

A Retrospective Glance of the dark and cruel days through which St. Croix has passed from 1848—1916.

The Insurrection of 1848.



It is most appropriate at this moment to cast a glance backward and recount the evil happenings from which this island has suffered during the past 67 years. All are acquainted with the fact that of all the people who inhabit the West Indian Islands, there are none to be found more peaceful, quiet and obedient than the natives of St. Croix. It may therefore be wondered at that during a period of 68 years there has been no less than 3 disturbances of serious natures, through which many lives were lost, and property to the value of several thousand dollars consumed by flames.

The question may then be reasonably asked:

Since the people of St. Croix are described as being so well disposed, how has it happened that the stigma of 3 serious uprisings has been placed upon them? We reply that on each occasion, those in authority have acted injudiciously, overstepping the limit of their authority, and irritating the people past endurance, thus causing the 3 uprisings referred to.

It is known to all that slavery existed in this island in 1848 in all its horrors. The Governor at that time being General von Scholten, who was acknowledged by all to have been the best Governor these islands ever had; and deservedly so, since he took particular care in every respect to protect the slaves from the cruelty of their masters, and punished with the utmost severity all masters and employees who infringed the laws laid down for the protection of the slaves. Still, good upright and severe in his control as he is said to have been, he fell under the *persidious influence* of the planters, for we learn that when the order was sent from the Home Government to abolish slavery; he did not obey it with the promptness he ought to have exercised, but connived with the planters to act contrary to the orders received from his Government, and at last attempted for the purpose of satisfying others, to take a base advantage of those whom he had all through his time strenuously striven to protect. Instead of at once declaring the slaves free, and leaving his Government to fix matters with their owners, he declared that all children born from Slave parents should be free, but the parents should remain slaves for a certain number of years. At this time there was quite a number of intelligent, educated free negroes residing in the island, from this class of men were chosen the persons who formed the Brand Corps and Governor von Scholten's favorite Jaeger Corps, and it is said that from among them unseen hands directed the movements of Martin King and Bordeaux which brought about the complete freedom of the slaves—and caused the ignominious flight of the Governor from the Island where he was highly esteemed and much respected by all classes of the inhabitants. Guilty consciences make cowards of all men—aye, even of the best. He feared the planters, and was believed in some quarters to have been bribed for protracting the period of slavery. So much for the planter's *baneful influence* over Governor-General Peter von Scholten. The uprising would have ended happily but for the unfortunate remark

made by an Irishman, whose name was Paddy Moore, father of the late Major Moore, who said: "What negroes want with freedom?" That question caused all the loss of life and property that occurred in 1848. Paddy Moore's property being the first which the slaves looted and burned.

Governor Federsen's Massacre of Unarmed People on Christmas Eve Night 1852.

On the 24th Dec. 1852 the order went forth from Governor Federsen to the Police, peremptorily forbidding the people from having their usual Christmas dances. One troop headed by a man nicknamed Johnny Salt Head collected his troops as usual in what is now known as John Alexander's yard, and started to dance. The police ordered him to stop, he refused, and they cut his drum. Salt Head and troop moved down the street and stoned the police assembled in the Court House—which then stood on the bit of ground now known as Governor Limpricht's Park. A guard of soldiers was ordered out with instructions to clear the street, they returned and reported their failure to disperse the mob; another detachment was despatched with orders to shoot. Thinly populated as St. Croix is, and as poor as the people are today, still on Xmas Eve nights the streets are quite crowded. In those days when the population was twice as many as it is to-day, and the destructive claws of poverty had not yet laid hold of the people, one can readily imagine how much more people must have been on the streets that memorable Christmas Eve night 64 years ago.

The second squad of soldiers came out, and as ordered, fired several volleys in the crowd killing and wounding many—they continued to shoot the unarmed people until commanded to desist by an English officer who was among the crowd. Governor Federsen realizing that he had made a most serious blunder, and fearing summary resentment from the Burgher Corps, Jaeger Corps and Brand Corps who were all well armed and fully equipped with ammunition, some of their friends being killed and others wounded—sent the soldier cart around early Christmas morning and disarmed the 3 Corps—some of the members delivered their guns and ammunition quietly, and others enraged, flung them at the soldiers. Thus through the cowardice of a wrongdoer, three well-drilled native Corps were disbanded. The massacre was reported to the Home Government, and a Commission was sent to enquire into it. After a good deal of bluff and humbugging it was reported by the Commission that it could not be found out who had given the order to the soldiers to fire on the crowd, and the bereaved relatives had to be content with that. Thus ended the most cruel outrage ever perpetrated on a defenseless and innocent people.

The Disastrous riot of 1878.

This riot broke out in Oct. 1878, and was brought about by Judge Rubner Petersen of Frederiksted refusing to permit the labourers from the B. W. I. whose contracts had expired to return to their homes. It was the most disastrous of the 2 uprisings, and is still fresh in the memories of many.

Quite a number of Estates were destroyed, many lives lost, and many outrages and acts of cruelty perpetrated on the people, and by them.

The Police-master was instigated by the planters to prevent the people leaving the island, although they were free to depart, and the result was distressing and ruinous in the extreme—a part of the town of Frederiksted was levelled to the ground, and almost every estate from Frederiksted to Anna's Hope were more or less damaged by the flames.

Today the entire laboring population of St. Croix is on strike for more wages; and it is most earnestly hoped that an amicable arrangement will be arrived at—so that the sufferings and privations which have long been the lot of the laborer may be ameliorated, such an arrangement as will be satisfactory to all concerned—administrators, planters and laborers.—*Com.*