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THE WEST INDIES TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

“These beautiful West Indian Islands were intended to be homes for the overflowing numbers of our own race, and the few that have gone there are being crowded out by the blacks from Jamaica and the Antilles.—FROUDE, “The English in the West Indies,” 1898.

Negro, Chinese, East Indians, and Whites—Duty of the Anglo-Saxon Toward West Indies—Good Government Needed

NOW that English-speaking peoples control the momentary destinies of the principal islands of the West Indies, when a canal joining Atlantic and Pacific is about to be constructed under an Anglo-Saxon protectorate, when, therefore, we are justified in anticipating an increased European interest in this part of the world, it is time for us to treat the West Indies not as isolated appendices of far-away colonial offices, but as a community of common commercial interests, of almost one language, and to some extent fitted for self-government. With Cuba and Porto Rico under the Stars and Stripes, Hayti independent, and Jamaica British, to say nothing of the large number of small islands either belonging to England or speaking English, there remain but Martinique and Guadeloupe to represent deep-rooted political at-

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tachment to other than Anglo-Saxon institutions. It is true that Sweden, Holland, and Denmark are still represented in the West Indies, but to an extent that may be ignored.

Hitherto, and up to the moment of negro emancipation (1834), the West India islands were most precious objects in the eyes of European cabinets, owing to the high price of sugar. The abominable trade in slaves enabled planters to make their fortunes and enrich the mother country besides—to say nothing of lulling to sleep the popular conscience regarding treatment of negroes. So full is West Indian history of crime and bloodshed among its islands, that one cannot fail to sympathize with Benjamin Franklin, who could not look upon a lump of sugar without fancying it to be stained with human blood.

Since negro emancipation, the nations of Europe have gone almost to the opposite extreme of indifference toward these islands; showing conclusively that such interest as existed was rather on pecuniary than sentimental grounds.

To-day West Indian matters are apt to be dismissed from public consideration on the ground that the white man cannot live there; that the black man alone is to be the inheritor in this part of the world; that we don't want any more negro States; and, that, in short, they are not worth having at any price.

If this view were correct, there would be an end of the matter, at least for Americans. But it is one based on a mixture of true and false that must be separated before we can draw just conclusions. The West Indies to-day have, in fact, identical interests, but by the

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artificial action of jealous governments whose policy had reference only to the revenues of the home countries, the different islands have been kept isolated one from the other, in a manner prejudicial to their development. Thus, the different mother countries, England, France, Spain, etc., paid heavy subsidies to steamers plying from France to Martinique, Southampton to Barbados, Spain to Havana, etc. The cost of this service was in many instances a heavy tax upon the islands themselves. The passengers were very largely government officials, and the laws were so framed that the islanders were compelled to ship at high rates to Europe rather than to better markets nearer at hand. The West Indies for centuries furnished the strange picture of a country where it was easier to get passage to Europe 4,000 miles away, than to the islands of the neighborhood. Even to-day this system of European subsidy continues, while from one island to the other the means of intercourse are very unsatisfactory. This is a relic of that suspicious colonial legislation which forbade colonies trading one with another for fear of ultimately organizing against the mother country. England applied this colonial doctrine to her own colonies in America and the West Indies for many years, and it was a cardinal principle in Spain and France as well. To-day, therefore, the islands of the West Indies, which should regard themselves as a Caribbean confederation, with Jamaica as the natural centre or capital, are virtually strangers to one another; do not co-operate for common purposes, but seek help from a far-away mother country.

This relation is not natural. Trade does not follow

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the flag in the West Indies. The merchant in those islands finds his best trade with the great republic at his door, rather than with the Europe whose flag floats over Government House. The relation of the West Indies to Europe has been an unnatural one since the beginning of this century, and has been maintained largely through national vanity, irrespective of commercial interests. The West Indies are a part of the American Continent in every essential characteristic, and no European subsidies or military demonstration can wholly prevent the persistent daily political and commercial drift toward the mouth of the Mississippi and the Hudson.

The expulsion of Spain from Cuba and Porto Rico is an important step toward the ultimate emancipation of all the Caribbean islands from European control, and their final federation, not necessarily as a part of the United States, but as an American political body under an Anglo-Saxon Protectorate, and with Home Rule to such as are fit for it.

Is this Utopian? Can self-government flourish in the tropics—where negroes largely outnumber the whites, and where the best sample of negro-government is in Hayti, an island whose administration suggests the ethics of a monkey-cage rather than of God's reasoning creatures?

The present is, indeed, full of discouraging symptoms, but these symptoms will become less dangerous in time if we do our duty toward the inferior races. The negro controls the West Indies numerically, because he has been transported thither against his will. He is to-day no better than he ever has been so far

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as intellectual or moral capacity is concerned; he shows no dangerous tendency toward dominion over those who are in the minority; on the contrary, he is, in the West Indies as in Basutoland, essentially an overgrown child, ready to obey the law of the white man.

Nor is he the only possible dominant factor as a laboring man. We have found him good in slavery because of the very qualities that make him bad as a free citizen.* His very docility and incapacity for combination kept him a slave for two centuries or more; and his freedom proceeded not from his own efforts, but exclusively from a morbid public sentiment developed by London and Boston philanthropists. We have habitually regarded the negro as the only working man of the West Indies and our Gulf States, merely because no other competitors appeared to be in the field. But this condition is changing, and the change is bringing about the gradual effacement of the black man, just as Italian and Scandinavian immigration has minimized the importance of the Irishman as a labor factor in New York.

On the occasion of a visit to Natal, in 1896, I found that already plantation work was practically monopolized, not by the native African whose kraals are on all sides, but by the imported coolie from Bombay,

* "The industrial opportunities for colored people have been lessening all the time (in New York), and now the sphere of their activities has become so narrow that it is a wonder that even 35,000 of them can earn honest livings.

"*And they do not.* The proportion of criminals among the negroes in New York is alarmingly large, and their influence is very dangerous. The birth-rate among the negroes in New York is small and the death-rate is large, being thirty in a thousand, as against nineteen in a thousand for the white population."—John Gilmer Speed, 1900.

[Population of New York proper, 1,950,000.]

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who is paid well for his work; whose sanitary condition is the subject of government supervision, and who at the end of his term of years has the option of returning home or of settling in the colony.

On his own ground in tropical Africa, the negro has been pushed aside by a race of man inferior to him physically, but superior in qualities that are essential to success on a sugar plantation. The coolie of the East Indies is spreading from Natal to other parts of Africa. Many of them are already settled in the Transvaal, and when the Cape to Cairo railway is opened we shall find them up and down the whole length of the continent, pushing the black man further and further back into his more congenial jungle.

The East Indian has already made his appearance in the West Indies—I have seen him in Trinidad and in British Guiana, and wherever he shows himself it is as the superior of the negro, not only in trade, but in the labor of the field as well.

The British East Indies are a human reservoir containing some 250,000,000 mortals more or less subject to death from starvation at home, and so accustomed to associate the English Government with justice, that they do not hesitate to embark for the most distant plantations provided the British flag is over them.

Close to this great storehouse of human energy is another with three or four hundred millions of Chinese, who also show the capacity, as well as the readiness, to meet the negro on his own ground and beat him out of the field. As a farmer or a gardener, a coal heaver or a laundry-man, a nursery-maid or a banker, he is incomparable. I have seen Chinamen driving camel-trains

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in a blizzard across the frontiers of Manchuria, and again have I seen the men of the same race speeding along in the blistering heat of Singapore with huge baskets of coal for the passing mail-steamers. This man is already in the West Indies, and when he turns his attention to small farming in those islands he will develop there treasures such as he has already brought to light in California, in Java, and in the Philippines.

The near future will see a brighter picture in the West Indies. We shall soon have four races on four different levels of capacity, all useful in the development of the islands, but of them all the black will be the lowest.

The question of government will then become of still greater importance, for race jealousy will beget political friction, and government in such cases must be strong in order to be just.

Already in the West Indies are many communities of white men trained to self-government. British Guiana, St. Kitts, Trinidad, Barbados, Antigua, Jamaica—these all are a nursery of colonial legislators, to say nothing of the Danish islands of Santa Cruz and St. Thomas, whose population is essentially English. The French islands are politically in a less satisfactory state, because of the large admixture of negro blood among the so-called whites.

The Spanish islands of Cuba and Porto Rico are very backward in a political sense, but in those islands the spread of education and Anglo-Saxon institutions may reasonably be expected to produce a change for the better.

But, after all, the most important consideration is

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in regard to the franchise. The West Indies would be hopelessly ruined if we of the white race, after conquering this part of the world and then building up white colonies through centuries of care, should now hand them over to be governed by races who have shown no capacity for administration.

The franchise should be granted very sparingly and only to such as have a stake in the country, as land-owners, for instance. The maxim should be emphasized that no man should be allowed to vote taxes unless he himself paid taxes. There may be negroes who are fit to vote in the United States, and there are many whites who are very unfit—and it would be well for us if we could so frame our laws as to exclude the corrupt or worthless voters of both races. But in the absence of such laws we must grope our way in the right direction as well as we can—and at least not perpetuate on new territory political principles that have proven mischievous among ourselves.

No man in the new West India Federation should vote unless he satisfies reasonable requirements regarding education, property, and general moral character. Many of the English islands already furnish us good patterns on which to base a future government—notably Jamaica, Barbados, or British Guiana. The governor should be appointed by the Paramount Power, and this governor should be assisted by a council selected from a list of the most eminent colonists, who should be appointed for life or during good behavior; and be in the nature of a Senate.

Then there should be a legislative assembly elected by the body of qualified electors.

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Acceptance of office should be compulsory, as also should be the casting of a vote. No one should be excused from his political obligation save by the governor for sufficient reason. The governor and officials generally should be paid highly in order to ensure the best work of the best men—and above all to remove public servants from the temptation of making money by indirect means.

The English were the first who adopted the policy of paying their public servants well, and they did so after many years of experience in India, when scandal after scandal warned the home government that a radical change was necessary.

Spain and Holland both paid their colonial servants very poorly, and consequently they were badly served.

At this time the United States consular service illustrates this proposition.

Throughout the West Indies, as elsewhere, we find the American consul a man with the shiftless habits of the "professional politician;" devoid of personal credit among Americans and despised by the people of other countries; unable to live respectably on his salary, and prone to make money by dishonest means; a man more apt to injure the American sailor by his assistance than by his ill-will. I have known exceptions to this rule—poor creatures who have persisted long in one island because they had come to like it and had not the energy to try something else. There are a few such exceptions—I have run across them in Europe also—and in China. But they are so very scarce that they may be left on one side in such a consideration as this.

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At the time when the United States is reconstructing the political affairs of Cuba and Porto Rico, it would have been of great use to us had we been assisted in this task by a number of officials who were familiar with West Indian conditions—who had already served in Cuba, or at least in islands of corresponding geographical conditions. This same want was felt in the Philippines.

As things go, we must improvise our officials as well as we can. Our first Governor of Cuba is a general of volunteers who six months before the war with Spain was an assistant-surgeon in the army. In a few years he may learn something of the island and the people, and then—he may be turned adrift to make room for another.

The first Military Governor of Havana was an excellent engineer officer, a graduate of West Point. Great hopes were entertained of him by those who enjoyed his personal acquaintance—but he had been scarcely long enough in Havana to know where the streets and sewers were located, when he was sent away for the alleged purpose of investigating the military systems of Europe. General Merritt had been but a few weeks in command at Manila when he also got an order to come to Paris for the alleged purpose of giving testimony on matters about which he was obviously ignorant. And so on!

At this moment we are repeating in Cuba and the Philippines the same political faults which have made Spanish administration a by-word throughout the world. Our first task should be, therefore, to reorganize our own administration on a business basis, so

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that in the course of time we may attract to our colonial service not the political riff-raff, the professional failures, the social tramps, but draw to the government service the flower of our well-educated young men, who should look forward to political life of this nature with as much confidence and enthusiasm as the young West Pointer looks forward to a commission at the end of his four years at the National Academy.

The United States needs a colonial West Point—a school in which young men shall be prepared for administrative positions in far-away countries—a school in which promotion shall follow upon good work and not political influence alone. With such a school, and an honest desire for the welfare of the colonies under our care, we may hope for a bright future in the West Indies.