

T H E
WEST INDIA MERCHANT.

BEING A

SERIES OF PAPERS

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IN THE

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WITH

CORRECTIONS AND NOTES.

BY THE AUTHOR.

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T H E
EDITOR TO THE READER.

COURTEOUS READER,

WE have seen the beginning of a great *Revolution*, the *Revolt of thirteen noble Provinces*; but we have not yet seen the end of it: whatever, or whenever, that shall be, we, in the interim, think it our *professional* duty, independant of our interests, to record, for the instruction or amusement of Posterity, all Facts, Sentiments and Opinions, concerning this great and important Transaction, that come within our knowledge and power; and more especially such documents, as being founded on general principles of sound policy, seem to be the genuine productions of sober men, untainted by factions. And although the *Grandees*, of the present age in our Nation, seem to have profited little by the Histories of the Revolutions of *Switzerland*, of the *Netherlands*, and of our own Country, in the three last centuries; being perhaps more delighted with perusing the Narratives and Memoirs of the *Heroic Usurpations* of the Kings of *Denmark* and *Sweden*, and of other Monarchs, over those *legal Rights* and *Immunities* of their Fellow Creatures, which, they were *chosen*, and *sworn*, to defend; we do not,

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2 *The* EDITOR *to the* READER.

however, on that account, relax our honest endeavours for the improvement of the political Virtue and Morals of Mankind.

The giddy and unthinking of the present age, not sufficiently warned or intimidated by the apprehension of Maladies, which are described, in many grave and learned Authors, to be the certain consequences of their debauched Lives, suffer themselves to be fatally convinced by sad Experience : Yet their negligence does not prevent the medical Philosopher from continuing to communicate his farther Discoveries from repeated dissections of diseased bodies.

In like manner, we go on, collecting every thing that may contribute to shew posterity, what were the general sentiments of private, as well as of public persons, during the progress of this great Revolution. To this end, we have, in this Volume, collected, from the scattered pages of the London Evening Post, the Sentiments and Opinions of *the West India Merchant*, his Friends and Correspondents, on this interesting Subject, agreeable to the desire expressed in his last Number.

F A R E W E L L.

T H E

T H E
WEST INDIA MERCHANT.

TAKEN FROM THE
LONDON EVENING POST OF JANUARY, 1776.
N U M B E R I.

S I R,

HA V I N G spent the greatest part of my life in a compting-house, I never troubled my head much about the political disputes between ministers and anti-ministers, till this last great topic concerning America compelled me to take notice of it, as it broke into my compting-house, and gave a shock, through the whole circle of my dealings, to that little property which I have been all my life labouring for.

The late extension of the West-India trade in the Ceded Islands, appeared to me in so advantageous a light, that about five years ago I quitted another branch of business, and adventured my whole capital, for consignments, among the new planters.

The confident language of the Ministry last year, who assured us that our disputes with North-America would be settled in a few months, kept me tolerably easy, tho', impressions made on me by the rational doubts and forebodings of many of our

body, as expressed in our petitions * to Parliament, obliged me to think seriously and steadily on the subject, though to my shame, I own, I did not sign those petitions.

Unhappily, every thing asserted by the Ministry has been falsified by events, which have proved the forebodings of the planters to be too true. But (as I have said above) having confined my attention principally to the perfect understanding of *my own business*, I generally concluded that men, who set themselves up for Ministers of State, would, in like manner, apply themselves studiously to be masters of *their trade*, and consequently that their schemes and plans would be equitable, rational, practicable, and so probable for their execution, that the odds of success should always be greatly in their favour. The whole train of events for some years past, and the miserable state to which our trade and national prosperity are now reduced, convince me of the contrary in every point.

My correspondents in Grenada, Tobago, St. Vincent's, and Dominica (whose calculations of great crops have hitherto so far deceived both themselves and me, that I have advanced both in money and credit by much too far, without the returns I

* See the account of the Petition in Almon's Parliamentary Register, vol. I. pages 131 and 327, and in Remembrancer, vol. II. p. 102.

had

had reason to expect) now call upon me to send them out provisions and lumber from Europe, or they must inevitably be ruined for want of these supplies, which hitherto they had at a moderate price from North-America, in exchange for their rum, which now, since the loss of that market, will lie as a dead stock upon their hands. To make such a farther advance as this demand requires, while things are more likely to grow worse than better, has thrown me into such a perplexity, that I know not how I can proceed, or what to do. If I deny the request, I ruin my correspondents, and perhaps lose my capital: If I comply with it, I entangle myself still further, perhaps to be more compleatly ruined at last. The agitation of my mind, under this dilemma, last night, produced the following dream :

“ I thought, that having adventured so much of my property in the new Islands, I had determined to make a voyage there, to be at hand to levy on the effects or estates of my correspondents, as prudence or necessity might direct me, but in my passage was taken by a North American privateer, in view of a squadron of French and Spanish men of war, and was carried to Philadelphia, where I heard a treaty was just concluded with France, Spain, and Prussia; that the Spaniards had proposed to have Jamaica in exchange for the Island of
Porto

Porto Rico ; but the Congress insisted, that (as they had been obliged to assert their independence in opposition to a barbarous, ministerial faction, which not only endeavoured to trample on their rights, natural and civil, but in the execution renounced the laws of humanity) it would ill become them to barter away the possessions of their brethren in Jamaica, without their own consent. But if the planters of Jamaica, on being consulted, could be convinced that the Island of Porto Rico would afford them estates equivalent to what they now possessed, and sufficiently indemnify them for the charge of removal, and would on that account consent to the proposed exchange ; they would then accommodate the Spaniards in this proposition, as it would bring their brethren somewhat nearer to them. But as this was not then in their power, they agreed on an alternative, that Porto Rico should be exchanged for Jamaica or Pensacola, at the option of the Congress, who knew, at all events, what happiness they could confer on the inhabitants of the latter, by removing them from their present misery. France had St. Vincent's, Grenada, and Dominica ; and Prussia had Tobago, securing to the inhabitants of these four islands their property, and the continuation of their present laws

laws and forms of government ; but the dominion of Jamaica, the old Leeward Islands, and Barbadoes, with rights of having representatives in the General Congress, was guarantied by these three powers to the United Colonies. — Lord have mercy upon me, and Old England, said I, — must I now look to France and Prussia for my property in the Ceded Islands !” — And saying this, I thought I fell as into a swoon, and hit my head against a table, the shock of which awaked me.

Now, Sir, though I was rejoiced to find this was only a dream, yet by reflecting upon it, and considering what I should do, if such a reverie should become real, my perplexity was greater than before : wherefore I resolved to send this narrative to you, hoping you will favour me with a corner of your paper as an occasional correspondent, for at present my thoughts are in such a crouded confusion, that I cannot give them orderly utterance. I also wish for the assistance and advice of my brethren and associates, planters and merchants ; for as those who are combined to injure us, must either be ignorant fools, or rogues, I hope it is not absolutely out of the power of honest and wise men to form such a combination, as may legally and equitably oppose them to effect.

N U M B E R II.

IT is reported, I cannot say on what authority, that the Congress has resolved to open a trade to, and with all the world, except Great-Britain and Ireland, by which I understand they would relax their former resolution in favour of the Sugar Islands.

If this should be true, what an unhappy consequence must the late hasty measure, the Prohibitory Act, have? For by cutting off all communication and commerce between our Sugar Islands and the United Colonies, it will prevent them from receiving those supplies for their subsistence, which the humanity of the United Colonies would have given, and which this country cannot give effectually, and I fear will not even grant what they can.

Hitherto our Sugar Islands have been supplied with corn, biscuit, cattle, salted provisions, and principally salt fish, (which last is the chief support of the labouring class) and also with lumber, under which denomination is comprehended all sorts of timber, planks, boards, &c. for maintaining their buildings, and for making the casks, without which they could not save or convey their produce to market. And all these necessaries they paid for conveniently by barter; that is, with a part of
their

their products, and chiefly with rum; for being by the several navigation acts confined to a narrow channel of domestic trade, and most of the wealthy planters residing in England, their spendings here, together with the freight, the cost of cloathing, furniture, iron tools, and sundry other stores and implements sent from Great-Britain, generally exhaust the value of all the rest of their products, so that little or no money in gold or silver specie, is returned to the islands from hence, and consequently the North-American commerce (by supplying what this country could not) was not only indispensibly necessary for the existence of the West-India Colonies as sugar plantations, but also their traders, by accepting payments in rum, instead of cash, were serving the interest of Great-Britain, and of the Sugar Islands, in a double capacity.

In consideration of the above-mentioned circumstances, I find it is now the unanimous opinion of our body, that to whatever part of the world we are to look for supplying the Sugar Islands with lumber and provisions, there is a preliminary step to be taken, which is to find a market for that part of the rum (upwards of fifty thousand puncheons) which hitherto was taken by North-America, in exchange for lumber and provisions, without which expe-

dient the planters are in no condition to pay for them; for, as in the islands, their produce, sugar, or rum, is their only money; and rum was a species sufficient to pay for the aforesaid supplies, as purchased of the North Americans, it is clear, that after the North-American commerce is cut off, if that money (rum) cannot be made to pass in exchange elsewhere, they cannot purchase these supplies at all.

And therefore, if the wisdom of administration, or of Parliament, or of the power that manages that wisdom, does not find them as certain, and as good a market for their rum, as they have deprived them of in North-America, there can be no doubt, but that all the smaller estates must cease to be sugar plantations, to the ruin, not only of nineteen in twenty of the planters (for whom as a species of foreigners, it must be confessed we have very little regard) but also to ourselves, and our trade here at home, to a degree that will shake both the Exchange and the Exchequer.

P. S. My nephew, Welchcotton (whose father was happy enough to make his fortune, and retire from business before the commencement of the present disorder in the State) being lately married, wrote to me to look out for a decent house to be purchased for him, in the new buildings at the West end of the town. But I advised

wis'd him to content himself for a while with lodgings, as I had reason to think he may have great choice, a year or two hence, at fifty per cent. below the present rate. He has been prudent enough to listen to my advice, and in his answer has sent me the following epigram, in the *laconic* style of the London Gazette, made by the curate of his parish, and which I think is not amiss :

ONE *Hannibal* from *Carthage* pass'd the *Alps*,
And put the Romans in a mighty pother ;
ONE *ARNOLD* pass'd the *wilderness of Scalps*,
And scar'd *Quebec* !--where find we *such another*?

N U M B E R III.

Mr. Printer,

I SHALL trouble you no further at present, than to communicate to you the following letter from a correspondent. I am, &c.

The West India Merchant.

To the WEST-INDIA MERCHANT.

S I R, Hereford, Jan. 19, 1776.

I dined yesterday at the house of a worthy gentleman, who, for the sake of good neighbourhood, endeavours, in the midst of our county bustle*, to make his house

* A contested Election.