

**THE FRENCH COLONIAL QUESTION,  
1789-1791: DEALINGS OF THE  
CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WITH  
PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE  
REVOLUTION IN THE WEST INDIES**

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**MITCHELL BENNETT GARRETT**

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1789-1791**

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Arising From the Revolution in the  
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By

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## PREFACE

Under the direction of the late Professor Ralph C. H. Catterall I began to make a study of Barnave's career in the Constituent Assembly to complete the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. At the outset I was confronted with the necessity of making a rather intensive study of the early revolutionary period in order to give the biographical sketch an adequate historical setting. To compile a narrative of Barnave's daily deeds and speeches without sufficient explanation of what other men were doing and saying around him promised to be an idle undertaking. I needed to estimate Barnave's influence on the actions of the Constituent Assembly. With this task in view, therefore, I turned aside, after a few months of general investigation, to familiarize myself thoroughly with the work of the committee on colonies of which Barnave was reporter and most conspicuous member. My intention was to study afterwards other phases of Barnave's political activity in the same intensive fashion and eventually to gather the results of my investigations into a complete biography. But that biography has now been written by another. *The Life of Barnave* (Oxford, 1915, 2 vols.) by Miss E. D. Bradby has well-nigh exhausted the subject. Rather than to go gleaning after her I prefer to put together the best of my materials on the colonies and withdraw from the field.

The French colonies in the West Indies, with which this study deals, have already attracted the attention of historians. The secondary works listed in my bibliography will indicate what has been done for the period of the Constituent Assembly. For the most part, however, historians have been interested primarily in the colonies as such and have not examined with painstaking

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care the records of the Constituent Assembly to discover the efforts of the national deputies at Paris to understand and redress the colonial grievances. This deficiency I have tried to supply. The failure of former writers to make this part of the story clear and accurate is my excuse for adding another book to the list.

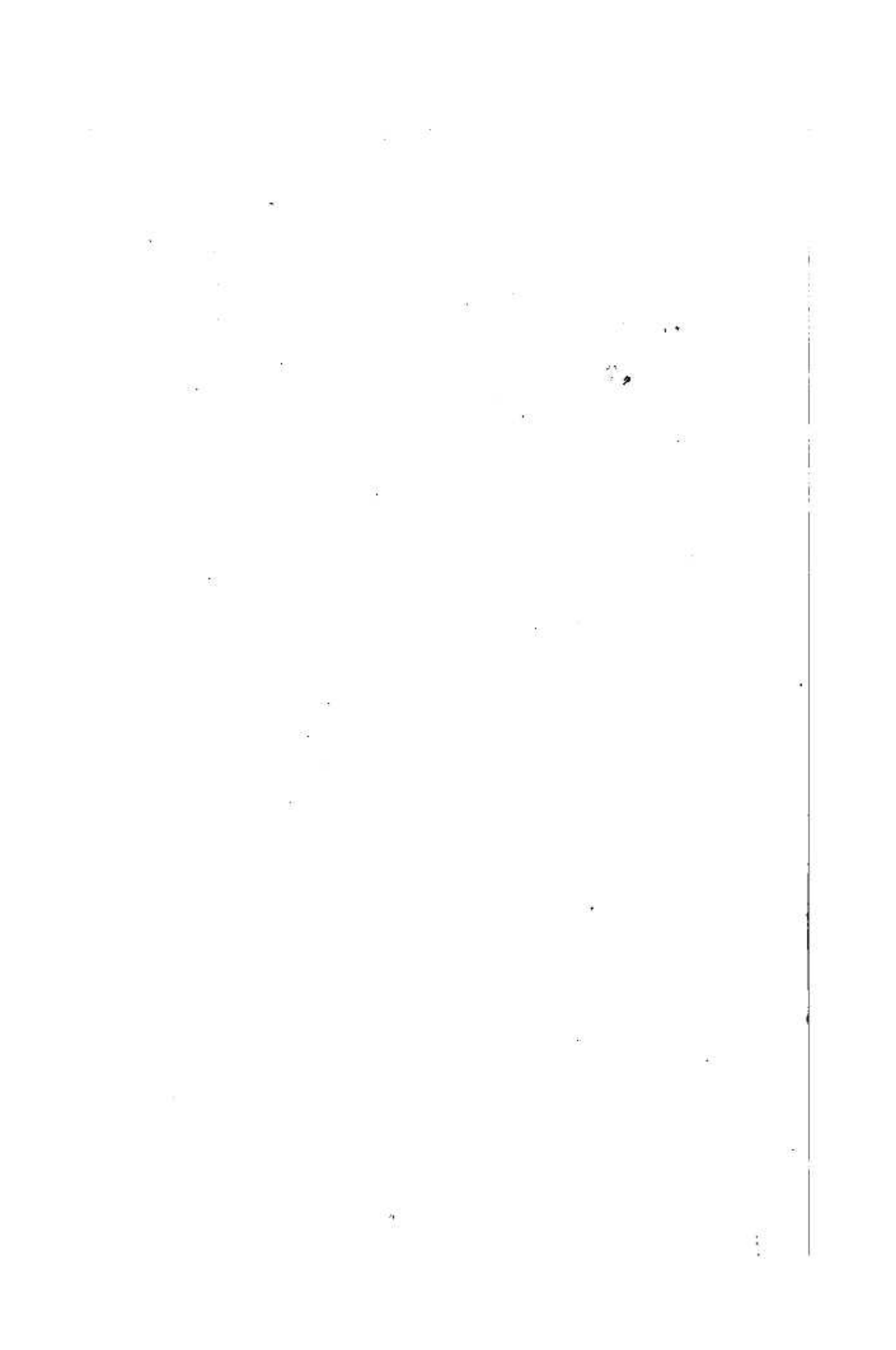
To the friends who have helped me I hereby acknowledge my obligations. Professor Charles O. Hardy, of Ottawa University, who is making a study of the mulattoes in the West Indies, more than once placed valuable bits of information freely at my disposal. Professor Edward Raymond Turner, of the University of Michigan, read a part of my manuscript and from time to time gave me advice and encouragement. Professor Charles H. Hull, of Cornell University, read the entire manuscript and gave me a valuable suggestion which I tried to adopt. To Mr. Willard H. Austen, Librarian of Cornell University, I am especially grateful for many courtesies. He allowed me the freedom of the stacks and permitted me to collect all pertinent material in an alcove where I could work in peace and comfort. During my researches in the Archives Nationales, I was guided and assisted by Messrs. Waldo G. Leland and Abel Doysié, of the Carnegie Bureau for Historical Research. To all these friends I take pleasure in acknowledging my gratitude.

Canton, New York.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PRELIMINARY DEALINGS WITH THE COLONIAL PROBLEM.

By 1789 the colonial empire of France had been reduced to scattered fragments. South of Newfoundland were the two small islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, inhabited by a few hundred Europeans engaged in cod-fishing. In the West Indies were Martinique, Guadeloupe, Tobago, Saint Lucia, and the French part of Santo Domingo or modern Haiti. Closely bound to this group by proximity of territory and similarity of institutions was French Guiana on the continent of South America. Across the sea on the western coast of Africa were Senegal, Saint Louis, Goree and Juda—mere factories to facilitate trade in slaves, ivory and caoutchouc. Beyond the Cape of Good Hope were the Ile de France and the Ile de Bourbon, of no great importance commercially, serving as ports of call between France and the Far East. In India were Pondicherry, Karikal and Yanaon upon the Coromandel, and Mahé upon the Malabar coast; while upon the banks of the Ganges was Chandernagore<sup>1</sup>. Nearly all these possessions were profoundly affected by the French Revolution, but in this study only those in the West Indies will be considered.

The white population of these islands was divided into three general classes—the planters, the government officials, and the *petits-blancs*. A majority of the planters resided permanently in the colonies and exploited their wide acres of coffee and sugarcane with slave labor; but a wealthy minority lived in France

<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Minister of Marine to the National Assembly.—*Le Point du Jour* (By Barère, started on June 19, 1879), no. 238, pp. 367-370.

as absentee landlords and not infrequently contracted marriage alliances with impoverished noble families. The fact that one hundred fifty colonial proprietors sat in the Constituent Assembly as national deputies<sup>2</sup> may be cited as evidence of the number and political influence in the mother country of these colonial nabobs. The government officials were an arrant lot of "arbitrary soldiers, supercilious bureaucrats, and pedantic lawyers"<sup>3</sup> sent out from Europe to bear sway over the King's dominions beyond the sea. Contemptuous and disdainful of all things provincial, they formed a caste apart. The *petits-blancs*, or "mean whites", were small traders, adventurers and nondescripts in the cities, and slave overseers and mechanics in the country — all men of shady character and noted for their brutality, their lawlessness and their hatred of the colored race.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise the colored population was divided into three classes—the mulattoes, the free blacks and the slaves. The mulattoes numbered about forty thousand against about eighty-three thousand whites,<sup>5</sup> and in some cases they had considerable wealth<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Journal des Etats-généraux* (By Lehouey de Saultchevreuil, started on June 1, 1789), XXXII., 159.

<sup>3</sup> Stoddard, T. Lothrop, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (Boston and New York, 1914), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond, *Observations sur l'Origine et les Progrès du Préjugé des Colons blancs contre les Hommes de Couleur*; \* \* \* (Paris, 1791), 11. Raimond, J., *Mémoire sur les Causes des Troubles et des Désastres de la Colonie de Saint-Domingue*, \* \* \* (Paris, 1793), 8. Brissot, J. P., *Discours sur la Nécessité de maintenir le Décret rendu le 15 Mai 1791* (s. l. n. d.). Cf. Stoddard, *op. cit.*, 24-26.

<sup>5</sup> Grégoire, *Lettre aux Philantropes*, \* \* (Reprinted in *Courier de Provence*, XI, 115-135), 117. Cf. Deschamps, Léon, *Les Colonies pendant la Révolution* (Paris, 1898), 296.

<sup>6</sup> It was asserted that the mulattoes owned one-third the soil and one-fourth the slaves in Santo Domingo. *Journal des Etats-généraux*, XXV., 496. Raimond, Julien *Véritable Origine des Troubles de S.-Domingue, et des Différentes Causes qui les Produits* (Paris, 1792), 3-4. Raymond was a mulatto, educated and wealthy, resident in France since 1764.