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Notes on

Jamaica in 1850

After the numerous misrepresentations of the situation of Jamaica since the freedom of the slaves, it is refreshing to have an account, the truthfulness of which is sustained by the official records of the Island, as well as, by the integrity of the Author. No work that we have seen on the subject has met the wants of the case with equal ability and candor, the Author has the happy faculty of stating facts with precision and giving details without tediousness. Most of those who have visited the British West Indies, and have written on them since Emancipation were determined to make phrophesy, history, it had been phrophesied that after the emancipation of the slaves industry should receive a new impulse, and the Islands would flourish, and they determined to make the facts agree with the phrophesy; we suppose their philanthropy induced them to look through a medium similar to the optic glass that inverts objects, the supposition requires the utmost stretch of Charity, for when we are told that one third of the manumitted slaves do as much work as the whole did before manumission, while the official statements show the fact, that the whole do not perform as much labor as one third did before emancipation, the charitable supposition is a severe tax on our credulity; it is asserted that a greater amount of labor is performed notwithstanding the decline in the exports, the increased consumption of the free slaves

cannot, we think more than equal the labor heretofore performed on the plantations now abandoned, we think the high price of all articles of home production an evidence of this. Before proceeding any further we will state that we are decided friends of freedom, but we are not discussing a principle but investigating a fact, we concede the fact that a free man has the right to determine the amount of his labor, or whether he will work at all, it is one of the attributes of freedom to work or starve.

We have spoken of the facts of our Author to which we give all credence, but, his opinions we think fair subjects of investigation and we must dissent from some of them. The planters in Jamaica complain of the high price of labor, the wages about 18 or 20 cents pr day, our opinion is that the complaint is just, the error in the opposite opinion has arisen from estimating the time, instead of the amount of labor, we are satisfied that labor in Jamaica is dearer than in New York or Massachussetts". I observed from 50 to 75 head of cattle grazing about, and 3 men and two boys were watching them" This requires no comment- page 128, they (the planters) "say that if they only had the protection on the staples of the Island which they enjoyed with slavery they could prosper. It was the removal of that protection which compelled them to surrender their accustomed Market to the cheaper productions of Cuba and Brazil" this is an admission that free labor cannot compete with slave labor, in the tropics without a premium in the

form of protection. Page 45 "out of 653 sugar estates more than 150 have been abandoned and the works broken up, this has thrown out of cultivation over 200,000 acres of rich land, which, in 1832 gave employment to about 30,000 laborers, and yielded over 15,000 hogsheads of sugar and 6,000 puncheons of rum; during the same period over 500 coffee plantations have been abandoned and their works broken up, this threw out of cultivation over 200,000 acres more of land, which in 1832 required the labor of over 30,000 men".

"I was greatly surprised to find that the number of coloured proprietors is already considerably over 100,000 and constantly increasing". If the tropical lathargy had not seized on these they could abundantly supply the markets at half the present prices. We have now arrived at a stage in our view at which we must dissent from the conclusions of our author, "the whole population of the Island 400,000" Page 40, "more than one fourth are owners of land, hence it is plain that with a very reasonable portion of labor they ought to supply the other three fourths with common marketing at half the prices stated, Butter 37½ cents (Page 110) milk 18¾ cts pr quart, Potatoes 6¼ cts per lb, eggs 75 cts pr dozen, onions 12½ cts pr lb. 200 bushels of potatoes is a medium crop pr acre, the American farmer would be glad to grow them at 1¼ cents per pound which would be equal to 75 cts per bushel; we know of no place where "labor" can be so easily and quickly turned into "Capital" as Jamaica.

We believe if our Author had attempted to urge them to work he would have heard from "Cudjo" "I dont want to lif up my foot." Onions 12½ cts per lb. If the girls on the Arcadian banks of the Connecticut River could get half this price the "supply" would soon exceed the "demand".

The American farmer produces 30 bushels wheat to the acre which at 1.25 fetches $37.50. Potatoes weigh 60 lbs pr bushel, allowing the Jamaica cultivator but 100 bushels to the acre he will have 6000 lbs which at 1¼ cents amount to 75.00 and he can have two crops in a year, but we will pursue this subject no further here.

There is one circumstance connected with the change from slavery to freedom that I do not understand, it is why the plan that we call "cropping to gather" or "working on the shares" was not adopted; this would at once settle the question of wages and convert labor into capital, we think this would be preferable to the plan of "Central Mills". "The planters aver it became impossible after emancipation to raise sugar for anything like the prices at which it was sold by the planters of Cuba, Brazil and Porto Rico." Here again is an avowal that free labor is dearer than slave labor.

As we have already said we are investigating a fact, not defending a thesis, however repugnant the fact may be to our wishes and prepossession. "Let labor be rewarded as it is in the U. States or even in England" Page 138, we must think that the 100,000 small land owners have the reward of labor in their hands, from the prices above stated more amply than the laborers in America."

We premised that at the same time that we admitted the facts we reserved the right to differ from the inferences of our Author. The whites leaving the Island "is hastening that partition of the soil which I have supposed necessary to a realization of its highest productiveness".

We opine that if one fourth of the population who are now owners of "the soil" have not effected a favorable change an increase of their number affords no fair shadowing of further improvement. "It never seems to have occured either to Mr Stanley or Mr Carlyle that their readers might want to know what the enormous wages were" that formed the subject of complaint, nor does it seem to have occurred to our historian that there is any difference in the amount of labor in a day's work, in other words that labor is dear where "three men and two boys" do the work of one person only, though they have but 20 cents pr day.

"When it is considered that flour costs 16 to 18 dollars a barrel, butter 38 cents a pound, eggs 3 to 5 cents a piece hams 25 cents a pound, does not the cry of high wages appear absurd". We think it quite as absurd to suppose that the laborer should buy one of these articles when it must be conceded that by working one day in a week on his lot he could supply himself. There are 3 to 5 times as many persons employed as are necessary that is, it takes 3 to 5 to do the work of one. We are not discussing the right of freedom that we admit, but we are comparing the prediction with the event.

although we are not of the lineage of the prophets, we will venture to foretell that Jamaica will continue to decline, the whites must leave the Island Voluntarily or compulsively, and the blacks will expel the mixed race as they did in Hayti. After this "Cudjo" will build his cabin against the wall of a ruined mansion and "wonder that man should need the larger pile."

As for American farmers emigrating to Jamaica, the organization of the government, the character of the inhabitants and the climate combine to prevent it. If the Island was depopulated the Yankees (in the English sense Americans) might cultivate the coffee region.

Again "labor receives no compensation" page 53. We have seen that potatoes at 1¼ cents pr lb are equally profitable to the Jamaica and American farmer. But allowing the Jamaica cultivater a medium crop, 200 bushels, or two half crops of 100 bushels each, he will have 12000 lbs which at 6¼ cts will fetch $750. We think this looks like "compensation" as "Potatoes are among vegetables easy of cultivation" page 65.

"I am clear that if Jamaica was an American State, she would speedily be more productive and valuable than any agricultural portion of the United States of the same dimensions" Page 74. "I have myself seen Americans from the United States, not the most naturally indolent of men, settled in the cities of the Spanish Main, and after long residence hardly distinguishable in point of activity from the people among whom they live" Page 84. We place these two paragraphs in juxtaposition.

We agree with our Author as to the injurious effect of absenteeism, Mr Stanley in taking the opposite ground argues against all experience: we beleive it would be ruinous in any proprietor perhaps the soil should belong to those who can live on it and work it. "To cultivate either of the great staples it has always been esteemed necessary to have extensive works, attached to each estate, costing from ten to fifty thousand pounds" here we must repeat our surprise that the co-partnership which interest and common sense would so plainly indicate to both parties was not resorted to. One party furnishing the capital and the other the labor, but our historian is not accountable for this.

"Neither anxiety nor poverty, nor desire of gain has written a line upon their faces". Page 117. An evidence that their physical wants are their only wants, and that they have nothing to stimulate them beyond the supply of their physical wants, the whites toil to obtain ease, the blacks have it already.

A great problem is to be solved, I state it hypothetically, if the whites cannot and the blacks will not work the sugar and coffe lands in the West Indies, whence is the supply to be deined, or will the community dispense with their use? The "home government" we beleive will not, and we further beleive they ought not to reinstate the protective duties, it would be taxing the industry of one party to sustain the indolence of the other.

"That the price of labor ought to advance is beyond a question" page 137. By the statements of our Author before noticed labor is dearer in Jamaica than it is in any part of the U. States.

Respecting the introduction of jamming Machinery, the only Machine they seem inclined to use in the West Indies is a Negro.

Whether the colonies were Royal or Baronial, it was always the policy of England to make them maintain their poor dependants and broken down politicians, when the Colonies can no longer pay them the "home Government" will abandon them. The government of England has done more to suppress and encourage the African slave trade than all other nations, as their measures decreased the productions of the West Indies, they increased the demand for slaves in the Brazils, Cuba and Porto Rico. The plan of Emancipation was concocted by the male and female Ladies of Exeter Hall by acclammations; acquainted with the system of home vasselage only, they devised a plan ruinous to the proprietors, and not calculated to benefit the slaves to the desired and practicable extent.

The expense of the Government is now borne by the large estates, as they fall into ruin, the owners can no longer sustain the charge, the blacks will neither be able or willing to do it, this will be the crisis in Jamaica.

"Nothing is more probable, in respect to the political fate of the Island twenty years hence, than that it will be one of the United States of America". No part of the work has surprised us more than this: Page 161.

"It shall be lawful for the Governor, by instrument under the broad seal of the Island to make any alien or foreigner who shall come to settle and plant in this Island having first taken the oath of allegiance to be to all intents and purposes fully naturalized" Page 179.

He may then go to work to sustain a government enormously expensive and almost entirely absolute, in a population of 400.000 there are but 3000 voters for members of the assembly and the Governor has one Veto and the "home government" another on their acts.

Aliens cannot hold real estate in Jamaica "Americans desirous of obtaining an interest in land here, ought to hold it in the name of a British subject". Page 181. our opinion is that the tenure of subjects, aliens, proprietors and laborers is feudatory. As for manufacturing, the colonial system forbids it, that system is now the same as it was when Chatham said "I would not permit the Colonists to make a hob nail"; hence, only the productions of the soil are encouraged by the Government, manufacturing Colonies would be competitors. Absenteeism we believe, to be ruinous generally to proprietors, but the community loses nothing by the insolvency of individuals, the cause of the ruin of a community must be sought in some other source.

We end as we began by expressing our satisfaction at having in our hands, for the first time the statement of a man who had the discernment to perceive, and the candor to state the actual situation of Jamaica. It has been said that a historian should be of no nation, our Author does not appear to be decidedly of any party; when we have dissented from his opinions, we designed to do it courteously.

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