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# BARBADOS IN THE POST- APPRENTICESHIP PERIOD: THE OBSERVATIONS OF A FRENCH NAVAL OFFICER — 2

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## 7. Jails and Prisons

I have visited the island's prisons. These establishments are superior to all those that I have seen in the other English possessions. Their management is flawless, sanitary conditions leave nothing to be desired, and the diet seemed to me suitable; above all, the Bridgetown jail attracted my attention. But, although I admired the efforts of the administration to ameliorate the moral state of the detainees, I was surprised not to find any organized work inside the jails. Those prisoners sentenced to solitary confinement spend their time confronted with their evil thoughts. This is a shortcoming in the prison system of Barbados.

Religion is not backward in the very Christian work of edifying the detainees. The physical layout of its chapel, where the prisoners of both sexes can hear and see the minister urging them to be virtuous, without seeing each other, shows how important it is considered that these unfortunate ones profit from the words which come down from the pulpit. During work hours, prisoners are employed in breaking stones and repairing roads.

It did not seem to me that there was an exorbitant number of detainees. On this subject, I have been reminded of the great leniency which the magistracy boasts of exercising toward the freed classes. Most of the convicted people were serving light sentences for theft or other offences. Only two young negresses attracted my attention: they were accused of infanticide and were awaiting trial.<sup>24</sup>

## 8. Moral State of the Emancipated Population

Infanticide is a new crime in the colonies. It was unknown

during slavery; the new state of society, the poverty of the countryside, and moral corruption in the towns have given rise to it.<sup>25</sup> God knows what its limits will be with the tameness of the magistracy! Thus, infanticide, which was only suspected at Antigua, has shown itself in all its reality at Barbados.

Also prostitution covers the streets in Barbados, but there is something less hideous about it than at Antigua. The prostitutes are older, and one gathers from this that the schools have not yet fed into the licentious and disorderly life of the towns. I want Barbados to keep its young people, who are the object of so much care, in all of their purity. But, alas, what will they do one day, these young people who are brought up without any work experience? Their primary schooling and their superficiality in religious belief will not save them from the precipice to which they are led by their misunderstood fervor. Religious sects have abolished slavery: it is to them that we owe the new social order, but one day the freed classes will be indebted to them for the evils and the vices that they had not known before.

### 9. The Education of Black Children

Among the questions that the authorities ask annually of the parochial magistrates, there is one that I find always answered negatively. It is the one that attempts to find out if the blacks encourage their children in the idea of work. I see in documents, the source of which in this case could not be unreliable, that freedmen everywhere are discouraging their children from work in the fields.\* [*\*A question addressed by the authorities to the parochial magistrates is: "Are the children employed on the plantations? If they are not, must one attribute this state of affairs to the planters' dislike of their services, or to the parents' reluctance to hand over their children to agricultural work?"*] The reply: "*The planters would willingly employ the children on their plantations, but the repugnance which the parents have of admitting them to participate in agricultural work keeps the children away from it.*"<sup>26</sup> The schools lend themselves to the parents' intentions. They keep the children locked up in the schools all day long, and in this way protect them from the requests of the planters who would be able to employ them because there is work for all ages on the plantations. I have heard it said, however, that more recently the blacks have been less categorical on this point, and that young people were appearing in the fields.

It is possible, although I have found no proof of this anywhere. I have seen the freed population close enough to believe that they will send their children back to work only when they are thoroughly convinced that there is no alternative way of life other than in the fields. The pretentious education which they so liberally and unflinchingly make available to the children confuses the minds of the blacks, and gives them ambitious ideas which it would have been prudent to contain within certain limits. It is in the midst of the fields that one should moralize to people destined to live from the labor of the earth. Without doubt, schools are good, but on as small a stage as that of the colonies one must prevent them from causing changes in the social structure that would be tearing down society rather than building it up. English philanthropy chose its means badly, but this was inevitable from the moment that the religious sects seized hold of social change.

#### 10. Sale Prices of Products

I have often given an explanation for the exorbitant price of colonial produce on the English markets: this price is the gauge of the prosperity of the former slave colonies. As long as the price of sugar has not come back down to an acceptable level, the question of emancipation, this question of life or death for the colonies, will not be settled. If, as is the case, the planters are producing less than formerly and even if their expenditures are greater, their profits have nevertheless increased: so that, if there is loss on one side, there is still gain on the other. But, if the sale price falls, and costs remain the same, what will become of the planter? In the colonies where blacks have a choice of working or not working for their former masters, and in those where they can gain a livelihood outside of the large properties, they are exacting about their wage level; in those colonies, I say, the planters, no longer able to satisfy the workers' demands, will stop producing sugar if the price falls. In areas where the livelihood of the black is closely tied to the large properties, and a reduction of wages is a consequence of the lowering of the price of goods, the black who, in these colonies, is already unhappy, will be even more unhappy when the modesty of his pecuniary remuneration will no longer permit him to satisfy his needs. Will he remain on unprofitable lands which inadequately reward his labor? Will he condemn himself to die of hunger while his neighbors find a secure life in places more favored by the sun? No.

He will leave the land where everything favors the master to enjoy the easy and independent life which suits his tastes and indolent habits. I repeat that the question of emancipation is not settled; it will continue to be the subject of considerable controversy as long as the price of products has not resumed the stable level that it had before the abolition of slavery. Will the price of products continue to be maintained at the present level? Will the aggrieved classes of England delay in obtaining from Parliament the satisfaction which they demand? I do not think so; neither do the men who concern themselves with the colonial question.

On this subject, I will quote the speech that Mr. M'Queen delivered to the inhabitants of British Guiana at the beginning of this year. Mr. M'Queen is the champion of the English colonies; for a half-century he has devoted himself to their interests.\* [*\*It is to the efforts of Mr. M'Queen that the colonies will owe this steamship line which, starting next October, will cross the Atlantic, and which will make communication so easy and prompt between the mother country and this part of the world.*<sup>27</sup>] In addressing himself to the planters of Demerara, he expressed himself thus: "You are surrounded by great difficulties; there is in your position, and in the position of the mother country, something which calls out for the most serious attention. Note the difficult situation in which Great Britain finds itself. The introduction of foreign sugar must take place despite your resistance and despite the endeavors of your friends in England. There is no doubt that you will lose this struggle. I am speaking to you this way, not to discourage you but so that you can prepare yourself to meet the circumstances which threaten you. The people of England are in a difficult position. There is a deficit of 40,000 tons of sugar on the market. How can this situation be remedied? It is true that you get a good price for your sugar, but its scarcity affects the revenues of the mother country. This circumstance works against you. You must not count on a reduction of the duty; the House of Commons would be unanimous in its rejection of the idea that this reduction would be useful to the Treasury. On the other hand, England cannot resist the outside pressures. Look at our trade with Brazil. I do not believe that the government can renew the expired treaty. The Ministry said: We are quite willing to deal with you under the same conditions as formerly. But, to my great surprise, Brazil declares that it will not renew the treaty, and that it will no longer import our merchandise worth 3,000,000 pounds sterling. The protective duty on sugar must therefore cease. Whatever com-

promise you may work out with the English, it can only be to your disadvantage because they do not need you; all their efforts will tend to favor the sugar of Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, and to bring it in on the same basis as English sugar.”

When a man devoted to colonial interests expresses himself thus, and when Mr. M'Queen speaks out as categorically on the double necessity facing the British government of introducing foreign sugar, the colonies cannot remain impassive in the face of the danger which confronts them. The petitions against foreign sugar come to the Queen from everywhere. What will be the fate of these petitions? Will it not be necessary to answer them with reasons of national interests? Time will tell. Meanwhile, the English colonies are languishing in the dread about a future more uncertain than the present.

### 11. Market Value of Property

Rural property has kept its original value in Barbados. This results from the fact that in the colonies land value fluctuates according to what the land earns. Barbados has maintained its cultivation and produce is selling well; this explains the high price of property. However, property is rarely sold because the future is too uncertain, maybe too threatening, for the capitalists to take chances in speculations which become more doubtful each day.

In Barbados, as in Antigua, the sales which most commonly occur are those of small parcels of land into which the blacks invest their savings. Climatic conditions being unfavorable to the raising of foodstuffs, they plant cane; at harvest time, they find that the planters are willing to manufacture their sugar. Thus, at Barbados the most perfect harmony reigns between former masters and freedmen.

### 12. Cabins and Gardens of the Emancipated Blacks

The act declaring the termination of Apprenticeship, dating from the 1st of August 1838, and passed by the legislature of Barbados the 15th of May in the same year, guaranteed to the freedmen the use of cabins and gardens until the first of November following; it also provided for the subsistence of the indigent aged, sick, or infirm.

The first of November 1838, the planters were not anxious to carry out the Act of 15 May. The freedmen remained in their

former houses, and without paying rent they continued to cultivate the quarter acre of ground that the proprietors had been accustomed to leaving them, on the single condition of working for the plantation. The question of cabins and gardens, therefore, was neither the object of misunderstanding nor of any difficulty in Barbados. But since a quarter acre of land is insufficient for the needs of the blacks, the planters turned over to them another quarter acre in return for rent; this rent almost always consists of one day of work per week. Land is precious in Barbados. He who possesses it does not like to part with it; however, in order to be useful to the community, the planters have given evidence of being kind and accommodating.<sup>28</sup>

### 13. Wages

The competition between laborers for work has made possible the maintenance of wage levels within acceptable limits. For the past three years wages have fallen rather than risen. Today, first class rural laborers are paid 1 franc 8 centimes per day; second class workers, 81 centimes. In Barbados, the black knows that his work must be good and that his hours must be used well; if not, the planter would refuse to employ him. Therefore, they have been able to continue work paid by the day as it was practiced previously, and the majority of the planters are satisfied with this. However, in some areas they would like to adopt task work, but the blacks do not understand this new arrangement. During my stay in Barbados, the blacks clamored for the intervention of the parochial magistrates, but they were not authorized to settle this question. I repeat that the system of task work is still the exception in this colony. The competition among the workers for work renders it useless because each one senses the necessity of making good use of his time.

### 14. Comparison of Free and Forced Labor

Moreover, it must be noted that free labor, when it is well directed and appropriately supervised, produces more than forced labor. Under slavery, the first and second gangs of a plantation would spend the day in the fields, but the time was badly used. One often assigned two or three times as many men as were needed to accomplish a job, because at that time they did not judiciously use their manpower and the number of slaves permitted this extra-

vagant use of labor. Today this is no longer the case; one must pay for everything. Help remunerated without good reason and without commensurate productivity would be the ruin of the property owner. The latter is thus forced into paying particular attention to how time is used and to the quality of work. The result of this is that work performed under these conditions is superior to what it would have been under a system that time and indolent ways had vitiated. In the emancipated countries, I have often seen plantations previously worked by 100 slaves today handled by 40 freedmen. This does not mean that the blacks have a greater inclination toward work than in former times, but rather one demands and gets a great deal more out of their time since they have been getting paid for it.

#### 15. Material Condition of the Laborers

Since the land of Barbados, or rather its climatic conditions, is not favorable for small scale farming, the black in the countryside can only obtain his livelihood from the wages that the planter gives him. Forced as the rural worker is to live off foodstuffs imported into the colony, his wage is a small thing when compared to his needs; therefore, as soon as he has saved some money he can be seen raising livestock and cultivating sugar cane. All of his possible income does not place him in a financial situation as prosperous as that of his neighbors in the other islands; however, he is clean and well clothed and his dwelling is not without comforts.

What struck me the most in visiting the colony is the air of contentment and of well-being that I found on everyone's faces; and, nevertheless, the black of Barbados has trouble in subsisting! How can I account for what would seem to be an anomaly anywhere else? Everything has been smooth and without obstacle in Barbados; there have been no serious disputes between proprietors and freedmen. The effective influence of a numerous clergy, led by the enlightened zeal of the Bishop, has not permitted any doubt or any false interpretation concerning the nature of everyone's rights. From the first day, the blacks were clearly informed about their position, their prospects, and their rights. Without doubt, these circumstances are responsible for the trust and contentment that I have noticed everywhere.<sup>29</sup>



16. Clergy — Religious Denominations

I spoke of the clergy; it has played a very fine and conciliatory role in Barbados. On the occasion of some disturbances which occurred at the moment that Apprenticeship was terminated, the Governor and Bishop had thought it necessary to bestow judiciary powers on several religious ministers. This measure did not have the sanction of the Secretary for the Colonies, and was of a short duration; however, it produced all the good effects which were expected from it. If the blacks in Barbados are so advanced, this is due to the unflagging efforts of the clergy; its zeal is carefully heeded in the case of the adult population, but the same is not the case for the younger generation.

The religious sects are composed of the Methodists and Moravians. They have not lagged behind the Anglican clergy in any respect: they share its zeal and its errors.<sup>30</sup>

17. Marriage Among the Blacks

The blacks marry in Barbados as elsewhere — perhaps more than elsewhere — but the old habits do not yet permit them to yield to the duties which marriage imposes. If I wanted to prove this point, I would open the records of the Courts of Arbitration and Reconciliation; I would show that the majority of offences to be settled are quarrels and cases of assault and battery which result from the infidelity of husbands who readily flee the conjugal bed to indulge in their taste for libertinism. In the midst of all this, in the countryside of Barbados everything shows an atmosphere of order and well-being which does honor to the administration, the planters, and the freed classes themselves.

18. Charitable Institutions

I have said that the Act of 15 May provided for the subsistence of indigent aged and disabled persons. This legislative act is only put into effect in the towns, where hospitals have been created and where daily distributions of food are made. The countryside does not benefit in any way from this work for the public welfare; the rural aged and sick have remained in the care of their kinsmen and friends. Family ties exist only tenuously among the blacks; however, I have come to believe that the blacks do provide for their elderly and infirm kinsmen in Barbados.

## 19. Immigration

The introduction of foreign workers is not necessary in Barbados; the island's considerable population frees it from dependence on immigration. However, the colony does not remain indifferent to what happens elsewhere; it is attentive to Jamaica and Demerara, which it knows are in the process of drawing freed blacks from Sierra Leone. Barbados is waiting for the outcome of an experiment which perhaps one day could fill its own labor need resulting from the fickleness of its workers or from any need the workers might feel to seek employment elsewhere.

## 20. The Colored Population

In the aristocratic land of Barbados one does not find the desired integration between the white and colored races. Colored people are admitted to public employment and to administrative posts, they sit on juries, they sometimes reach the Council and the legislative assemblies of the former colonies; but all of this does not bring to an end the distance at which society holds them.<sup>31</sup> As I have already said, the more important that countries are, either because of the size of their population or because of their wealth, the more difficult it is to overcome social prejudices. Barbados presents no exception to this rule.

## Conclusion

In speaking of Barbados, I have described what it is today. It has lost nothing from the point of view of labor productivity: that is a fact that I have had to record. The state of society has improved from one point of view and is being vitiated from another: that is also a truth. I do not pretend to predict the future of this colony in any way. It is possible that the future will not be as good as the present. This possibility depends on the government of Great Britain or, to be more precise, on the needs of the population of the mother country and on external exigencies.

I repeat that there is legislative action on sugar yet to take place; the fate of the English colonies will depend on this legislation. The legislation can prolong the existence of the most favored of these colonies just as it can completely ruin them. Without doubt, Barbados may be able to survive, but I cannot give assurance despite its large population, its extensive ownership and use of

land (which discourages idleness and vagabondage), and the advantages of a wealthy and non-absentee class of property owners. I cannot give assurance, I say, that this colony will be an exception to the general rule of the ruin of former slave possessions. Barbados is nonetheless a handsome and interesting colony.

Respectfully,

Sloop Captain commanding the Brig *Le Hussard*

Layrle

NOTES

24. For conditions in the prisons in November 1837, including plans of the Bridgetown jail and yard, and an itemization of the prisoners by name, race, offense, etc., see J.W. Pringle's "Report . . . on Prisons in the West Indies, Part II" (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1838, vol. 3, rept. 270; pp. 3-19; cf. J. Sturge and T. Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* [London, 1838], pp. 5-8). Schomburgk presents similar materials relating to the early 1840s (*History*, pp. 134-140).
25. On the other hand, in 1837 J.A. Thome and J. H. Kimball received "the unsolicited testimony of a planter, that slave mothers frequently poisoned, and otherwise murdered, their young infants, to rid them of a life of slavery" (*Emancipation*, p. 77). Beyond this comment, the available evidence for slave infanticide is slim, but the act was not, as Layrle maintains, "a new crime in the colonies"; in fact, in April 1819, the Barbados legislature found it necessary to "put in force" a law to "regulate the trials of women charged with the murder of their bastard issue" (CO 30/20, no. 379, Public Record Office, London).
26. Plantation fieldwork was considered the hallmark of slave status, and the dislike of such labor became particularly evident during the apprenticeship period when, of course, the ex-slaves were able to exercise some control over their labor. For various comments by the stipendiary magistrates on this issue, see *Parliamentary Papers*, 1837, vol. 53, rept. 521-1, *passim*.
27. In his book, *The West India Colonies* (London, 1824), James M'Queen defended the West Indies planters at great length against the criticisms of the British emancipationists. The book won the plaudits of the Barbadian plantocracy, and in September 1825 the legislature awarded M'Queen £500 sterling in appreciation for his "unremitting and disinterested . . . defence of the West Indies" (CO 30/21, no. 469, Public Record Office, London).

M'Queen's ideas on mail communication are discussed in his *West Indian Mail Communication* (London, 1838). The Royal Mail Packer Company was formed in London in 1840, and its first vessel arrived at Barbados on January 5, 1842 (*JBMHS* ix [1941] 24; *ibid.* x [1942] 88).

28. For another view, see, for example, Bruce Hamilton's discussion of the "located labourer" system and the "Masters and Servants" act of January 7, 1840 (*Barbados & the Confederation Question 1871-1885* [London, 1956], pp. 4-6). "This law," in Hamilton's words, "yielded in its operation abuses so gross as to be almost incredible to a modern reader studying the institutions of a supposedly free community" (*ibid.*, p. 4). The law, "An Act to Regulate the Hiring of Servants and to Provide for the Recovery and Security of their Wages," is published in *Parliamentary Papers* (1847/48, vol. 45, rept. 63, pp. 10-17); an earlier version was passed in June 1838, but it was disallowed in September of that year (*ibid.*, rept. 419, pp. 6-19).
29. Other visitors to Barbados around this period had varying impressions of the "material condition of the laborers" and related issues; for their accounts, see Handler, *Guide to Source Materials*, pp. 92-96, and *passim*.
30. A comparative overview of Methodist, Moravian, and Anglican involvement with the non-white population during the later years of the slave period is given in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 154-161 and *passim*. Schomburgk (*History*, pp. 92-110) provides details on church groups in the 1840s.
31. For an account of the struggle of colored persons to achieve public positions of prestige, and the racial prejudice against them, see Handler, *Unappropriated People*. It was not until 1831 that all formal racial restrictions were removed from the qualifications to vote, hold elective office, and serve on juries. In 1833 a colored man was recommended for the first time to hold a commission in the militia. The first colored member of the Barbados Council was Thomas Joshua Cummins. He was appointed in April 1840, and, as the "youngest councillor" he presided over the Court of Grand Sessions in December 1840 when Samuel Prescod was tried and convicted of libel (see note 15); at the time, Cummins had been a police magistrate from Saint George, a vestryman of Saint Michael, and the Queen's Casual Receiver General (*JBMHS* ix [1942] 23, 142-143). Ironically, in 1833 Prescod had vigorously defended Cummins when the latter had been refused an administrative position because of his racial ancestry (Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 106-107). During the period of slavery, Cummins had been a leading member of the free colored community and was active in its struggle for civil rights.

Samuel Jackman Prescod, as is more widely known, became the first colored member of the House of Assembly when, in 1843, he took his

seat as one of the representatives of the newly created constituency of Bridgetown. For details on his life, see Handler, *Unappropriated People, passim*; H.A. Vaughan, "Samuel Prescod: The Birth of a Hero" (*New World Quarterly*, vol. 3 [1966], pp. 55-60); and F.A. Hoyos, *Our Common Heritage* (Barbados, 1953, pp. 34-39). A handful of little known letters, written by Prescod in 1840, are located in the Rhodes House Library at Oxford University (Mss. Brit. Emp., S.22, G.54); these letters provide an excellent view into the nature of the man, his perceptions of Barbadian society, and his involvement with the island's auxiliary of the British Anti-Slavery Society.

Joseph Garraway (see note 17) was probably the first colored person appointed to a magistracy when he became a stipendiary magistrate in November 1836; however, he was not not a Barbadian. Although he informed Thome and Kimball in 1837 "that prejudice against color was rapidly diminishing" in Barbados (*Emancipation*, p. 66), the colored population apparently believed the pace was too slow; in 1840, for example, they forwarded a memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in which they stressed the "necessity of promoting the advancement of the coloured and black races by appointing them to offices under government" ("To the Right Honourable The Earl of Carnarvon . . ." [Mss. Brit. Emp., S.22, G.54]).

(Concluded)