

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE  
INSURRECTION IN ST. DOMINGO,  
BEGUN IN AUGUST 1791, TAKEN  
FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES**

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An Account of the Insurrection in St. Domingo, Begun in August 1791, Taken From Authentic Sources by J. G. Hopkirk

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**J. G. HOPKIRK**

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BY

J. G. HOPKIRK, LL.B.

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Quis cladem illius noctis, quis funera fando  
Explicit, aut possit lacrimis æquare dolores?  
Plurima per vias sternuntur inertia passim  
Corpora.

Crudelis ubique  
Luctus, ubique pavor, et plurima mortis imago.  
*VIRGIL—Æneid.*

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH;

AND

T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

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## PREFACE.

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*THIS little Work has no other pretensions than to give a simple narrative of the nearly-forgotten story of the Insurrection in St Domingo, as related by those who witnessed it; leaving to the reader inwardly to digest it, with reference to the present time, when the settlement of the "West India Question" is looked forward to with trembling expectation (paventosa speme.)*

*The fate of the French colony seems a beacon-light held out by the hand of Providence to guard Great Britain from striking against the rock on which St Domingo perished. May she not neglect the solemn warning!*

Inform his mind—one flash of heavenly ray  
Would heal his heart and melt his chains away.  
Then would he say—submissive at thy feet,  
While gratitude and love made service sweet—  
“ I was a bondsman on my native plain—  
Sin forged and ignorance made fast the chain.  
Thy lips have shed instruction, as the dew—  
Taught me what path to shun, and what pursue.  
Farewell my former joys ! I sigh no more  
For Africa’s once-lov’d—benighted—shore :  
Serving a benefactor, I am free  
At my best home—if not exil’d from thee !”

COWPER.



## INTRODUCTION.

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ST DOMINGO, or Hispaniola, is one of the largest, and was accounted the most fertile of the islands forming the American Archipelago. It is about one hundred and seventy leagues in length, thirty in breadth, and about three hundred and sixty in circumference. By the natives it was called Haiti, or the Highland Country, on account of the hilly nature of its north division. When originally discovered by Columbus, it was called by him Isabella, in honour of the queen of Spain, but it soon afterwards was denominated St Domingo, after the principal city of the island. It is situated among the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, and Porto Rico. It extends from  $17^{\circ} 37'$  to  $20^{\circ}$  of north latitude, and from  $67^{\circ} 35'$  to  $70^{\circ} 15'$  west longitude.

The island was formerly divided into two parts, that which is properly called Haiti, and Hispaniola; the former being the part which belonged to the French, and the latter to the Spanish.

The Spaniards held undisputed possession of the whole island of St Domingo for upwards of one hundred and twenty years, till, about the middle of the sixteenth century, when a number of French bucaniers settled at Tortuga, a small island lying to the north of St Domingo,

q. r.

From this place, they made constant incursions against the Spanish settlements, till, at length, by the treaty of Ryswick, that part of the island in which they had established themselves was ceded to the French king, who had acknowledged them as his subjects, and taken them under his protection.

From this time the colony rapidly increased, favoured by the fertility and natural productions of the soil, as well as by the mildness with which the government, in itself essentially military, had been exercised. It is true that the laws which regarded the Mulattoes, placed them in an infinitely worse situation than those of the same class in the British colonies, but the very severity of these laws prevented their being executed, from the acknowledged humanity of the whites, and the abhorrence which would have attended their enforcement. The privilege also, which the coloured people of St Domingo held, of acquiring and holding property to any amount, mainly contributed to their protection.

The population, in the end of 1789, consisted of thirty thousand eight hundred white inhabitants, about twenty thousand free people of colour; while the negroes amounted to not less than four hundred and eighty thousand. The number of sugar plantations was seven hundred and ninety-three. There were upwards of three thousand plantations of coffee, seven hundred and eighty-nine of cotton, three thousand one hundred and sixty of indigo, and six hundred and twenty-three smaller establishments, such as provision grounds, tanpits, potteries, brick-kilns, &c. &c.

At the period when a false philosophy had lighted up the torch of revolution in France, a strong feeling pre-

vailed in the minds of many, whose passions had been inflamed by the writings of their distinguished but infidel philosophers, that they who were themselves about to enjoy their new-born liberty, were bound to communicate it to their enslaved fellow creatures. Hence there arose, throughout France, a strong prejudice against the inhabitants of the sugar islands, on account of their negroes being in a state of slavery. It was not asserted that the condition of this class was worse at the time than at any former period, for the reverse was notoriously the case; but declamations in favour of freedom, and invectives against despotism of every kind had now taken hold of the public mind, and its indignation was directed against the planters, by those who were desirous of exciting commotion and insurrection in different parts of the French dominions.

This spirit was fostered and kept alive by a society which had established itself under the name of *Amis des Noirs*, and which is supposed to have been formed on the model of a similar society in London. There existed, however, this essential difference between the two societies, that the English society *then* professed to have no farther or ulterior object in view, than to obtain an act of the legislature for prohibiting the introduction of African slaves into the British colonies—disclaiming all intention of interfering with the government or condition of the negroes, and declaring their opinion to be that a general emancipation of these people, in their state of ignorance, would prove to themselves, in place of a benefit, a source of misery and distress. The association of the *Amis des Noirs*, on the contrary, whose latent design was to destroy the ancient despotism of France, *whose philosophy was a*