# THE *Black Jacobins*

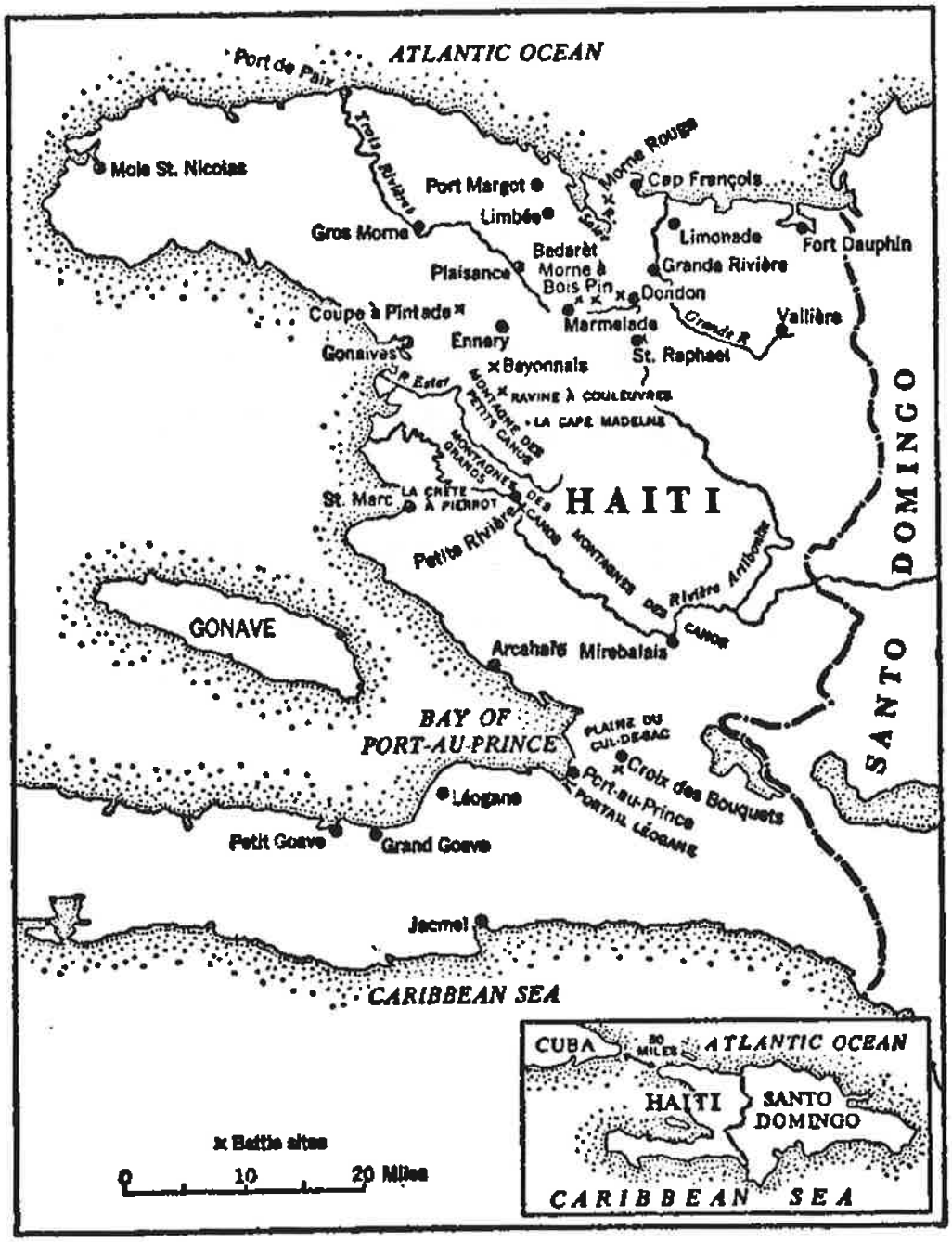
## TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE AND THE SAN DOMINGO REVOLUTION

SECOND EDITION, REVISED

C. L. R. JAMES

VINTAGE BOOKS

*A Division of Random House, Inc.* *New York*


ATLANTIC OCEAN
Port de Paix
Trois Rivières
Môle St. Nicolas
Port Margot
Limbé
Gros Morne
Morne Rouge
Cap François
Limonade
Fort Dauphin
Bedarêt
Morne à Bois Pin
Plaisance
Grande Rivière
Dondon
Coupe à Pintade
Marmelade
Grande R.
Vallière
Ennery
Gonaives
St. Raphael
Beyonnais
R. Estat
RAVINE À COULEUVRES
LA CAPE MADELINE
MONTAGNE DES PETITS CANOS
MONTAGNES DES GRANDS CANOS
St. Marc
LA CRÊTE À PIERROT
HAITI
Petite Rivière
MONTAGNES DES CANOS
Rivière Artibonite
SANTO DOMINGO
GONAVE
Arcahaie
Mirebalais
BAY OF PORT-AU-PRINCE
PLAINE DU CUL-DE-SAC
Croix des Bouquets
Port-au-Prince
PORTAIL LÉOGANE
Léogane
Petit Goave
Grand Goave
Jacmel
CARIBBEAN SEA
CUBA
80 MILES
ATLANTIC OCEAN
HAITI
SANTO DOMINGO
CARIBBEAN SEA
x Battle sites
0
10
20 Miles

# 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



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 detribalised 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.

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 Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue* (1629-1789). Paris, 1909. 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 Vaissière, *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 breakfast and worked again till midday. They began again at two o'clock and worked until evening, sometimes till ten or eleven. A Swiss traveller [6] 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] Girod-Chantrans, *Voyage d'un Suisse en différentes colonies*, Neufchâtel, 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 *lianes*—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 Vaissière 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 Vaissière 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 memoirs[8] 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 Vaissière, pp. 198-202.
[9] De Vaissière, 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.

[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."



What was the intellectual level of these slaves? The planters, hating them, called them by every opprobious 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

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 Wimpffen, 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, bafio 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'Ouverture[13] 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 illtreatment 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 case[14] 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 *rapporteur*, 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-

cil 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. Those 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, throve 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