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THE NEW INDUSTRIAL ORDER

IT WAS THIS TREMENDOUS INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION that the West Indian monopolists had to face. They had the advantages of prestige, custom, their great contributions to British economy in the past, and a strongly entrenched position. We can see today that they were doomed, that the Lilliputians could not hold down Gulliver nor their barbs hurt him. Lecturing to Oxford undergraduates in 1839, Merivale warned that "the rapid tide of sublunary events is carrying us inevitably past that point at which the maintenance of colonial systems and navigation laws was practicable, whether it were desirable or not. We are borne helplessly along with the current; we may struggle and protest, and marvel why the barriers which ancient forethought had raised against the stream now bend like reeds before its violence, but we cannot change our destiny. The monopoly of the West Indian islands cannot stand. . . ." ¹ The West Indians, however, could not see this and acted as all vested interests do. They put up a desperate fight, "struggling by the aid of their accumulated wealth against the encroaching principle of decay," ² blind to all considerations and consequences except the maintenance of their diseased system.

The attack on the West Indians was more than an attack on slavery. It was an attack on monopoly. Their opponents were not only the humanitarians but the capitalists. The reason for the attack was not only that the West Indian economic system was vicious but that it was also so unprofitable that for this reason alone its destruction was inevitable. ³ The agent for

Jamaica complained in 1827 that "the cause of the colonies altogether, but more especially that part of it which touches upon property in slaves, is so unattractive to florid orators and so unpopular with the public, that we have and must have very little protection from Parliamentary speaking."⁴ Hibbert was only half right. If West Indian slavery was detestable, West Indian monopoly was unpopular, and the united odium of both was more than the colonies could bear.⁵

The attack falls into three phases: the attack on the slave trade, the attack on slavery, the attack on the preferential sugar duties. The slave trade was abolished in 1807, slavery in 1833, the sugar preference in 1846. The three events are inseparable. The very vested interests which had been built up by the slave system now turned and destroyed that system. The humanitarians, in attacking the system in its weakest and most indefensible spot, spoke a language that the masses could understand. They could never have succeeded a hundred years before when every important capitalist interest was on the side of the colonial system. "It was an arduous hill to climb," sang Wordsworth in praise of Clarkson. The top would never have been reached but for the defection of the capitalists from the ranks of the slave-owners and slave traders. The West Indians, pampered and petted and spoiled for a century and a half, made the mistake of elevating into a law of nature what was actually only a law of mercantilism. They thought themselves indispensable and carried over to an age of anti-imperialism the lessons they had been taught in an age of commercial imperialism. When, to their surprise, the "invisible hand" of Adam Smith turned against them, they could turn only to the invisible hand of God.⁶ The rise and fall of mercantilism is the rise and fall of slavery.

A. PROTECTION OR LAISSEZ FAIRE?

Queen Victoria once sent a famous message to two African chiefs: "England has become great and happy by the knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ."⁷ To the Manchester capitalist, "Jesus Christ was Free Trade, and Free Trade was Jesus Christ."⁸

If Corn was the king of monopolies, Sugar was his queen. The attack on the preferential sugar duties of the West Indies was a part of that general philosophy which in 1812 destroyed the East India Company's monopoly and in 1846 the Corn Laws of England. The Anti-Corn Law League, said its treasurer, was "established on the same righteous principle as the Anti-Slavery Society. The object of that society was to obtain the free right for the Negroes to possess their own flesh and blood—the object of this was to obtain the free right of the people to exchange their labor for as much food as could be got for it."⁹ In the delirium of free trade sentiments the brunt of the advance on the anti-monopolistic front had to be borne by the West Indian monopoly which was not only iniquitous but expensive.

The advocates of East India sugar persistently attacked the West Indian monopoly. They called the islands "sterile rocks," whose insatiable calls for money represented "an eternal sponge on the capitals of this country, both national and commercial." Even before the end of the eighteenth century Britain was "ripe for an abolition of monopolies." A general hardship could not be inflicted on the community at large for the sake of affording a partial and unreasonable benefit to a small number of its members.¹⁰

The East Indian opposition was more virulent in the eighteenth twenties. They wanted, at least so they alleged, no exclusive favor, preference or protection. All they asked for was equality with the West Indies.¹¹ Were the West Indians entitled to the enjoyment of the monopoly merely because they had enjoyed it for a length of time? "It would be to contend, that because a great many people who used to be employed in the manufacture of cotton, or other articles, by hand, are thrown out of employment by the invention of machinery, a tax upon machinery should therefore be levied. . . . It would be to say that because the conveyance by canal has been found much more cheap and convenient than the old mode of conveyance by wagon, a tax should therefore be laid upon canal conveyance."¹² The claim of the West Indians that they were entitled to a continuance of protection because they had invested their capital in sugar cultivation was "a claim which might be urged with

equal force in the case of *every* improvident speculation.”¹³ They could not depart from the ordinary principles of commerce in order to benefit the West Indians.¹⁴ Hume trusted that the good sense, the honest feeling and the patriotism of the British people would never allow the continuance of such a monopoly, for all restraints and monopolies were bad.¹⁵

As early as 1815 a protest was entered in the Journals of the House of Lords against the Corn Laws, threatening the very keystone of the arch of protection. In 1820 the merchants of London presented a petition to Parliament in which it was stated that “freedom from restraint is calculated to give the utmost extension to foreign trade and the best direction to the capital and industry of the country.”¹⁶ In the same year Mr. Finlay, of Glasgow, made an impassioned speech in support of a petition from the Chamber of Commerce of Glasgow praying for free trade and the removal of all restrictions upon commercial imports and exports. “If it should be found,” said Finlay, “that the history of our commercial policy has been a tissue of mistakes and false notions, it surely was not too much to express a hope that the policy should be given up.”¹⁷ All monopolies, declared the merchants of Liverpool, which prohibited trade with any other country, and in particular the East India Company’s monopoly, were injurious to the general interests of the country. The Corporation of the town declared that British subjects possessed “an inherent right” to a free intercourse with any part of the world. Not without reason had Pitt complimented Adam Smith some thirty years before at a dinner party, “We are all your scholars.”¹⁸

The West Indian monopoly was not only unsound in theory, it was unprofitable in practice. In 1828 it was estimated that it cost the British people annually more than one and a half million pounds.¹⁹ In 1844 it was costing the country £70,000 a week and London £6,000.²⁰ England was paying for its sugar five millions more a year than the Continent.²¹ Three and a half million pounds of British exports to the West Indies in 1838, said Merivale, purchased less than half as much sugar and coffee as they would have purchased if carried to Cuba and Brazil. Goods to the value of one and three-quarter million pounds

“were therefore as completely thrown away, without remuneration, as far as Britain is concerned, as if the vessels which conveyed them had perished on the voyage.”²² Two-fifths of the price of every pound of sugar consumed in England represented the cost of production, two-fifths went in revenue to the government, one-fifth in tribute to the West Indian planter.²³

It was high time to revise this “beetle-eyed” policy which bolstered up “the rotten cause” of the West Indian slaveholder.²⁴ Huskisson pleaded for caution. “That the West Indian was an owner of slaves was not his fault but his misfortune; and if it was true that the production of slavery was more costly than that of free labour, that would be an additional reason for not depriving him of the advantage of his protecting duty.”²⁵ But the West Indians were not to misunderstand this. “The time must come, and could not be far distant, when the subject would be ripe for consideration, and when it would be the imperative duty of Parliament to enter into a full investigation of all the circumstances connected with it.”²⁶

The capitalists, eager to lower wages, advocated the policy of “the free breakfast table.” It was injustice and folly to impose protective duties on food.²⁷ Monopoly was unsound, costly to all, and had destroyed the great colonial empires of the past.²⁸ The West India interest was doomed. “There can be no prosperity for the West India colonies by any arrangement or juggling of duties in this house. No majorities here will give prosperity to the West Indies; and no dancing attendance at the Colonial Office will accomplish any such end.”²⁹ The protective system was compared to many monkeys in different cages, each stealing from his neighbor’s pan, and each losing as much as he had stolen.³⁰ Ricardo advised the planters to yield gracefully; “the ball was rolling, and nothing that they could do would suffice to stop it.”³¹

Time was when the leading statesmen were on the West Indian side. Now Palmerston lined up with the opponents of the planters. The word “protection” should be erased from every commercial dictionary,³² as “a principle of fatal injury to the country and inimical to the prosperity of every country to whose affairs it may be applied.”³³

The protectionists were on the side of the West Indians. The landed aristocracy of the corn bushels joined hands with the landed aristocracy of the sugar hogsheads. Peel, free trader in cotton and silk, was protectionist in corn and sugar. The West Indian cause was ably championed by Bentinck, Stanley and Disraeli. If the West Indian interest was made, as Disraeli criticized, "the harridan of party,"³⁴ he too was instrumental in so making it. The debates on the repeal of the corn laws and the equalization of the sugar duties gave him an audience for his matchless oratory and mordant wit, but it is doubtful whether any serious personal convictions or economic philosophy motivated his diatribes. For when the West Indians, after 1846, were trying to postpone the evil day of actual enforcement of the principle of free trade in sugar, Disraeli, too, turned against them. "After the immense revolution that has been carried into effect, we cannot cling to the rags and tatters of a protective system";³⁵ and in *Sybil* he wrote with detachment that in a commercial country like England every half century developed some new source of public wealth and brought into public notice some new and powerful class—the Levant merchant, the West Indian planter, the East Indian nabob.³⁶ Mercantilism was not only dead but damned.

The West Indians tried to stem the free trade torrent. The colonial system was "an implicit compact . . . for a mutual monopoly."³⁷ It was theirs, they claimed, not of grace but of right. Their exclusive possession of the home market was their just reward for the restrictions imposed on them by the colonial system.³⁸ At other times they were not indisposed to plead for charity. The superior advantages of their rivals made competition impossible and the protecting duty indispensable to their preservation. In the case of India they pointed to the cheapness of labor, the abundance of food and unlimited extent of the richest soil, capable of irrigation and intersected with navigable rivers.³⁹ In the case of Brazil they blamed the facility with which the Brazilians could acquire laborers for their fertile soil. Whatever the state of these colonies their refrain was always the same—protection. "Ruin" was ever the first word in their

vocabulary—a word used to designate “not the poverty of the people, not the want of food or raiment, not even the absence of riches or luxury, but simply the decrease of sugar cultivation.”⁴⁰ Where they had, as slaveowners before 1833, demanded protection against the free-grown sugar of India, now, as employers of free labor after 1833, they demanded it against the slave-grown sugar of Brazil and Cuba. Where formerly they had extenuated the evils of sugar cultivation by slaves, now they exaggerated those evils. As slave owners they had apologised for the evils of slavery; as employers of free men they exalted the blessings of freedom. Inconsistent in all things, they were yet consistent in one—the maintenance of their monopoly.

To the very end the West Indians continued to suffer from their myopia and to demand a seventeenth century position in a nineteenth century empire. Read their manifestoes, pamphlets and speeches—instead of Saint Domingue there is India or Mauritius or Brazil or Cuba. The dates have changed, freedom has replaced slavery. But their claims are the same, their fallacies identical. They keep “crying out for more monopoly, in order to redress those evils which monopoly itself inflicted.”⁴¹ They are greeted with sneers and contempt⁴² but pay no heed. Occasionally they talk free trade, as when a West Indian, opposing the renewal of the charter of the West India Dock Company, lectured Parliament on “the impolicy as well as injustice of continuing, in an enlightened age as this, such monopolies, which were at once injurious to commerce and to the revenue of the country.”⁴³ In general, however, they remain oblivious of the new order and the beam in their own eyes.

Protection and Labor—these were their slogans in 1846 as they had been in 1746. Protection was simply justice.⁴⁴ To refuse it was un-English.⁴⁵ The protecting duty was necessary to safeguard the experiment of free labor.⁴⁶ Sugar cultivation requires labor. Give us indentured Africans, indentured East Indians, convicts, now that you have emancipated the Negroes and made them lazy; and some, in desperation, even advocated the renewal of the slave trade.⁴⁷

Their outstanding champion was Gladstone. But Gladstone

was more than a West Indian; he was an imperial statesman as well, who never lost sight of the wood for the trees. With all the casuistry and eloquence at his disposal—and he had much of both—Gladstone tried to justify the West Indian monopoly on the ground that it was protection for free-grown sugar against slave-grown sugar. But he was forced to admit that the distinction was not so clear that it could be drawn with uniform and absolute precision.⁴⁸ Nor could he ignore the fact that the West Indian claim for protection was weakened after 1836 when the protecting duty was extended to East Indian sugar which could plead no such difficulties and disadvantages as faced the West Indians.⁴⁹ And Gladstone knew that the course had been run. Protection could not be permanent, and even if continued for twenty years, would not bring West Indian cultivation to a sound and healthy state.⁵⁰

B. THE GROWTH OF ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The colonial system was the spinal cord of the commercial capitalism of the mercantile epoch. In the era of free trade the industrial capitalists wanted no colonies at all, least of all the West Indies.

The trend dated back, as we have seen, to the early years of the Industrial Revolution. Its development paralleled the development of the free trade movement. The whole world row became a British colony and the West Indies were doomed. The leader of the movement was Cobden. Cobden referred approvingly to Adam Smith's chapters in his "immortal work" on the expense of colonies.⁵¹ To him the colonial question was a pecuniary question.⁵² The colonies were expensive encumbrances, making dazzling appeals to the passions of the people, serving only as "gorgeous and ponderous appendages to swell our ostensible grandeur, but, in reality, to complicate and magnify our government expenditure, without improving our balance of trade." He could see nothing but a "monstrous impolicy" in "sacrificing our trade with a new continent, of almost boundless extent of rich territory, in favour of a few small islands, with comparatively exhausted soils."⁵³ In 1852

the British declared war on Burma and annexed Lower Burma. Cobden protested. He wrote an article entitled "How wars are got up in India," suggesting that Britain ought "to advertise in the *Times* for a governor-general who can collect a debt of a thousand pounds without annexing a territory which will be ruinous to our finances."⁵⁴

To Molesworth, one of the outstanding colonial reformers, Britain's colonial policy was motivated by "an insane desire of worthless empire," as on the frontier of the Cape Colony in South Africa, where "the loss of one axe and two goats . . . has cost this country a couple of millions sterling." Australia was a collection of "communities, the offspring of convict emigration." New Zealand was a constant headache with its "imbecile governors, discreditable functionaries, and unnecessary wars with the natives." South Africa was "a huge worthless and costly empire, extending over nearly 300,000 square miles, chiefly rugged mountains, and arid deserts, and barren plains, without water, without herbage, without navigable rivers, without harbours, in short, without everything except the elements of great and increasing expense to this country." In charge of this diverse and heterogeneous collection of colonies was the Colonial Secretary, "traversing and retraversing, in his imagination, the terraqueous globe—flying from the Arctic to the Antarctic pole—hurrying from the snows of North America to the burning regions of the Tropics—rushing across from the fertile islands of the West Indies to the arid deserts of South Africa and Australia—like nothing on earth, or in romance, save the Wandering Jew."⁵⁵ The cost of protecting this empire was one-third of Britain's export trade to the colonies. Colonial independence was cheaper. The colonies should be freed from the "ever-changing, frequently well-intentioned, but invariably weak and ignorant despotism" of the Colonial Office.⁵⁶

Hume, another radical politician, joined in the attack on "Mr. Mother Country." Remove the iron chains which fettered the best exertions of the colonies,⁵⁷ let them manage their own affairs instead of being kept in leading strings and subjected to the fluctuating management of Downing Street.⁵⁸ The Colonial Office "is" a nuisance and should be locked up.⁵⁹

Trusteeship was out of fashion. Roebuck, a free-lance Radical, opposed as cant the humanitarian refusal to surrender the colonies to local self-government. History taught that the savage must disappear in the face of the relentless advance of a superior race; justice and humanity must yield to the iron law of an unjust necessity.⁶⁰ James Stephen, the famous Permanent Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office, never wavered in his determination not to lay down the "wretched burdens which in an evil hour we assumed." But the capitalists, like Taylor, also of the Colonial Office, could see in the colonies nothing but "furious assemblies, foolish governors, missionaries and slaves,"⁶¹ which, in the words of Merivale, were to be retained for the mere "pleasure of governing them."⁶² Nothing was true but what went to West Indian condemnation, nothing was just but what went to West Indian ruin.⁶³ It seemed to the desperate planters as if a coalition had been formed to destroy the colonies.⁶⁴ The assemblies of Jamaica and British Guiana went on strike in 1838 and 1840 and refused to vote supplies. Jamaica preferred "Yankee Doodle" to "God save the Queen."⁶⁵ Who cared? Members of Parliament were prepared to barter the West Indies to America for a slight compensation.⁶⁶ "Jamaica to the bottom of the sea," thundered Roebuck, "and all the Antilles after it." These "barren colonies" had been a source of nothing but war and expenditure.⁶⁷ They had ever been the "most fatal appendages" of the British empire, and if they were to be blotted out from the face of the earth Britain would lose not "one jot of her strength, one penny of her wealth, one instrument of her power."⁶⁸

It was an epidemic. Even Disraeli, the arch imperialist of later decades, was infected. In 1846 the "forlorn Antilles" were still to him "a fragment, but a fragment which I value, of the colonial system of England."⁶⁹ Six years later Canada had become a diplomatic embarrassment, and the wretched colonies a "damnosa hereditas," millstones round Britain's neck.⁷⁰ In nine cases out of ten, according to Gladstone, it was impossible to secure parliamentary attention to colonial concerns and in the tenth case it was only obtained by the casual operations of

party spirit.⁷¹ The age of empire was dead; that of free traders, economists, and calculators had succeeded, and the glory of the West Indies was extinguished for ever. Only another thirty years, however, the tune would change. But the West Indian Humpty Dumpty had had a great fall, and all the King's horses and all the King's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again.

C. THE GROWTH OF WORLD SUGAR PRODUCTION

The strength of the British sugar islands before 1783 lay in the fact that as sugar producers they had few competitors. In so far as they could, they would permit none. They resisted the attempt to introduce the cultivation of sugar (and cotton) into Sierra Leone on the ground that it would be a precedent to "foreign nations, who have as yet no colonies anywhere,"⁷² and might prove detrimental to those who possessed West Indian colonies;⁷³ just as a century previously they had opposed the cultivation of indigo in Africa.⁷⁴ Their chief competitors in the sugar trade were Brazil and the French islands, Cuba being hampered by the extreme exclusiveness of Spanish mercantilism. This situation was radically altered when Saint Domingue forged ahead in the years immediately following the secession of the mainland colonies.

The cultivation of Barbados and Jamaica had transferred the sugar trade of Europe from Portugal to England. The progress of Saint Domingue gave control of the European sugar market to France. Between 1715 and 1789 French imports from the colonies multiplied eleven times, French colonial products re-exported abroad ten times.⁷⁵ In 1789 two-thirds of French exports to the Baltic, over one-third of the exports to the Levant, were colonial produce. It was "by it, and by it alone, that she turned the balance of the trade with all the world to a favourable result."⁷⁶

It was the old law of slave production at work. Saint Domingue was larger than any British colony, its soil was more fertile and less exhausted, hence its costs of production were lower. This difference in costs of production became an object

of particular inquiry with the Privy Council Committee of 1788.

From the standpoint of the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, this was the decisive factor. The age of the British sugar islands was over. The West Indian system was unprofitable, and the slave trade on which it rested, "instead of being very advantageous to Great Britain . . . is the most destructive that can well be imagined to her interests."⁷⁷ For a Prime Minister whose father had been consistently on the West Indian side of the fence, and whose predecessor a mere ten years previously had blandly turned down a petition for abolition, this was a momentous conversion. Pitt turned to India.

Pitt's plan was twofold: to recapture the European market with the aid of sugar from India,⁷⁸ and to secure an international abolition of the slave trade⁷⁹ which would ruin Saint Domingue. If not international abolition, then British abolition. The French were so dependent on British slave traders that even a unilateral abolition by England would seriously dislocate the economy of the French colonies.

Pitt's plan failed, for two reasons. The importation of East India sugar, on the scale planned, was impossible owing to the high duties imposed on all sugar not the produce of the British West Indies.⁸⁰ Lord Hawkesbury, for the West Indian monopolists, opposed the alteration of the existing law "in favour of a monopolising company" which was exceeding the bounds of its charter.⁸¹ But Hawkesbury was more than a West Indian. He was in close touch with British commerce and industry, especially Liverpool. He therefore recommended, instead, the importation of all foreign sugar provided it was done in British ships and solely for refining and re-export. "The commerce and shipping of France will be more diminished, and the commerce and shipping of Great Britain more augmented, than by any single measure that has been pursued for the last century."⁸² By this very simple regulation Britain would recover the sugar trade she had enjoyed from 1660 to 1713 but which thereafter she lost to France.⁸³

Secondly, the French, Dutch and Spaniards refused, with what Lord Liverpool called thirty years later "sheer perverseness,"⁸⁴ to abolish the slave trade.⁸⁵ It was not difficult to see

the political motives behind Pitt's cloak of humanitarianism. Gaston-Martin, the well-known French historian of the slave trade and the Caribbean colonies, accuses Pitt of aiming by propaganda to free the slaves, "in the name no doubt of humanity, but also to ruin French commerce," and concludes that in this philanthropic propaganda there were economic motives which explain the liberality with which Britain put funds at the disposal of the French abolitionists, and the way in which France was swamped with translations of the anti-slavery works of the British abolitionist, Clarkson.⁸⁶ As Ramsay had admitted: "We may confidently conclude that the African trade is more confined in its utility than is generally imagined and that of late years it has contributed more to the aggrandisement of our rivals than of our national wealth."⁸⁷

At this juncture the French Revolution came to the aid of Pitt. Fearful that the idealism of the revolutionary movement would destroy the slave trade and slavery, the French planters of Saint Domingue in 1791 offered the island to England,⁸⁸ and were soon followed by those of the Windward Islands.⁸⁹ Pitt accepted the offer, when war broke out with France in 1793. Expedition after expedition was sent unsuccessfully to capture the precious colony, first from the French, then from the Negroes. It was not, Parliament was assured, "a war for riches or local aggrandisement but a war for security."⁹⁰ The allied cause in Europe was weakened in the interests of British imperialism. "The secret of England's impotence for the first six years of the war," writes Fortescue, historian of the British army, "may be said to lie in the two fatal words, St. Domingo."⁹¹ Britain lost thousands of men and spent thousands of pounds in the attempt to capture Saint Domingue. She failed, but the world's sugar bowl was destroyed in the process and French colonial superiority smashed forever. "For this," writes Fortescue, "England's soldiers had been sacrificed, her treasure squandered, her influence weakened, her arm for six fateful years fettered, numbed and paralysed."⁹²

This is of more than academic interest. Pitt could not have had Saint Domingue and abolition as well. Without its 40,000 slave imports a year, Saint Domingue might as well have been

at the bottom of the sea. The very acceptance of the island meant logically the end of Pitt's interest in abolition. Naturally he did not say so. He had already committed himself too far in the eyes of the public. He continued to speak in favor of abolition, even while giving every practical encouragement to the slave trade. But it was not the old Pitt of 1789-1791, the Pitt of Latin tags, brilliant oratory and infectious humanitarianism. The change can be followed in the debates in Parliament and in Wilberforce's diary. In 1792 Wilberforce's diary struck the first ominous note: "Pitt threw out against slave motion on St. Domingo account."⁹³ Thereafter Pitt's support of Wilberforce's annual motions became nothing short of perfunctory. On one occasion he supported the West Indians, on another he put off the motion, on another he "stood stiffly" by Wilberforce, on yet another he simply stayed away.⁹⁴ Under Pitt's administration the British slave trade alone more than doubled,⁹⁵ and Britain conquered two more sugar colonies, Trinidad and British Guiana. As the abolitionist Stephen wrote with bitterness: "Mr. Pitt, unhappily for himself, his country and mankind, is not zealous enough in the cause of the negroes, to contend for them as decisively as he ought, in the cabinet any more than in parliament."⁹⁶

Liberal historians plead Pitt's fear of Jacobinism. The real reason is more simple. It can be taken as axiomatic that no man occupying so important a position as Prime Minister of England would have taken so important a step as abolishing the slave trade purely for humanitarian reasons. A Prime Minister is more than a man, he is a statesman. Pitt's reasons were political and only secondarily personal. He was interested in the sugar trade. Either he must ruin Saint Domingue by flooding Europe with cheaper Indian sugar or by abolishing the slave trade; or he must get Saint Domingue for himself. If he could get Saint Domingue, the balance in the Caribbean would be restored. Saint Domingue would be "a noble compensation" for the loss of America, and "a glorious addition to the dominion, navigation, trade and manufactures of Britain."⁹⁷ It would give Britain a monopoly of sugar, indigo, cotton and coffee: "This island, for ages, would give such aid and force to industry as

would be most happily felt in every part of the kingdom." Followed by an offensive and defensive alliance between Britain and Spain, "such friendship for ages might preclude France and America from the New World, and effectually secure the invaluable possessions of Spain."⁹⁸ But if Pitt captured Saint Domingue, the slave trade must continue. When Saint Domingue was lost to France, the slave trade became merely a humanitarian question.

The destruction of Saint Domingue meant the end of the French sugar trade. Not all the decrees of consuls, black or white, wrote Eden with complacency, could fill up the gaps in the population of the island.⁹⁹ But the ruin of Saint Domingue did not mean the salvation of the British West Indies. Two new enemies appeared on the scene. Cuba forged ahead to fill the gap left in the world market by the disappearance of Saint Domingue. Bonaparte, defeated in his attempts to recapture the lost colony and determined to conquer England by strangulation of her trade, gave the first impetus to beet sugar, and the war of the two sugars began. Whilst, under the American flag, Cuban and other neutral sugar still found a market in Europe, British West Indian surpluses piled up in England. Bankruptcies were the order of the day. Between 1799 and 1807, 65 plantations in Jamaica were abandoned, 32 were sold for debts, and in 1807 suits were pending against 115 others. Debt, disease and death were the only topics of conversation in the island.¹⁰⁰ A parliamentary committee set up in 1807 discovered that the British West Indian planter was producing at a loss. In 1800 his profit was 2½ per cent, in 1807 nothing. In 1787 the planter got 19/6d profit per hundredweight; in 1799, 10/9d; in 1803, 18/6d; in 1805, 12/-; in 1806, nothing. The committee attributed the main evil to the unfavorable state of the foreign market.¹⁰¹ In 1806 the surplus of sugar in England amounted to six thousand tons.¹⁰² Production had to be curtailed. To restrict production, the slave trade must be abolished. The "saturated" colonies needed only seven thousand slaves a year.¹⁰³ It was the new colonies, crying out for labor, full of possibilities, that had to be restrained, and they were permanently crippled by abolition. That explains the support of the abolition bill by so many West

Indian planters of the older islands. Ellis had stated categorically in 1804 that the slave trade should be continued, but only to the older colonies.¹⁰⁴ It was the same old conflict between "saturated planters" and "planters on the make."

The war and Bonaparte's continental blockade made abolition imperative if the older colonies were to survive. "Are they not now," asked Prime Minister Grenville, "distressed by the accumulation of produce on their hands, for which they cannot find a market; and will it not therefore be adding to their distress, and leading the planters on to their ruin, if you suffer the continuation of fresh importations?"¹⁰⁵ Wilberforce rejoiced: West Indian distress could not be imputed to abolition.¹⁰⁶ Actually, abolition was the direct result of that distress.

If abolition of the slave trade was the solution of the planter's problems, it was only a temporary solution. For, as Merivale argued soundly, without imports to replace their slaves, the West Indies, and especially the newer colonies, could not hope to sustain the still fiercer competition of the nineteenth century. "Slavery without the slave trade . . . was rather a loss than a gain."¹⁰⁷ At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the sugar planters were no better off than they had been before. India was still a rival to be feared. The one devil of Saint Domingue was replaced by three, Mauritius, Cuba, Brazil. Sugar cultivation was later extended to Louisiana, Australia, Hawaii, Java. Beet continued its progress until its major victory in 1848 when it freed the slaves on the cane sugar plantations of the French colonies, while it became later a permanent European and even an American feature in the interest of autarchy.

Between 1793 and 1833 the imports of sugar into Britain more than doubled. Complete records for the same period for the West Indies are lacking, but between 1815 and 1833 West Indian production was stationary—3,381,700 hogsheads in 1815, 3,351,800 in 1833, with a maximum of 4,068,000 in 1828. It is significant that this level of production was maintained only at the expense of the older islands with their exhausted soil. Between 1813 and 1833 Jamaica's production declined by nearly one-sixth; the exports of Antigua, Nevis and Tobago by more

than one-quarter, St. Kitts by nearly one-half, St. Lucia's by two-thirds, St. Vincent's by one-sixth, Grenada's by almost one-eighth. Dominica's exports showed a slight increase, while Barbados almost doubled its exports. On the other hand, the output of the newer colonies increased, British Guiana's by two and a half times, Trinidad's by one-third.¹⁰⁸

Mauritius lends further confirmation to this law of slave production. Its exports to Britain, less than Antigua's in 1820, were over four times Antigua's in 1833.¹⁰⁹ East India sugar sold in England increased twenty-eight times between 1791 and 1833.¹¹⁰ Foreign sources were arising as suppliers of the raw material Britain needed for refining, consumption and export. Singapore's exports in 1833 were six times those of 1827; imports from the Philippines quadrupled, from Java increased more than twenty times.¹¹¹ Cuban sugar production increased more than forty times between 1775 and 1865.¹¹² British imports from Brazil increased sevenfold between 1817 and 1831, from Cuba sixfold between 1817 and 1832.¹¹³

Sugar production, as we have seen, is more efficient on a large plantation than on a smaller one. But the size of the plantation is limited by one factor—transportation. The cane, within a specified time after it has been cut, must be taken to the factory. More than any other British island, Jamaica in the eighteenth century was the land of large planters. But in 1753 there were only three plantations in the 2,000-acre class in Jamaica which had about one-tenth of the land in cane. The largest, belonging to Philip Pinnock, and called by Pitman "the show place" of Jamaica of that day, contained 2,872 acres of which 242 were in cane, employed 280 slaves, and produced 184 tons of sugar a year.¹¹⁴ After emancipation Jamaica was faced with the shortage of labor and wages rose. The island was unable to compete with the more extensive and more fertile soil of Cuba with its slave population. The development of the railroad—the first was constructed in Cuba in 1837—enabled the Cuban planter to enlarge his plantation, increase his output and reduce his costs of production, while the Jamaican planter was still asking for protection and labor. The competition thereby became more unequal. By 1860 we read of "monster" planta-

tions in Cuba, the largest comprising 11,000 acres, of which over one-tenth was in cane, employing 866 slaves, and producing 2,670 tons of sugar a year.¹¹⁵

The British West Indies had clearly lost their monopoly of sugar cultivation. In 1789 they could not compete with Saint Domingue; nor in 1820 with Mauritius; nor in 1830 with Brazil; nor in 1840 with Cuba. Their day had passed. Limited in extent, slave or free, they could not compete with larger areas, more fertile, less exhausted, where slavery was still profitable. Cuba could contain all the British islands of the Caribbean, Jamaica included. One of Brazil's mighty rivers could hold all the West Indian islands without its navigation being obstructed.¹¹⁶ India could produce enough rum to drown the West Indies.¹¹⁷

The West Indian situation was aggravated by the fact that production was in excess of the home consumption. This surplus, estimated at twenty-five per cent,¹¹⁸ had to be sold in European markets in competition with cheaper Brazilian or Cuban sugar. This could be done only by subsidies and bounties. The West Indian planters were being paid, in fact, to enable them to compete with people who, as we have seen, were some of Britain's best customers. Between 1824 and 1829 the imports of Cuban and Brazilian sugar into Hamburg increased by ten per cent while those into Prussia doubled; Cuban sugar imported by Russia increased by fifty per cent and Brazilian by twenty-five per cent in the same period.¹¹⁹ To the capitalists this was intolerable. Overproduction in 1807 demanded abolition; overproduction in 1833 demanded emancipation. "As far as the amount of the production of sugar is concerned," stated Stanley, sponsor of the emancipation measure, "I am not quite certain that to some extent a diminution of that production would be a matter of regret—I am not quite certain that it might not be for the benefit of the planters and of the colonies themselves, in the end, if that production were to be diminished."¹²⁰ A century before the British had complained of West Indian underproduction, now they were complaining of West Indian overproduction. Common sense alone would show that the emancipated Negroes would remain on the plantations only

where they had no choice. In fact, comparing the years 1839-1842 with the years 1831-1834, the production of Jamaica and Grenada declined by one-half, British Guiana's by three-fifths, St. Vincent's by two-fifths, Trinidad's by one-fifth, and the other islands proportionately.¹²¹

In justification of emancipation, it was argued that the restriction of production would give the planters a "real" monopoly of the home market by equating production with home consumption. This was parliamentary strategy. Every effort was being made to make West Indian cultivation as expensive as possible. In 1832 the Trinidad Council petitioned for the abolition of the slave tax of one pound island currency per head. The Colonial Office refused: it was "of very great importance that this tax should be continued; instead of rendering slave labour cheaper it is desirable to render it dearer."¹²² The issue at stake was the monopoly itself. It was only the West Indian monopoly which restricted the full development of British trade in sugar with all the world. The monopoly therefore must be destroyed. In 1836 the monopoly was modified by admitting East India sugar on equal terms. In 1846, the year of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the sugar duties were equalized. The British West Indian colonies were thereafter forgotten, until the Panama Canal reminded the world of their existence and revolts of their underpaid free workers made them front-page news.