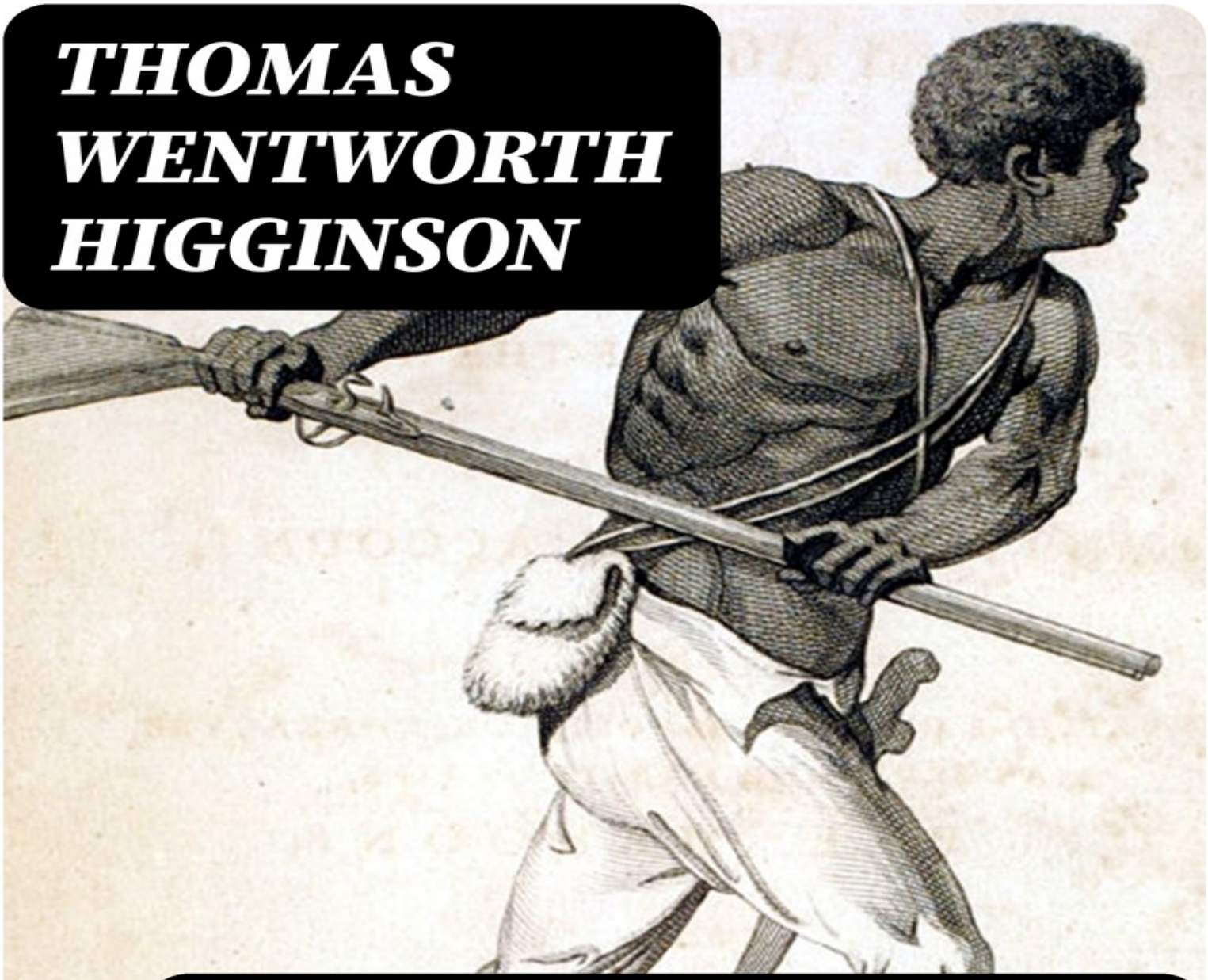
THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON



BLACK REBELLION: FIVE SLAVE REVOLTS

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THE MAROONS OF JAMAICA

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The Maroons! it was a word of peril once; and terror spread along the skirts of the blue mountains of Jamaica when some fresh foray of those unconquered guerrillas swept down from the outlying plantations, startled the Assembly from its order, Gen. Williamson from his billiards, and Lord Balcarres from his diplomatic ease,—endangering, according to the official statement, "public credit," "civil rights," and "the prosperity, if not the very existence, of the country," until they were "persuaded to make peace" at last. They were the Circassians of the New World, but they were black, instead of white; and as the Circassians refused to be transferred from the Sultan to the Czar, so the Maroons refused to be transferred from Spanish dominion to English, and thus their revolt began. The difference is, that while the white mountaineers numbered four hundred thousand, and only defied Nicholas, the black mountaineers numbered less than two thousand, and defied Cromwell; and while the Circassians, after years of revolt, were at last subdued, the Maroons, on the other hand, who rebelled in 1655, were never conquered, but only made a compromise of allegiance, and exist as a separate race to-day.

When Admirals Penn and Venables landed in Jamaica, in 1655, there was not a remnant left of the sixty thousand natives whom the Spaniards had found there a century and a half before. Their pitiful tale is told only by those caves, still known among the mountains, where thousands of human skeletons strew the ground. In their place dwelt two

foreign races,—an effeminate, ignorant, indolent white community of fifteen hundred, with a black slave population quite as large and infinitely more hardy and energetic. The Spaniards were readily subdued by the English: the negroes remained unsubdued. The slaveholders were banished from the island: the slaves only exiled themselves to the mountains; thence the English could not dislodge them, nor the buccaneers whom the English employed. And when Jamaica subsided into a British colony, and peace was made with Spain, and the children of Cromwell's Puritan soldiers were beginning to grow rich by importing slaves for Roman-Catholic Spaniards, the Maroons still held their own wild empire in the mountains, and, being sturdy heathens every one, practised Obeah rites in approved pagan fashion.

The word Maroon is derived, according to one etymology, from the Spanish word *Marrano*, a wild boar,—these fugitives being all boar-hunters; according to another, from *Marony*, a river separating French and Dutch Guiana, where a colony of them dwelt and still dwells; and by another still, from *Cimarron*, a word meaning untamable, and used alike for apes and runaway slaves. But whether these rebel marauders were regarded as monkeys or men, they made themselves equally formidable. As early as 1663, the Governor and Council of Jamaica offered to each Maroon, who should surrender, his freedom and twenty acres of land; but not one accepted the terms. During forty years, forty-four Acts of Assembly were passed in respect to them, and at least a quarter of a million pounds sterling were expended in the warfare against them. In 1733, the force employed in this service consisted of two regiments of

regular troops, and the whole militia of the island; but the Assembly said that "the Maroons had within a few years greatly increased, notwithstanding all the measures that had been concerted for their suppression," "to the great terror of his Majesty's subjects," and "to the manifest weakening and preventing the further increase of strength and inhabitants of the island."

The special affair in progress, at the time of these statements, was called Cudjoe's War. Cudjoe was a gentleman of extreme brevity and blackness, whose full-length portrait can hardly be said to adorn Dallas's History of the Maroons; but he was as formidable a guerrilla as Marion. Under his leadership, the various bodies of fugitives were consolidated into one force, and thoroughly organized. Cudjoe, like Schamyl, was religious as well as military head of his people; by Obeah influence he established a thorough freemasonry among both slaves and insurgents; no party could be sent forth, by the government, but he knew it in time to lay an ambush, or descend with fire and sword on the region left unprotected. He was thus always supplied with arms and ammunition; and as his men were perfect marksmen, never wasted a shot, and never risked a battle, his forces naturally increased, while those of his opponents were decimated. His men were never captured, and never took a prisoner; it was impossible to tell when they were defeated; in dealing with them, as Pelissier said of the Arabs, "peace was not purchased by victory;" and the only men who could obtain the slightest advantage against them were the imported Mosquito Indians, or the "Black Shot," a company of Government negroes. For nine full years this

particular war continued unchecked, Gen. Williamson ruling Jamaica by day and Cudjoe by night.

The rebels had every topographical advantage, for they held possession of the "Cockpits." Those highlands are furrowed through and through, as by an earthquake, with a series of gaps or ravines, resembling the California cañons, or those similar fissures in various parts of the Atlantic States, known to local fame either poetically as ice-glens, or symbolically as purgatories. These Jamaica chasms vary from two hundred yards to a mile in length; the rocky walls are fifty or a hundred feet high, and often absolutely inaccessible, while the passes at each end admit but one man at a time. They are thickly wooded, wherever trees can grow; water flows within them; and they often communicate with one another, forming a series of traps for an invading force. Tired and thirsty with climbing, the weary soldiers toil on, in single file, without seeing or hearing an enemy, up the steep and winding path they traverse one "cockpit," then enter another. Suddenly a shot is fired from the dense and sloping forest on the right, then another and another, each dropping its man; the startled troops face hastily in that direction, when a more murderous volley is poured from the other side; the heights above flash with musketry, while the precipitous path by which they came seems to close in fire behind them. By the time the troops have formed in some attempt at military order, the woods around them are empty, and their agile and noiseless foes have settled themselves into ambush again, farther up the defile, ready for a second attack, if needed. But one is usually sufficient; disordered, exhausted, bearing their wounded with them,

the soldiers retreat in panic, if permitted to escape at all, and carry fresh dismay to the barracks, the plantations, and the Government House.

It is not strange, then, that high military authorities, at that period, should have pronounced the subjugation of the Maroons a thing more difficult than to obtain a victory over any army in Europe. Moreover, these people were fighting for their liberty, with which aim no form of warfare seemed to them unjustifiable; and the description given by Lafayette of the American Revolution was true of this one,—"the grandest of causes, won by contests of sentinels and outposts." The utmost hope of a British officer, ordered against the Maroons, was to lay waste a provision-ground, or cut them off from water. But there was little satisfaction in this: the wild-pine leaves and the grapevine-withes supplied the rebels with water; and their plantation-grounds were the wild pineapple and the plantain-groves, and the forests, where the wild boars harbored, and the ringdoves were as easily shot as if they were militiamen. Nothing but sheer weariness of fighting seems to have brought about a truce at last, and then a treaty, between those high contracting parties, Cudjoe and Gen. Williamson.

But how to execute a treaty between these wild Children of the Mist and respectable diplomatic Englishmen? To establish any official relations without the medium of a preliminary bullet, required some ingenuity of manoeuvring. Cudjoe was willing, but inconveniently cautious: he would not come halfway to meet any one; nothing would content him but an interview in his own chosen cockpit. So he selected one of the most difficult passes, posting in the

forests a series of outlying parties, to signal with their horns, one by one, the approach of the plenipotentiaries, and then to retire on the main body. Through this line of dangerous sentinels, therefore, Col. Guthrie and his handful of men bravely advanced; horn after horn they heard sounded, but there was no other human noise in the woods, and they had advanced till they saw the smoke of the Maroon huts before they caught a glimpse of a human form.

A conversation was at last opened with the invisible rebels. On their promise of safety, Dr. Russell advanced alone to treat with them; then several Maroons appeared, and finally Cudjoe himself. The formidable chief was not highly military in appearance, being short, fat, humpbacked, dressed in a tattered blue coat without skirts or sleeves, and an old felt hat without a rim. But if he had blazed with regimental scarlet, he could not have been treated with more distinguished consideration; indeed, in that case, "the exchange of hats" with which Dr. Russell finally volunteered, in Maroon fashion, to ratify negotiations, might have been a less severe test of good fellowship. This fine stroke of diplomacy had its effect, however; the rebel captains agreed to a formal interview with Col. Guthrie and Capt. Sadler, and a treaty was at last executed with all due solemnity, under a large cotton-tree at the entrance of Guthrie's Defile. This treaty recognized the military rank of "Capt. Cudjoe," "Capt. Accompong," and the rest; gave assurance that the Maroons should be "forever hereafter in a perfect state of freedom and liberty;" ceded to them fifteen hundred acres of land; and stipulated only that they should keep the peace, should harbor no fugitive from justice or from slavery, and should

allow two white commissioners to remain among them, simply to represent the British Government.

During the following year a separate treaty was made with another large body of insurgents, called the Windward Maroons. This was not effected, however, until after an unsuccessful military attempt, in which the mountaineers gained a signal triumph. By artful devices,—a few fires left burning with old women to watch them,—a few provision-grounds exposed by clearing away the bushes,—they lured the troops far up among the mountains, and then surprised them by an ambush. The militia all fled, and the regulars took refuge under a large cliff in a stream, where they remained four hours up to their waists in water, until finally they forded the river, under full fire, with terrible loss. Three months after this, however, the Maroons consented to an amicable interview, exchanging hostages first. The position of the white hostage, at least, was not the most agreeable; he complained that he was beset by the women and children with indignant cries of "Buckra, Buckra," while the little boys pointed their fingers at him as if stabbing him, and that with evident relish. However, Capt. Quao, like Capt. Cudjoe, made a treaty at last; and hats were interchanged, instead of hostages.

Independence being thus won and acknowledged, there was a suspension of hostilities for some years. Among the wild mountains of Jamaica, the Maroons dwelt in a savage freedom. So healthful and beautiful was the situation of their chief town, that the English Government has erected barracks there of late years, as being the most salubrious situation on the island. They breathed an air ten degrees

cooler than that inhaled by the white population below; and they lived on a daintier diet, so that the English epicures used to go up among them for good living. The mountaineers caught the strange land-crabs, plodding in companies of millions their sidelong path from mountain to ocean, and from ocean to mountain again. They hunted the wild boars, and prepared the flesh by salting and smoking it in layers of aromatic leaves, the delicious "jerked hog" of buccaneer annals. They reared cattle and poultry, cultivated corn and yams, plantains and cocoas, guavas, and papaws and mameys, and avocados, and all luxurious West-Indian fruits; the very weeds of their orchards had tropical luxuriance in their fragrance and in their names; and from the doors of their little thatched huts they looked across these gardens of delight to the magnificent lowland forests, and over those again to the faint line of far-off beach, the fainter ocean-horizon, and the illimitable sky.

They had senses like those of American Indians; tracked each other by the smell of the smoke of fires in the air, and called to each other by horns, using a special note to designate each of their comrades, and distinguishing it beyond the range of ordinary hearing. They spoke English diluted with Spanish and African words, and practised Obeah rites quite undiluted with Christianity. Of course they associated largely with the slaves, without any very precise regard to treaty stipulations; sometimes brought in fugitives, and sometimes concealed them; left their towns and settled on the planters lands when they preferred them: but were quite orderly and luxuriously happy. During the formidable insurrection of the Koromantyn slaves, in 1760,

they played a dubious part. When left to go on their own way, they did something towards suppressing it; but when placed under the guns of the troops, and ordered to fire on those of their own color, they threw themselves on the ground without discharging a shot. Nevertheless, they gradually came up into reputable standing; they grew more and more industrious and steady; and after they had joined very heartily in resisting D'Estaing's threatened invasion of the island in 1779, it became the fashion to speak of "our faithful and affectionate Maroons."

In 1795, their position was as follows: Their numbers had not materially increased, for many had strayed off and settled on the outskirts of plantations; nor materially diminished, for many runaway slaves had joined them; while there were also separate settlements of fugitives, who had maintained their freedom for twenty years. The white superintendents had lived with the Maroons in perfect harmony, without the slightest official authority, but with a great deal of actual influence. But there was an "irrepressible conflict" behind all this apparent peace, and the slightest occasion might, at any moment, revive all the old terror. That occasion was close at hand.

Capt. Cudjoe and Capt. Accompong, and the other founders of Maroon independence, had passed away; and "Old Montagu" reigned in their stead, in Trelawney Town. Old Montagu had all the pomp and circumstance of Maroon majesty: he wore a laced red coat, and a hat superb with gold lace and plumes; none but captains could sit in his presence; he was helped first at meals, and no woman could eat beside him; he presided at councils as magnificently as

at table, though with less appetite; and possessed, meanwhile, not an atom of the love or reverence of any human being. The real power lay entirely with Major James, the white superintendent, who had been brought up among the Maroons by his father (and predecessor), and who was the idol of this wild race. In an evil hour, the Government removed him, and put a certain unpopular Capt. Craskell in his place; and as there happened to be, about the same time, a great excitement concerning a hopeful pair of young Maroons, who had been seized and publicly whipped on a charge of hog-stealing, their kindred refused to allow the new superintendent to remain in the town. A few attempts at negotiation only brought them to a higher pitch of wrath, which ended in their despatching the following peculiar diplomatic note to the Earl of Balcarres: "The Maroons wishes nothing else from the country but battle, and they desires not to see Mr. Craskell up here at all. So they are waiting every moment for the above on Monday. Mr. David Schaw will see you on Sunday morning for an answer. They will wait till Monday, nine o'clock, and if they don't come up, they will come down themselves." Signed, "Col. Montagu and all the rest."

It turned out, at last, that only two or three of the Maroons were concerned in this remarkable defiance; but meanwhile it had its effect. Several ambassadors were sent among the insurgents, and were so favorably impressed by their reception as to make up a subscription of money for their hosts, on departing; only the "gallant Col. Gallimore," a Jamaica Camillus, gave iron instead of gold, by throwing some bullets into the contribution-box. And it was probably

in accordance with his view of the subject, that, when the Maroons sent ambassadors in return, they were at once imprisoned, most injudiciously and unjustly; and when Old Montagu himself and thirty-seven others, following, were seized and imprisoned also, it is not strange that the Maroons, joined by many slaves, were soon in open insurrection.

Martial law was instantly proclaimed throughout the island. The fighting men among the insurgents were not, perhaps, more than five hundred; against whom the Government could bring nearly fifteen hundred regular troops and several thousand militiamen. Lord Balcarres himself took the command, and, eager to crush the affair, promptly marched a large force up to Trelawney Town, and was glad to march back again as expeditiously as possible. In his very first attack, he was miserably defeated, and had to fly for his life, amid a perfect panic of the troops, in which some forty or fifty were killed,—including Col. Sandford, commanding the regulars, and the bullet-loving Col. Gallimore, in command of the militia,—while not a single Maroon was even wounded, so far as could be ascertained.

After this a good deal of bush-fighting took place. The troops gradually got possession of several Maroon villages, but not till every hut had been burnt by its owner. It was in the height of the rainy season; and, between fire and water, the discomfort of the soldiers was enormous. Meanwhile the Maroons hovered close around them in the woods, heard all their orders, picked off their sentinels, and, penetrating through their lines at night, burned houses and destroyed plantations far below. The only man who could cope with