

THE PRESENT STATE OF HAYTI.*

A race of blacks, stigmatised by Europeans with the reproach of inferiority, have been elevated, by their courage, to the rank of a free people. Their flag flies in the sea of the Antilles, and their ancient metropolis itself has been compelled to acknowledge their independence. This is the race which now occupies the island of Hayti, and from which we are called upon to decide, whether it be actually true, that the Maker intended to imprint, on the front of the African, the symbols of slavery and degradation. But, does the volume before us contain the documents which are necessary to direct our judgment? Has the author been uninfluenced by hatred and prejudice? Does he hold the balance even, between the planters who are now the victims of those whom they oppressed, and the slaves who hold their former tyrants in abeyance? We think not. Mr. Franklin is not the impartial historian we could wish, for the people of Hayti, who, having scarcely entered on the career of civilisation, cannot, without manifest injustice, be compared with those of England or of France.

The historical account of St. Domingo, which occupies the first two hundred and seventy pages of Mr. Franklin's work, reaches no further back than the year 1789, the date of the first insurrectional movements of the planters of St. Domingo against the authority of France. We must, therefore, have recourse to other writings, to become acquainted with the previous condition of the colony.

The Ygneres were the first known inhabitants of Hayti. The Caraihs subsequently made a conquest of the island, and established themselves in it, by alliance with the daughters of the vanquished. They formed a numerous and quiet nation, when the Spaniards landed in their midst, massacred them without mercy, and repaired the ruined population by the importation of negro slaves from the coasts of Africa. At length some pirates, for the most part French, and known in American story by the name of *Buccaneers*, having escaped from the ravages of war, established themselves on the western side of the island: they had recourse to their mother-country for laws and for wives, while their numbers were swollen by prostitutes and convicts, whom the law would have condemned to punishment and ignominy. Under these immoral, cruel, and avaricious men, the colony was covered with slaves, and the negro trade assumed an activity proportioned to the general eagerness for wealth.

* The Present state of Hayti, with Remarks on its Agriculture, Commerce, Laws, Religion, Finances, and Population. By James Franklin. 8vo. pp. 420. Murray. London, 1828.

The first planters, established as they were, in small numbers, on a country which, according to the calculations of Mr. Franklin, is at least four hundred miles long, and one hundred and sixty broad, could easily acquire extensive estates: they divided the whole soil among themselves, in such a manner that few middling or small houses were to be seen. The concentration of their property, and the identity of their interests, placed riches in their very hands; pride ensued, followed by the distinction of ranks; and the population of St. Domingo were subdivided into *high whites*, or rich land-owners, *low whites*, composed of lawyers, tradesmen, clerks, people of business, &c. *men of colour*, and *slaves*, all detesting one another, and imposing every thing which was vexatious and disagreeable on the class immediately beneath them.

Now broke out the French Revolution; the *high whites* adopted the principles of it with enthusiasm. Oppressed by the metropolis, they seized the opportunity of recovering their rights; and, being thwarted by the refusals of the mother-country, they rebelled. Independence was the object of their wishes, but only for their own enjoyment; for they excluded the *low whites* from the advantages to which they themselves aspired. The *low whites*, also, were desirous of liberty; but were, likewise, imprudent enough to separate themselves from the men of colour, who, in their turn, no less greedy of political rights, would have thought it derogatory to share them with the free blacks. And these, as selfish as the mulattoes and the whites, had no thought for some time of admitting to an equal enjoyment of the blessings of freedom, their former companions in sorrow,—the slave population, formed in 1789, and consisting of about four hundred and eighty thousand souls, a number nearly double that of the free inhabitants.

It was impossible to prevent disturbance from speedily arising in the bosom of a people, composed of elements so heterogeneous, and excited at once by pride and interest, by jealousy and malice. For a considerable time, the slaves remained tranquil spectators of the bloody scenes to which the free population were abandoned: 'So great,' says a French writer, 'is the weight with which slavery overwhelms the soul; so powerful the spell which the submission of many generations attaches to the name of master.' But, instigated by the emissaries of Spain, they also aspired to be free; they flew to arms; fire and sword spread, like a torrent, from one end of the colony to the other; and the white men first, and afterwards the men of colour, fell beneath the weapons of the blacks.

The beginning of the Haytian Revolution makes one shudder: it forms one uninterrupted series of dreadful crimes, massacres, conflagrations, and reprisals, on which it were odious to dwell. It was not till after the accession of Toussaint L'Ouverture to power, that the insurrection was organised; and it is not till we come to this period, that the work of Mr. Franklin, confused and encumbered in

its early chapters, affords any thing like order, clearness, and interest; combined, by the by, with too much partiality in favour of the whites, and some severity against the blacks.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, whose glory Mr. Franklin vainly endeavours to depreciate, put an end to the destruction and bloodshed which laid waste his country. The whites were recalled, and order was re-established; and he was governing the people in peace, and preparing them for liberty, when Napoleon accomplished the conquest of St. Domingo, the ruin of Toussaint, and the absolute triumph of the white skin. The blacks bravely withstood the European soldiers that were sent against them; and General Leclerc, not being able to effect their subjugation, entered into a treaty with them: when, to his shame, to the eternal shame of Napoleon, in violation of his sworn faith, he took possession of the person of Toussaint, and sent him to France, where he ended his days in the cells of a prison.

The arrest of Toussaint became the signal for a new war. The blacks again flew to arms; the men of colour united themselves with them; the war-like Dessalines assumed the command; and the French army was utterly cut down.

Dessalines was assassinated by his own men. Hayti was divided, the southern part resolving itself into a republic, under the authority of President Petion, while the north, adopting the monarchical form, elected Christophe for its king. Christophe, whose coercive system Mr. Franklin warmly eulogises, at the same time endeavouring to justify his odious tyranny, died by assassination, and his short-lived kingdom was united to the republic under the successor of Petion, M. Boyer, of whom our author draws no very flattering portrait:

Jean Pierre Boyer, who succeeded the late president, Petion, and who consequently became chief of the countries of his predecessor and of Christophe united, is a native of Port au Prince, and is about forty-eight or fifty years of age. He is a mulatto, but somewhat darker than the people of that class. His father, a man of good repute, and possessed of some wealth, was a store-keeper and a tailor in that city. His mother was a negress of the Congo country in Africa, and had been a slave in the neighbourhood. He joined the cause of the Commissioners Santhonax and Polverel, with whom he retired, after the arrival of the English, to Jacmel, when he joined General Rigaud, whom he accompanied to France, after the submission of the south to the authority of Toussaint. On his voyage thither he was captured by the Americans, during the short dispute between France and the United States, and, after the adjustment of the differences between those two powers, he was released. Having resided in France some time, he, with many other persons of colour, attached himself to the expedition of Le Clerc, and accompanied that armament for the subjugation of the colony: but, on the death of that general, he joined Petion, who successively

appointed him to be his aid-de-camp, private secretary, chief of his staff, general of the arrondissement of Port au Prince, and finally named him for his successor in the presidential chair.

Boyer is below the middle size, and very slender; his visage is far from being pleasing, but he has a quick eye, and makes a good use of it, for it is incessantly in motion. His constitution is weak, and he is afflicted with a local disease, which compels him to be exceedingly abstemious. He is fond of parade and exterior ornaments, as is the custom of the country; but he does not display his propensities for them, except in compelling those of his staff and household to appear in all their embellishments. He is but little seen among his people, except on a Sunday, when he appears at the head of his troops, and, after reviewing them, he rides through the city, attended by a cortège of officers and guards. He is exceedingly vain of his person, and imagines that it is attractive and captivating, and that his manners are irresistible.

In the second part of his work, Mr. Franklin gives a picture of the moral, intellectual, and political condition of the population of Hayti. In the one hundred and forty pages which he has devoted to this subject, his partiality and injustice, in relation to the citizens of the infant republic, are more particularly manifest. He paints, in the most revolting colours, the ignorance and business, debauchery and corruption, which, if we must believe him, prevail generally throughout St. Domingo, and declares that no amelioration has taken place among the people since their emancipation:

‘It is indisputable, that the declaration of freedom to the slave population in Hayti was the ruin of the country, and that it has not been attended with those benefits which the sanguine philanthropists of Europe anticipated. The inhabitants have neither advanced in moral improvement, nor are their civil rights more respected; their condition is not changed for the better. They are not slaves, it is true, but they are suffering under greater deprivations than can well be imagined, whilst slaves have nothing to apprehend, for they are clothed, fed, and receive every medical aid in the time of sickness. The free labourer in Hayti, from innate indolence, and from his state of ignorance, obtains barely enough for his subsistence. He cares not for clothing, and, as to aid under sickness, he cannot obtain it; thus he is left to pursue a course that sinks him to a level with the brute creation, and the reasoning faculties of the one are almost inferior to the instinct of the other, and will be so until moral instruction effect a change. Had the Haytians been prepared for freedom by moral and religious education, emancipation might have done them some good; but, even then, they would not have made much progress, unless agriculture had been legally imposed as a duty, and the Government enforced all the laws enacted for punishing negligence and disobedience. I have never yet been able to discover in Hayti, that the blacks, since

their emancipation, have improved in the extraordinary degree which they are sometimes represented to have done. It is probable, that those blacks who live in the towns may have improved a little. Their intercourse with the strangers who visit the country, and their avocations, afford them opportunities of improving, which are denied to their brethren in the interior parts. But to calculate the increase of improvement from the progress of those in the towns, is wrong. The whole mass of the people must be taken, and then, if the measure of moral improvement be ascertained, it will not be found to exceed one in fifteen. The state of ignorance prevailing among the people in the mountains and the interior parts, is almost inconceivable. It appears as if the work of civilisation had not commenced, and that the people had not taken one voluntary step towards improving themselves in any one thing. Neither is there one step taken by the Government to force some degree of attention to those duties that may eventually improve them, unless, since the conviction of their own impolitic system of governing, the Code Rural should effect that change which ought to have been accomplished before.

We are far from wishing to insinuate that, with liberty, the people of Hayti have come into possession of every virtue. We do not deny that they may have their vices; that they may be superstitious, ignorant, idle, and even corrupt. But these are faults which Mr. Franklin has exaggerated, and are, besides, the legacies of their former masters, from which they have not yet had time to purge themselves. For, though to regain his freedom nothing is required in the slave but a few acts of courage or desperation, he cannot recover the dignity of man without reason and reflection, those moral qualities, the developement of which, in a mind that has been laid prostrate by slavery, is uniformly very gradual. 'The moral state of the people,' says Mr. Franklin, 'is at the lowest possible ebb.' Why? would not their deepest corruption be the fruit of the example which they received from the whites? And whereas Mr. Franklin's consistency in condemning so bitterly, towards the close of his volume, the very thing which he attempts to excuse in one of his first chapters, when he says:

'The proprietors and planters of all denominations had arrived at a very high state of affluence, their plantations were extensive, in a high state of cultivation; thus possessing a soil rich and productive, in a climate particularly favourable for cultivation, their wealth scarcely knew any limits. But, unfortunately, their manners and habits became relaxed and depraved, in proportion as they advanced in affluence and prosperity. Proud, austere, and voluptuous, they often committed acts which humanity must condemn; and, in the season of agitation and disappointment, when the contending factions at home and abroad were endeavouring to undermine them, they, perhaps, were led to the infliction of excessive

punishments, and to practise an unusual degree of severity in exacting labour from their slaves. Sensual pleasures had also, at this time, become so prevalent as to excite very general disgust.

The mass of society had become so depraved, that vice in every shape was gloried in, whilst virtue was scarcely known; it cannot, therefore, be a matter of much surprise, that the rude, untaught, and unlettered slave, just emerging from his savage customs, should be led by example to imbibe the vicious habits, and indulge the loose and ungovernable propensities, which characterised his master.

The ignorant cultivators give themselves no concern about procuring moral education for their children; and on the score of religion they seldom feel the least anxiety, for three-fourths of them are at this moment as rank idolaters as their forefathers were in Africa.

In the towns also, it should be understood, the people are mostly engaged in some mercantile avocations, or else they are handicraftsmen, or persons holding some civil or military appointments. They, therefore, have not only an opportunity of educating their children, being contiguous to the schools, but they have the pecuniary means for doing so. The cultivators in the country have neither; money, in particular, they never have, except just as much as the sale of their vegetables, on a Sunday, brings them, but which is generally disposed of in payment for the salt provisions, and the supply of taffia, required for their weekly consumption. They have no reserve for purposes of improvement, nor are they taught to improve; but the Government seems to consider, that to keep them in ignorance is the most secure way to insure tranquillity and repose to the country. That such is the feeling of the Government, I think, is quite evident from the one hundred and seventy-eighth article of the Code Rural, which I have given before, and which orders that children shall be sent to their fathers, "to follow their condition of life." As long, therefore, as their parents continue in ignorance and immorality, it is clear that the children have no means of profiting by a good example. It is the prevailing sentiment of the people of colour, that the blacks should be kept in their present state of ignorance, and so long as the Government is composed of people of the former class, the latter will remain in their present abject condition. As the negro is now situated, he is in a worse state of degradation than the slave; for, although he is free, he is almost excluded from the general mass of the population; he is marked with the name of freedom, whilst he actually groans under despotism and oppression. In this state he is likely to remain until some general change be effected in Hayti which shall place him in a state of unresisted intercourse with the more enlightened portion of the people, by which he may be taught properly to estimate the value of liberty, and made to participate in those blessings which it is wont to diffuse.

I do not know a circumstance that shows more clearly the backward state of knowledge and education in Hayti, than the little progress made by the representatives of the people in the Senate and in the Chamber of Communes, for there are many of them who can neither read nor write. In the senate, out of twenty-four members, I could mention four or five who, at the time I left the island, could not write their names, nay, not even their initials. It may appear strange, that the President, who has the selection of the members who occupy seats in the senate, should appoint men thus incapable and uneducated to become his council and advisers. However strange this may seem to others, it excites no surprise in my mind, because I am convinced, and it is a matter of general notoriety, that Boyer wants only mere passive instruments to obey, and not canvass or oppose any measures emanating from the Government. Out of about seventy-two members composing the Chamber of Communes, there are twenty-six equally ignorant, and their only qualification seems to be a sufficient degree of pliancy to yield a ready assent to any proposition which has been submitted by the Government for their consideration.

All that Government wants of the members of either house, is to keep up the appearance of legislative deliberation, to give a colour to their own proceedings, and form a cloak to cover their plans of oppression and rapacity. The persons selected in the different Communes as representatives, are those who have been recommended by the Government; for the people have no voice, or, what is nearly the same, they dare not raise it against those whom the President has recommended to their choice. These abject representatives are mere tools in the hands of Government; and, as they are well paid, they care little or nothing for the duties of the station to which they are elevated.

Ignorant of the benefits of education, the planters gave themselves but little uneasiness about the instruction of their slaves. The troubles which followed the revolution have hindered the progress of knowledge; but it is not true that the Government wish to keep the people in ignorance. Hayti contains some public schools, and printing houses, and possesses native writers of some reputation in more than one branch of literature. The blacks are accused of idleness; but they owe this vice to their former masters. The man who emerges from slavery, has a natural horror of labour, because task-work was the source of his most grievous sufferings, and also, because, by seeing his masters immersed in indolence, he must have imbibed the notion, that supreme happiness and felicity consisted in a state of inactivity. But we do not agree with Mr. Franklin in thinking, that the Haytian agriculturist cannot succeed without the employment of coercive means. Does it not appear, even from the calculations of our author himself, that the produce of the island has already increased, by one third, between the

years 1821 and 1823? Theft, and corruption, are, moreover, vices with which Mr. Franklin reproaches the Haytians; but, do they not equally exist among the nations of Europe? Admitting, however, that they are more prevalent among the inhabitants of St. Domingo, is it at all unreasonable to believe, that they are the temporary effect of previous events, and independent of the national character?

In this rapid analysis, we have endeavoured to point out the spirit and design of Mr. Franklin's work. It certainly contains some useful information, but it is evidently hostile to the black race of St. Domingo. It exaggerates their faults, while it passes by all the good qualities, even their valour and their love of independence, which other writers have consented to attribute to them. For our part, even after the perusal of this volume, we continue fixed in the persuasion that, before half a century shall have gone by, education and freedom will place the black people of Hayti on a level with the white inhabitants of Europe.

WAR SONG FOR GREECE.

Up! rouse ye, Grecians, freedom smiles,
Resound the song through all your isles;
Up! rouse ye, Grecians,—prove ye men,
And freedom will return again.

Unsheath the sword in freedom's cause;
Defend yourselves from despot laws;
Bestir ye all—be firm—be bold,
As were your ancestors of old.

Your sires, who sleep within their graves,
Have left their curse for abject slaves;
Come, arm yourselves! nor longer be
Shackled by Turkish slavery.

Take every man his spear in hand,—
Spread quick example through the land;
And let your murd'rous foemen feel
The vengeance of vindictive steel.

Freedom alone can make your isles
A land of joy—a land of smiles;
Her peaceful banners, waving round,
Will soon dry up your gory ground.

Up! rouse ye, Grecians! freedom smiles,
Resound the song through all your isles;
Up! rouse ye, Grecians! prove ye men,
And freedom will return again.