field he slept dressed, booted and spurred, in the towns he always kept near to his bed a pair of trousers. At all hours of the night couriers and officers found him ready to receive them with becoming dignity.

His control over his soldiers was not due only to his skill as a general. He had that reckless physical bravery that makes men follow a leader in the most forlorn causes. From the beginning of his career to the end he charged at the head of his men whenever a supreme effort was required. In one battle he chased the Spanish commander alone for nearly a mile and brought back two prisoners, and in ten years was wounded 17 times. Even on his ordinary trips he took all sorts of risks. When he was already Commander-in-Chief he was nearly drowned in trying to cross a swollen river on horseback, and escaped only by getting rid of his sword. He could make soldiers accomplish the seemingly impossible. In the march on Spanish San Domingo, when he wanted speed, the men were doing over 40 miles a day and had to be checked to wait for the cavalry.¹¹

He seemed to bear a charmed life. During the civil war against the South his enemies tried to ambush him twice. The first time his doctor, who was sitting in the carriage with him, was killed at his side, several of his officers were unmounted, and the plume of his hat was cut away by a bullet. A little later on the same journey his coachman was killed and his carriage riddled with bullets. Only a few minutes before, he had left the carriage and was at the time riding some distance away. No wonder he came in the end to believe in himself as the black Spartacus, foretold by Raynal as predestined to achieve the emancipation of the blacks. The labourers in their turn worshipped him as a direct servant of God.

¹¹ Nemours, *Histoire Militaire de la Guerre* . . . , Vol. I, p. 146.

His aides were Negroes, one of them his nephew. Despite the broadness of his views and his conciliatory aims, Toussaint kept his army overwhelmingly black and ex-slave. But his personal advisers were all white men: Vincent, Pascal who had come as secretary to the Commission in 1796, and two Italian priests. He liked to talk to the rich white planters. But no person, man nor woman, ever had any influence on him. He seems to have had one friend in all his life, Laveaux. Impenetrable, he trusted no one, confided in no one. If he had a weakness it was in keeping people mystified. Yet he guarded his reputation and was careful in his contacts with people. He had the extraordinary faculty of satisfying all who came to see him, and was known all over the island as a man who never broke his word. Even Sonthoux, the Jacobin lawyer and a very finished intriguer himself, said in the French Chamber that Toussaint was incapable of telling lies. But this was before Toussaint accused him of plotting independence.

Despite his awkwardness of build and ugliness of feature he managed in the end to make a strong impression upon all with whom he came in contact. He had in the last years an unusual distinction of carriage. His step was martial, his manner commanding. Simple in his private life, he wore resplendent uniforms on state occasions, and his aides-de-camp followed his example in elegance and display. He knew how to listen to a subordinate officer with dignity and yet with affability. He could acknowledge marks of public respect and affection while avoiding them with easy good nature. With all classes of people he found instinctively the right method.

When the black labourers came to him, nervous about their liberty and white domination, he would take a glass vase and fill it with grains of black maize, then put in a few grains of white maize. "You are the black maize; the whites who would enslave you are the white maize." He then

shook the glass and showed it to them. "See, the white ones only here and there." The blacks went away reassured. They came to him saying that they did not wish to obey either whites or Mulattoes (due in all probability to some insults or injustices meted out to them by these former masters). Toussaint took a glass of wine and a glass of water, mixed them together and showed the result. "How can you tell which is which? We must all live together." They went away satisfied.

A Negro who wanted the post of judge came to see Toussaint. He was unfitted for the post, but Toussaint did not want to hurt his feelings. "You know Latin, of course," said Toussaint. "Latin!" Toussaint reeled off a string of cheap Latin phrases that he had picked up, probably from official documents and the church service. The applicant retired, satisfied that he was incompetent, and marvelling at the knowledge of the Governor.

He was absolutely at home with the masses of the people and yet, at the same time, men like Maitland and the local whites were astonished at the singular courtesy and charm of his manners. There was nothing of the rough diamond about Toussaint. Three white women of the ancient régime, living abroad, wrote to him asking for the restoration of their properties. Toussaint's reply showed some of the secret of his success with all classes of people.

"I have received the letters with which you have been so kind as to honour me. . . . I have always done as much as lies in my power to preserve the property of each and every one; yours, citizens, . . . has not suffered from the unhappy events inevitable in a revolution; it is intact. The power to remove the sequestration under which it lies does not rest with me; that is in the hands of the Agent of the Directory. I can only assure you that his decision will be punctually executed."

"For more than three years, citizens, I have asked the Citizen Descheaux, your mother, to come back to her property; my advice, unhappily for her and for you, has not prevailed over that of her brother. There was still time to

profit . . . by a proclamation carrying the name and authorisation of the French Government. Your mother has, however, preferred to follow the fate of her brother, Cockerey, rather than remain at St Marc to profit by the advantages of the amnesty and retake possession of her property. She has left with her brother; it no longer depends on me to get her to come back home."

"In regard to the husband of the Citizen Fontanges, I can no longer prevent him from being written down as an émigré. That would be to place myself above the law, and that has never entered my mind nor my principles. When the Agent decides to raise your sequestration . . . I shall neglect nothing to put the Citizen Fortier, whom you recommend to me, in a position to look after your interests in the most advantageous manner. If my advice can be of any use to him, I shall give it to him, if he wishes it, with the greatest pleasure, being happy to seize the opportunity to witness the infinite value which I attach to your goodwill, on every occasion that it is in harmony with my duty."

"Accept, citizens, the assurance of my respect and regards. I sincerely wish the happiness of you all and the return of your mother to your arms." 12

Perhaps it is in his correspondence that we can most easily grasp the range and sensitivity of Toussaint's untaught genius. In his letter to the Commissioners in 1791, his correspondence with Laveaux, his overtures to Dieu-donné, his letter to the Directory in 1796, his speech at Port-Républicain after the expulsion of the English, his letters to Hédouville and his resignation, in all these, as here in this gracious but careful letter, his vision of precisely what is required is unerring, his taste is faultless, and the constantly varying approach is always suffused with revolutionary passion, a large humanity and a never-failing personal distinction. These letters more than anything else show that whatever the task that faced him he did it to the manner born.

12 Schoelcher, *Vie de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, p. 289.

tended devotion of the men and the liking the women might have for him as an individual. It was in 1798 that he wrote so courteously to the white women who asked for a return of their property, and all through that year he and Hédouville quarrelled about the policy to be adopted toward the white émigrés. Yet at that very period when the whites of Port-au-Prince were bowing and scraping before him, an incident took place which lets us see what Toussaint thought of the whites as whites.

A white colonist wanted a post as storekeeper and asked Toussaint for it. Toussaint said no. The colonist's wife tried many times to approach Toussaint, but was unsuccessful. Some time after she gave birth to a son and asked Toussaint to be the godfather. Toussaint, usually so suave and conciliatory, for some reason or other, decided to let this woman know his mind.

"Why, Madame, do you wish me to be godfather of your son—you approach to me has no other aim than to get me to give a post to your husband, for the feelings of your heart are contrary to the request that you make of me."

"How can you think so, General? No, my husband loves you, all the whites are attached to you."

"Madame, I know the whites. If I had their skin—yes, but I am black and I know their aversion to us. Have you reflected well on the request which you make of me? If I accept, how do you know that when he reaches the age of reason, your son may not reproach you for giving him a Negro as godfather?"

"But, General . . ."

"Madame," Toussaint interrupted her, pointing to the sky, "He who governs all is alone immortal. I am a general, it is true, but I am black. After my death, who knows if my brothers will not be driven back into slavery and will yet perish under the whip of the whites. The work of men is not durable. The French Revolution has enlightened Europeans, we are loved and wept over by them, but the white colonists are enemies of the blacks. . . . You wish your husband to get a post. Well, I give him the employment

that he demands. Let him be honest and let him remember that I cannot see everything, but that nothing escapes God. I cannot accept your offer to be godfather to your son. You may have to bear the reproaches of the colonists and perhaps one day that of your son."¹⁷

These were his views; he never changed them. Yet he set his face sternly against racial discrimination. He guarded his power and the rights of the labourers by an army overwhelmingly black. But within that wall he encouraged all to come back, Mulattoes and whites. The policy was both wise and workable, and if his relations with France had been regularised he would have done all he hoped to do. But San Domingo did not know where it stood in relation to France. There were still fears for liberty, and the black labourers did not approve of Toussaint's policy. They felt that he showed too much favour to their old enemies.¹⁸

These anti-white feelings of the blacks were no infringement of liberty and equality, but were in reality the soundest revolutionary policy. It was fear of the counter-revolution. They had loved Sonthonax, called down blessings on his head, and made their children pray for him at night. Fifty years afterwards their old eyes would glow as they told travellers of this wonderful white man who had given them liberty and equality, not only in words but in deeds. But men like Sonthonax, Vincent, Laveaux, and Roume were few and with the decline of the revolution in France had come a man like Hédouville. The black labourers had their eyes fixed on the local whites and resented Toussaint's policy. It was not the whites at home whom Toussaint feared. It was the counter-revolution in France. But the blacks could see in the eyes of their former owners the regret for the old days and the hatred. ~~Some of these whites issued a~~ ~~Toussaint issued a~~ ~~some of these whites issued a~~ ~~the blacks to the plantations, some of these whites issued a~~

¹⁷ Malenfant, *Des Colonies et particulièrement de celle de Saint-Domingue*, Paris, 1819.

¹⁸ Proclamation of Christophe I, 1814, Printed in Beard, *Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture*, p. 326.

Every municipal administration was composed of a mayor and four administrators. They were nominated by the Governor for two years from a list of 16 submitted to him.

The Church was strictly subordinate to the State. The Governor apportioned to each minister of religion the extent of his administration, and the clergy were not allowed under any pretext whatever to form an association in the colony. Laws were to be preceded by this formula: "The Central Assembly of San Domingo, on the proposal of the Governor . . ." They were to be promulgated with the formula: "The Governor commands . . ." Every department of administration, finance, police, army, was confided to him, and he corresponded directly with France on everything relating to the colony. He had the censorship of all printed matter.

The Central Assembly could accept or reject laws, but the Assembly was in the hands of the Governor, being elected by the principal administrators, whom he nominated. The Constitution appointed Toussaint Governor for life, with power to name his successor.

Constitutions are what they turn out to be. France in 1802 could have no quarrel with Toussaint over this Constitution on the score of despotism. What would strike any Frenchman, however, was that the Constitution, though swearing allegiance to France, left no room for any French official. Toussaint wanted them to come out and help govern, but under the local government. It was virtual independence, with France as elder brother, guide and mentor. He had no precedents to guide him, but he knew what he wanted. When remonstrated with as to where was the place of France in such a government, he replied, "The French Government will send Commissioners to speak with me." Absolute local independence on the one hand, but on the other French capital and French administrators helping to develop and educate the country, and a high official from France as a link between both Governments. The local power was too well safeguarded for us to call the scheme a protectorate in the political content of that dis-

honest word. All the evidence shows that Toussaint, working alone, had reached forward to that form of political allegiance which we know to-day as Dominion Status.

Firm as was his grasp of reality, old Toussaint looked beyond San Domingo with a boldness of imagination surpassed by no contemporary. In the Constitution he authorised the slave-trade because the island needed people to cultivate it. When the Africans landed, however, they would be free men. But while loaded with the cares of government, he cherished a project of sailing to Africa with arms, ammunition and a thousand of his best soldiers, and there conquering vast tracts of country, putting an end to the slave-trade, and making millions of blacks "free and French," as his Constitution had made the blacks of San Domingo. It was no dream. He had sent millions of francs to America to wait for the day when he would be ready.²¹ He was already 55. What spirit was it that moved him? Ideas do not fall from heaven. The great revolution had propelled him out of his humble joys and obscure destiny, and the trumpets of its heroic period rang ever in his ears. In him, born a slave and the leader of slaves, the concrete realisation of liberty, equality and fraternity was the womb of ideas and the springs of power, which overflowed their narrow environment and embraced the whole of the world. But for the revolution, this extraordinary man and his band of gifted associates would have lived their lives as slaves, serving the commonplace creatures who owned them, standing barefooted and in rags to watch inflated little governors and mediocre officials from Europe pass by, as many a talented African stands in Africa to-day.²²

Too much importance has been attached to the Constitution. It was merely a formal embodiment of the position to which Toussaint had been moving steadily since his expulsion of Hédouville. His method of publishing it was his usual one of mystery. He summoned his white and Mu-

²¹ Saint-Antoine, *Vie de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, p. 325.
²² Written in 1938.

manders: "Leave nothing white behind you."¹⁰ But the mischief had been done.

Yet Toussaint's error sprang from the very qualities that made him what he was. It is easy to see to-day, as his generals saw after he was dead, where he had erred. It does not mean that they or any of us would have done better in his place. If Dessalines could see so clearly and simply, it was because the ties that bound this uneducated soldier to French civilisation were of the slenderest. He saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness.

In the last days of December, the fleet of Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse, bearing on board the first detachment of 12,000 men, sailed into the harbour of Samana Bay. Toussaint, standing alone on a neighbouring peak, watched the vessels. Unaccustomed to naval armaments, he was overwhelmed by their number; as he returned to his staff he uttered the words, "We shall perish. All France is come to overwhelm us." It was not fear. He was never afraid. But certain traits of character run deep in great men. Despite all that he had done he was at bottom the same Toussaint who had hesitated to join the revolution in 1791 and for one whole month had protected his master's plantation from destruction. Only this time it was not a plantation and a few score slaves but a colony and hundreds of thousands of people.

¹⁰ Mauviel, Bishop of San Domingo, memorandum to Napoleon, *Les Archives Nationales*, AF. IV. 1187.

XIII

The War of Independence

THE DEFEAT of Toussaint in the War of Independence and his imprisonment and death in Europe are universally looked upon as a tragedy. They contain authentic elements of the tragic in that even at the height of the war Toussaint strove to maintain the French connection as necessary to Haiti in its long and difficult climb to civilisation. Convinced that slavery could never be restored in San Domingo, he was equally convinced that a population of slaves recently landed from Africa could not attain to civilisation by "going it alone." His tergiversations, his inability to take the

firm and realistic decisions which so distinguished his career and had become the complete expression of his personality, as we watch his blunders and the inevitable catastrophe, we have always to remember that here is no conflict of the insoluble dilemmas of the human condition, no division of a personality which can find itself only in its striving for the unattainable. Toussaint was a whole man. The man into which the French Revolution had made him demanded that the relation with the France of liberty, equality, fraternity and the abolition of slavery without a debate, should be maintained. What revolutionary France signified was perpetually on his lips, in public statements, in his correspondence, in the spontaneous intimacy of private conversation. It was the highest stage of social existence that he could imagine. It was not only the framework of his mind. No one else was so conscious of its practical necessity in the social backwardness and primitive conditions of life around him. Being the man he was, by nature, and by a range and intensity of new experiences such as is given to few, that is the way he saw the world in which he lived. His unrealistic attitude to the former masters, at home and abroad, sprang not from any abstract humanitarianism or loyalty, but from a recognition that they alone had what San Domingo society needed. He believed that he could handle them. It is not improbable that he could have done it. He was in a situation strictly comparable to that of the greatest of all American statesmen, Abraham Lincoln, in 1865; if the thing could be done at all, he alone could do it. Lincoln was not allowed to try. Toussaint fought desperately for the right to try.

If he was convinced that San Domingo would decay without the benefits of the French connection, he was equally certain that slavery could never be restored. Between these two certainties, he, in whom penetrating vision and prompt decision had become second nature, became the embodiment of vacillation. His allegiance to the French Revolution and all it opened out for mankind in general and the people of San Domingo in particular, this had made him what he was. But this in the end ruined him.

Perhaps for him to have expected more than the bare freedom was too much for the time. With that alone Desalines was satisfied, and perhaps the proof that freedom alone was possible lies in the fact that to ensure it Dessalines, that faithful adjutant, had to see that Toussaint was removed from the scene. Toussaint was attempting the impossible—the impossible that was for him the only reality that mattered. The realities to which the historian is condemned will at times simplify the tragic alternatives with which he was faced. But these factual statements and the judgments they demand must not be allowed to obscure or minimise the truly tragic character of his dilemma, one of the most remarkable of which there is an authentic historical record.

But in a deeper sense the life and death are not truly tragic. Prometheus, Hamlet, Lear, Phèdre, Ahab, assert what may be the permanent impulses of the human condition against the claims of organised society. They do this in the face of imminent or even certain destruction, and their defiance propels them to heights which make of their defeat a sacrifice which adds to our conceptions of human grandeur.

Toussaint is in a lesser category. His splendid powers do not rise but decline. Where formerly he was distinguished above all for his prompt and fearless estimate of whatever faced him, we shall see him, we have already seen him, misjudging events and people, vacillating in principle, and losing both the fear of his enemies and the confidence of his own supporters.

The hamartia, the tragic flaw, which we have constructed from Aristotle, was in Toussaint not a moral weakness. It was a specific error, a total miscalculation of the constituent events. Yet what is lost by the imaginative freedom and creative logic of great dramatists is to some degree atoned for by the historical actuality of his dilemma. It would therefore be a mistake to see him merely as a political figure in a remote West Indian island. If his story does not approach the greater dramatic creations, in its social significance and human appeal it far exceeds the last

days at St Helena and that apotheosis of accumulation and degradation, the suicide in the Wilhelmstrasse. The Greek tragedians could always go to their gods for a dramatic embodiment of fate, the *dike* which rules over a world neither they nor we ever made. But not Shakespeare himself could have found such a dramatic embodiment of fate as Toussaint struggled against, Bonaparte himself; nor could the furthest imagination have envisaged the entry of the chorus, of the ex-slaves themselves, as the arbiters of their own fate. Toussaint's certainty of this as the ultimate and irresistible resolution of the problem to which he refused to limit himself, that explains his mistakes and atones for them.

Like Toussaint, Bonaparte did everything himself and he wrote out the plan of campaign with his own hand.

He divided it into three periods. In the first Leclerc was to promise Toussaint everything he asked for, in order that Leclerc might establish himself in the principal points of the country.

"As soon as this is done, you will then be firmer. Command him to reply without equivocation to me, the proclamation and my letter." Toussaint was to come to Le Cap and swear fidelity to the Republic. On that very day¹ he and all his supporters, white and black, were to be shipped to France without being disgraced but with honour and consideration. (This was merely to avoid irritating the population unnecessarily: no epaulette was to be left on the shoulders of a single nigger.) Raimond (with no mass following) was to be arrested and sent to France as a criminal. During this first period Leclerc was to treat Moïse, Dessalines, and Toussaint well, and every attempt was to be made to win over men like Christophe, Clairveaux, and Maunrapas who were "favourable to the whites," in other words men who had carried out Toussaint's policy and treated them with fairness and consideration. This was the first period, to last about 15 or 20 days.

But Bonaparte had his doubts about Toussaint, Moïse, and Dessalines. If they did not come to swear fealty (and he politely but firmly deported), they were to be declared traitors, hunted down by "a war to the death," and if captured shot within 24 hours. This would end the second period. "On the same day" at all points "all doubtful persons, whatever their colour, were to be arrested, and all the black generals whatever their status deported." The last stage was the disarming of the population. The National Guard and *gendarmérie* were to be "reorganised," in other words made all white, and San Domingo would then be ready for the "special laws."

The first thing was to break the military power of the blacks: no black above the rank of captain was to be left in the island.

The second thing was prestige. Bonaparte knew the imperialist importance of a proper respect for white women among natives. The ancients never thought a conquest completed until the victor had slept with the wife or daughter of the conquered monarch. It is difficult to inculcate the proper sentiment of inferiority in a man who sleeps with your sister. Bonaparte ordered that all white women who had "prostituted themselves" to Negroes, were to be sent to Europe, whatever their rank. Leclerc was not to tolerate from anyone any talk about the "rights of those blacks who had shed so much white blood."¹ Whatever his rank or services he was to be shipped to France.

The "special laws" were not specified, but the Mulattoes, too, were to be suitably dealt with. Rigaud, Pétion, Villate and other officers, having no fears for their own rights and thinking to supplant Toussaint and his generals, had obtained permission to come with the expedition. Bonaparte had them all put on one ship, the *Vexu*. If Toussaint welcomed the expedition they were not even to be allowed to land, but were to be deported at once to Madagascar. If there was fighting to be done, however,

¹ The instructions are printed in full in *Die Kolonialpolitik Napoleons I*, by Roloff (Münich, 1899), as an appendix.

terms. On the other hand, ~~it was unlikely that Leclerc would dare to arrest him while Dessalines, Belair, and the others still had command of the island. It was here that he was wrong.~~ He met Brunet at eight in the evening accompanied by only two officers. The men talked for a few minutes, and then Brunet begged to be excused for a moment. As soon as Brunet left, some grenadiers with fixed bayonets, having Ferrari, Leclerc's aide-de-camp, at their head, entered the house. Toussaint rose and drew his sword. Ferrari with lowered point went up to him. "General, we have not come here to do you any harm. We merely have orders to secure your person." And Toussaint submitted. They bound him like a common criminal, arrested his aide-de-camp, arrested his wife, son and niece, treating them with every indignity; they broke into his house, stole his money, his jewels, and his family papers, destroyed his plantations. They rushed the family on board a frigate which was waiting in the harbour of Le Cap and embarked them for France.

As Toussaint stepped on board the boat he spoke to Savary the captain some words which he had doubtless carefully prepared, his last legacy to his people.

"In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep."

The news of Toussaint's arrest came like a cold shock to the whole population. Whatever Toussaint had done, he stood for liberty. ~~He had been the only one in the mountains who had been beating and calling the people to revolt, and in the heights of Plaisance, Dondon, and around, the mass insurrection against Leclerc began. But one population as a whole gave little sign of interest. Leclerc was deceived, but not Lacroix and others of his officers. Dissimulation is the refuge of the slave, and the unnatural calm frightened some of the whites. The black masses did nothing because they did not know what to do. They saw Maurepas, Dessalines, Christophe and their officers main-~~

training their commands. Leclerc, as he had said from the time he came, swore that he had no designs against liberty. Toussaint had fought, then submitted, and now, as Leclerc said, he had been guilty of treason. Leclerc proclaimed that he had two letters proving Toussaint's treason, and published one. It was a forgery, for when the Home Government asked him for proofs in order to bring Toussaint to trial, he confessed that he had none. Let post mortem and retrospective arguments about morality be the happy hunting-ground of well-fed professors! Leclerc had been instructed to get rid of Toussaint, and had got rid of him. But the arrest did not help Leclerc.

~~"If the First Consul wishes to have an army in San Domingo in the month of October, he must have it sent from France for the ravages of sickness here are too great for words. Not a day passes without my being told of the death of someone whom I have cause to regret bitterly. . . . Man cannot work here much without risking his life. Since my arrival in this country I have often been in very poor health from having worked too hard. The Government must seriously think of sending me a successor."~~

~~"It is quite impossible for me to remain here more than six months. I reckon by that time to hand over the colony free from the state of war to the one who will be designated to replace me."~~

~~"My health is so wretched that I could consider myself very fortunate if I can last that long."~~ 34

~~"I have notified you, Citizen Minister, in one of my last dispatches, of the pardon which I had been pleased to grant General Toussaint. This ambitious man, from the moment I pardoned him, has not ceased his underhand conspiracies. The reports which have reached me even through General Dessalines of the way he has behaved since his submission leave me~~

~~84 June 11th, 1802. To the Minister of Marine.~~

unofficial second-in-command. Dessalines traveled over the island reorganising the local troops. Many of the petty chiefs and rank-and-file viewed him, as was natural, with distrust. He and Pétion won them over or hunted them down and destroyed them. Dessalines drilled the raw levies daily preparing for a campaign on a grand scale. In the middle of January Rochambeau asked for authorisation to restore slavery at once.⁶⁴ Leclerc had not even dared to confide Bonaparte's authorisation to him, so utterly opposed were the sentiments of even post-revolutionary France to the reactionary savagery of the maritime bourgeois.

While waiting for this authorisation Rochambeau began on his own account to exterminate the Mulattoes. They outnumbered the whites, and looking forward to the restoration of white supremacy he thought it as well to get rid of as many as possible: Rochambeau hated the Mulattoes more than the blacks. One night at Port-Républican he gave a great ball to which he invited several of the Mulatto women. It was a magnificent fête. At midnight Rochambeau stops the dancing and begs them to enter into a neighbouring apartment. This room, lit by a single lamp, is hung with black draperies in which white material figures as skulls; in the four corners are coffins. In the middle of their horrified silence the Mulatto women hear funeral chants sung by invisible singers. Dumb with terror they stood rooted to the spot, while Rochambeau told them: "You have just assisted at the funeral ceremonies of your husbands and your brothers."⁶⁵

The French shot and drowned them, hundreds at a time, and not only shot the rich but confiscated their property.⁶⁶ By early March the Mulatto South was in full insurrection. But the Spaniards in the West and Laplume still
⁶⁴ To the Colonial Minister. 25 Nivôse. AN XL. (January 14th 1803.) *Les Archives du Ministère des Colonies*.
⁶⁵ Sannon, *Histoire de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, Vol. III, p. 150. This incident is found in two early historians, Ardouin and Delattre, who are referred to by Sannon.
⁶⁶ Lacroix. Memorandum to Napoleon. *Les Archives Nationales*; AF. IV. 1212. Boyer, *Histoire Militaire de la Révolution* . . . pp. 371-372.

stuck to the French. Rochambeau received in all 20,000 men after Leclerc's death.⁶⁷ But by now Dessalines was ready.

We cannot describe that war in detail. It was a war not so much of armies as of the people. It was now a war with the racial divisions emphasizing the class struggle—blacks and Mulattoes against whites. Leclerc had proposed a war of extermination, and Rochambeau waged it. As late as November 4th Kerverseau, who had served a long time under Toussaint, was confident that the French could still count on the "free Negroes and proprietors as much as on the whites."⁶⁸ But he counted without Rochambeau's precipitancy. One week later his tone had changed. "This is no longer a war. It is a fight of tigers. One has to be in a transport of frenzy to keep it up, and I have to keep on telling the troops: 'It is no longer bravery I want from you. It is rage.' But one cannot always be in a rage, and humanity makes us weep sometimes."⁶⁹ He wept but he fought.

Rochambeau drowned so many people in the Bay of Le Cap that for many a long day the people of the district would not eat fish. Following the example of the Spaniards in Cuba and the English in Jamaica, he brought 1500 dogs to hunt down the blacks. The day they arrived there was a fête.⁷⁰ In the grounds of a former Jesuit convent an amphitheatre was constructed, and on a certain day a young black was led in and bound to a post, while the whites of Le Cap, the women in brilliant costumes, sat waiting—(and Toussaint had shot Moïse and the blacks of Limbé, Dondon and Plaisance for their hostility to these very people). To the sound of martial music arrived Rochambeau, surrounded by his staff. But when the dogs were let loose they did not attack the victim. Boyer, chief of

⁶⁷ Lacroix, *Mémoires pour Servir* . . . Vol. 2. B. 253.

⁶⁸ Kerverseau to Lacroix. November 4th, 1802. *Les Archives du Ministère de la Guerre*, B7. 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, November 11th, 1802.

⁷⁰ Beard, the English author, says that the white ladies of Le Cap went down to meet the dogs the day they were landed and greeted them with kisses.

staff in place of the dead Dugua, jumped into the arena and with a stroke of his sword cut open the belly of the black. At the sight and scent of the blood the dogs threw themselves on the black and devoured him in a twinkling, while the applause ran round the arena and the band played. To encourage them in a liking for blood blacks were daily delivered to them, until the dogs, though useless in battle, would throw themselves on blacks at sight.⁷¹ The French burned alive, hanged, drowned, tortured, and started again their old habit of burying blacks up to the neck near nests of insects. It was not only hatred and fear, but policy. "If France wishes to regain San Domingo she must send hither 25,000 men in a body, declare the negroes slaves, and destroy at least 30,000 negroes and negroes—the latter being more cruel than the men. These measures are frightful, but necessary. We must take them or renounce the colony. Whoever says otherwise lies in his throat and deceives France."⁷² This was the general opinion of the whites. Kill them all off and get new ones who know nothing about liberty and equality. They chained 16 of Toussaint's generals to a rock where they wasted away 17 days. They drowned old Pierre Baptiste. The wife and children of Maurepas were drowned before his eyes, while the sailors nailed a pair of epaulettes into his naked shoulders. Some of the French, it is fair to say, turned in horror from this barbarism. A few captains of boats refused to drown the blacks handed over to them, but sold them into slavery instead. Some others landed them on deserted beaches in San Domingo or on other islands. Allix, Commander of Port-Républicain, would not accept 10,000 shot sent him to tie to the feet of those to be drowned. Rochambeau banished him. Mazard, another sea-captain, worked as hard to save blacks as most of his colleagues to drown them. But these were drops in the ocean. It was the

⁷¹ Lacroix Memorandum. *Les Archives Nationales*. Sannon, *Histoire de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, Vol. III, pp. 152-153.

⁷² Letter from Le Cap, October 6th (14 Vendémiaire AN XI). *Les Archives Nationales*. Quoted in Lothrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo*, p. 347. Needless to say, Stoddard has no objection whatever to this policy.

policy of the Tories that the British followed in Ireland, in 1921, not the remonstrances of the *Manchester Guardian* or the Society of Friends. So it is, so it always has been.

Desalines was a one-sided genius, but he was the man for this crisis, not Toussaint. He gave blow for blow. When Rochambeau put to death 500 at Le Cap and buried them in a large hole dug while they waited for execution, Desalines raised gibbets of branches and hanged 500 for Rochambeau and the whites in Le Cap to see. But neither Desalines' army nor his ferocity won the victory. It was the people. They burned San Domingo flat so that at the end of the war it was a charred desert. Why do you burn everything? asked a French officer of a prisoner. We have a right to burn what we cultivate because a man has a right to dispose of his own labour, was the reply of this unknown anarchist.⁷³ And far from being intimidated, the civil population met the terror with such courage and firmness as frightened the terrorists. Three blacks were condemned to be burnt alive. A huge crowd stood round while two of them were consumed, uttering horrible cries. But the third, a boy of 19, bound so that he could not see the other two, called to them in creole, "You do not know how to die. See how to die." By a great effort he twisted his body in his bonds, sat down and, placing his feet in the flames, let them burn without uttering a groan. "I was there," said Lemmonier-Delafose, "spectator of the heroic death of this wretch, greater than Mucius Scaevola. . . . These were the men we had to fight against."⁷⁴ Another thrown to the dogs showed no anger, but stroked them and encouraged them while he presented his limbs to be destroyed.⁷⁵ With the women it was the same. When Chevalier, a black chief, hesitated at the sight of the scaffold, his wife shamed him. "You do not know how sweet it is to die for liberty!" And refusing to allow herself to be hanged by the executioner, she took the rope and hanged herself.

⁷³ Lacroix Memorandum. *Les Archives Nationales*.

⁷⁴ Lemmonier-Delafose, *Seconde campagne de Saint-Domingue précédée de souvenirs historiques et succints de la première campagne*, Paris, 1846.

⁷⁵ Lacroix Memorandum.

To her daughters going to execution with her, another woman gave courage. "Be glad you will not be the mothers of slaves."

The French, powerless before this fortitude, saw in it not the strength of the revolution but some, peculiarly special to blacks. The muscles of a Negro, they said, contracted with so much force as to make him insensible to pain. They enslaved the Negro, they said, because he was not a man, and when he behaved like a man they called him a monster.

In the spring of 1803 Bonaparte was preparing vast armaments to send to San Domingo during the coming autumn. With sublime impudence he blamed the blacks for what was happening in San Domingo. At a meeting of the Institute at which Grégoire was present he said that the friends of the blacks should hide their heads at the news from San Domingo. That the blacks would not docilely submit to be slaves again was an unpardonable crime and they wreaked their vengeance on the man whom they considered mainly responsible for their disappointment. It was Toussaint's resistance which had upset all calculations.

The balked greed of Bonaparte and the French bourgeoisie, their hatred of the "revolted slave" who had ruined their plans, can be judged from the brutality with which they persecuted him. He landed at Brest on July 9th, saw his family for the first time since they had left Le Cap, and never saw them again. Not only Leclerc but Bonaparte feared him, and Bonaparte feared too the French Revolution which he and his kind had stifled. In a closed carriage and under instructions devised and carried out with the greatest rigour and secrecy, they hurried him across France. Bonaparte, it seems, was afraid that attempts might be made to rescue him. There were no blacks in France to do this, and such an attempt could have been anticipated from scattered Jacobins stirred to anger at this final degradation of the revolution—the restoration of slavery. But such fears were far-fetched. At one town some French officers who

had served under him heard that he was passing through and asked to be allowed to salute their old commander.⁷⁶ That was all.

On August 24th, with his faithful servant, Mars Plaisir,⁷⁷ Toussaint was imprisoned in the Fort-de-Joux, situated in the Jura mountains, at an altitude of over 3,000 feet. Leclerc was writing his frantic letters charged with fear of the black leader. He could send no evidence on which to accuse him. But Governments do not need evidence, and Bonaparte did not murder Toussaint judicially because he feared the repercussions in San Domingo of a trial and execution. But he was to be got rid of and Bonaparte decided to kill him by ill-treatment, cold and starvation. On Bonaparte's strict instructions his gaolers humiliated him, called him Toussaint, gave him convict's clothes to wear, cut down his food, and when the winter came reduced his allowance for wood; they took away his servant.⁷⁸ Bonaparte sent his aide-de-campe, Caffarelli, to interview him, to find out where he had hidden his treasure, and what secret arrangements he had made with the British. Caffarelli had seven interviews with him and could find out nothing: there was nothing to find out. Toussaint had no treasure. He had not sold himself to the British.

The régime tightened always. His gaolers, still on Bonaparte's advice, watched him eat his food, watched him perform his natural functions. They feared that he might escape, and wanted him to die as quickly as possible, thinking that once the great leader was gone their chances in San Domingo would be better. He had medical attendance at first, but his gaoler soon dispensed with it. "The construction of Negroes being totally different to that of Europeans, I have dispensed with his doctor and his surgeon who would be useless to him."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Isaac L'Ouverture. *Mémoires*.

⁷⁷ He was a Mulatto—typical of Toussaint.

⁷⁸ Nemours, *Histoire de la Captivité et de la Mort de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, Paris, 1929. The definitive account of Toussaint's captivity with many of the most important documents printed in full.

⁷⁹ Poyen, *Histoire Militaire de la Révolution* . . . , p. 224. Poyen quotes the gaoler's official report.

He was 57 and quite early he broke down. He wrote long reports of his conduct, addressed letters to Bonaparte asking for trial, appealed to his greatness and magnanimity.

"I have had the misfortune to incur your anger; but as to fidelity and probity, I am strong in my conscience, and I dare to say with truth that among all the servants of the State none is more honest than I. I was one of your soldiers and the first servant of the Republic in San Domingo. I am to-day wretched, ruined, dishonoured, a victim of my own services. Let your sensibility be touched at my position, you are too great in feeling and too just not to pronounce on my destiny. . . ."

In the warning to the Directory, as in his proclamations to his soldiers and to his people, so now in his personal grief the limitations of his political conceptions stood revealed. The sombre cadences in which he begged for trial are evidence of his fatal sincerity. Despite the treachery of France he still saw himself as a part of the French Republic "one and indivisible." He could not think otherwise. The decree of the 16th Pluviose had marked in his mind the beginning of a new era for all French blacks. His experiences of French Commissioners, his fears for his people, his hard sense of reality, had driven him along the road of independence. But there was a limit beyond which he could not go. He had a profound conviction that the French could never restore slavery in San Domingo and he falsely believed that, once the means of defending liberty for all were safeguarded, no sacrifice was too great to make the French see reason. That was why his chief concern in prison was the fate of his wife and children. About the future of San Domingo he maintained an unshakable silence. His words to the captain when stepping on the boat were the last he ever said on that subject. The maintenance of liberty for all had been his life's work and the words and the silence afterwards were certainly intentional.

Shivering with cold, he was spending his first winter in a cell inadequately warmed, where the walls ran with moisture. His iron frame, which had withstood the privations and fatigues of ten incredible years, now huddled before the logs measured out by the orders of Bonaparte. The hitherto unsleeping intellect collapsed periodically into long hours of coma. Before the spring he was dying. One April morning he was found dead in his chair.

There is no drama like the drama of history. Toussaint died on April 7th, 1803 and Bonaparte must have thought that half the battle against San Domingo was now won. But in Toussaint's last hours his comrades in arms, ignorant of his fate, were drafting the declaration of independence.

For some months after November 1802, the national army still carried the French flag, and in December a rumour had spread among the French that the blacks and Mulattoes were not fighting for independence because they still carried the French colours. To end this Dessalines summoned a conference at Arcachay. From the red, white and blue of the tricolour, the white was removed, and instead of the initials R. F. (République Française), "Liberty or Death" was inscribed. The new flag was unfurled on May 18th. On that very day some officers from the South, hastening back to their commands, were in danger of being captured by a French cruiser. Rather than surrender, Laporte, the senior officer, ordered the boat to be sunk and drew a pistol on himself, while the crew disappeared below the waves shouting, "Long live independence!"

learned that the war between Britain and France had begun again: Rochambeau was cut off by the British fleet.

This was welcome news, but the San Domingo blacks now knew all that there was to be known about imperialism. The British policy was opportunist. They attempted no hostilities against the coast towns and they allowed American vessels to provision Rochambeau at Le Cap.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Sannon, *Histoire de Toussaint-L'Ouverture*, Vol. III, p. 185.