

of agents, became a standing evil. They were an evil both to the colonies to which they owed but did not discharge responsibilities, and to England where a West India interest was created, as powerful as the Nabobs, probably more so, and still more tainted inasmuch as the basis of West Indian wealth and influence was slavery and the slave trade. The three great cities of London, Liverpool and Bristol profited by and supported the slave trade, and therefore backed up the West India interest, which was bound up with it. The treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which gave to Great Britain the contract, the Assiento, for supplying Spanish America with slaves, confirmed her as a leader in this wicked traffic, and it would be idle to look on the West Indian colonies between 1713 and 1783 as other than a sphere of trade, closely linked to West Africa, a sphere of trade in its worst and grossest form. In the beginning these West Indian islands had been as much colonies as was New England : they were now in strong contrast to the New England colonies ; and meanwhile, through the perverse stupidity of the British Government or owing to the criminal selfishness of the merchants in the Mother Country, trade in the case of the mainland North American colonies was largely traffic contrary to the law. The navigation acts, defensible during the infancy of the colonies, became more and more indefensible when the colonies had become adult communities, conscious of their constantly growing strength and of what was due to them as British citizens. Yet the more they grew, the more the commercial restrictions imposed upon them by the Mother Country were tightened, were resented, and