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A SUCCESSFUL TROPICAL REPUBLIC IN THE WEST INDIES

“ This capacity for adequate organization has been the key-note of distinction between the Democracy of our race and all the Democracies by which it has been preceded.”—GEORGE PARKIN, “Imperial Federation,” p. 2.

Barbados—A Tropical Republic—Declares Charles II. King—
Opposes Cromwell—Economic Development

BARBADOS lies well within the tropics—a little pin-prick on the fringe of the Caribbean Sea. Her area is so small that on the mainland it would represent but a big plantation. For comparative purposes let us say that it is about the size of the Isle of Wight. One can walk clean across it at its broadest point between luncheon and dinner, and the population is so dense that some of it threatens to drip over into the water. No country of the world has so many people to the square inch as this happy little island—the healthiest, the richest, the best governed—a microscopic metropolis of the West Indies. If there is any truth in the maxim, *Happy is the country that has no history*, no better illustration of it can be offered than this tropical outpost of Anglo-Saxon liberty—the most eastern or windward island of the Spanish Main. According to all orthodox political economy, its enor-

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mous population of over 1,000 to the square mile should be unhappy as compared to the others where land is to be had for the asking; but Mr. Malthus finds few followers in Barbados amidst a population which sees on all sides colonies prospering in proportion as population increases. Cause and effect are here confused, as in most political problems, but the West Indian can make as good an argument as Mr. Malthus on the subject of over-population.

On the occasion of my visit to this interesting island what struck me most forcibly was the evidence of British tenacity in matter of social custom. In the midst of a broiling tropical noontide, the social leaders of the capital moved to church clad in the conventional top-hat, stiff collar, black frock-coat and patent leather shoes, enduring fifty-two times a year the martyrdom which many of their enterprising ancestors in the age of Elizabeth compressed into a single sufficiency when they fell foul of the Spanish Inquisition at La Guayra. The "Bim," as the Barbadian is affectionately called for short, is an Englishman through and through, excepting where he has rubbed off something from the Yankee. The clean streets, comfortable houses, solid public buildings, effective sanitary inspection, local policing—all these reflect an English ancestry, with little admixture.

The governor of this little toy empire holds garden parties and sits in state quite as grandly as if he presided at Calcutta or Singapore. Tommy Atkins swaggers about the streets with the same easy indifference to latitude and longitude that he exhibits at Cape Town or Hong-Kong, and the gorgeous black privates

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of the West India Regiment, in their zouave outfit, show that the Englishman respects the black man as a man if not as a brother.

There is a railway in Barbados—it must have been a tight squeeze to get it in; and electric trams, and one or two huge American hotels on the beach, where families come from all over the Spanish Main to recruit their health at this Narragansett of the tropics.

The negroes are the biggest and strongest in the West Indies, and they all must work, for there is no waste Hinterland where they can get their dinner from the shake of a cocoa-nut tree. They are English through and through in language, church, and custom, though as to apparel a few yards of cotton print with a string around the middle seems enough for practical purposes.

When the citizen of Barbados, who represents three centuries of English blood, creole from the days of King James, reads in the papers that Anglo-Saxons should not acquire tropical territory because the white man cannot thrive except in the temperate zone, he smiles in pity and says: "What fools of men sit in Parliament! Yet they pretend to govern us!"

For Barbados is a republic, in practice if not in theory. Tropical republics are scarce—the only other one of which I have personal knowledge is Natal, on the east coast of South Africa, which is not only one of the hottest of England's colonies, but at the same time one of the healthiest and best governed of any in Africa.

The history of Barbados runs back into obscure times, when only Spain was acknowledged in the West

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Indies and those who invaded her territory did so at the risk of the gallows or the Inquisition.

Officially Barbados was settled in 1625 under a royal grant, by forty English emigrants, one of whom was the son of John Winthrop, afterward Governor of Massachusetts.

But, as in the case of New England, the official action of the mother country was resented by the colonists, and did more harm than good. It had no doubt been already, for many years before the official grant, frequented by Englishmen who sought here freedom from political and religious interference. There was here also a large admixture of the freebooting element that made Martinique and San Domingo nurseries of French liberty long after self-government had disappeared in France. The civil and religious dissensions in England sent refugees to Barbados, as they did to Maryland, Massachusetts, and Virginia, and from the very outset these people, while mainly royalist refugees, developed a characteristically English capacity for taking care of themselves.

Already in 1636 there were 6,000 Englishmen in the island, and successive governors complained that these were animated by a determined disposition to have their own way. The island prospered in spite of the fact that it was given away by the English Crown to court favorites and treated as a plantation to be exploited. Fortunately there were rival claimants, and these exhausted themselves while the colony itself practically conducted its own affairs.

An idea of this little island's strength and public spirit may be gathered from the fact that when Charles

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I. lost his head, it was the only colony whose resistance to the Commonwealth caused Cromwell any great trouble. Charles II. was proclaimed king by the loyal "Bims," the militia was called out, and not till 1652 was the great Protector able to assert his authority in Barbados. The adjustment was characteristic of Anglo-Saxons. Each party was drawn up ready to fight, but when the British "Bims" were convinced that the struggle was hopeless and that in capitulating they would receive honorable terms, they disbanded their forces and turned once more to their daily routine.

Barbados has never permitted a foreign enemy on its soil. When Père Labat visited there at the beginning of the eighteenth century, he studied particularly the military condition of the island with a view to French invasion. He was himself a skilful engineer and had constructed some forts in the French islands. He describes Barbados as a magnificent island to plunder, admired the wealth of the planters, and, above all, the large proportion of white men trained to military service. He found forts and batteries at many points on the shores, and congratulated himself upon having succeeded in stealing a map of the place from his host. This Dominican priest, whose book on the West Indies remains to-day delightful reading, was an essentially practical man, and returned from Barbados with no desire to venture an attack upon that place.

When Cromwell attacked Jamaica in 1655, he secured 3,500 volunteers from Barbados alone, and, between 1643 and 1657, it was estimated that at least 12,000 white men left the island to settle and develop

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other parts of the West Indies, or the North American colonies.

Just one hundred years before the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia, Barbados had 50,000 whites and 100,000 negro slaves.

It is late in the day to discuss negro slavery, but, throughout the British West Indies as well as Virginia, it is worth noting that the legalizing of the slave-trade was followed by a gradual diminution of the white population and a disproportion between the numbers of white and black to a degree which in several cases, as in Jamaica, endangered the existence of the white settlers and made representative government more difficult, if not impossible.

After slavery had taken deep root, and when plantations had come to resemble manufactories devoted to a single crop; when white labor had wholly disappeared in consequence of slave competition, then many people agreed that slave labor was absolutely essential to successful tropical agriculture, and that black emancipation meant colonial ruin. There was much plausibility in this, in the early years of this century, when the abolition of slavery was agitated in England, but it was negro slavery itself that created the very plantation system which was only profitable when worked on a large scale by negro gangs.

Sugar—that crop which has since monopolized the interest of the West Indies and been the prime justification of slavery for two centuries and more, was only introduced into the island in 1640. In 1643 there were 18,600 able-bodied white men in Barbados, of whom 8,300 were proprietors, and only 6,400 negroes. The

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mere mention of this number allows us to draw the inference that white labor was successfully employed here as it was in the early days of Martinique and Virginia—and would have continued to make the colonies prosper but for the greed of gold which permitted Christian nations to enslave Africans, and then sell them as human machines—I will not say as beasts of burden.

In our day we have laws protecting animals against ill usage at the hands of their masters—in those days, the black man on a Jamaica plantation had less protection from the common law than has to-day the cab horse of London! Black labor has so thoroughly dispossessed that of the Anglo-Saxon in the cotton, tobacco, and sugar-growing sections of America, that we are apt to think this state of things natural and unalterable. But from the experience of our English ancestors I am inclined to think that if, by some happy magic, the negro should suddenly return to his native Africa, the white man would develop his tropical American territories more satisfactorily.

In the olden days colonization was much assisted by a system which permitted a man who had got into the clutch of the law, through debt or other misfortune, to buy his release through personal service—such a man worked after the fashion of one who, nowadays, labors to pay back the money that has been advanced for his passage from the old world to New York. The law forbids it, but human nature finds means of evading such legislation.

Under that old system thousands of stout white men came to the new world with their families, and after

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servicing a term of years, were pronounced once more restored to their civil rights and given land to cultivate. This system, like every other, was open to abuse; but under proper inspection was eminently useful to all concerned—the mother country, the colony, and, chief of all, the white emigrant himself.

The home government simply handed the man over to an agent for the colonies, and was thus, by a stroke of the pen, relieved of all further responsibility.

But this system received a check in 1776, when the American War broke out, and the thirteen colonies, one and all, forbade the sending of any more indented or apprenticed whites to their shores. This action of America gave a still stronger impulse to the African slave-trade by increasing the demand for plantation hands—a consequence little dreamed of by our Puritan liberators.

One consequence of the negro in America is that he has retarded the use of labor-saving machinery, or of any machinery requiring intelligent handling. The smaller the price of labor, the less importance is attached to machinery. It is not in Russia, but in Minnesota, that agriculture develops labor-saving implements—it is among highly educated people only that highly efficient machinery is profitable. People who are well paid with ten cents a day cannot rise to an appreciation of a modern reaping-machine—or even an American plough. A Chinaman of the interior cannot understand why a Massachusetts machinist can earn \$5 a day and turn from his machine cotton stuff which under-sells stuff made in Canton by girls earning five cents a day.

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Although the Great Wall of China was built by forced labor, it is more than probable that to-day an American contractor would undertake to build it over again with free labor for less money than it originally cost. The reason for this is, that only high-priced mechanics can be trusted with high-priced machinery—and a good machine can underbid the best of slaves.

The white man has never yet shown great taste for long and arduous labor in the tropics—such as hoeing a field of cotton, for instance. We have never known it done, for the mere reason that the white man is more valuable as a superintendent of black labor than as a single hand in the furrow.

White sailors do their work in the tropics as they do in the north; and soldiers fight as well in India as in Northern China. If we hear of excessive mortality in hot climates among white troops, we can generally trace it to bad habits of living, to inexperience on the part of the officers, to the unsanitary state of the country—not merely to the heat. America is essentially the land of labor-saving machinery, for the reason that in the northern part, at least, labor has been intelligent and consequently expensive. In England, where, on the contrary, domestic service has been comparatively cheap and unintelligent, the American is struck by the absence of labor-saving contrivances. The consequence is that an English house requires about one-third more servants than a corresponding one in America. Such common things as speaking tubes, dumb waiters, electric lights, gas stoves, hot and cold water on tap in every room, bath-tubs properly fitted

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up—all these came to England long after they had become commonplace in America. I can recall many mansions in England where none of these things are yet known—where guests dress for dinner by the light of two dim candles; where a little tin bath-tub is brought into one's room along with two jugs of water; where on cold evenings the ladies huddle about the open fire with shawls, because the machinery for heating would be too complicated for the forces obtainable in the neighborhood.

It is fair to say that many a wealthy English nobleman has fewer comforts in his palace than the average New England professor, whose income represents but a tithe of that enjoyed by his Old World kinsman.

All industry in the West Indies is at a low ebb because sugar fetches but little on the market, and the planters have depended too much on that one crop. They have had their day of abundance, and the present generation is paying the penalty. In the good old days of slavery there was no need of intelligence in the running of a plantation. The price of sugar was such that any machinery was good enough, and planters could lounge in London while overseers looked to the estates and remitted fat dividends at regular intervals.

But times changed, and the emancipation of slaves (1834) diminished profits. Then the planters borrowed money and hoped for better times. But the times did not improve, so they mortgaged their estates and kept on expecting better things that never arrived.

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Finally, they had spent all their capital, had no money with which to buy improved machinery, had lost the energy that characterized their ancestors, and got more and more involved in financial embarrassment, until once wealthy plantations were abandoned to wild beasts—as any traveller can testify.

Parliament has been much importuned to give pecuniary relief, and latterly has done so—but all such measures are unwise. It is not the business of government to take money out of the pockets of the thrifty and give it to the unsuccessful. If the West Indies are depressed at present it is largely because they have latterly been looking to the Government for relief, instead of depending entirely upon themselves. When Government has removed all hampering restrictions to the colonial development of the islands, it has done enough—and if after that the colonists cannot earn a living, then they had better abandon sugar and grow something that pays better.

The West Indies need no pauper legislation—they need but the wholesome tonic of healthy competition to revive prosperity. Men who own land should be compelled to work it themselves—not leave it to agents. Government should be simplified to the greatest possible extent, in order to introduce more economy of administration. The incompetent planters should be allowed to go into bankruptcy and drop away as soon as possible, and leave room for a new generation of more enterprising and better equipped husbandmen.

If Government wishes to interfere without doing much harm, let it limit itself to the building of good

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roads, and the fostering of communication between the islands; the establishing of cheaper telegraph rates; of savings banks; the simplification of land transfer; the encouragement of peasant proprietors among the blacks; the abolition of land speculation.