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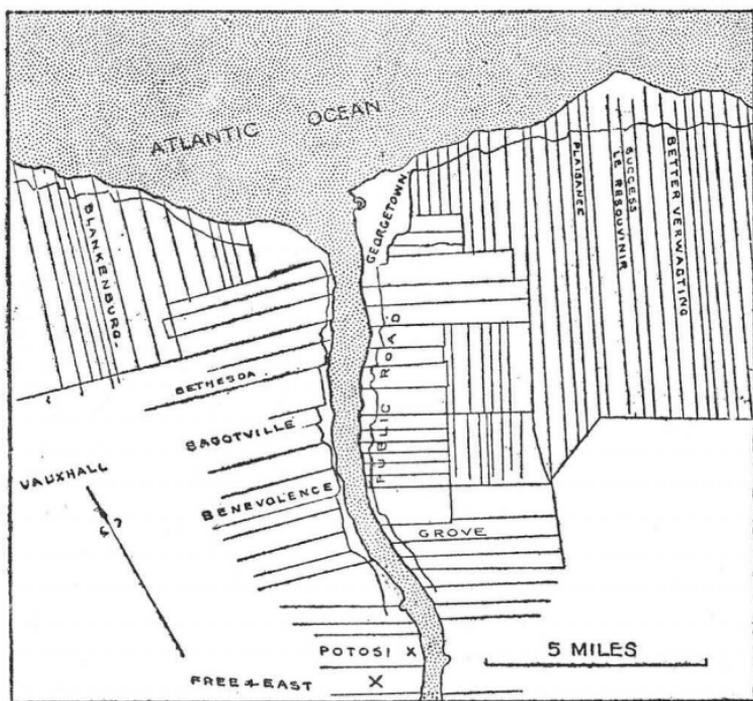
John Smith

*(From a miniature on ivory).*

## Smith of Demerara

of Berbice, and his successor at Le Resouvenir was a young man of whom few would have prophesied great things, for he was far from robust in body. Yet John Smith, as he was plainly named, was destined to kindle a light upon the difficult path to freedom, which shone increasingly until its work was done.

John Smith was the martyr of Demerara whose tale is to be told.



*The Demerara River and some of the neighbouring Plantations.*

# SMITH OF DEMERARA

(Martyr-Teacher of the Slaves)

BY

DAVID CHAMBERLIN

WITH A PREFACE BY

SIR SYDNEY OLIVIER, K.C.M.G., C.B.,

Formerly Governor of Jamaica

LONDON

COLONIAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY,

MEMORIAL HALL, E.C. 4

1923

## THE MARTYR-TEACHER

“Humbly depending on the presence and support of Him who hath commissioned His disciples to go and teach all nations—I will go.”

*John Smith's acceptance of his appointment to Demerara.*

“If ever you teach a Negro to read, and I hear of it, I will banish you from the Colony immediately.”

*Governor Murray's reception of Smith in Demerara.*

“No man can cast his eye upon this trial without perceiving that it was intended to bring on an issue between the system of the slave-law and the instruction of the Negroes.”

*Henry Brougham in the House of Commons debate on Smith's trial.*

“Many such triumphs (if triumphs they should be called) would only hasten the final triumph over all attempts to shut out instruction.”

*George Canning in the House of Commons.*

## PREFACE

BY SIR SYDNEY OLIVIER, K.C.M.G., C.B.  
(FORMERLY GOVERNOR OF JAMAICA).

THE first Treasurer of the London Missionary Society was Mr. Joseph Hardcastle, a native of Leeds. He was a Russia merchant in London; a drawing of his house at Hatcham, then a rural Surrey village, belonging to my mother (his granddaughter), is one of the earliest pictures I remember. Hatcham House, on whose large black bearskin hearthrug, no doubt some client's tribute, she had sprawled her infant limbs, was habitually referred to among her generation as if it were a place of august notoriety, like Blenheim or Buckingham Palace. It did not look it; and I never realised why it was so regarded until I had cause to investigate how it was that men who thought they were defending the Church had beaten and tarred and feathered English Christian missionaries in the West Indies, burnt their chapels and their houses, hustled them off the bench when they were made magistrates, and, in the case of the subject of this record, John

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Smith, condemned him by Court Martial to be hanged, making sure of their purpose by killing him by maltreatment in prison.

I found that Thomas Clarkson (I quote from the Memoir of Joseph Hardcastle), soon after the commencement of his great work, became a frequent guest at Hatcham House, and was animated in his exertions by the cordial sympathy of his friendly host, at a time when the object in which he was engaged was too often regarded as Utopian by multitudes who did not absolutely frown on his perseverance. Here Clarkson first met his future wife, who was Mrs. Hardcastle's niece, and there, during fifty years' frequentation, he wrote a great part of his History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. There in the "parlour" with the woolly hearthrug, one of his energetic associates in the anti-slavery movement beheld an exhibition which convinced him of the abominations of the slave trade. "They consisted," he writes, "of iron handcuffs, shackles for the legs, thumb-screws, and the *speculum oris*, an instrument for wrenching open the mouths of the poor slaves when they were obstinate and would not take their food. In the same room I saw various articles of manufacture in cloth and in leather, and also different kinds of dyeing, the whole calculated to show the capacity and ingenuity of this class of the human species, and proving that they are

## Preface

capable of all the enjoyments and duties of civilised life"—which, perhaps, was rather a liberal inference; but Joseph Hardcastle was a Russia merchant and, doubtless, saw a great deal in leather.

“The philanthropy of Thomas Clarkson,” writes Hardcastle’s biographer (whose “Memoir for his Descendants” was presented to me by my great-aunt when I was just sixteen months old), “seemed almost to be bound up with his nature, but it was many years before his soul was enlightened by the true light of the Gospel.” “His bride,” it is added, “was first drawn to her future husband by her admiration of his philanthropic heroism. She was a young lady of no ordinary mind, and in her a powerful intellect was united with a most loving heart. Some of the most distinguished poets and philosophers of that day were her friends; but the wrongs which drove the French people into a tumultuous revolution, for a time moved her sympathies towards a vein of sceptical rationalism, which was injurious to the life of God in her soul.”

It is creditable to Joseph Hardcastle’s character that his devotion to the abolition of slavery was so far stronger than his intense evangelical convictions that he not only tolerated, but fostered, the intimacy in his family of this dangerously latitudinarian couple. Was it partly on

## Smith of Demerara

this account, one may wonder, that the emancipators, and even the London Society's missionaries, were denounced by Colonial Christians as enemies of revealed religion? But I anticipate.

In 1791 Joseph Hardcastle and his friends, including Clarkson and Wilberforce, established a mercantile Company "for the purpose of promoting civilisation and protecting the inhabitants of Africa from the sordid cupidity of slave traders. . . ." But as the constitution of this Sierra Leone Company admitted only incidentally of efforts to promote Christianity, the greater part of these gentlemen resolved to form a Society for the purpose of sending missionaries to the Foulah country, a district adjacent to Sierra Leone. Thus arose the London Missionary Society, formed in 1795, which, at first devoting its attention chiefly to the South Seas and Africa, sent in 1807, at the request of a Dutch planter in Demerara, its first missionary to our Western tropical colonies, who was in 1817 succeeded by John Smith, whose heroic story Mr. Chamberlin tells in this book.

The condition of affairs which Smith so admirably describes in Chapter II. was typical, and his experiences in his efforts as a teacher and minister are illuminating. In 1823 and 1824 Thomas and William Knibb (near neighbours, as Mr. Chamberlin

## Preface

recalls, in their Northamptonshire birth-place, of John Smith) were sent to Jamaica by the Baptist Missionary Society, which had been founded in 1792. The policy of both Societies and their instructions to their missionaries had been to keep as quiet as possible on the subject of slavery, lest a political character should be given to the missions and excuse afforded for debarring them from the strictly religious and educational work which alone they had undertaken. But it is not surprising that an emissary of the London Missionary Society (notwithstanding that the redoubtable Clarkson was not on its Board) should be suspect, through its close associations with the Anti-slavery People. The Demerara planters publicly avowed their conviction that "it was impossible to teach slaves to read without making them free." The *Demerara Royal Gazette* protested that "it was dangerous to make slaves Christians without giving them liberty." Another contemporary wrote of Jamaica: "It must be evident to the dullest capacity and is universally seen and felt here both by friend and foe, that *either Christianity or slavery must fall*. Unless slavery be extinguished the hope of freely publishing the Gospel is fallacious."

The Colonial legislatures and the Jamaica Colonial Church Union, in this dilemma,

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opted for slavery, and resolutely opposed and penalised any attempts to give their slaves any form of education or religious teaching. Knibb and his associates in 1831 were as badly maltreated in Jamaica as Smith had been in Demerara, under exactly parallel circumstances; a rising of slaves, or rather a refusal to work, under the belief that their freedom had been given them by the King and was being withheld. For this excitement the missionaries were held responsible, and were attacked, as Smith was in Demerara, and as unjustly, although Lord Belmore, Governor of Jamaica, did not suppress the true facts, as the Governor in Demerara did. Fortunately, in Jamaica, the missionaries were charged before an upright magistrate, Richard Barrett,\* who discharged all the defendants, to the great fury of his brother magistrates. Two of them were again indicted, but, as the expedient of a Court Martial was not thought of, again abortively; the Attorney-General, after the collapse of his first case in the Supreme Court, withdrawing the case against Knibb. The Jamaica missionaries, moreover, were fortunate in being lodged in custody on board a ship of the Navy; otherwise they, no doubt, would

\* This gentleman was a kinsman of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Browning himself, curiously enough, was in his youth one of the frequenters of Hatcham House. My mother recalled with dislike his long, shiny black ringlets.

## Preface

have been roasted, as Smith and his wife were. Knibb would certainly have been killed if his friends had not insisted on his leaving the island to plead their cause in England; and, whereas the outrage on John Smith aroused the intense feeling and parliamentary denunciation which Mr. Chamberlin records, it was, I should say, the presentation of the case against slavery by Knibb and his friends in the agitation of 1832 that was still more instrumental in forcing the Government in 1833 to introduce the Abolition of Slavery Bill. Knibb was examined for six days before Committees of the House of Lords and Commons.

Why rake up this painful ancient history a hundred years later? In my opinion the London Missionary Society do well to mark the centenary of John Smith's martyrdom by means of this memoir, so reminding us of the fact that however much it may be deemed that slavery was bound to collapse from economic and political causes, it was not in fact so collapsing and has not yet been brought, by those causes, to an end, and that the actual efficient agency which did destroy the slave trade and slavery in British Colonies was a religious ferment; an invincible conviction that slavery was un-Christian and destructive of spiritual life, both in those who were subject to it and those who maintained

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themselves on its basis and profited by it.

Slavery, and all modified forms of slavery, such as the forced labour of natives in African territories for European settlers, have usually been justified from the secular side, from the side of those who profited by them and of those who had administratively to maintain the economic interest of mixed communities, as essential not only to those secular interests, but to the welfare of the African. I do not say in all cases and everywhere; there have been and are curious differences between the policy of our Colonial and Foreign Offices and Colonial Governments and administrators in different parts of our dominions; but the institution and justification of slavery have continuously persisted, and persist to this day, and whilst many secular administrators and enlightened colonists have always been found in opposition to it, it is, within the scope of my experience and observation, the Christian missionary (who believes that progress in secular welfare depends on progress in spiritual life) who is most generally to be relied upon to take a clearer, wider, wiser, and more far-reaching view of what is essential for the advance and development of the more backward races. It is, therefore, I believe, still essential—however well disposed and enlightened the Colonial Office, the Man-

## Preface

dates' Commission of the League of Nations, Colonial Governors and officials, and white colonists themselves may be—essential in the interest of sound civilisation in the undeveloped parts of the world in whose government we have intervened, that there should be a continual supply of missionaries, entirely independent of any secular association with the governments of those territories and as independent as possible of the patronage of the dominant white congregations. Experience in such mixed communities makes one envious of the organisation of the Roman Catholic Church, which is still able to maintain its missionary activity in complete independence. It has been the policy of some of the English missionary societies to withdraw the support of their organisations from West Indian colonies and elsewhere, where the local churches are deemed strong enough to stand on their own feet; and in such old-established colonies this is a healthy principle, although I have sometimes thought that the connection had perhaps been prematurely or too much weakened. But in the great territories of Africa it is still, from the secular point of view, essential for the welfare of the Africans that missionary work should be maintained, for precisely the same reason as inevitably made the Missionary Societies that were founded in the Eighteenth Century, not only factors

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in the propagation of religion and education, but vital agents in the prevention of slavery and oppression.

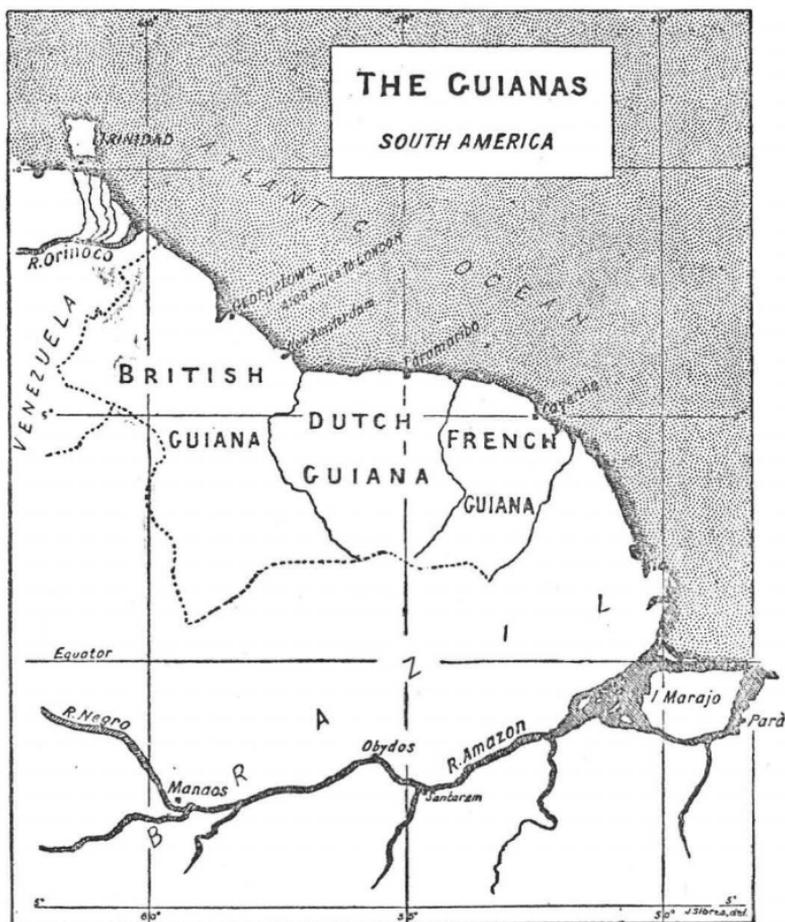
The tendencies which gave birth to the outrages on John Smith and the Jamaica missionaries, however astonishing their story may appear to those who read of these events for the first time, are, in fact, active and operative, though in less naked and brutal form, to-day, and will always remain active and operative so long as a stronger race has command of the land and the labour of a backward, uneducated and unenlightened one.

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*The Demerara River enters the Atlantic at Georgetown.*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE Slaver, the Gold-seeker and the Pirate have stamped the brand of infamy upon the story of the Spanish Main. But, in the very days when the Atlantic was being reddened by the worst atrocities of the traffic in human beings, a brief drama of another kind was wrought out in Demerara. A plain and humble man, with dogged integrity, was making a great fight for the right to give instruction to the plantation slaves. His battle ended in seeming failure, but he won the war, and Time, the great teacher of perspective, has placed the name of John Smith on the world's Roll of Honour.

John Morley, in his "Life of Gladstone," wrote :

"Everybody who has ever read one of the most honourable and glorious chapters in our English history knows the case of the missionary, John Smith. . . . The death of the Demerara missionary, it has been truly said, was an event as fatal to slavery in the West Indies as the execution of John Brown was its death-blow in the United States."

## Smith of Demerara

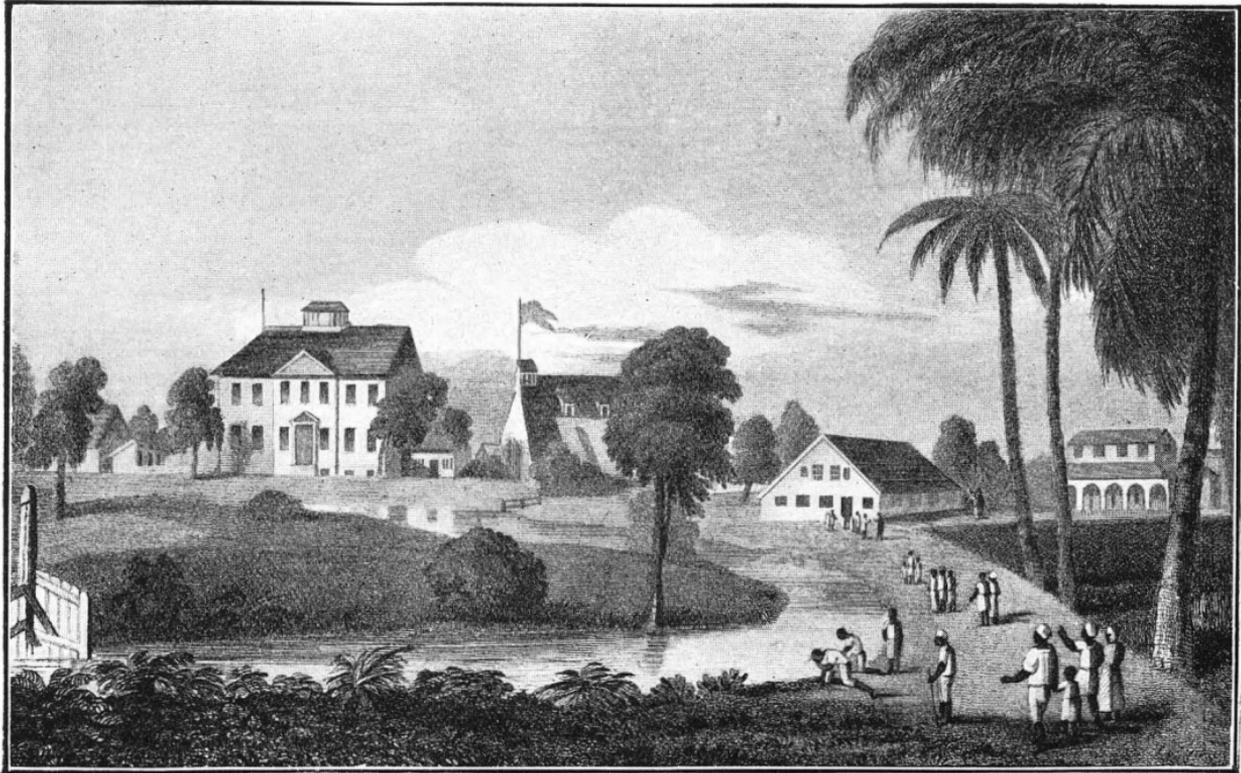
In 1824 Smith's name ran through Britain like a fiery cross, calling the chivalrous to action, and men knew that it was the name of a young missionary in Demerara, who had died in a felon's prison, sentenced to death after a blameless life given freely in the cause of the Negro slaves.

It was known also, that the ferocity of the verdict against Smith was hastening the day when the whole question of slavery in the British Colonies must be brought to a decision.

The years which followed brought ample proof that the events of 1823 and 1824, in which John Smith was the central figure, marked the turning point. The tide of opinion in Britain then began to gather itself for the final act of full Emancipation.

The terrible story of the Slave Trade need not be told again here. The men who worked during long years for Abolition reached their first objective in 1807, when the Trade was outlawed in the British Colonies. Thereafter the friends of the Africans set themselves to soften the hard lot of the West Indian slaves, and the attention drawn to their miserable state resulted in the appearance of the London Missionary Society upon the scene.

Among the planters of British Guiana there was a Christian Dutchman—Hermanus H. Post, who was concerned about the well-being of the Negroes who worked for him,



Manager's House

Bethel Chapel

Smith's House

**Plantation, "Le Resouvenir," in 1823**

## Introduction

and desired their instruction in the Christian faith. He was the owner of a plantation named Le Resouvenir, and after seeking vainly in other directions for help in the education of his people, appealed to the London Missionary Society to send a man out to teach the Negroes on that estate.

In the year which saw the Slave Trade sentenced to death, the Society despatched the Rev. John Wray to the help of Hermanus Post, and the vessel which carried Wray entered the Demerara River, on February 6th, 1808, as the last of the ships which had been engaged in the transport of African slaves to Guiana left it.

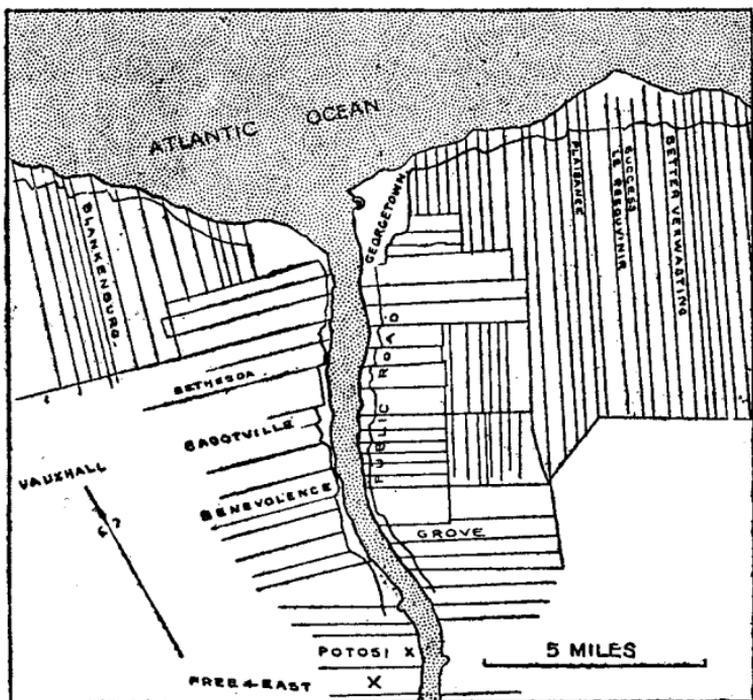
John Wray was a pioneer of a band of men who nobly stood beside the slaves and lived laborious days for their improvement. They were not sent to work for Emancipation, and yet Emancipation, when it came, was the flower from the seed they had sown. They went out to minister to the slaves for whom no provision was made by the churches of the white planters in the Colony. Sternly opposed by most of the colonists, often hindered by the local governors, and even derided by some of the Christian leaders of the white men's churches, they lived down twenty years of petty persecution, and whilst working for the conversion of the Negroes, accomplished the more difficult task of converting Britain to Emancipation.

Wray removed to the neighbouring colony

## Smith of Demerara

of Berbice, and his successor at Le Resouvenir was a young man of whom few would have prophesied great things, for he was far from robust in body. Yet John Smith, as he was plainly named, was destined to kindle a light upon the difficult path to freedom, which shone increasingly until its work was done.

John Smith was the martyr of Demerara whose tale is to be told.



*The Demerara River and some of the neighbouring Plantations.*

## CHAPTER ONE

JOHN SMITH

His Birth—Youth—  
Arrival in Demerara

Push off, and sitting well in order, smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the paths  
Of all the western stars, until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down :  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles.

. . . . .

—but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note may yet be done.

ULYSSES—*Tennyson*

**T**HIS John Smith was born on June 27th, 1790, in the ancient market-town of Rothwell, in Northamptonshire. Four miles away is Kettering, the first home of another man (William Knibb, of Jamaica), eminent for his sufferings on behalf of the Negroes, and the cradle of the Baptist Missionary Society, which was founded there in 1792 through the burning zeal of William Carey, the "consecrated cobbler."

The father of John Smith died in the fight against the army of Napoleon on the plains of Egypt. The widow and her small boy were left to face hard times with such scanty resources that John was mainly indebted to his Sunday School for such education as

## Smith of Demerara

he had. When bread cost two shillings a quarter there was no money to spare for the schoolmaster. At fourteen he came to London to be apprenticed to a biscuit baker, of 2, St. John's Lane, Clerkenwell. Blunden, the baker, in whose employ he now found himself, fortunately took a serious view of his duty towards the youth, and led him into a wider realm of knowledge than any he had been able to enter before. Books became his best companions.

Only one incident of those days is recorded—the apprentice read in bed, and once, when the bed-clothes caught fire, he narrowly escaped death by burning. Probably his love of books saved him from other forms of tragedy. He had smallpox rather badly, and does not seem to have been physically strong at any time: those early days at Rothwell, with his father at the front, left their mark upon him.

London life obscured the lessons of Rothwell Sunday School, and a period of indifference to religion came, but it ended when he was nineteen during a sermon at Silver Street Chapel (Falcon Square), and Smith soon attached himself to Tonbridge Chapel, Somers Town, where he made rapid progress in character and ability. His qualities were of the solid sort; steadiness, diligence, and prudence—his diligence being specially shown in satisfying his craving for learning—he had to make up for lost time.

## John Smith

After completing his term of apprenticeship, he offered himself for foreign service to the London Missionary Society, and was accepted. As was the custom of those days, the young candidate was required to live for a time under the eye of a man in the active ministry. The practice gave the Directors of the Society the best kind of testimony as to the young man's character, and it gave the candidate the best available training for his future ministry.

Samuel Newton, of Witham, was chosen as Smith's spiritual foster-father, and in that Essex village the cadet proved so modest, amiable and industrious, that at his going the Newtons felt as though they were parting with a son.

British Guiana was being prepared just as John Smith was being prepared, and when he was ready to go, a place was ready for him to occupy. That place was the vacant one at Le Resouvenir—which John Wray had left for Berbice. He was ordained with ample ceremony at Somers Town, on December 12th, 1816, sailed from Liverpool with his wife (he had found her as Jane Godden, at Tonbridge Chapel), in the brig *William Neilson*, and on the 23rd of February, 1817, sailed into the muddy waters of the Demerara River, whose palm-fringed shores he never afterwards left.

Two days after his arrival in Georgetown the new missionary was introduced to

## Smith of Demerara

Governor Murray, but was not received with much favour. He wrote :

“ His Excellency frowned upon me. He asked what I had come to do, and how I proposed to instruct the Negroes. I answered: ‘ By teaching them to read ; by teaching them Dr. Watts’ catechisms ; and by preaching the Gospel in a plain manner.’ To which he replied : ‘ If ever you teach a Negro to read and I hear of it, I will banish you from the colony immediately.’ ”

At a second interview, Smith obtained permission to preach, and his first sermon in Bethel Chapel, Le Resouvenir, was delivered on the 9th March, 1817. The chapel was nearly full, and the text was, “ For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”

From this day forward the work flourished. Consider the amount of it. The new minister preached three times every Sunday : at seven a.m. to a small congregation ; at eleven to about 600 people, after which he spent half an hour in catechising ; in the evening he preached again at seven-thirty in Bethel Chapel. He did not spare himself. There were more sermons on Tuesday and Friday evenings, Catechism on Mondays and Wednesdays, and a Missionary Prayer Meeting on the first Monday in the month, attended by 300 to 400 persons. He was

## John Smith

allowed to teach free people, and accordingly commenced classes both for children and adults, in which the instruction was chiefly in reading and was given gratis. No bad week's work this, for a feeble man living near the Equator. Many of the slaves, having hymn-books and catechisms in their hands, learned somehow to read them. It is certain that they looked to Bethel Chapel as the centre and hope of their enlightenment, and thronged its doors so that, within a year of Smith's arrival, the building was not large enough to contain the worshippers, some of whom had walked five, ten, and even fifteen miles to Le Resouvenir.

The missionary kept a journal,\* from which it is possible to gather many illuminating details of his crowded hours and their intense emotions.

Bethel Chapel was a long wooden building, made of the famous "greenheart" timber from the back lands. Imagine an evening service. The Negroes—dressed in white—sit upon benches. The big windows along the sides of the chapel are open to let in such air as is stirring; outside is tropical night, disturbed by the sustained and noisy clamour of croaking frogs. The minister looks down upon seven hundred black faces, made barely visible by means of seven candles! To the heat, other trials are added. The preacher is

\* The original journal is in the care of the London Missionary Society, and there is a copy in the Record Office in London.

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worried by mosquitoes and countless flying beetles, which come in through the open windows, many finding their way inside his collar. In this physical heat and gloom he is possessed by one burning purpose. He is there to do battle with a moral darkness which weighs upon him even more than the sultry night.

The men and women before him are very tired and very ignorant, and very hot. A thought has to be repeated many times if it is to be remembered, and even so, his hearers find a meaning in Smith's words which is often at variance with his intentions, for the Negroes are good imaginers. He does his best to obey the instructions of those who sent him from England, to give the Gospel to the slaves without making them dissatisfied with their servitude, but it is a baffling and anxious task, and in the result a vain one, for that Gospel does "proclaim liberty to the captives," and who can blame them for applying the proclamation to their bodily captivity. They sing the hymns of Isaac Watts, whose vivid images of solid joys for the children of Zion are more generous than the instructions of the prudent Directors in London.

The singing is fervent but bad. Smith has tried again and again to teach his people to sing. He writes in his Journal—"Tried to teach them the tune 'Sprague,' the easiest I know, but it is most disheartening. They

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simply cannot learn. They begin in the middle." The fruit of the minister's labours in this matter, did, however, appear in later years. The Negroes sang wonderfully well *after they were freed*, and they do still.

In addition to the Sunday services there were two evening preachings in the week, when the same wrestling with the powers of darkness sapped the energy of Smith as he warned, exhorted and pleaded with those dimly-seen faces before him. The Journal often tells us that the day's work was "most fatiguing," and it is a modest phrase for such close battle. In truth, the preacher was pouring forth his life for his people, without stint, and without complaint.

In the middle of his brief span of service, John Smith was holding up the Cross in his pulpit at Bethel with such effect that the Church became pre-eminently the centre of hope and a harbour of refuge for the oppressed and forlorn slaves from all the plantations within five miles of Le Resouvenir, who came in such numbers that it is not difficult to understand how the belief arose in the minds of the white population that the missionary was a dangerous man. Here is an entry in the Journal which shows the power of Bethel, quite as much as it shows the force of superstition among the people.

"1820. *Monday, September 18th.*

"For these two Sabbaths past our

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chapel has been attended by vast numbers of Negroes, multitudes of whom could not gain admission. The reason of this religious commotion is a report that Demerara is to be destroyed by a flood at the next full moon.

“The Negroes, frightened at the idea of such a calamity, resolved to attend the worship of God as much as possible, before they were buried in a watery grave.

“I suppose this report is founded on the probability that at the approaching equinox the tides will be higher than usual, and if there be a strong northerly wind at the time, it is likely enough to overflow the dams, and do much damage in this low country. *I think I never found preaching more fatiguing.*”

The success of Bethel Chapel made many of the owners of the plantations nervous. Hermanus H. Post, who had been denounced as a fool and a madman for introducing anarchy into the colony, stood almost alone as one who believed in the value of Christian teaching.

The colonists, in the main, offered a very determined opposition to any kind of instruction for the Negroes. Their alarm may be read in the words of the *Royal Gazette* (Demerara):

“It is dangerous to make slaves

## John Smith

Christians without giving them their liberty. He that chooses to make slaves Christians, let him give them their liberty. What will be the consequence when to that class of men is given the title of 'beloved brethren,' as is actually done? Will not the Negro conceive that by baptism, being made a Christian, he is as credible as his Christian white brethren?"

The planters had also published their belief that it was "impossible to teach slaves to read without making them free," and it was, therefore, determined that the education of the Negroes must be obstructed by every possible means, even if it meant the suppression of the missionaries.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LIFE ON THE PLANTATIONS

### Smith describes the System at Work

Know this, O man, whate'er thy earthly fate—  
God never made a tyrant nor a slave.  
Woe, then, to those who dare to desecrate  
His glorious image! For to all he gave.  
Eternal rights, which none may violate;  
And, by a mighty hand, the oppressed He yet shall save!

*William Lloyd Garrison.*

**I**N the year 1822 John Smith sent home a clear and careful account of the state of the slaves, which is valuable as an indication of his powers of discernment. This temperate and convincing letter, and his masterly defence at his trial in the following year, prove that the young missionary was no dunce, in spite of his scant schooling. Let his writings testify:—

“The plantation slaves are, of course, employed in the cultivation of the ground. At about six o'clock in the morning, the ringing of a bell, or the sound of a horn, is the signal for them to turn out to work. No sooner is this signal made than the black drivers, loudly smacking their whips, visit the Negro houses to turn out the reluctant inmates, much in the same manner

## Life on the Plantations

that you would drive out a number of horses from a stable-yard, now and then giving a lash or two to any that are tardy in their movements. Issuing from their kennels, nearly naked, with their implements on their shoulders, they stay not to muster, but immediately proceed to the field, accompanied by the drivers and a white overseer. The former remain with them all day; the latter is not so confined to the spot but he can leave them occasionally. In the middle of the day they are usually allowed about an hour and a half for rest and refreshment: but when they have task-work, not more than half the gang are able to avail themselves of this intermission from labour. Soon after sunset (which is always within about fifteen minutes of six), they leave off work in the field; and each one having cut or picked a bundle of grass for the master's horses, which serves instead of hay, an article not made in the West Indies, they bend their course homewards. They all carry the grass to a certain spot, forming a general muster; and there remain in the open air, often shivering with cold, till the cracking of the whip informs them they are to take it to the stable, which is generally about eight o'clock. If there be no other work to do, they may then go to their houses.

“I say, if there be no other work; for, after toiling all day, many of the slaves are frequently compelled to work nearly half

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the night, especially when they are making sugar, which is six months out of the twelve. Some are employed in grinding the canes, some in boiling the juice, others in carrying away the cane-trash, while another part of the gang is often employed in carting or shipping sugar, rum, etc. Where the coffee is cultivated, the plan of night-work is followed, though it is far less severe to the slaves; there is but one large crop in the year, and the gathering of it in does not last more than ten or twelve weeks. They pick the coffee-berries off the trees in the day, and pulp them at night. The whole of the work, at the rate they are obliged to do it, is very laborious. Should a stranger indicate to a planter his surprise that the slaves are able to toil so many hours, he is reminded that 'many mechanics and labourers in England work equally hard, and on an average as many hours in the day.' With respect to the slaves attached to cotton or coffee plantations, this may be the case; but it is by no means generally true of those employed in the cultivation and manufacture of sugar; and perhaps four-fifths of them are so employed. But even though it were true of all, it would prove nothing in mitigation of slavery. The labourer in Britain is impelled to active and persevering industry by motives to which the slave is a stranger. The one is stimulated by the expectation of an adequate remuneration,

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by a jealousy for his reputation, by the fear of losing his employment, by his numerous wants, and, in most cases, by the necessities of a dependent family ; and besides, if the work be beyond his strength, he is at liberty to leave it. With the slave, the case is far otherwise. He knows it would be vain to look for reward ; and as for reputation, he is quite unconscious of any such thing. If he neglects his work, he is punished ; but that is attended with no dishonour amongst slaves : it is too common an occurrence to be accounted disgraceful. Neither can he be in any fear of losing his employment ; his own wants are very few, and those of his family give him little or no concern. To all this add that, however much his work may exceed his strength, or how unequal soever is his constitution to it, he is compelled to do it as long as his manager thinks proper, till he frequently sinks under the burden.

“ While speaking of their work it would be unjust to the slaves to make no reference to their Sunday ! The great advantages of keeping this day are acknowledged by all wise and good men. As a day of rest it is necessary to recruit exhausted nature ; and every hard-working man knows how the anticipation of it lightens his labours. But the Sabbath is not generally allowed to the slaves in the West Indies. The ordinary field-work of the plantation is certainly

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suspended on the Sunday; but in most places, the Negroes are in some way or other employed. And even where the Sabbath is professedly allowed the slaves as a day of rest, they seldom, perhaps never, as a gang, have the whole day. All the odd jobs that can possibly be reserved for that day must then be done. The jobs of this description are endless, often vexatious, and commonly occupy the Negroes till noon, and sometimes till night. It very often happens that they are not able to finish their day's task, and that for the week together. All these remnants will make a moderate day's work for Sunday, when it must be done. This burden falls chiefly on the women, and the feeble among the men. This method of getting work done is defended by some of the planters on the plea of humanity, and Scripture authority. 'Is it not better,' say they, 'to make them finish their work on a Sunday, than to be always punishing them?' Plausible as this may appear, the writer knows it to be a mere pretext, at least, in many instances, for making the slaves do more work than, in justice to themselves, they are able to perform. If their tasks be not finished every day, they are punished in the evening, besides being made to complete it on Sunday. The Scripture authority by which they endeavour to justify their making the slaves work on Sundays is, that the Fourth Com-

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mandment enjoins : 'Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work.' It therefore follows, according to their reasoning, that if all our work be not done in six days it may be finished on the seventh ! To mention such an argument is to refute it.

“The habitations of the slaves may next be surveyed. On every plantation there is a cluster of buildings, of which the Negro-houses form a considerable though not the most conspicuous part. They are usually built of frail materials : thatched with certain leaves, which at a distance resemble straw ; and enclosed with wattle, plastered with mud, and sometimes whitewashed outside. On some plantations they are built of better materials, the roofs being shingled, and the sides enclosed with boards : these have not a bad appearance. They are all very low, and have no chimneys or fireplaces. The air and the light are admitted at the door ; windows are uncommon. The furniture consists of an iron pot for the whole family, and a blanket for each individual to sleep on at night. This is all that the proprietor provides for household use. Whatever else the Negroes require they must procure as they can. To make stools, tables, boxes, etc., they mostly steal their master's boards, for which they get many a flogging. Most of the houses are very dirty, which is not to be wondered at, considering how little time they have for cleaning, and that their fowls, etc.,

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lodge in them at night.\* When repairs are necessary, the Negro inhabitant must do them himself on the Sunday.

“The food of the slaves consists of vegetables and salt fish. The plantain, in those parts where it thrives, is the staff of life to the Negroes. It grows on a small, frail tree in large bunches. Some of the planters give an allowance of plantains to the slaves every week,† but the general plan is to make them fetch from the plantain fields on the Sunday as many as they require, or are allowed, for the week. Considering the distance the plantain fields often are from their homes, and that they frequently have to fetch them from distant plantations, the inability of the children and the infirm people to carry their share, which obliges their friends to bring a double quantity, and the weight of the plantains, the labour of getting them home must be great. A bunch of plantains weighing twenty pounds will not yield more than about half that quantity of food. Where the plantain does not thrive, yams, cassava, Indian corn, and pulse form the chief articles of food. To procure these, the slaves must cultivate, on a Sunday, the ground allotted them for the purpose. The fish used by them is the

\* “I can imagine myself almost within the confines of heaven, while I sit by the side of these despised people in their miserable huts.”  
Smith's Journal.

† Two bunches, each containing about 100 plantains, worth 1s. a bunch.

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salt cod, brought from the British settlement in North America. It is given on the Sunday, in allowances at the rate of a pound per week for every working Negro. The children and the superannuated have a smaller quantity. This is the diet of the slaves all the year round, except at the three Christian festivals. They then receive an additional allowance, consisting of a piece of beef or pork, about a pound each person, a little sugar, some leaf tobacco, a couple of pipes, and an abundance of rum, to make them drunk ; indeed, they have plenty of this every week. Now it is evident that two ounces of salt fish per day (and deducting the bone, it is no more, even when they have their share) is not sufficient for a hard-working man. The Negroes, therefore, of both sexes, are obliged to spend much of the Sunday and of the nights in fishing.

“ In a climate so warm as that of the West Indies, clothing is not of that importance which it is in Britain ; nor are the slaves overburdened with it by their masters. They usually receive an allowance of clothing once in twelve or eighteen months. Then the men receive a coarse woollen jacket, worth about 3s. ; a hat, worth about 2s. 6d. ; six or seven yards of cotton check ; a piece of canvas, to make a pair or two of trousers ; a slip of blue cotton, to twist round their middle when they work naked (as indeed they mostly do), and sometimes a razor,

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and a pocket-knife, to pick out of their feet those troublesome insects called chigoes (Jiggers), which, by the way, some have supposed were the lice that plagued the Egyptians; and, if so, it was a sore plague indeed. The women receive the same kind and quantity of clothing as the men. Those women who have young children receive a 'babba,' that is a piece of stuff to sustain them at their backs, as you see gipsies carry their young ones. The children in general go quite naked till they are eight or nine years old, unless the parents buy clothing for them.

“At meal-time they usually sit on the ground, wet or dry. Add to this that their clothing is deficient; the time they are frequently made to stand shivering at night with their grass; their being obliged to go out fishing at night; and the unwholesome nature of much of their food, the salt fish being often in a putrid state when given them; and it will not appear strange that so many of the young men and women should be so constantly afflicted with rheumatic pains, fevers, and ulcerous limbs. No doubt, the irregularities of their own conduct contribute considerably towards their diseases.

“Every plantation has a hospital for the reception of the sick; though, in general, a charnel-house would be a more appropriate name. It is difficult to persuade oneself

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they could ever be intended for the afflicted. Ventilation and cleanliness seem never to be thought of. The excessive heat and the noxious effluvia almost produce suffocation to a person entering. There are no beds in them: the sick lie on a blanket, spread on a sloping kind of platform, elevated about two feet above the floor.

“From the mass of infirmity and decrepitude everywhere seen on the plantations, a superficial observer might fancy the slaves commonly live to a great age. But the contrary is the fact. The registration in 1820 makes it manifest that no more than three in a thousand of the present generation had reached threescore years and ten. The Negroes are soon worn out and look old. Having advanced to fifty, they are seldom capable of doing any more regular field work.

“In a domestic point of view, the condition of the slaves is deplorable. It may be confidently affirmed that scarcely one planter in a hundred pays the least attention to the household concerns of the Negroes under his management. When their attachments take place, which is at an early age, they feel no delicacy in declaring their passion for each other. The man will simply ask the woman whether she will live with him as a wife, and the woman often puts the same question to the man. An answer being given in the affirmative, all is soon settled, and the

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contract almost immediately consummated ; sometimes even before their relations are apprised that such a connexion is formed. They have no ceremonies for these occasions, except those of drinking and dancing, and these, especially the latter, are frequently dispensed with. The honeymoon does not always wane ere one suspects the fidelity of the other ; and sometimes ' the first morning that dawns on the marriage, witnesses also its virtual dissolution.' The cause of these jealousies is, doubtless, the unlimited familiarity between the sexes in early life. When they do continue to live together it is evident they can enjoy but little conjugal comfort. From what has been said respecting their work, it will be seen that the time a man and his wife can be in each other's company is exceedingly limited. The woman works as many hours as the man, nights and Sundays not often excepted, so that she has no time, at least is allowed none, to attend to her household affairs. It is no wonder, therefore, that their houses and linen should be so extremely filthy, and their children so much neglected.

“ Respecting the moral character of the Negro slaves but little need be said. It corresponds with their degraded condition. As reasonably might we look for grapes on thorns, or figs on thistles, as to expect to find moral feeling among uninstructed men, and especially when they are slaves. Of honour

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or decency they have no sense whatever. They know nothing of the obligations of truth, honesty, sobriety, chastity, etc. They are complete masters of the black art of lying, and make no scruple to resort to it on any occasion when they fancy their interest is concerned. When that is the case, their word is not to be taken, unless corroborated by other evidence. Their numerous thefts are mostly of a petty kind; housebreaking or highway robberies being seldom heard of as committed by plantation-slaves. So secure do the whites on the plantations feel themselves that they are indifferent whether their doors or windows have any fastening or not, and they frequently leave the latter open all night. In profane swearing, the negroes generally are outdone by their managers: the domestics can often vie with their tutors. The grossest licentiousness is practiced by all Negroes all over the West Indies. Indeed, nothing short of a miracle can prevent it, until the system of management be altered. The boys and girls work together naked, or nearly so, till after they have arrived at a state of puberty; and herd together like the cattle of the field. After their marriages, if their loose contracts may be so called, it is no uncommon occurrence for the man to go searching at night for his absent wife, or the woman for her husband. As they make no ceremony of entering each other's houses at midnight, the

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delinquent is commonly caught. A quarrel, a fight, and sometimes a separation, ensues. It is a common practice among them for the husband to leave his wife when she suffers a protracted affliction; and the women serve their afflicted husbands the same. But when the deserted party recovers, the temporary helpmeet is often dismissed, and they come together again. All this is attended with little or no disgrace in the West Indies; nor can it be, while most of the whites live in open vice, frequently enticing the negro women to leave their husbands, and afterwards dismissing them at pleasure.

“With respect to religion, the Negroes in the West Indies cannot be said to have any. They believe there is a God, but whatever notion they have of Him, it is certain they pay Him no kind of worship, nor do they appear to consider themselves under any obligation to serve Him. They have some confused apprehension of future rewards and punishments, for they talk of ‘top’ and ‘bottom,’ or, in other words, heaven and hell.

“When it is said that Negroes have no religion, such of them as are happily under the instructions of the missionaries must be excepted. Most of these are much attached to the Christian religion, and, considering their condition in life, are very regular in their attendance at public worship, and

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exemplary in their general conduct. The obvious reformation in the characters and morals of the Negroes that attend upon the missionaries, is frequently attributed, by the planters, to their own superior management. The patience and constancy of some of the Christian Negroes under severe sufferings on account of their religion, are truly astonishing. Neither the whip, nor the stocks, nor the dark hole, nor their being deprived of their allowances of food, nor the additional work laid on them, can conquer their attachment to their chapel and their Bible. Some among them will, of course, relinquish their holy religion, and sacrifice their brightest hopes through a timid fear of temporary punishment, or the promise of trifling gain.

“ This diabolical system offers no prospect of speedy alleviation, though sooner or later it will certainly cease to exist. By what means it will be annihilated we cannot predict, beyond that of the gradual decrease of the Negro population. If the present rigorous method of management be continued without abatement, it is highly probable that in a hundred years hence there will scarcely be a vestige of Negro slavery in the West Indies, unless new Negroes be imported ; a practice which, though prohibited, it is to be feared is not yet wholly suppressed.

“ The above remarks are to be understood as applying to the condition of the slaves generally. There are, it is to be hoped,

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some exceptions. Some good masters (an absentee may be a good *man*, but can hardly be called a good *master*) are diffusing as much comfort among their Negroes as the nature of slavery will admit, and they find their account in so doing. These exceptions are, however, very rare; and even if they were ten times more numerous, still we must remember that the uncontrolled will of the most virtuous individual is a fearful thing to live under."

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PERSEVERANCE OF "THE SAINTS"

### The Negroes learn to Read—Ferment in the Colony — Canning's Resolutions

"He's true to God who's true to man; whatever wrong is done  
To the humblest and the weakest 'neath the all-beholding sun,  
That wrong is also done to us; and they are slaves most base  
Whose love of right is for themselves and not for all their race."

**T**HE London youth whose diligence had been applauded by his seniors was no less industrious now that he was transferred to the tropics. With noiseless determination he applied himself to answering the call of the enslaved people.

That patience and constancy under suffering which Smith had commended in the Negroes were qualities of his own also, and he needed them, for as his work prospered, persecution increased. The sound of the lash was frequently in his ears as he wrought for the uplift of the slaves.

He awoke early one Monday morning amidst tremendous claps of thunder, which shook the house. Between the crashes he listened to the whipping of a naked Negro near his window.

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“ When the flogging was over Mrs. Smith said, ‘ Did you count those lashes ? ’ ‘ Yes. ’ ‘ How many did you reckon ? ’ I said, ‘ 141. ’ I then asked her if she had counted them. She said : ‘ Yes. I counted 140. ’ ”

A deacon reported on another occasion that his master had caused nearly the whole of his men to be severely flogged because they would not work on the preceding Sunday ; three stakes were driven into the ground, two for the hands and one for the feet. To these the men were tied with their backs upwards. A driver was placed on each side to wield the whip alternately, and each victim received about fifty lashes on his bare skin. There were cases in which, owing to repeated whipping, the whole skin was flayed off the back and the men were kept in the stocks till they got better.

A few of the slaves spoke ill of the church, which they imagined had brought them into such woe. The amazing thing was that so many remained faithful.

One sick slave was put into the stocks, where he lay neglected. Three of his companions went to the manager to ask that their friend might be put in the sick-house, and they were promptly thrashed and put into the stocks also. Finally the Fiscal\* was requested to go and settle the matter.

\* Secretary to the Governor.

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He came and ordered a further thrashing for the three before he would allow them to speak. One received 200 lashes, the others more, and then they were told they might speak. They declared justly that they had done nothing to deserve punishment, and the manager confessed that he had nothing against them except their religion.

The plantation managers were being goaded into fury by their own fears of what might happen if the slaves learned to read. It was openly and truly said that the instruction of the Negroes would be the destruction of the slave system.

Hermanus Post, who had introduced the teaching of his slaves, in defiance of the general opinion, had died in the year 1809, and there were few of the planters now willing to imitate his kindly ways with his servants.

But there were many indirect means by which the Negroes picked up the art of reading. The free people could not be kept ignorant, and some of them taught the slaves when they had opportunity. It is recorded also that a fugitive white sailor, who was sheltered for a time in a Negro hut, taught his host's family the elements of reading in exchange for their hospitality.

There were white children going to school as well as the sons and daughters of coloured freemen.

Little by little the light spread by these

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and other channels, made easier by the strong desire of the ignorant to become masters of the printed word and by the use of hymns and catechisms in the Church.

In 1810 the missionary, John Davies had printed in Georgetown some octavo slips of paper with a few simple sentences in words of one syllable, and some texts from the Bible, for the use of free children under his instruction. A small spelling book, called the First Class Book, was also in circulation. Copies had been brought from London for the use of the missionaries, and many stories gather round those dangerous days when it could only be used by the slaves in secret.

John Foreman, in "Echoes from Slave Time," wrote :

"I was greatly amused by hearing one who had been a slave describe the difficulties he and others had in concealing the First Book published by the Sunday School Union, containing the alphabet, etc. Their clothing was of the scantiest—too scanty to hide even so small a book. Hence, it was hidden sometimes in a bundle of grass, at others in a piece of bamboo, or in a hollow branch of a tree.

"One moonlight night he was telling the others the names of the letters of the alphabet when an overseer suddenly

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appeared and caught them in the act. Next day the whole company was taken to the manager's house and flogged, the reader getting a double portion, being flogged the first and again the last of the batch."

This man occasionally got a pass to go and hear the missionary. He tried to remember what he heard, and tell it to his fellow slaves. This came to the manager's ears. He called the Negro to him, saying: "William, how much does the missionary pay you for teaching the people?" The reply was—"Nothing, sir."

"And how much does Mr. ——" (the Attorney of the Estate) "pay you." Again the reply was: "Nothing, sir."

"Then," said the manager, "I will pay you," and after having William flogged, he sent him for an hour a day to the treadmill.

The planters were committed to the dangerous policy of withholding instruction from their slaves. Repression, in the long run, only increased the desire for knowledge, though for a time it caused much suffering.

Twenty years afterwards, an old Negro deacon in the colony, speaking at a public meeting, told, in graphic words, a tale of petty persecution endured by the slaves in their search for instruction. He said:

"You see this" (holding up a cat-o'-

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nine-tails). "You young people don't know this, but plenty of my old brothers and sisters, they know it well; they know that time when you hear nothing but the whip going bam, bam, bam—slash, slash, slash, from morning till night.

"In old time, if you have Bible, and manager see it, you know what you will catch to-morrow—you will catch this" (pointing to the whip). "If we want to go to chapel at Souvenir, what did we have to do?"

"Many times me put all my clean clothes in a bundle, and walk to chapel in my dirty clothes. In case manager see me, he see my dirty clothes, he think I am going to work. Then, when me get near chapel, me just go in the bush, change our clothes, and go to Mr. Smith's chapel. When chapel done, me go back, and put on all our dirty clothes again, for fear of Massa. Then we go pretend catch fish, catch crab, but if manager see we go to chapel, to-morrow you will catch this flogging."

Bethel Chapel was steadily spreading the light of knowledge in spite of the prohibition of teaching. It could not be otherwise, since Bibles, Hymn Books and Catechisms were going about speaking eloquently of Liberty and a better life.

John Wray came over from Berbice in July, 1822, found his young successor pros-

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pering, and very graciously applauded him in a letter to the Missionary Society.

"In the evening a great many came together with whom we conversed a long time. I rejoice that they have a minister so much interested in their spiritual welfare as Mr. Smith. I was also much pleased with some of his plans, particularly his dividing them into classes, according to the estates to which they belong, and examining their progress in the catechism in rotation.

"I greatly lament that the missionaries in Demerara are not permitted to teach the slaves to read . . . and yet many do acquire the art of reading. I met a Negro, who has no opportunity to attend chapel, learning to read. All along the coast, which is about seventy miles, a desire for instruction prevails."

After five years' work Smith himself was able to mark his progress in significant figures. He then (1822) baptised 462 persons, and admitted 61 to the Church, the membership of which rose to 203.

His average congregation was 800, and there were about 2,000 professing Christians from Le Resouvenir and the adjacent plantations on the Register.

"We hold every Sabbath an overflowing

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congregation, behaving with praiseworthy decorum ; and we see them zealous for the spread of Christianity.\* ”

A hundred and fourteen marriages were solemnised, and loose living manifestly decreased.

While this upward movement was taking place among the slaves, a corresponding uneasiness assailed the whites. Sunday by Sunday the planters could see the long streams of Negroes passing along the raised paths between the swamps, carrying their only literature—Bibles, Hymns, and Catechisms—in their hands. What was it all for? The little bundle of books meant that the blacks, somehow, were learning to read, and the things they were learning were such as would undermine the slave system and bring chaos and black ruin upon the owners of this living property.

What was happening in those closely-packed chapels? They went to see and hear. Their demeanour compared unfavourably with that of the slaves. One overseer would jangle his keys, perhaps to remind the Negroes of his authority. The younger whites ogled the black girls. Ragging the missionary became a new variant upon the usual Sunday pastimes. But more serious obstacles were necessary to stem the rising tide of learning.

Governor Murray issued orders in May,

\* They gave about £200 in that year to the L.M.S.

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1823, that planters were not to refuse passes to Negroes wishing to attend church. Passes were designed to prevent the arrest as fugitives, of slaves who might be going on a journey, but the new proclamation, though it sounded benevolent, gave a hint to the plantation managers that their slaves required passes to go to church. The hint was taken, and by delaying the time at which passes were issued, by jeers at religion and abuse of the parsons, especially in regard to their receipt of money for books, and for the work of the Society, the planters' pin-pricks began the work of irritation and the attendance at chapel fell off. Slaves who went to church without passes laid themselves open to punishment. The more hostile managers destroyed the people's books, and stopped the little gatherings of Christians in their own homes. The dullest Negroes could now see that their governors were out to prevent their instruction.

At the same time news came from England of the growing activities of the Anti-Slavery party, and the colonists, feeling themselves secure in the support of the British Government, broke out in derision of Wilberforce and his "saints." But the ships presently brought different news across the water. "The saints" were gaining ground, and the Government might give way. So it happened that before the House of Commons had taken action, the members of the Demerara

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Court of Policy, apprehending that it would be best for any initiative to appear to come from them, set down a notice of motion in the name of Councillor John Austin (May 5th, 1823), to reduce and limit the working hours of the slaves. But the Court was half-hearted about it, came to no published decision, and let London lead the way.

On May 15th, the new battle for freedom was set. Thomas Fowell Buxton rose early in the evening of that day in his place in the House of Commons and moved :—

“That the state of slavery is repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution and of the Christian religion ; and that it ought to be gradually abolished, with as much expedition as may be found consistent with a due regard to the well-being of the parties concerned.”

The mover plainly declared that the object of the group he represented was the abolition of the slave system, but not by sudden emancipation.

There was to be preparation of the Negroes to fit them for freedom, first by limiting their punishments and increasing their comforts, and then by such improvement as instruction might produce on their intelligence, and power to exercise civil rights.

A long and animated debate arose which

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showed that the House was agreeable to some amelioration of the lot of the slaves, but not ready to declare categorically for abolition.

Canning, on behalf of the Government, proposed a series of resolutions in substitution for Buxton's motion, and these were carried in the following form :

" 1. That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the slave population in His Majesty's colonies.

" 2. That, through a determined and persevering, but at the same time judicious and temperate enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty's subjects.

" 3. That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose at the earliest period that shall be compatible with the well-being of the slaves themselves, with the safety of the Colonies and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of the private proprietors."

The form of these resolutions was significant, and in their immediate effect

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they differed very little from the motion they supplanted.

Lord Bathurst sent out from the Colonial Office, on May 28th, a copy of the resolutions, with a temperately worded covering letter, which reached Governor Murray on July 7th. The despatch very tactfully left room for the Demerara governor to "originate measures," but pointed out that the flogging of females would be expected to cease entirely, and that the use of the whip in the field should also stop. And the same day (May 28th, 1823) there left London another despatch, signed by thirty-two plantation owners, one of whom was John Gladstone, father of William Ewart Gladstone.

It viewed the action of the House of Commons with grave anxiety, but recommended active co-operation in carrying out the new instructions. The men who sent the letter were, however, doubtful of the results of the regulations, and called attention to the need for Militia protection, and a good understanding with the Indians in case of trouble.

These absentee owners did not state the reasons for their fears. Perhaps if they had been asked they would have said that the interference of the Home Government would have the effect of undermining the authority of the Colonial Government and the planters, but Earl Bathurst had provided against this contingency already by hinting quite plainly

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that the amelioration might be announced as the act of the colonial authorities.

The Demerara Court of Policy knew this perfectly well, for on August 7th, a month after the receipt of the despatch, it passed three resolutions, two of which embodied the instructions of the Home Government, and the third—a face-saving formula—was a decision to devise some other measures for the control of female slaves and to prepare further regulations for the flogging of males.

But neither these resolutions nor the Colonial Office despatch were made public! Already malign influences were at work to make bad weather of the whole business. The planters' letter suggested fear—the action of the Court of Policy in secreting its resolutions showed that fear was already there, and from this point, fear—unwarranted, as it proved—carried the colony rapidly to disaster.

In the neighbouring province of Berbice the new regulations were explained to the slaves soon after the despatch arrived, and there was no trouble in Berbice.

Governor Murray must take a large share of blame for what followed. He kept back good tidings, when common prudence would have told him that through many indirect avenues the truth, though distorted, would find its way to the slaves, and his duty to the King forbade concealment.

The news was public property in England,

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so that every ship brought sailors whose reputation was enhanced by circulating their vivid versions of it. The planters knew it, and spoke to one another feelingly about the regulations which most of them expected would cripple their authority over the slaves. These muttered conversations were overheard. Benefits concealed, like unexamined bank balances, always seem bigger than they are. The rumours crystallised as Freedom, anxiety to hear the facts grew rapidly among the slaves, and their hopes were confirmed when the planters increased their punishments.

“You want freedom, do you. I’ll give you freedom,” said one overseer, as he laid on the whip.

In John Smith’s journal, under the date July 25th, 1823, there occurs this entry :

“Quamina of Success came to enquire if I had heard the report that the King had sent out orders to the Governor to free the slaves. I told him I had not heard of it, and that if such a report was in circulation, it must not be believed, for it was false.

“He said he was sure there was something in agitation, and he wished to know what it was. He said his son, Jack Gladstone, heard it last Sunday from Daniel, the Governor’s servant, who heard

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his master talking about it with some gentlemen.

"I told him it was likely the Governor had some orders, because the Government at home wished to make some regulations for the benefit of the slaves, but not to make them free.

"This answer, however, scarcely satisfied him."

Now Quamina was one of the most intelligent Negroes. He was senior deacon at Bethel Chapel, a prudent and efficient man, accepted by his own people as a father in the faith. How much less satisfied must the simple ones have been by the denial of their hopes!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RISING

### What is the Good News? The Governor Speaks Too Late.

"It is liberty alone which fits men for liberty. This proposition, like every other in politics, has its bounds; but it is far safer than the counter doctrine, 'Wait till they are fit.'"

*W. E. Gladstone*

**B**Y the middle of August, 1823, the position had become such that action of some kind was inevitable. The slaves had been irritated for many months by the increasing pressure of their toilsome bondage, by the petty restrictions imposed upon their freedom in attending chapel, and by the evident hostility to their education. Upon the top of these vexations a new one was piled. The King's Parliament had been talking of things for the good of the slaves. What it was, none of them exactly knew. The Governor and the planters knew but would not tell.

At this point the Negroes found a new power of combination growing out of their common sufferings. The system of slavery had been constructed with an eye to such a possibility as this. The gangs of imported

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Negroes were composed of members of various African tribes, so mixed that they retained nothing of their original tribal cohesion. They had been distributed among the plantations with new names and a new language, and members of the same family born on the plantations were widely sundered from each other by the custom of selling them separately to new and distant owners.

But the preaching of the Gospel had introduced a new element. It is said that the Negroes acquired an erect habit of body through the custom of carrying everything on their heads. They now achieved another kind of erectness because of something which had entered their minds.

They discovered in their Bibles and hymn-books that their well-being was a matter of concern to One Whom they called "God A'mighty a top." They had learned to pray, and did it with a fervour and eloquence which astonished the missionaries. The result was inevitable. They began to seek for themselves a change in their conditions, and the moment had arrived at which they thought it was only necessary to ask for it, and it would be given them.

On Sunday, August 17th, after the midday service, two or three of the Negroes who had been to Bethel Chapel came to Smith's house, as their custom was, to bid the missionary "good-bye" before returning to their homes.

## Smith of Demerara

Two of them, Deacon Quamina and Seaton, were talking together quietly when their minister overheard the words "Manager" and "New law." Smith, supposing them to be still harping on the belief that the new regulations were something of tremendous import, rebuked them, and Quamina said :

"O, it is nothing particular, sir ; we were only saying it would be a good thing to send our managers to town\* to fetch up the New Law."

Smith told them it would be very foolish to say anything to the managers about it, for the managers were not the law-makers, and if there was any good news for them they would soon hear of it, but that if they behaved insolently they would lose their religious character and provoke the Governor as well as the Home Government.

"Very well, sir," replied Quamina, "we will say nothing about it, for we should be very sorry to vex the King and the people at home."

Early on Monday morning Smith rode into Georgetown to see his doctor about an alarming increase in pains and weakness which had begun to threaten the carrying on of his beloved work. An immediate sea voyage was urged to save his life, but something very different was in store.

At ten o'clock on the same morning a planter had sent word to the Governor that

\* Georgetown, seven miles from Le Resouvenir.

## The Rising

he had heard from a coloured servant that a general rising of Negroes was to take place the same night or the next day.

At once hurrying messengers put the estates along the East Coast of the river on their guard, and the small body of Colonial Cavalry mustered to arms.

In the afternoon, the Governor, attended only by a few friends, rode out to the East Coast plantations and met about forty armed\* Negroes, with whom he expostulated.

Then, for the first time, he announced the terms of the new regulations, and accompanied the announcement with the statement that any unlawful violence would prevent the new law taking effect.

But it was too late. For six weeks he had kept secret the good news for which the slaves were hungering, and now they heard it, they would not believe that he had told them all there was to tell. In reporting the incident to Earl Bathurst, Murray made no complaint of any violence being offered to him or his friends, though it is clear that the Negroes refused to lay down their arms.

The Governor and his friends rode home to make plans for the suppression of the rising. By midnight more troops were on the road, and next morning the Militia was summoned to arms and Martial Law proclaimed. Meanwhile, on most of the East

\* Most of the Negroes throughout the rising were armed only with the cutlass—a long knife used in cutting the sugar-cane.

## Smith of Demerara

side of the River Demerara, the managers and other white people had been put into the stocks, where they remained until the soldiers relieved them. The slaves were not out to shed blood.\*

“We will take no life,” said they, “for our pastors have taught us not to take that which we cannot give.”

About six o'clock on Monday evening Smith received the first definite news of the rising in a note handed to him by a messenger as he and Mrs. Smith were preparing to take a walk. The writer of the note was a slave, Jackey Reed, and he enclosed another note from Jack Gladstone,† son of Quamina the deacon. These notes were as follows :

*“From Jackey Reed to Rev. J. Smith.*

“DEAR SIR,

“Excuse the liberty I take in writing to you ; I hope this letter may find yourself and Mrs. Smith well. Jack Gladstone has sent me a letter, which appears as if I had made an agreement upon some actions,

\* In other parts of the West Indies, where there were no missions to the slaves, there had been risings very different in character. They were sudden and murderous onslaughts on the whites. The Demerara rising took no such character. Governor Murray wrote to Earl Bathurst :—“I have not heard of any whites being deliberately murdered.”

† Jack Gladstone was a cooper on plantation Success, and though more intelligent than most of the slaves, he was said to be dissolute, and was certainly very irregular in his visits to Bethel Chapel. In the advertisements, offering a reward for the apprehension of Quamina and Jack, the latter is described as being 6 feet 2 inches high, twenty-five years of age, handsome, well made.

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which I never did ; neither did I promise him anything ; and I hope that you will see to it and inquire of the members whatever it is they may have in view, which I am ignorant of ; and to inquire after and know what it is ; the time is determined on for seven o'clock to-night.

(Signed) "JACKEY REED."

*"From Jack Gladstone to Jackey Reed.*

"MY DEAR BROTHER JACKEY,

"I hope you are well, and I write to you concerning our agreement last Sunday. I hope you will do according to your promise. This letter is written by Jack Gladstone, and the rest of the brethren of Bethel Chapel, and all the rest of the brothers are ready, and put their trust in you ; and we hope that you will be ready also. I hope there will be no disappointments, either one way or the other. We shall begin to-morrow night at the Thomas,\* about seven o'clock."

The reading of these notes brought back to John Smith's mind the words he had overheard between Quamina and Seaton on Sunday, and they brought the first news of seriously-organised mischief. He asked the messenger if he knew anything of the contents of the notes, but he seemed to know nothing, so Smith hastily wrote the following

\* A neighbouring sugar estate.

## Smith of Demerara

answer in pencil and sent it back to Jackey Reed :

*“ To Jackey Reed.*

“ I am ignorant of the affair you allude to, and your note is too late for me to make any inquiry. I learnt yesterday that some scheme was in agitation ; without asking questions on the subject, I begged them to be quiet. I trust they will ; hasty, violent, or concerted measures are quite contrary to the religion we profess, and I hope you will have nothing to do with them.

“ Yours, for Christ’s sake,  
“ J.S.”

Mr. and Mrs. Smith continued their walk with minds disturbed by the news. They came near the house of Mr. Hamilton, manager of the estate of Le Resouvenir, and found it besieged by a noisy mob of slaves demanding firearms. The missionary at once spoke to the Negroes, begging them to keep the peace, and return home, but they were furious, brandished their cutlasses, and bade him depart. Before he went, however, he was able to prevail upon them to do no violence to the manager, whom they were about to put in the stocks.

Mr. Hamilton thanked him for his friendly aid, and Smith went home to join his wife, who had already gone there.

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The Church of England clergyman, Rev. W. S. Austin, with Mr. Smith's concurrence, went to Governor Murray to offer that they should go amongst the people to persuade them to return to work, but their help was madly refused. John Mortier, a Wesleyan missionary in Georgetown, also waited on the Governor, to offer his services "in any way His Excellency might deem proper," and was told that he might do most good by keeping his congregation peaceful. The other Wesleyan missionary, Mr. Cheese-wright, was granted exemption from military service.\*

On Tuesday, August 19th, Mrs. Smith, without her husband's knowledge, sent a messenger for Quamina, hoping to get from that trusted helper some more news of the rising. He came on Wednesday. After speaking to Mrs. Smith, he entered a room in which her husband was sitting. The latter said :

"Quamina, I am sorry and grieved to find the people have been so wicked and mad as to be guilty of revolting, and hope *you* are not concerned in it."

To this Quamina made no reply.

"Where have you been all this time," asked Mr. Smith, "and where have you come from now" ?

To these questions Quamina gave no

\* For an admirable account of the important Wesleyan work in the West Indies, see Vol. 11. *Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, by Findlay and Holdsworth.

## Smith of Demerara

answer, but suddenly went away, not having spent more than two or three minutes in the house.

The struggle going on in Quamina's mind may be guessed. He was being pulled two ways. His loyalty to the Church of which he was a distinguished leader drew him to peace, while his splendid son, full of unregulated ardour for the slave cause, appealed to the blood in the old man. The only direct evidence of any action of his during the rising showed him protecting his master from the strikers. He went out into the wilderness with Jack and was presently hunted down, shot and hung in chains on the middle path of Success—as true a martyr in an ill-fated cause as any hero of resounding fame.

On Thursday, John Smith commenced a letter to the Secretary of the London Missionary Society, in which he wrote :

“ The whole united colony of Demerara and Essequibo is now under Martial Law. The Negroes on this coast, at least, have seized the firearms belonging to the several plantations and retired : while in the act of rising they put some of their managers into the stocks to prevent their escaping to give alarm ; but, in other respects, they offered no personal violence to any one ; neither did they set fire to a single building, nor rob any house that

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I have heard of, except of arms and ammunition. . . .

“Nor have they, I believe, to this moment, attempted anything like an outrage, either upon persons or property. The estates are merely abandoned, the property remains as it was. . . .

“On seeing Mrs. Smith alarmed, they told her and me that they did not intend to injure any one, but their rights they would have. I think they were sincere in what they said, for they had the fairest opportunity of murdering every white person on the coast. . . .

“The planters do not appear to have considered that the increase of knowledge among the slaves required that an alteration should be made in the mode of treating them.

“However intelligent a Negro might be, still, he must be ruled by terror, instead of reason! The most vexatious system of management has been generally adopted; and their religion has long rendered them obnoxious to most of the planters. On this account, many of them have suffered an almost uninterrupted series of contumely and persecution.”

This letter was never finished. While it was being written the house was surrounded by soldiers, and Mr. and Mrs. Smith were dragged from their home and escorted to Georgetown under a military escort.

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At first the soldiers behaved with some hesitation. Their orders from Captain McTurk\* were to command Smith's attendance to be enrolled in the Militia as the Proclamation of Martial Law required. But Smith claimed exemption on the ground of his profession, and the officer in command of the soldiers went away after having sealed up the missionary's papers. In about three quarters of an hour a larger body of troops, including cavalry under the command of Captain Simpson, again beset the house. Simpson, in the foulest language, demanded to know why Smith had not obeyed the order to enlist.

"I told him," wrote Smith, "that I was entitled to exemption from military service."

"Damn your eyes!" said Simpson. "If you give me any of your logic, I'll sabre you in a minute. If you don't know what Martial Law is I'll show you."

And the sabre was brandished within an inch of the missionary, to show the boaster's skill. One who was standing by says that the Captain was so infuriated that another word from Smith would have sufficed to make the threat a tragedy.†

\* McTurk was a doctor in civil life. He had a ready way of arresting people. Later on, when he was Major Michael McTurk, he put J. H. Hughes in a poultry-house for eight days without warrant or charge. The Demerara Court awarded Hughes 1,000 guilders damage, but the Privy Council in London made it 10,000 guilders.

† Simpson's was a tropical temperament. A few years later he presented to the Mission a site for a new chapel.

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A file of men seized the missionary, while others took possession of his papers.

It appeared that Mrs. Smith had to leave the house also, and Mr. Smith begged for five minutes delay in order to take out some clothing and lock up the place.

“ But in less than three minutes, I apprehend, a file of soldiers came to the bottom of the stairs, and said to me : ‘ If *you* don’t fetch Mrs. Smith, by God, sir, *we* will.’ ”

In this manner the two were hurried off without a change of garments, and left their peaceful home open to all vagrants.

The reason given for the arrest was the refusal to take up arms at the command of Captain McTurk, but afterwards the charge was turned into a much more serious one, as will appear.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE RISING SUPPRESSED

### Shootings and Executions— Home Government Interferes —The Real Cause of Trouble

We that build Freedom's body, cell by cell,  
To outlive these our own when they are gone  
Into the dust, choose that to labour on  
Which is most stubborn and intractable ;  
Our elemental passions that rebel  
Against all governance,—these one by one  
We build into that living Parthenon,  
Wherein the spirit of Liberty shall dwell.

*Henry Bryan Binns*

JOHN SMITH, instead of voyaging at sea for his health, was imprisoned in a garret in the Colony House, Demerara, on August 21st. It was a small room, and being near the roof, it was exposed to the burning heat of the tropical sun at a time when the thermometer in the shade out on the plantations averaged 85 degrees. Mrs. Smith went with her husband, who was a consumptive and knew it. The prisoner was put under strict military guard ; two sentries, one at his door and another at the foot of the stairs, watching over him. They were relieved every two hours, and at each change of the guard the prisoner had

## The Rising Suppressed

to be called upon, even when asleep, to make sure that he had not escaped. The sentries entertained one another by shouting indecent jests and blasphemy over the stairs. It was done to shock the prisoner. "Damn the parson! Why don't they hang him and be done with it," said one. The early days of his confinement were made worse by the fact that he had no change of clothing.

In this exhausting jail Smith and his wife were detained for seven weeks, without pen and ink, and forbidden to send messages to the Directors of the Society in London.

The colonists had long before pledged themselves to be revenged upon the missionaries, and their opportunity had now come. They occupied those seven weeks in the preparation of charges and in the collecting of evidence which might secure a verdict which would have the effect of ridding the colony for ever of those whom they regarded as the real cause of their trouble.

While the missionary was stewing in that broiling garret, the military were busy shooting and hanging the insurgent Negroes.

Martial Law had been proclaimed on August 19th, and detachments of regular troops and militia, with the aid of armed Indians, were visiting the plantations and giving short shrift to any slaves who were not at work. Some there were who had never joined the rising, and others, who had at first sided with the strikers, returned

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to their tasks when Martial Law was proclaimed

Early on Wednesday morning, August 20th, a party of Negroes, supposed to number about two thousand, was met at Plantation Bachelor's Adventure by Colonel Leahy in command of troops. The Colonel tried to persuade the slaves to lay down their arms.

"What do you want?" he said to them. They replied:

"Massa treat us too bad; keep us at work on Sundays; no let us go to chapel; no give us time to work in our gardens; they beat us too much; and we hear for true, that the great buckra (King) at home, give us our freedom for true."

They then demanded certain days in the week for themselves, and Colonel Leahy promised to report their wishes to the Governor if they would lay down their arms. A few of them had firearms, in the use of which they had no skill, but most had only their cutlasses with which they cut the cane stalks. They refused to give up these arms until their demands were granted, and the soldiers were ordered to fire upon them. Nearly two hundred were killed, and the rest scattered, some into the bush, the rest to their plantations, where they resumed work.

During the next two days there were other and smaller skirmishes, in which the slaves suffered severely, without any loss of life among the troops, and the revolt was over.

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By August 26th, the Governor was able to report to Lord Bathurst that affairs had assumed a peaceable aspect, and by August 31st, only a hundred Negroes who had fled to the bush (probably thinking it an opportunity to gain their liberty) were not accounted for.

But the needless slaughter of slaves continued. Twenty-three were put to death out of hand by the sole order of Colonel Leahy, and a Court Martial hanged many more. Martial Law was continued for five calendar months, nearly two hundred prisoners were tried, and within a month forty-seven of them were hanged in small batches. Many of them were hung in chains on the public roads, and the decapitated heads of others were exposed upon poles. The cruellest floggings were ordered, the number of lashes varying from 200 to 1,000 each. These long-drawn agonies were designed to break the spirit of the slaves, but they had the effect, along with the vindictive trial of the missionary Smith, of arousing British opinion on behalf of the oppressed, and when it was found that there still remained fifty prisoners awaiting trial in May, 1824, the bloody proceedings were summarily stopped by order of the home Government. On General Murray, the Governor of the Colony, must be laid the chief cause of the tragedy. Smith was charged with misprision of treason (or the withholding of knowledge of it), but it was

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the guilty withholding of the knowledge of the new laws for the improvement of the lot of the slaves, which caused the storm to break, and that guilt was Governor Murray's.

What was the real meaning of the rising? It must first be noticed that it was limited to the east side of the Demerara River and that only a small proportion of the slaves in that area took an active part in it. No large body of insurgents is mentioned beyond the reputed two thousand at Bachelor's Adventure.

The Register of Baptisms at Bethel Chapel was kept with great care by John Smith: it contained the names of two thousand Christians, of whom about 200 were communicants. A comparison of this Register with the list of negroes tried and executed shows that only one communicant and not more than five of the baptised were adjudged guilty. Twelve of the ringleaders lived on estates where none had been baptised by Smith, estates on which there had been peculiarly oppressive and exasperating masters.

There is evidence that in many instances the Christians behaved well. On Plantation Hope, where there were fifty baptised adherents, the slaves continued quietly at work throughout the strife, and the manager returned from a week's militia duty to find everything in good order; even his furniture and money had been carried for safety to

## The Rising Suppressed

the Negro huts and were brought back on his return. On an adjoining estate also, the slaves stood by their master, and such instances were not rare.

On Plantation Brothers (the third from the chapel) the slaves defended the estate against the insurgents at some risk to their lives. When the manager returned, all his Negroes were on duty.

Deacon Quamina, of Plantation Success (Mr. Gladstone's property), was proved to have prevented the mob from doing injury to Mr. Stewart, the manager of Success.

Quamina's son Jack was certainly involved in the rising, but though he had been baptised as a child, he seldom went to church, and had no right to speak for the "brethren of Bethel Chapel" as he did in the letter to Jack Reed.

So far as Quamina was informed of the plan, it was simply a strike on which the slaves were to "down tools" until their managers had gone to the Governor\* and extracted from him the new laws which had come from England.

To such a plan it may well be that the Christians offered no obstacle, though it is clear that a majority of them did not assist it actively.

The history of other colonies proves that

\* There had been something said about "driving the managers to town." "Driving" did not necessarily imply violence. The word was commonly used to mean "causing" or "compelling" in a peaceable way. A servant would say, for example, "Me so good, Massa, me drive you to give me new jacket Christmas."

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a society built upon slave labour is always, like a volcano, liable to explosions. Jamaica had about thirty slave insurrections. In Berbice the Dutch colonists had suffered one rising, and in Cuba, where there were no Protestant missionaries, there had also been a serious outbreak. The main and permanent reason for them always has been the repressive action of the planters and the colonial governments. The whole plan of slavery requires that the slave must be kept down, kept ignorant, and kept servile—a process like sitting on the safety-valve, which cannot be long continued without risk.

In Demerara the explosion was caused by the increasing severity of punishments, the excessive hours of labour, the denial of education, and the stupid withholding of the new laws, at a time when two separate influences (missionary instruction and the British Government's action) had aroused a new capacity and desire for improvement.

The leaven of Bethel Chapel, when the crisis came, was found to be acting as the best of all ameliorators. Here is the testimony of the Rev. W. S. Austin, the chaplain of Georgetown, who, in spite of the fact that the Governor declined his help, went about among the plantations unarmed, pacifying the workers, when all the civilian whites were arming and drilling as for a war, and their wives and children were sheltering in the ships on Demerara River.

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“ Nothing but those religious impressions which, under Providence, Mr. Smith had been instrumental in fixing ; nothing but those principles of the Gospel of Peace, which he had been proclaiming ; could have prevented a dreadful effusion of blood here.”

For such and similar declarations, Mr. Austin was hounded out of Demerara in 1824, by vindictive letter-writers in the newspapers of Georgetown.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE COURT MARTIAL

### The Search for Evidence— Sentenced to Death—Re- joicings in Georgetown

Who would true valour see,  
Let him come hither ;  
One here will constant be,  
Come wind, come weather.

*John Bunyan*

**S**EVEN weeks after his arrest, John Smith was brought down from his hot garret to the court-room in the same house, to be tried by the Court Martial, and was for the first time confronted with an elaborate indictment which the prosecution had been busily compiling while he was in close confinement.

A court of enquiry had been set in motion which examined a large number of witnesses and prisoners, many of whom were terrified slaves, faced with probable conviction and death, and, therefore, doubly ready to say what they were expected to say. The evidence thus garnered was available for the drawing up of the charges against the missionary, and it is remarkable that in spite of the advantage thus falling to the

## The Court Martial

prosecution, very few specific acts of a treasonable nature could be alleged against the defendant, and those were not proved.

The Court Martial was constituted on October 13th, 1823 : it consisted of fifteen officers of the regulars and militia, one of whom, Lieut-Col. Charles Wray, was the President or Chief Justice of the Colony, upon whom military rank had been conferred in order that he might sit with the officers. The legality of the trial, the composition of the Court, the manner of its procedure and the absurd decision were very properly challenged during the subsequent Debate in the House of Commons, which will be found summarised in the next chapter.

The trial lasted twenty-eight days, much time being consumed in the examination of witnesses upon matters which occurred long before Martial Law was proclaimed, and should, therefore, have been excluded. The prosecution, in order to support the charges, took into view the whole of John Smith's conduct from the time of his arrival in the Colony six years before, and received evidence upon some particular facts which occurred four years before the date of the trial.

A detailed account of the charges, evidence and judgment was printed for the House of Commons, but upon examination it was found that some important evidence had been omitted ; the London Missionary Society, therefore, printed and published its own

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version, containing the matter left out of the official copy, and the accuracy of the Society's version was never seriously questioned.

It is not possible to reproduce here a full account of what happened during those twenty-eight days, nor is it necessary. The book of the trial stands as a monument of muddled law and perverse judgment for the study of any who wish to know how evidence, especially Negro evidence, may be so selected, presented and interpreted as to produce any desired result.

The Court of Captains and Lieutenants, being duly sworn, listened to the recital of the following charges against the missionary, now bracing his feeble frame to endure the supreme test of his devotion.

1. "For that he the said John Smith, long previous to and up to the time of a certain revolt and rebellion, which broke out in this Colony, on or about the 18th August now last past, did promote, as far as in him lay, discontent and dissatisfaction in the minds of the Negro slaves towards their lawful masters, managers and overseers, *\*(he the said John Smith, thereby intending to excite the said Negroes to break out in such open revolt and rebellion against the authority of their lawful masters,*

\* The words in italics, between the brackets, are the parts which the Court decided were not found proven.

## The Court Martial

*managers and overseers,*) contrary to his allegiance, and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

2. " For that he the said John Smith, having, about the 17th day of August last and (*on divers other days and times*) theretofore preceding, advised, consulted, and corresponded with a certain Negro named Quamina, touching and concerning a certain intended revolt and rebellion of the Negro slaves within these Colonies of Demerara and Essequibo ; and, further, after such revolt and rebellion had actually commenced, and was in a course of prosecution, he, the said John Smith, did further aid and assist in such rebellion, by advising, consulting and corresponding, touching the same, with the said Negro Quamina ; to wit, on the (*19th and*) 20th August last past, he, the said John Smith, then well knowing such revolt and rebellion to be in progress, and the said Negro Quamina to be an insurgent engaged therein.

3. " For that he the said John Smith, on the 17th August last past, and for a certain period of time thereto preceding, having come to the knowledge of a certain revolt and rebellion, intended to take place within this Colony, did not make known the same to the proper authorities, which revolt and rebellion did subsequently take

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place ; to wit, on or about the 18th August now last past.

4. “ For that he, the said John Smith, after such revolt and rebellion had taken place, and during the existence thereof, to wit, on or about (*Tuesday and*) Wednesday, the (*19th and*) 20th of August now last past, was at plantation Le Resouvenir, in presence of and held communication with Quamina, a Negro of plantation Success, he, the said John Smith, then well knowing the said Quamina to be an insurgent engaged therein, and that he, the said John Smith, did not use his utmost endeavours to suppress the same, (*by securing or detaining the said insurgent Quamina as a prisoner, or*) by giving information to the proper authorities, or otherwise, but, on the contrary, permitted the said insurgent Quamina to go at large and depart, (*without attempting to seize and detain him, and*) without giving any information respecting him to the proper authorities, against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity, and against the laws in force in this Colony, and in defiance of the proclamation of Martial Law, issued by His Excellency the Lieutenant-governor.”

It will be seen that the four counts in the indictment thus preferred against the missionary Smith contained, in substance, an

## The Court Martial

accusation of *Conspiracy and Rebellion* ; and included the following seven allegations :

1. “ That Mr. Smith had long intended to stir up rebellion in the Colony, and had, in pursuance of such intention, endeavoured to excite such discontent in the minds of the slaves as might induce them to rebel against the lawful authority of their master.

2. “ That he often, and particularly on the 17th August, 1823, conspired with a slave named Quamina, to bring about such rebellion, and positively knew on the 17th that it would take place.

3. “ That he gave no previous information to the Government of the intended rebellion.

4. “ That the very rebellion so devised, and plotted by and known to him, did actually break out on the 18th August.

5. “ That Quamina was an insurgent therein, and was known so to be by Mr. Smith.

6. “ That Mr. Smith aided and assisted in the rebellion on the 19th, by communication with Quamina, knowing him to be an insurgent.

7. “ That he further aided and assisted in it on the 20th, by a personal interview with Quamina, and by not seizing or giving information against him.

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Smith, who pleaded "not guilty," had, so far, been without the assistance of Counsel; he therefore applied for it, and the Court adjourned till the next morning. During this interval Mr. Smith obtained the aid of Mr. William Arrindell,\* a Colonial Barrister, whose friendship and help cheered the hearts of the lonely Smiths.

Forty-nine witnesses were examined—(twenty-one white and twenty-eight black or coloured people). The missionary's private Journal, which had been seized with his papers, was ransacked for evidence against him, and eighteen quotations from it were read. They proved nothing which could not have been disproved by ten times the number of other passages in the book. It was hoped that something in the Journal or papers would show that Smith was an agent of the Abolitionists, but not a shred of such evidence was found. The prisoner placed before the court a copy of the instructions he had received from the Directors of his Society, in which the following words appeared :

"Some of the gentlemen who own the estates, the masters of the slaves, are unfriendly to their instruction; at least, they are jealous, lest by any mismanagement on the part of the missionaries, or misunderstanding on the part of the

\* Afterwards Her Majesty's Attorney-General for British Guiana.

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Negroes, the public peace and safety should be endangered.

“ You must take the utmost care to prevent the possibility of this evil ; not a word must escape you, in public or private, which might render the slaves displeased with their masters, or dissatisfied with their station.

“ You are not sent to relieve them from their servile condition, but to afford them the consolation of religion.”

There was ample evidence in the Journal and in the mouths of witnesses that these directions were faithfully carried out, difficult as they were.

Though the prisoner showed that his method of preaching the Gospel and his choice of Bible subjects were the same as those of other preachers to the Negroes, his sermons were seized upon as evidence against him. Much play was made with one sermon on the deliverance of the Children of Israel from their bondage under Pharoah, and it was contended that the congregation of slaves took this to be a foretelling of their own deliverance. This sermon was preached two years before the revolt, and witnesses declared that they had never heard of the history of the Israelites being applied to the condition of the Negro slaves. A sermon preached on the Sunday before the revolt was upon the text : “ He beheld the

## Smith of Demerara

city and wept over it." This also was quoted against the prisoner, indeed, there would have been very little of the Bible left to preach from if everything capable of being twisted into anti-slavery propaganda had been omitted.

The facts that the Negroes gave money to the Missionary Society, and made payments for Bibles and other books, were used to show that the missionary had gained an undue ascendancy over the slaves. It was argued that these people would be the last to give their money for such things if left to themselves, therefore they must have been coerced. It must have astonished the planters to hear how much their labourers gave, but the explanation was simple. The members of Bethel Chapel had found a new interest in life: they no longer wasted the little store of money earned on their allotments, in the dissipations of the Sunday market in Georgetown, and so they had guilders to pay for better things.

Thus the prejudice against the prisoner was fed by many things which had nothing to do with the charges upon which he was being tried, but at the back of them all was the panic fear of instruction.

Most of the planters believed that, if slavery was to continue, it would have to continue as it was, without attempts to raise the character of the slaves, and that such attempts would undermine the

## The Court Martial

slave system and endanger the prosperity of the Colony.

“The estate owners ought to have said to the missionaries, ‘We shall not suffer you to enlighten our slaves, who are by law our property, till you can demonstrate that when they are made religious and knowing, they will still continue to be our slaves.’”\*

Amidst all the turmoil of the time, the quietest and clearest mind was that of the missionary Smith, who was the centre of the storm. His questions to witnesses, his able defence and his letters, reveal a single-minded, honest man doing his best to unravel the tangled web in which he was being enclosed. He brings managers to prove that the Christians are better behaved than others; he gives a reasoned and patient answer to every accusation, even when it might be brushed aside as outside the scope of the trial; he puts his finger upon the vital spot—his relations with Quamina—and shows how the witnesses contradict one another in their evidence on this matter. The prosecutor tries to show that Smith had an aversion to slavery, and the prisoner concedes the point thus :

“That I have an aversion to slavery I cannot deny, for if it be a crime to cherish such an aversion, then I have as my

\* *The Colonist* newspaper, February 18th, 1824.

## Smith of Demerara

associates in guilt the most liberal and best part of mankind. After the recent recognition by the House of Commons and the British Government of the proposition that 'Slavery is repugnant to Christianity,' it cannot be necessary for me, a minister of the Gospel, to enter into any justification of my sentiments on this subject."

Brave words these, in the presence of men smarting with resentment against what they considered the meddling interference of the House of Commons, and yet he does prove to them that he has not intended to incite the slaves to rebellion. The withdrawal of that charge from the indictment was a triumph for his honesty of purpose.

On the 14th November, Smith replied to the charges in a convincing speech and concluded with a solemn declaration of his innocence.

The Prosecutor took five days to prepare his final charges to the court. In his efforts to get a verdict against the prisoner, he frankly relied mainly upon the general impression produced by the missionary's ministry. At one point he said :

" It is not by any one isolated act that the intention of the actor can be proved. The point in question is a part of a system, and must be judged of by the whole tenor of that system."

## The Court Martial

Here is the naked appeal to prejudice. The prisoner's acts would not condemn him, so the deeply hated missionary system is, in the person of John Smith, to be judged and punished.

It is easy, after the lapse of a century, to see that the trial was an effort to throw upon the missionary the responsibility for the events of August, which had been precipitated by the concealment of the new laws, and to bolster up the falling slave trade.

Five days later (November 24th, 1823) the Court Martial delivered its judgment. The prisoner was found guilty of many of the charges against him (see Page 80), condemned to be hanged by the neck at such time and place as the Lieutenant Governor "may think fit to direct," but under all the circumstances of the case recommended to mercy.

The demon of fear still presided over the Court. Here in its verdict is concentrated the fear of the instructed Negro, fear of the planters, and fear of the Home Government.

Upstairs in the garret John Smith guessed what the verdict was when he heard the exultant shouts of joy in the court below.

It is possible that the recommendation to mercy was not announced to the assembled whites; it was certainly omitted from the notices published in the Georgetown Press, which simply stated that the result was

## Smith of Demerara

satisfactory, but that the sentence would have to be submitted to the King in England for approval.

The temper of the whites may be gathered from the fact that the gallows had already been prepared and an effigy of Smith suspended there by a jeering crowd.\*

The feeble frame of the living victim was removed from the Colony House to the common jail, where, in a room on the ground floor, with stagnant water sending its poisoned vapours upward through the gaping boards, he awaited in increasing weakness the King's decision

\* Stated in Captain Studholme Hodson's "Truths from the West Indies," Page 130.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FROM THE COURT TO THE GRAVE

### Letters from Jail Death and Burial

I with uncovered head  
Salute the sacred dead,  
Who went, and who return not.—Say not so!

Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave,  
No bar of endless night exiles the brave;  
And to the saner mind  
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.

HARVARD COMMEMORATION ODE.—*J. R. Lowell*

**I**N December, Smith summoned up enough strength to write a sensible and dispassionate letter to the London Missionary Society, describing the trial and the real causes of the rising. He wrote :

“It is worthy of remark that none of the Negroes who gave testimony against me were punished. This, of course, I learn from others. I must not omit to mention the kindness of the Rev. W. S. Austin. I am under the greatest obligations to him. . . .

“I have been two days writing this, and now feel so ill that I must come to a close. I am satisfied that I am in the Lord’s hand, and there I wish to be.”

To his old friend and employer, Mr. Davies (Blunden’s successor), in London, he wrote :

## Smith of Demerara

“I feel pretty happy in my mind. I know not what judgment awaits me. Sometimes I think my decaying frame will not hold together long enough for it to affect me.

“Indeed, I often feel anxious for the period to arrive when I shall inhabit a house not made with hands. Pray for me.”

When the news of the proposed trial by Court Martial reached London, the Directors of the Missionary Society went to the Government with a request that if Smith were found guilty no punishment should be inflicted until a full investigation of the causes of the rising had been made. They went again when they heard of his declining health, with an appeal for his removal to England, security being given for his submission to any measures the Government might approve.

Earl Bathurst so far agreed as to send an order to Governor Murray that the prisoner should be sent home, if possible, but the order, which reached Demerara on February 9th, 1824,\* arrived too late. Smith had been dead three days.

\* The same mail conveyed the news that Governor Murray was to be relieved of his office, and Sir Benjamin D'Urban appointed in his place. An examination of the Colonial Office despatches shows that during the two years before the outbreak, Earl Bathurst had written ten times to Governor Murray upon matters which required criticism, correction, or dissent. It is specially significant that one despatch, issued with full formality from the King's Court at Carlton House, on July 1st, 1821, orders “That you do not on any occasion or under any pretence suffer any kind of punishment which can in no case be inflicted under the laws of England to be inflicted on any of our subjects under your Government.” It may be inferred that Murray had not won the confidence of the Home Government, though it did its best to defend his action afterwards.

## From the Court to the Grave

On the morning of February 6th, 1824, the severe sufferings of John Smith came to an end in the most happy manner. He was perfectly sensible to the last moment, and died in unshaken confidence in the Master Whom he had served so faithfully.

Before he died he was compelled by the authorities to draw a bill upon the funds of the Missionary Society to pay for the cost of the Court Martial. Years afterwards it was discovered that in a corner of the bill Smith had written in very small letters the reference, II. Cor., iv. 8, 9 ("We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed").

The pulmonary consumption, the strain of his long trial and the rigours of imprisonment, first in a sun-scorched attic, and afterwards in a damp cell, had completed their work; the spirit which had sustained the frail body in such ardent service for the slaves, during six and a half years, returned to Him Who gave it.

Only by faith could his friends hear the trumpets sounding for him on the other side, but though he died a felon and had lost a battle, he had won a war.

Before sunrise next morning the body was committed to the grave. His Excellency Governor Murray had given orders that no one was to be allowed to *follow* the

## Smith of Demerara

coffin to the burial. The order was obeyed to the letter—Mrs. Smith and her friends went *in front* of it. There in the darkness, brightened only by the glimmer of a Negro's lanthorn, Chaplain Austin, one of the few fearless friends of Smith in the Colony, read the service for the burial of the dead.

Never were the deep words of that service truer which said :

“ He that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

Negroes who loved Smith came to put a railing round his grave to mark the place of burial : but the Governor, still with a genius for doing the wrong thing, caused their work to be blotted out. To this day no one knows where the body of the martyr lies.

Yet it is true that “ The Righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.” Forbidden a tomb, his name now speaks from a church, and lives in the life of a free and educated people.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Agitation in England— Brougham, Canning and Wilberforce

“ The whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men ; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone, but on hearts of flesh. Make them your examples, and esteeming courage to be freedom, and freedom to be happiness, do not weigh too nicely the perils of war.”

THUCYDIDES—*Speech of Pericles*

**A** TORRENT of slander burst from the British newspapers\* when the news of Smith's trial and condemnation became known. The verdict of the Court Martial was hailed as a just and proper ending to a wicked attempt to destroy the prosperity of the Colony.

Some of those engaged in the Anti-Slavery Movement had not shown much sympathy with the cause of reform at home, though in the long run their action, especially in Africa, greatly helped the establishment of honest trade, by which the British workman received benefit. It happened, therefore, that the plantation owners and their friends

\* One of the few exceptions was *The New Times*, which consistently befriended the missionary's cause.

## Smith of Demerara

were joined by many of the Reform party at home in condemnation of the missionaries.

William Wilberforce issued "An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the inhabitants of the British Empire, on behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies."

To this, Cobbett, the vigorous penman of Reform, wrote a terrific reply, in which he said :

" You have found out that every nation is benefited by the growing affluence of others ; and that all are thus interested in the well-being and improvement of all ! *Mad ranting devils* ; to what pitch will your ravings go at last."

" I am of opinion, not only that slavery cannot be abolished, but that it cannot be other than it is now without the overthrow of the colonies."

For six months the case of John Smith was hotly debated in the Press and on public platforms.

The Directors of the Missionary Society moved slowly, but when they did take action it was well considered and effective. In April, 1824, a petition from the Board was presented to the House of Commons by Sir James Mackintosh, setting out the whole story in sober and convincing terms. It asked for a revision of the sentence and

## In the House of Commons

the adoption of such measures as would protect Christian missionaries in every part of the Empire.

Meetings were held, from which resolutions and petitions in an increasing stream poured in from every part of England, to prove the growing approval of Smith's work. Two hundred petitions were presented to Parliament in eleven days, and steadily the force of truth silenced the clamour of the scorers.

On June 1st, 1824, there was a memorable debate in the House of Commons on the action of the Court Martial. The House was crowded when Henry Brougham rose to move a resolution declaring the trial and condemnation of John Smith a violation of law and justice. In a speech lasting three hours \* he completely destroyed the confidence which many of his hearers had felt in the Court Martial. He asserted that :

“ from the beginning of those proceedings to their fatal termination, there has been committed more of illegality, more of violation of justice than, in the whole history of modern times, was ever witnessed in any enquiry that could be called a judicial proceeding.”

Brougham's speech was so effective that, though the Government had determined to

\* Quoted very fully in Appendix V. to "The Demerara Martyr" (Wallbridge). Also in "The Missionary Smith. Substance of the Debate in the House of Commons." Hatchard, 1824.

## Smith of Demerara

meet his resolution with a negative vote, the debate was adjourned, and ten days later, when the discussion was resumed, Canning replied to the attack by moving the previous question, which meant "That the resolution be not put to the vote."

It was during this adjourned debate that the veteran William Wilberforce appeared for his last public act on behalf of the noble cause to which he had dedicated his life, and spoke with warmth in praise of Smith.

Wilberforce added a few lighter touches to the debate. In criticising the composition of the military Court Martial, he mentioned that in his long experience, naval and military men, when questioned concerning the state of the slaves, spoke of it as being all the most exquisite humanity could desire. "One declared that so happy were the slaves that he had often wished himself to be one of their number!"

The most brilliant exposure of the Court Martial came from Dr. Lushington, who, basing his arguments solely on the documents before the Commons, claimed for the injured man perfect innocence, both legal and moral.

In its simplest form the accusation against Smith was that he overheard a treasonable conversation and concealed his knowledge of it. The evidence for this was Negro evidence—admittedly untrustworthy in those days, because of the inaccurate memories of the slaves; and even this evidence was

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contradictory. Many of the statements made by the Negroes were manifestly ridiculous,\* and were proved to have been framed for them by those interested in the prosecution.

Hearsay evidence was admitted until the prisoner's witnesses began to offer it—then it was stopped as improper.

The continuance of Martial Law for five months, when the affair had been settled in a few days; the close and inconsiderate confinement of a dying man from August to February; the vague and retrospective nature of the charges; the concealment of the new regulations by the Governor; these things found no adequate defence even from Murray's apologists in the Commons. The best that could be said for the Court Martial was that it acted according to its light, and, after all, had it not recommended the prisoner to mercy?

Canning very justly observed that the Court must have known, when it sent home a recommendation to mercy, that the King would never allow the sentence of death to be carried out. But there should never have been any sentence of death. It was the last touch of folly which brought odium upon the Colony and turned the event into a strong weapon for the Emancipationists.

The report of the speeches in the Commons

\* Paris (executed before Smith's trial), had sworn that if the rising had been successful, Smith was to be made Emperor!

## Smith of Demerara

occupies two hundred and fifty pages, each longer than this, but nowhere is there any reference to the despatch from the Government (dated July 1st, 1821), ordering that no punishment should be inflicted "which could not be inflicted under the laws of England."

The House had some difficulty in finding the legal code under which the Court Martial had conducted its enquiry. Dutch law, Roman law, and Martial Law were claimed by one speaker or another as the sanction, but in the end Parliament could only decide by 193 against 146 that it would rather not vote upon Henry Brougham's Motion.

Enough has been written, and yet a few of the sayings of the men of the Commons deserve repeating. Here are two from Brougham :

"The question is not, ' Shall the Negroes be taught by missionaries ? ' but, ' Shall they or shall they not be taught at all ? ' "

"The Right Honourable gentleman seems disposed to quarrel with the title ' martyr.' For my own part I have no fault to find with it ; because I deem that man to deserve the name who willingly suffers for conscience' sake.

"His blood cries from the ground—but not for vengeance. It cries aloud for justice to his memory, and for protec-

## In the House of Commons

tion to those who shall tread in his footsteps.

“If theirs is a holy duty, it is ours to shield them, in discharging it, from that injustice which has persecuted the living, and blasted the memory of the dead.”

And one testimony from Thomas Denman (afterwards Lord Chief Justice) embodies the opinion of a great lawyer.

“I am no fanatic. I subscribe to no missionary society. Yet I read the evidence with utter astonishment. This man has been most foully treated, nay, the very circumstances brought forward in proof of his guilt prove his innocence.”

Most prophetic of all were Canning's words at the end of the debate, after he had done his best to defend the Court Martial.

“In the person of that individual (Smith), the spirit of religious instruction is not extinguished. The Colony will find enough to be convinced that theirs was not a triumph over the individual as a missionary: and that many such triumphs (if triumphs they should be called) will only hasten the final triumph over all attempts to shut out instruction.”

That day was indeed hastened. The colonists had in effect closed the door on

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those whose self-denying labours aimed at improving the lot of the slaves. There was only one other way, and that was to remove altogether the system which denied humanity in the Negroes and disgraced it in their masters.

On August 1st, 1834, at a cost of £20,000,000 to Britain, the Act of Emancipation came into force, and among the shouting, singing, sobbing multitude of Negroes attending the Proclamation before the Government House in Georgetown, John Smith was not forgotten.

Nor is he unremembered now, for, in the centre of the city, the spire of a church bearing his name, points to heaven in the place where his spirit left the earth.

## APPENDIX

### BRITISH GUIANA

### Area—Character—Products— The Planters—Their Slaves

**O**N the north-east shoulder of the map of South America, there are three sections which look like tabs on a soldier's collar, for they are small in relation to the vastness of the continent. They are British, Dutch and French Guiana, and, small as they seem, the British Colony is about the same area as Great Britain, containing 90,277 square miles, with a coast-line of 270 miles, and an average width, from the coast inland, of 500 miles. It is the only British possession on the South American mainland. From the days when Raleigh explored the Orinoco River it has been known as a land of wondrous beauty and fertility. The tradition grew up that it was not healthy for Europeans: yellow fever and malaria were terrible scourges when white men lived recklessly. There have, however, been ardent advocates of inland Guiana as a health resort to set over against its detractors. The land near the coast is flat and swampy, but the early Dutch settlers, who carried the arts of Holland thither in the sixteenth century, found that, by building sea walls and cutting

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drains, a most prolific alluvial soil could be rescued for the cultivation of sugar, cotton and coffee. Cotton was grown in Guiana fifty years before it was planted in the United States, but it was generally abandoned for more profitable crops when the American cotton captured the markets of the world.

Behind the mud flats there is a second belt of undulating country 80 to 100 feet above sea-level. Behind this stand the hills with some mountains as high as 8,000 feet, and at the back of all is Manoa, the El Dorado of the Spanish adventurers.

Sir Walter Raleigh, like the Spaniards, went to Guiana in search of gold. He returned to England to implore Queen Elizabeth to conquer and keep the country. "For whatsoever Prince shall possess it shall be greatest, and if the King of Spain enjoy it, he will become irresistible." But he saw many other desirable things besides gold, and their number was so great that he declared the territory "rich beyond description."

That is still true, for here gold is found, and sugar, rum and rice are shipped away in large quantities; there are 10,000 square miles of splendid timber available and awaiting modern enterprise, and there are over 88,000 square miles of unallotted Crown lands. It is a land to delight a frontiersman; a land of forest and stream where there are no violent contrasts of heat and cold, where the storms and earthquakes which rack the

## Appendix—British Guiana

islands rarely come, and the clothing of the body may be reduced to the rudiments.

The *Victoria Regia*, whose floating leaves, nearly six feet in diameter, astonish the young visitors to Kew Gardens, was first discovered in the Berbice River. Pineapples, coconuts, oranges, lemons, limes and a hundred other fruits grow with little help from man; plantains and cassava provide the daily bread of the labourers, and the various products of the sugar-cane help to make Guiana a land of plenty.

Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice, now comprising the Colony of British Guiana, were originally three distinct Dutch Colonies.

In the year 1796 they were taken by the British. They were restored to the Dutch in 1802, but finally ceded to the British Crown in 1803. At that time there were only two churches in the Colony, one a Lutheran Church, richly endowed, in Berbice, the other, a Dutch Reformed Church on Fort Island. These churches were about a hundred miles apart, and were for the planters, not the slaves.

On the occupation of the country a British Chaplain attached to the garrison read prayers in a small room in the Old Court House, Georgetown, but the few inquisitive black people who tried to peep in at the door were driven away. In later years the planters and colonial authorities provided English, Scotch, Romish and Lutheran Churches with

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Bishops, Archdeacons and other clergy at a heavy cost to the public funds, but these also were for the white population.

In the United Colony of Demerara and Essequibo\* there were in 1823 about 80,000 persons, *i.e.*, 74,000 slaves, 3,500 whites and 2,500 free coloured people, besides a few soldiers and some Indian tribes dwelling in the backwoods, and subsidised by the Government to recapture fugitive slaves.

The value of a slave at that time was about £70. Later on, just before Emancipation, when the planters were to be compensated for the loss of their labourers, the price rose sometimes as high as £110.

The number of slaves on a plantation varied widely; 90 plantations had less than 100 each; 110 had from 100 to 200 each, and 150 had from 200 to 600, but the whites did not average more than six to a plantation. Between 1817 and 1823 the death-rate among the negroes was markedly in excess of the birth-rate; in those six years there was a decrease of over 4,000 among them. Various causes were suggested, such as the inequality of the sexes (eight males to two females) among the imported slaves, but bad medical service and licentiousness had something to do with it. The planters naturally regarded the Negroes as property, and one of their arguments in repudiating interference from England was based on the fact

\* Berbice was not added to the colony until 1831.

## Appendix—British Guiana

that, when the country was ceded in 1803 the condition was laid down that the "ownership of property" was to be respected. The slaves were the labourers, and consequently the chief source of that wealth which the planters evidently enjoyed. Here, then, was a small body of armed whites controlling the destiny of negroes twenty times their own number.

The morals of the community were below the general standard of the age; plantation managers had black or coloured house-keepers, who were their mistresses. Marriages between slaves could not be legally recognised. Incest and illegitimacy were common amongst all classes, and the ferocity engendered by the possession of a whip, which could be applied to a naked girl at the will of the slave-driver, corrupted the whites, while it brutalised the blacks.

The owners, in the main, could not see that the fundamental error of slavery was endangering the Colony; did not, indeed, recognise it as an error. They were mortally afraid of a Negro rising, so their fixed idea was to keep the slaves down by labour, by punishment, and by the continued deprivation of all the rights and privileges which, in a well-ordered state, add to the self-respect and value of its members. Above all, they were in fear of education, for knowledge was power, and power, at all costs, must remain in the hands of the white masters. Many attempts were made to prove that the slaves

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were happy and contented. No doubt some of them were. In the course of the trials, after the insurrection, many of the Negroes cheerfully swore that their lot was satisfactory and they had nothing to complain of, but a closer examination of the facts will show that they were satisfied with very little, and content if they were only less wretched than others about them.

The inhabitants of the Colony were divided by colour into three classes—the whites, the coloured and the black. Except for illicit intercourse, the whites kept themselves apart; the coloured people of mixed parentage considered themselves superior to the Negroes, but were not allowed to mingle with the whites. The Negroes, as a rule, thought themselves better than their coloured neighbours, and reserved a special dislike for the few Indians who were employed to trap them when they ran away.

Towards their slaves the proprietors were in a position of high responsibility. Food, clothing, housing and medical treatment all came from the hands which held the whip, and yet there were very few of the whites who cared as well for their Negroes as they did for their horses. One reason for the absence of a true concern for the slaves' welfare must be found in the fact that a great many proprietors were absentees, who entrusted the management of their estates to agents. In 1820 there were 339 plan-

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tations worked by slaves, but only on 159 were there resident proprietors, the others being controlled by subordinates who were called Trustees or Attorneys.

After the death of Smith a determined effort was made by the Colonists to evict all missionaries. The planters held a meeting in Georgetown, at which long and bitter resolutions were passed, and a plan of concurrent endowment of various denominations adopted, with the object of more closely controlling the religious activities of the preachers.

For a time this plan seemed to succeed. The L.M.S. missionaries died or left, and it looked as though the Colonists had won all they wanted.

But the Negroes did not forget, and when, in 1829, new leaders came from England, affairs went forward with a bound. By 1867 the native Churches had become practically self-sustaining, and the missionaries were gradually withdrawn.

But hard times fell upon the Colony. The racial character of the population was changed by the incoming of East Indians, who now number more than the Negroes and reproduce the sounds and scenes of India, and the day came when missionary leaders were needed again. The Colonial Missionary Society has now the oversight of the work begun by the London Missionary Society in the Colony, while the latter Society has developed a great service for the Africans in Africa.

## CHRONOLOGY

Columbus discovered the West Indies . . . . .	1492
Columbus, on his third voyage, reached the Orinoco . . . . .	1498
Sir John Hawkins used English ships in the slave trade . . . . .	1562
Dutch arrived in Guiana and settled in creeks . . . . .	1580
Sir Walter Raleigh explored Guiana rivers. . . . .	1595
Dutch settled on coast lands . . . . .	1741
Society for suppression of slave trade formed . . . . .	1787
Guiana annexed by Britain . . . . .	1803
Slave Trade made illegal in British Empire. . . . .	1807
John Wray arrived in Demerara . . . . .	1808
John Smith arrived in Demerara . . . . .	1817
Canning's resolutions in House of Commons . . . . . May 15th	1823
Rising of Negroes . . . . . Aug. 18th	1823
Martial Law proclaimed . . . . . Aug. 19th	1823
Maintained five months.	
John Smith arrested . . . . . Aug. 21st	1823
Court Martial on Smith . . . . . Oct. 13th	1823
It continued till Nov. 24th.	
John Smith died in prison . . . . . Feb. 6th	1824
Demerara papers publish first account of Trial . . . . . Feb. 26th	1824
House of Commons Debate June 1st and 11th	1824
Act of Emancipation came into force Aug. 1st	1834
Children up to six years of age freed. Others subject to an apprenticeship system which ceased in 1838.	
United States Congress voted for abolition of slavery . . . . .	1865

## *THE PRESENT*

**I**N 1867 the London Missionary Society began a process of withdrawal from British Guiana, and twenty years later the last of the old missionaries had retired. The Rev. A. W. Wilson was afterwards appointed that he might train young native men for the Ministry. The Congregational Union of British Guiana was formed, and the Churches of the Colony left free to carry on their own Christian work.

Subsequent history, however, demonstrated that the people were not strong enough to stand alone. Ultimately, in sheer desperation they appealed once again to England for leadership and assistance. The London Missionary Society did not see its way again to take over the responsibility for British Guiana, and for three years the Churches were placed under the care of a Joint Committee composed of representatives of the London Missionary Society, the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and the Colonial Missionary Society. An appeal was then made to the Colonial Missionary Society to assume responsibility for the work in British Guiana, as it had already done in Jamaica by taking over all the work of the L.M.S. in that Colony. This the Colonial Missionary Society consented to do in 1917, and the past six or seven years have seen a wonderful transformation in the situation. Four European ministers have been sent out to strategic points, the latest being to the

historic Smith Church in Georgetown, built as a memorial to the martyr-hero with whose life this book deals. But the situation demands infinitely more than we are able to give with our present resources ; for throughout the whole Colony, during the period between the L.M.S. giving up and the Colonial Missionary Society taking on the work, Churches, Schools, and Manses got into a state of disrepair which is appalling.

The work is being hindered and in some places almost crippled because of the condition of the buildings. At least £5,000 is needed, in addition to what can be raised by the people themselves, to put them into a state of decent repair. If this can be done, it will put new life into all our workers and take from our pastors a terrible burden. If only some of the wealthy laymen of our English Congregationalism could visit the Colony and see things as they are, the very buildings themselves would cry out so eloquently to them that their hearts would be touched and their purses opened. British Guiana to-day presents a great challenge to the Churches of England which a hundred years ago were responsible for sending John Smith to Demerara. The death of Smith did perhaps more than any other one cause to set the people of British Guiana free from the shackles of slavery. Will you not to-day help to set the Churches of British Guiana free from the shackles of decay and disrepair ?

Cheques should be sent to the Rev. A. G. Sleep, Secretary of the Colonial Missionary Society, 20, Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.