

of the East India Company, enriched by ill-gotten gains.

Though in the Old Empire the West was, roughly speaking, a sphere of British settlement as opposed to the East, which was patently a sphere of British trade, the existence of the navigation acts testified that there was no lack of trade in and with the West. But, until the eighteenth century was on the threshold, the imported wealth which tainted public life in England came more especially from the East—the sphere of trade. It has been seen that the West Indies, in spite of tropical conditions and climate, were a scene of early British colonisation no less than was the coast of North America ; but, after the middle of the seventeenth century, when sugar was becoming the staple product of the West Indian islands, and notably of Barbados, trade in the sugar-growing British islands began gradually but surely to dominate, if not to run counter to, settlement.

The case of Jamaica stood alone. This island was on a much larger scale than the other West Indian islands and presented more openings, as a headquarters of privateering and as a depôt and distributing centre for the slave trade. It received from various sources constant small accessions to its white population. But in the smaller islands the numbers of the white residents tended at best to remain stationary and rather to decrease than to grow, both actually and markedly so in proportion to the number of slaves. In the eighteenth century absentee planters living in England and leaving their West Indian estates with their human chattels under the control and at the mercy