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OUR NEW POSSESSIONS—THE DANISH WEST INDIES

By the recent purchase treaty agreed upon between this country and Denmark the United States government has for the sum of \$25,000,000 obtained the three Virgin Islands known as the Danish West Indies. As more than ninety per cent. of their 27,000 inhabitants are Negroes, the American people, upon whom devolves the duty of shaping the destiny of these new subjects, will doubtless be interested in learning more about them. Searching for these islands on the map they appear as three tiny spots lying to the east and southeast of Porto Rico and at the extreme east of the Greater Antilles. The islands are St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix which lies about 40 miles southeast of St. Thomas. The area of St. Thomas is about 33 square miles; that of St. John 21, while St. Croix is much larger, covering about 84 square miles. These islands are no less remarkable for their fertility than for the intelligence and industry of their inhabitants. The climate is delightful, but this is counterbalanced by the earthquakes and hurricanes which occur at uncertain intervals.¹

¹ For a general description and account of the Danish West Indies see: H. W. Bates, "Central America and the West Indies," 176-178; Susan De Forest Day, "The Cruise of the Scythian in the West Indies," pp. 52-57; Otto Delitsch, "Westindien und die Südpolar-Länder," Bd. 1, Abth. 4, Dänische Besitzungen, pp. 2106-2115; A. Von Dewitz, "In Dänisch-Westindien," *passim*; H. M. W. Fischer, "Om Dansk Vestindien," *passim*; A. Granier de Cassagnac, "Voyage aux Antilles," II, 161-184; Robert T. Hill, "Cuba and Porto Rico with other Islands of the West Indies," pp. 25, 26, 306, 309-316; George Höst, "Efterretninger om den Sanct Thomas og dens Gouverneur, optegnede der poa Landet fra 1769 indtil 1776," *passim*; John P. Knox, "An Historical Account of St. Thomas, West Indies," *passim*; J. P. Labat, "Nouveau Voyage aux îles de l'Amerique," I, 73, 74, 78 and II, 12, 196, 197, 285-292; A. P. Ledru, "Voyage aux îles de Ténériffe, la Trinité, Saint-Thomas, Sainte-Croix et Porto Rico," pp. 160-188; G. Van Lennep Coster, "Aanterkeningen, gehonden gedurende mijn Verblijf in de West-Indiën in de jaren 1837-1840"; W. C. Morris, "The History of Colonization," II, 284-286; C. G. A. Oldendorp, "Geschichte

Although the discovery and settlement of the Danish West Indies by Europeans are not of ancient date, their early history is fragmentary and conjectural. Tribes of Caribs² were found on these islands by Christopher Columbus when he discovered the group on his second voyage to America in 1493. Judging from carvings upon the rocks and numer-

der Mission der Evangelischen Brüder auf den Caribischen Inseln St. Thomas, St. Croix, und St. Jan," *passim*; P. L. Oxholm, "De Danske Vestindiske Öers Tilsand i Henseende til Population, Cultur og Finance-Forftning i Anledning af nogle Breve fra St. Croix," *passim*; "The Present State of the West Indies," pp. 72-74 and 93-94; J. J. Élisée, "Virgin Islands and Santa Cruz" (in *The Earth and its Inhabitants* by the same author), Vol. XVII, pp. 430-436; J. Reinhardt and C. F. Lülken, "Bidrag til det Vestindiske Öriges og namligen til de Dansk-Vestindiske Öers Herpetologie," pp. 153-291; J. P. B. Von Rohr, "Anmerkungen über den Cattunbau," Part I; Karl von Scherzer, "Die Westindischen Inseln St. Thomas, Haiti, Porto Rico und Cuba," II, 467-495; Damian Schütz-Holzhausen und R. Springer, "Cuba und die übrigen Inseln Westindiens"; Sir Hans Sloane, "A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christophers and Jamaica"; James Smith, "The Winter of 1840 in St. Croix, with an Excursion to Tortola and St. Thomas"; Stenzel, "Die Insel St. Thomas," *passim*; C. A. Stoddard, "Cruising among the Caribbees," pp. 23-50; C. E. Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," *passim*; Frederik Thaarup, "Verledning til det Danske Monarkies Statistik," *passim*; C. W. Tooke, "The Danish Colonial Fiscal System in the West Indies," *passim*; A. Trollope, "The West Indies and the Spanish Main," pp. 8 and 235-241; H. West, "Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Sta. Croix med kort Udsigt over St. Thomas, St. Jean, Tortola, Spanishtown og Crabeneiland" and "Beyträge zur Beschreibung von St. Croix," *passim*; F. Wharton, "A Digest of the International Law of the United States"; "A Winter in the West Indies and Florida," by an invalid, pp. 35-62.

² The Caribs who were kind to each other and hospitable to strangers were made vindictive and cruel by the treatment received from the Spaniards. With their cruel weapons they fought without ceasing for the possession of their native land, but they, of course, were no match for the invaders.

When missionaries from Europe attempted to convert them they haughtily replied "You have stolen our lands and those of our neighbors; you have massacred our people, desolated our homes, and committed unheard-of cruelties for the sake of gold. How then can you expect from what we have seen of the bad life of you Christians that we should wish to be like you?" So fearful had been the barbarities practiced upon them that the very name of Christian inspired them with horror and to call them Christians never failed to excite them and to make them grind their teeth with rage. A defenceless, subject people who were so intelligent as to understand thoroughly the hypocrisy of their conquerors and who were possessed of the courage to express their contempt boldly were, in those times, inviting greater cruelties, even possible extermination. Taylor, "Leaflets from the West Indies," 108.

ous relics these people had occupied the islands from time immemorial. The natives were decreed enemies of the state by Charles V in 1550 and thereafter were soon exterminated. When the Earl of Cumberland touched at the islands on his way to Porto Rico in 1596 he described them as a knot of little islands, uninhabited, sandy, barren and craggy.³

The Dutch and English preceded the Danes in the occupation of St. Thomas, but as far as is known, they were at no time present in large numbers. Nine families of them with their slaves were found there in 1666. That year a company of Danes under Erik Smidt landed at St. Thomas and made the first Danish settlement in the Virgin Islands. They claimed to represent the Danish Chartered Company of Guinea and the West Indies with headquarters at Copenhagen. Before these settlers could permanently settle here, however, their expedition was broken up by certain Dutchmen led by one Huntman after the death of Smidt and before the Danes had finished their fort. But this was only temporary success for the Dutch. This company had previously acquired territory on the Gold Coast and had built forts between Christiansburg and the eastern side of the Volta River. Their purpose in the West Indies was the cultivation of sugar, tobacco and other products; and because of the scarcity of labor the work was to be done by slaves⁴ from their African possessions. Under the encouragement of Christian V the first cargo of slaves was brought over in 1680.⁵

It is conceded that the real progress of the colony began with the rule of Gov. Jörgen Iwersen, who succeeded Smidt, landing on the island May 23, 1672. He was a man of stern and forceful personality who exacted absolute observance of the regulations he imposed, with severe penalties for

³ Taylor, "Leaflets from the West Indies," 108.

⁴ It is said that a relic of the Danish slave trade, the long Danish gun, played an important part in the Ashanti War with England and that up to the present these long-barrelled muskets are prized in remote parts of West Africa.

⁵ Knox, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 45, and Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," 2 et seq.

their violation. He required the strict keeping of the Sabbath, dealt severely with bond servants guilty of misdemeanors, and treated the Negro slaves still more cruelly.⁶

It is said that while the Danes in Africa were not particularly unkind to the slaves the West Indian Danes were very cruel, especially in St. John and later in St. Croix. "Besides the usual floggings, cutting off of ears, hands, and legs and final hangings (when there was nothing more to torture) the Danes—till the influence of the Moravian missionaries bettered things—were in the habit of 'pinching' recreant slaves with red-hot iron pinchers, or for heinous offences pinching pieces of flesh out of them. The Moravian missionaries came to the islands and brought to the inhabitants the practice and precept of a simple Christianity. Their work among the slaves being especially helpful, the lot of the latter was lightened and masters were no longer allowed to exercise the power of life and death over them."^{6a}

In those days pirates and buccaneers held sway over the seas and for the better defence of the colony "Christians'-fort" was erected. In 1674 Gov. Iwersen bought a slave to serve for seven years as master mason in the building of this fort. Within the fort was the governor's residence, and the services of the Lutheran Church (the State Church of Denmark) were also held therein, usually in the armory. "Christians'-fort," modernized, is still standing and is supposed to be the oldest building on the island.⁷

About 1682 Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg, entered into partnership with the Danish Company. The purpose of this agreement was to encourage immigration from Europe and to promote trade with the islands. The Brandenburgishers established themselves in St. Thomas, built a factory there and maintained a line of ships trading between Stettin, the Gold Coast and St. Thomas.⁸ This ar-

⁶ Taylor, "Leafflets from the Danish West Indies," 3.

^{6a} Sir Harry H. Johnson, "The Negro in the New World," p. 345.

⁷ Knox, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 60 et seq.

⁸ Labat, "Voyage dans l'Amerique," II, 285; *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XXII, 101.

rangement seemingly worked satisfactorily for a while, but finally caused such discontent that it was discontinued.

In 1684 the Danes took possession of St. John, the smallest but the most fertile of these islands. It was colonized about two generations later by some inhabitants who had the courage to leave St. Thomas. At this period the colonists were fearful not only of depredations of pirates or of the settlers of neighboring islands but they dreaded the attacks of the maroons and uprisings among the slaves. When in February, 1697, after a severe hurricane the force of the garrison was reduced to one lieutenant, one ensign, one drummer, and five privates, a number of maroons gathered in the western part of the island were considered a menace but no outbreak occurred. For a period of about sixty years afterward prosperity reigned in the islands.⁹ Sugar, molasses, rum, tobacco and spices were the principal exports and wealth brought to the master class leisure, luxury, and refinement.

In 1733 the island of St. Croix, after continuously passing from the control of one proprietor¹⁰ to another, was purchased by certain merchants of Copenhagen and later was bought from them by King Christian VI of Denmark. The land was then divided into estates and sold to various planters, some of whom came from St. Eustatius, Virgin

⁹ Knox, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 35.

¹⁰ We hear nothing of importance of St. Croix after its discovery until 1625. We learn from Bryan Edwards that the Dutch then came to St. Croix. Du Tertre says that for many years prior to 1645 it was in the possession of the Dutch and English. A conflict between the two ensued and by a series of attacks the English forced the Dutch to leave. The Spaniards in Porto Rico, alarmed at this rising English colony so near, exterminated the English in 1650. Soon afterwards the French at St. Christopher took the island with an expedition. Then in 1653 Louis XIV transferred St. Croix with St. Christopher, St. Bartholomew and St. Martin to the Knights of Malta. In 1665 a newly formed West Indian Company purchased the island from the Order of Malta, but the company being dissolved by royal edict, the island again became annexed to the Crown. On account of destructive droughts the island was practically abandoned and the forts were demolished in 1720. The French again took possession of the island in 1727 and held it until 1733 when it was purchased by the Guinea Company and later from that firm by the King of Denmark. See Taylor, "A Few Words about St. Croix," 5-7; and Rochfort, "Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles," 45.

Gorda, and Tortola. Being thereafter under more stable control, the island made progress, becoming, like the other Danish West Indies, a sugar colony. The seat of government was then transferred from St. Thomas to St. Croix.

The outstanding fact in the history of this group in the eighteenth century is the insurrection of 1733, which took place on the island of St. John. Because a large number of slaves had just been brought in from Africa there had been urged by the masters and later enacted by decree of the Royal Council certain additional tyrannical regulations which doubtless caused this trouble. Instead of increasing the number of armed men necessary to keep order the planters resorted to legislation.¹¹ At that time at the west

¹¹ These regulations were:

1. The leader of runaway slaves shall be pinched three times with red-hot iron, and then hung.

2. Each other runaway slave shall lose one leg, or if the owner pardon him, shall lose one ear, and receive one hundred and fifty stripes.

3. Any slave being aware of the intention of others to run away, and not giving information, shall be burned in the forehead and receive one hundred stripes.

4. Those who inform of plots to run away shall receive \$10 for each slave engaged therein.

5. A slave who runs away for eight days, shall have one hundred and fifty stripes, twelve weeks shall lose a leg, and six months shall forfeit life, unless the owner pardon him with the loss of one leg.

6. Slaves who steal to the value of four rix-dollars, shall be pinched and hung; less than four rix-dollars, to be branded and receive one hundred and fifty stripes.

7. Slaves who shall receive stolen goods, as such, or protect runaways, shall be branded, and receive one hundred and fifty stripes.

8. A slave who lifts his hand to strike a white person or threaten him with violence, shall be pinched and hung, should the white person demand it, if not to lose his right hand.

9. One white person shall be sufficient witness against a slave, and if a slave be suspected of a crime, he can be tried by torture.

10. A slave meeting a white person, shall step aside, and wait until he passes; if not, he may be flogged.

11. No slave shall be permitted to come to town with clubs or knives, nor fight with each other, under penalty of fifty stripes.

12. Witchcraft shall be punished with flogging.

13. A slave who shall attempt to poison his master, shall be pinched three times with red-hot iron, and then broken on a wheel.

14. A free Negro who shall harbor a slave or thief shall lose his liberty, or be banished.

end of St. John stood the only fort which was garrisoned by eight soldiers under a lieutenant and a sergeant. These men had to be depended upon to handle thousands of discontented slaves.¹² The insurrection, on the other hand, was well planned. Governor Philip Gardelin, of St. Thomas, who was at that time on a visit to the island was to be murdered along with all other white inhabitants so as to bring the island entirely under the control of the Negroes. An unexpected change in his arrangements, however, caused the Governor and a part of his family to leave St. John on the day preceding the uprising. On the following Sunday, however, the insurrection began.

Early that morning certain slaves, as was usual, took into the fort bundles of wood for the use of the soldiers. Within these bundles they had concealed their knives and cutlasses, and at a given signal they brought them forth and murdered all the garrison save one who succeeded in concealing himself. When in possession, the insurgents fired the signal previously agreed upon and at once upon every plantation the slaves began to massacre the masters and their families. Most of the surviving planters fled with their families to the Durlo estate, situated on an eminence and protected by two cannon and, under the direction of an old Englishman, repulsed the slaves, killing and wounding many. While the slaves were in retreat the planters hastily removed their families to vessels which conveyed them to Tortola and St. Thomas.

Thinking that this insurrection might spread to St. Thomas, precaution was immediately taken. Ninety men

15. All dances, feasts, and plays, are forbidden unless permission be obtained from the master or overseer.

16. Slaves shall not sell provisions of any kind, without permission from their overseers.

17. No estate slave shall be in town after drum-beat, otherwise he shall be put in the fort and flogged.

18. The king's advocate is ordered to see these regulations strictly carried out.—See Knox, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 69-71.

¹² For an interesting sketch of the insurrection see Knox, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 58 et seq. See also *The Annals of the Am. Academy of Political and Social Science*, XXII, 101.

were armed, sixty sailors from vessels in the harbor were impressed into service, and the large vessel on which the Governor had come from St. John was brought nearer the town. A detachment of thirty soldiers, some young burghers, and the Jaeger Corps, fully armed and equipped, then proceeded to St. John and drove the slaves from the fort. The Durlo estate was then relieved with much difficulty, so determined were the slaves to continue their work. In spite of these successes, however, the whites decided that it was impossible to suppress the insurrection with such a small body of troops and withdrew to St. Thomas. It was discovered that save those who had sought refuge on the Durlo estate only Dr. Cornelius F. Bodger had survived. He had been spared on the condition that he would give wounded Negroes medical aid. The whites learned too that the Creole Negroes had not taken a part in the uprising. In obtaining information the whites were assisted by a servant of Dr. Bodger, called Christian Sout,¹³ who, having the confidence of both the whites and the blacks, became a useful spy for the former, who rewarded him with freedom for these services.

Upon returning to St. Thomas the Royal Council secured the assistance of Captain Meaux and his sixty men of the *Nevis*, a vessel lying in harbor, but he failed to subdue the Negroes, losing two of his sons in the conflict. The government then sent to Martinique for help. The governor of that colony promptly despatched a force of 400 men who, joined by all the available troops from St. Thomas, drove the Negroes from the fort and, sending out detachments in various directions, finally forced the insurgents to concentrate on the northeast side of the island, where they were surrounded. After holding the island six months, the blacks, finding all chances of escape cut off, resolved upon self-destruction. "Three hundred," says an historian, "were, after a few days from the time they were surrounded,

¹³ The whites referred to Sout as an intelligent man and considered him "skilful and successful as a botanist in the use of medicinal plants found in the island." See Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," 104.

found lying dead at Brim's Bay, now Anna Burg. In a ravine, a short distance off, were discovered seven others, who appeared to have been leaders in the insurrection, who had shot each other. Seven guns broken to pieces, save one, were found lying by their sides. Tradition reports that three hundred had cast themselves from a high precipice on the rocks below. The historian Høst says they were shot and were found lying in a circle. A few had been taken prisoners. Two of these had been summarily executed in St. John and twenty-six in St. Thomas, some of the latter having been made to undergo the severest torture."¹⁴

The disproportion of the white and black elements of the population was then brought before the planters as a perplexing problem. In this unstable state of affairs the islands could not prosper. Many planters for fear of servile insurrection moved to other islands, as the situation did not soon become inviting. Captain Peter Tamaryn, of the Jaeger Corps (the night guard of the town), was ordered by Governor Jens Kragh to take a census in 1772 of free colored people living in St. Thomas. It was discovered that there were one hundred and six men capable of bearing arms; forty-one Catholics, twenty-one Reformed Dutch, and the rest Moravians and heathen. Among these were eleven masons, twelve carpenters, ten captains of boats, twenty-nine sailors, thirteen fishermen, eleven tailors, five shoemakers, one cigar-maker, one washer, one goldsmith, one musician, two planters and the rest without occupation. Belonging to the free group were 285 women and children. In 1773, however, on account of the European wars, during which Denmark remained neutral, prosperity returned and the population greatly increased. Once more the harbor of St. Thomas was crowded with the vessels of all nations. The town limits were extended, business establishments were multiplied and thousands of refugees, adventurers and capitalists sought its shores for commercial purposes.

For some decades thereafter the history of these islands was largely commercial. At one time, however, the Dutch

¹⁴ Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," 105.

took from the Danes practically all of the trade of the islands. The Danes, therefore, secretly fitted out vessels and sent them from Amsterdam under the Dutch flag and regained their trade, driving the Dutch from the field.¹⁵ But this was not without some evil consequences. Having a monopoly of the trade, the Danes set prices rather high and discontent followed. To put an end to the oppressive restrictions then prevailing, King Frederik V purchased the privileges of the Danish West India Company in 1755.¹⁶ The port of St. Thomas brought then under royal control was no longer free. This sweeping change caused ruin and starvation to follow. The prosperity of the colony ceased, money became scarce, and some inhabitants moved away, adding another problem by leaving slaves in the majority. Endeavoring to check the injudicious importation of slaves and actuated by the same motives which led him to liberate the serfs of Denmark, King Frederik VI prohibited the slave trade in 1792.¹⁷ Prosperity did not again return until 1764 when St. Thomas was declared a free port for all nations. For some time thereafter things went well despite the European wars as Denmark still remained neutral.

This state of affairs continued until 1800 when Denmark became involved in a war with Great Britain and the islands were blockaded. They endured for a while and surrendered in 1801. After holding them ten months, the British restored them in 1802. The short occupation, however, materially affected the commerce of the island and as a result of further complication in the Napoleonic wars they were conquered again by the English and held from 1807 to 1815. Then came another revival of commerce in these islands, the port of St. Thomas becoming the principal rendezvous for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's vessels.¹⁸ Yet to a student of economic conditions it was evident that the prosperity of the colony could not become permanent after

¹⁵ Knox, "St. Thomas," 84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, "St. Thomas, West Indies," 111.

¹⁸ Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," 35.

the rise of the beet sugar industry at the expense of the cane sugar of the West Indies.¹⁹

During these years slavery was becoming onerous and undesirable in certain parts of the West Indies and humanitarian forces were operating, at least, to ameliorate the condition of the slaves as a preparation for gradual emancipation. Steps were, therefore, taken to do the same in the Danish West Indies but seemingly without permanent results. There still remained evidences of oppression and cruelty and as an observer saw the situation the low physical, intellectual, and moral condition of the slaves, as compared with that of the liberated Negroes of the British islands, was obvious and unquestionable.²⁰ Some time in the forties, however, a commission was appointed at Copenhagen to inquire into the state of the islands with a view to emancipation. Moreover, there were constructed "seven large buildings in different parts of the island to serve as chapels and schools for the religious and literary instruction of the Negro population." Some of the planters too were making "laudable exertions for the education of their slaves in reading and in a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures."²¹ At the head of this system of schools was one McFarlane, an intelligent and efficient man of color, who was successfully disseminating information from plantation to plantation.²² The condition of the Negroes was thereby improved, but this increasing knowledge instead of making them grateful to their benefactors led them to appreciate freedom and to realize their power.

In 1848, therefore, came an upheaval long to be remembered. This happened in St. Croix during the administration of Major General P. von Scholten, a friend of the Negroes. King Christian VIII was induced in the year 1847 to enact laws to emancipate the slaves in the Danish West Indies. It was ordered that from the 28th of July, 1847, all

¹⁹ *Arena*, XXVIII, 242-247.

²⁰ Guernsey, "A Winter in the West Indies," 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

children born of slaves should be free and that at the end of twelve years slavery should cease altogether. These decrees caused little joy among the slaves. Discontent was generally shown. They were thereby made more anxious to have freedom and to have it immediately. They, therefore, plotted an insurrection which broke out in Frederiksted and extended to the eastern part of the island.²³ It seemed that the country Negroes were coming to town to plunder and destroy.

The details of this insurrection are interesting. On the evening of Sunday, July 2, 1848, the Negroes began rioting and the ringing of bells and blowing of horns aroused the island. At first they had confined themselves to noisy demonstration, but the planters, remembering the insurrection in St. John's more than 100 years before, were in a state of great alarm. There was in St. Croix one efficient company of fire-fighters called the Brand Corps which was composed entirely of free colored men. The Stadthauptmand was advised to call them out to put down the disorder, but he hesitated to place so much authority in their hands. One of the Brand officers, however, took a few of his men and assisted in maintaining peace. The white major of the Brand Corps nearly lost his life at the hands of a colored woman who attacked him with an ax. The blow, aimed at his neck, glanced off and his brave bearing saved him from a second attack. The rioting, looting of homes and stores, burning of bonfires and the like continued through several nights. The slaves were led by a young Negro whom they called Bourdeaux, and in whom they had great confidence. In the west end of the islands Martin King, another Negro, was in command or as the slaves styled it, "chief of the fleet." The free people of color had little or nothing to do with the outbreak. "It is but fair to say," says Chamberlain Von Scholten, "that it was owing to the activity and

²³ This insurrection is well set forth in Knox's "St. Thomas" on page 110 et seq. and in Taylor's "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," page 125 et seq.

representations of the free colored people that more violence was not committed." ^{23a}

"A considerable number of Negroes had assembled together in the Fort yard," continues he. "They cried and shouted, demanded their freedom, and called on the soldiers to fire upon them. This the commander of the fort had some difficulty in preventing. Many who were present begged him also not to do so, as the town would surely be burnt to ashes. Of this there could not be any doubt, as near by, behind a corner house which could not be commanded by the guns of the fort there were several Negro women gathered together with trash and dry cane leaves which, at the first shot from the fort, it was arranged they should light and throw into the doors and windows. The fire would thus have quickly spread through the town, as the houses were mostly deserted, and there was no one to check it." ^{23b}

Governor-General von Scholten, the friend of the Negroes, arrived at the fort in Frederiksted on the morning of July 3 and upon his own authority proclaimed freedom to all slaves in the Danish West Indies Islands. As it took some time for this news to spread throughout the island the rioting continued. Finally the authorities called to their assistance General Bourdeaux and Martin King, who partly restored order. The rioters in the eastern part who refused to disperse were fired upon. A few were killed and many wounded. General von Scholten did not at first let the military commander fire on the rioters. The planters appealed to him for permission to take the field against the Negroes but he refused. Upon renewal of the request, however, the militant element was allowed to proceed on the condition that they should not fire on the rioters, unless the latter fired on them. Accordingly the cavalry ran over the estates and forced and overawed many Negroes into respecting the law on the north side of the island. On the south side in the meantime disorder was unusual, but en-

^{23a} Taylor, "Leaflets from the West Indies," pp. 127-128.

^{23b} *Ibid.*, 129.

ergetic troops under Major V. Geillerup and Captain V. Castonier scoured the country, captured leaders of the riot and imprisoned them. In the meantime Governor Prim of Porto Rico had in response to an appeal for assistance despatched 600 Spanish troops and two mountain howitzers that assured peace and order.

The subsequent humiliation of General Bourdeaux is a blot on the character of the Danish government. After using his influence to save the lives of many of the planters who assured him of their good will, he was forcibly abducted from his station and made a prisoner. Major Gyllich, whose life General Bourdeaux saved, stood by him, sharing even his imprisonment a few days. He was finally sent aboard a vessel in the garb of a gentleman, provided with all the necessaries and comforts and then stripped of them as soon as the vessel was out of port and forced to toil as a member of the crew. He was taken to the Port of Spain, Trinidad, where he was told that if he returned to the Danish West Indies, he would be executed.²⁴ He was said to have been seen in Curaçao afterwards, whence he proceeded to the United States of America. Martin King escaped arrest until after the reign of martial law. He was imprisoned, however, for two years and in 1855 could do no better than serve his community as rat-catcher.

Peter Hansen the next governor undertook to settle these difficulties. He passed what is known as the "Labor Act," intended to meet the exigencies of the situation. This was a little better than slavery but it actually gave the Negroes a status ranging between serfdom and indentured service. They were still under rigid restrictions.²⁵ Thereafter an effort was made to prevent Negroes from assembling, especially at Christmas dances, which were considered dangerous to the peace of the colony. On one occasion in

²⁴ Before things returned to the former state Oberst V. Oxholm arrived to displace General v. Scholten as governor. The latter was tried by a Commission and condemned for dereliction of duty by the influence of the slave-holding class whom he had angered because of his favorable attitude towards the Negroes. Upon appealing to the Supreme Court, however, he was acquitted.

²⁵ See "Labour Act" in Documents of this number.

1852 to put a stop to such a function a squad of militiamen were ordered out and it fired upon the participants in private dances in their homes, killing many innocent persons. This caused great alarm. The militia was ordered back to the barracks, an investigation was made but no one could tell exactly who gave the order for this cowardly act.

Things went on prosperously for years thereafter. It seemed ideal even under the Labor Act, which the Negroes learned to endure without complaint. In this ideal state of things it was thought advisable to reduce the militia. This was finally done, leaving the whole island outside of Christiansted defenseless. Forced labor, however, under the disguise of apprenticeship could not but be odious, especially so when the differences of blood and color tended to render irritating the very semblance of restraint, and exaggerate every difficulty of class and position. Hence, these injudicious artificial regulations, however seemingly well-intentioned, only gave rise to ill-feeling, mistrust and eventually resistance. The trouble was that the Negroes had grown in intelligence and had begun to appreciate the blessings of actual freedom and free labor. Seeing the trouble in the embryo, the government procrastinatingly made some amendments to the Labor Act. The Negroes, however, eventually defied the act, abandoned agriculture, and came to town to assert themselves.

In 1878 a large number of the country laborers got from some source the impression that the Labor Act was to cease to be operative on the first of October of that year.²⁶ This was the usual time for the shifting of laborers from one estate to another upon the expiration of their annual contracts and they usually assembled in towns to find new fields, many of them seeking, however, to secure employment in the town. Some planters having foresight, saw the need of larger military force to deal with these people, should they become discontented. The establishment of a rural constabulary was urged, but it was not provided. There were only 60 soldiers to maintain order. On the first

²⁶ See Taylor, "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," 151 et seq.

of October there started an uproar in the street of Frederiksted near the home of Rev. J. C. DuBois, the British Vice-Consul, who upon inquiring of the mob the cause of the uproar, was informed that they had been ill-treated by the police, who had severely beaten one of their number, for which they had chased them into the fort. Rev. Mr. DuBois sought to appease the rioters, persuading them to leave town. They eventually consented, but upon being authoritatively and roughly ordered by the Policemaster and his assistants, brandishing their swords, the crowd became furious and attacked these officers with stones, driving them to the fort. Seeing that they intended to attack the fort, Rev. Mr. DuBois followed them, earnestly entreating them not to resort to such harsh measures to redress their grievances. The mob finally agreed to accept his advice, the Vice-Consul agreeing to hear from a representative delegation the following day exactly what their complaints were, and promising to assist them in righting their wrongs. Before leaving them, however, a few of their most intelligent men set forth what these grievances were. They were in short: low rate of estate wages in comparison with the larger amounts given those who labored in the Central Factory—10 cents against 30 cents; the annual contract which was so managed as to be virtually slavery; the frequent abuse of the power given the manager by law to impose fines for certain offences; and the difficulties thrown in the way of laborers leaving the island by the police in requiring them to exhibit what money they had when they wanted a passport. They then gave three cheers for the Vice-Consul and were about to depart when there suddenly appeared a woman running towards them to convey the information that the one of their number who had been arrested had died at the hospital. The mob then hastened to the hospital, threatened to kill the doctor, rushed in, knocked down the sick nurse and one of the patients and demanded to see the dead man. It was said that he was not seriously hurt. They then started for the fort and attacked it with stones

and all sorts of missiles. The fire of the fort being too hot the mob had to withdraw, as several were wounded. The defenders, too, managed to send word to the President at Christiansted, asking for help. The mob, however, ceased to disturb those armed and sought to harass those who were defenseless, destroying homes, stores or whatever they found in their way. The rioters did not, however, destroy the property of such persons, for example, as Rev. Mr. Du-Bois who was known to be their friend. Goods were thrown into the street and burned. Men dared not utter a word when they saw their accumulations of a life time destroyed. The rioters later made another attack on the fort but could not carry it. When they contemplated making a third attack the much desired assistance had come in time to drive the mob away in all directions.

There had been much difficulty in reaching Christiansted and especially in informing the Governor. This official arrived the following afternoon and declared the town in a state of siege. New troops were put in the field, but it was not until the 3d of October that they succeeded in overtaking the first band of rioters, after several soldiers and other whites had been killed and one third of Frederiksted had been reduced to ashes. Some were captured and some shot. Others were later hunted down and bayoneted, the innocent suffering with the guilty. The militia was reenforced by other soldiers and French and British men-of-war arriving opportunely in port offered their assistance to the struggling government. Later the United States *Plymouth* appeared and assisted. Three hundred prisoners were finally captured, and twelve were condemned by a court martial and shot. On the 28th of October the court martial was discontinued and a commission of investigation charged with adjudging all cases arising from the riot was appointed. No other severe punishments, however, ensued. The fact is that the riot had destroyed the Labor Act and made the Negro actually free.

Despite these undesirable conditions, the United States had for years desired to purchase the Danish West Indies.

The Civil War demonstrated very clearly our need for a naval and coaling station in the West Indies. The ports of the Southern States were declared blockaded, but it was difficult to maintain that decree, when at several ports in the West Indies, especially at Nassau, blockade runners were hospitably received and helped where our vessels were not wanted.²⁷ A writer has said: "If it had not been for the friendship of Denmark our vessels would have had a hard time in the Caribbean during the Civil War so President Lincoln was disposed to be generous in his offer for the islands out of gratitude to the Danes. The purchase of Alaska was in part payment of a war debt of the same sort."²⁸ It doubtless appears strange, however, that one of these plans was carried out immediately after the war, while the other could not be effected before 1917. That this was not done earlier is a sad reflection on American diplomacy.

The negotiation for the purchase of these islands began January, 1865, when Secretary of State Seward and General Raasloff, the Danish Minister to the United States, met at a dinner party.²⁹ Seward wanted them for a naval station. The minister was not in favor of it and did not think the King of Denmark would sell, and so Denmark replied. When the unfavorable report came, Seward was confined to his bed and the minister was advised to drop it and leave it to the United States to take it up again. Then came the assassination of Lincoln and the attack on Seward. In the meantime there came to power in Denmark a new ministry favorable to the project. The instructions then were to say that the government had no desire to sell but would not be

²⁷ Rhodes, "History of the United States," V, 397.

²⁸ *The Independent*, LXXXIV, 515.

²⁹ For a detailed account of the efforts to purchase these islands see W. E. Curtis, "The United States and Foreign Powers," pp. 28-51; Wm. H. Seward, "The Diplomatic History of the War for the Union," V, 28-29; Francis Wharton, "A Digest of the International Law of the United States," I, 416-417; James Parton, "The Danish Islands," *passim*; United States, Twenty-first Congress, second session, House of Representatives, Report No. 117. Executive Document 21, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session, House of Representatives. Miscellaneous Document No. 80; and Dixon, "The History of the St. Thomas Treaty," *passim*.

unwilling to entertain Seward's proposition. Not long thereafter Seward went to Cuba for his health and on the way saw St. Thomas. He then became resolved to buy and asked Denmark to name a price, but she refused. The plan, however, was laid before the Danish Cabinet in 1866. The Danes were reluctant to alienate these islands because they loved the colony. They believed, too, that the sale would offend England, France, and Spain. Mr. Seward and Mr. Yeaman, our minister at Copenhagen, however, pushed it and the Danish government finally offered the United States the three islands for \$15,000,000. Denmark was finally persuaded to sell St. Thomas and St. John for \$7,500,000. A vote of the natives was taken and they agreed to the transfer of their country to the United States. The treaty was laid before the United States Senate but delayed on account of the serious trouble then existing between Charles Sumner, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and the administration. The Danish government regarded this an indignity of the worst kind. The time for ratification was extended but the treaty finally fell a victim to the storm of political hatred then raging, and it was dropped in 1868. After an adverse report of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate it was finally rejected in 1870.³⁰

After this the situation of Denmark became such that the transfer of the islands would have been almost impossible even if the two countries had come to another agreement. By a secret alliance between Germany and Russia, Denmark was rendered helpless. Germany was hostile to American expansion in that quarter.³¹ The Republican

³⁰ According to Schuyler, "Charles Sumner, then chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, who was engaged in a personal quarrel with the Administration, simply refused to report back the treaty to the Senate, and he was supported by a sufficient number of his Committee and of Senators to enable the matter to be left in this position. It required new negotiations to prolong the term of ratification and it was with great difficulty that in a subsequent session the treaty was finally brought before the Senate and rejected. As may be imagined, our friendly relations with Denmark were considerably impaired by this method of doing business." See Schuyler, "The St. Thomas Treaty."

³¹ *The Independent*, LXXXIV, 515.

Party incorporated into its platform in 1896 a plank requiring the purchase of the Danish West Indies and in 1898 Senator Henry Cabot Lodge introduced in the Senate a bill to purchase the group for \$5,000,000.³² No steps were then taken, doubtless for the reason that we had just come into the possession of Porto Rico and the Philippines, which were regarded as burdens to the nation. Many thought still, however, of the commercial advantages of the islands; the protection they would be to the proposed Panama Canal, and the difficulty we would encounter, should a foreign nation in violation of the Monroe Doctrine undertake to get possession of them.

But the purchase could not then have been effected on account of the dominating influence of Germany although, because of the Monroe Doctrine, she dared not acquire the islands herself. Germany decided upon a policy of commercial expansion in the Danish West Indies, a scheme to which the United States could make no objection, although the country was much alarmed by rumors as to German annexation. In 1902, therefore, President Roosevelt and Secretary John Hay offered the Danish government \$5,000,000 for the islands.³³ It was accepted and the required treaty was drawn up and sent to the United States Senate, where it was held up too long. German influence being at work in Denmark, however, it was rejected there also. Prominent among those opposing the transfer were persons claiming to be friends of the islands and promising to see to it that several millions be spent for their improvement. This was accordingly done, bringing some prosperity to the islands. The present war, however, brought this to an end. For fear then on this side that the complications of this war might result in the transfer of the islands to some other power and for fear in Denmark that she might have to alienate them without receiving just compensation the two countries reached an agreement that they should be transferred to this country for \$25,000,000.

³² *North American Review*, CLXXV, 501; and 55th Congress, 2d session, Senate Report No. 816.

³³ 57th Session. First session. Doc. No. 284.

We have thereby come into possession of three islands inhabited by about 27,000 inhabitants, ninety per cent. of whom are Negroes. They have come under all European influences which have reached the West Indies, as some of them have lived in other islands. It may seem strange too that although England held the islands only a few years their language is not Danish but English.³⁴ Danish was confined largely to the officials formerly sent out from Denmark and even these quickly learned English. This was doubtless due to the influence of England and the United States, with which these islands have had close commercial relations and to the fact that Denmark never forced the natives to learn the official language. The Lutheran has been the state church, but many of the people have Roman Catholic, Moravian, Israelite, Episcopalian, Dutch Reformed and Methodist connections. The islands have had no system of actual public education and for that reason the country is in this respect backward. The Danish government has been content to subventionize schools maintained by other agencies, especially those of the churches.

These islands, however, despite their handicaps have produced some useful Negroes. In addition to Bourdeaux, King and McFarlane they can point to at least one truly great man. This was Edward W. Blyden, a man whose sterling character and scholarly attainments gained for him international recognition. Dr. Blyden was born in St. Thomas in 1832, of purest Negro parentage. He early felt an ardent love for Africa, the fatherland, and came to the United States hoping to prepare himself for work in Africa. Failing in this, he went to Liberia and was among the first pupils enrolled in the State College. He served after graduation as professor in the college and was appointed Secretary of State in 1864. In 1877, Dr. Blyden was made minister plenipotentiary of the Republic of Liberia at the Court of St. James and was received by Her Majesty July 30,

³⁴ We have here relied to some extent on information obtained from the United States Consul C. H. Payne and Vice-Consul A. P. Zabriskie stationed at St. Thomas for a number of years.

1878. He numbered among his personal friends Lord Brougham, Mr. Gladstone, Dean Stanley, Charles Dickens, Charles Sumner and many other notables. He was sent on a diplomatic mission to powerful chiefs in the interior by the Governor of Sierra Leone, in which mission he was entirely successful. As a teacher, an author and a statesman Dr. Blyden was a shining example of what the pure-blooded Negro may accomplish under unhampered conditions. He died in Sierra Leone in 1912 loved by his countrymen and respected throughout the civilized world.

LEILA AMOS PENDLETON.