CHAPTER XII

The Slave Merchants

'Ebony', or 'sacks of coal', or simply 'bales' (bultos), as slaves were now described by those who sold them, partly in jest, partly in order to defeat the moralistic English, were still wholly bought directly by planters from merchants (negreros), who specialized in the trade. Sometimes, as in Liverpool or Nantes in the past, the slave voyage from Havana would be a joint stock enterprise, with numerous shareholders, some shares worth as little as $100.1 On the African side of the Atlantic, most of the dealings were through factors residing permanently there and professionally occupied with the problems of dealing with African kings. Journeys were now usually direct trips to and from Africa, though sometimes North America came into the route. Often the ships were built in North America and often the insurance for the voyage was raised in New York. Occasionally ships were fitted out at, and returned to, Cádiz. Most merchants of Havana had Spanish connections: indeed, the biggest of them had almost always in the nineteenth century started life in Spain, being usually regarded and regarding themselves as members of the Spanish section of the Havana community: negrero was even a slang word for a peninsular Spaniard in the 1870s.2

About twenty important Havana merchants had now almost completely displaced foreigners in the traffic in slaves. The biggest slave merchant in the 1830s was probably Joaquin Gomez, a native of Cádiz, co-founder of the first bank in Havana, an anti-clerical and freemason whose masonic name was ‘Aristides the Just’ and who ‘arrived at Havana – about the age of thirteen or fourteen years old, almost naked’; he was the first importer of horizontal sugar mills with iron rollers from Fawcett and Preston of England in 1830 and bought several productive culebras and sugar mills himself.3 After him came Manuel Cardozo, a Portuguese, and Francisco Marty y Torrens and Manuel Pastor, both Spaniards of great riches, the former a retired bandit, both later associated with Antonio Parejo and the Spanish queen mother in slave traffic in the 1840s and 1850s on the very largest scale, in fast steamers (Pastor later became a count, his heirs became bankers in Madrid and

1 In 1821, P.P. (1822), Anecdotes and Papers, XXII, 540-7.
2 See Gallego, 67.
3 Moreno Fraguinals, 107; see also Philalethes, Letters from the Havana, 62.

of London had a Havana representative, with exclusive concern with slaving. Cunha Reis, slavers of New York, had a Havana man. Pedro Martinez of Cádiz was also represented in Havana, sometimes by himself. Another firm established on both sides of the Atlantic was Pedro Blanco and Carballo, of whom Blanco, a native of Málaga, at first a captain of slave ships, lived near the Gallinas lagoon with a large harem and many luxuries,4 and later retired in 1839 to Barcelona with over $Mm, where he became a major figure on the Stock Exchange.4 Others active were Julian Zulueta, also with a London connection in the person of his cousin Pedro, though by 1840 this skilful Basque entrepreneur had become a planter and local grande; and José Baró, a man

4 Turnbull, 312.
5 Theodore Canot, Revelations of a Slave Trader or Twenty Years Adventures of Captain Canot (1854), 135, cf. Parliamentary Papers, XXIX, 349, where he is captain of the Barbacena, and ibid., 358, where he stayed at Gallinas; ibid. (1828), XXVI, Correspondence with British Commissioners, 128, shows him as captain of the Herrnula Dolorita.
6 He figures in Twedde’s novel in the style of Eugène Sue, Barcelona y sus misterios and in Lino Nova’s Galvo’s fictionalised biography, Pedro Blanco, el negrero (Buenos Aires, 1941)
of much the same origin and position as Zulueta who in addition to his mills and his slave ships controlled the supply, manufacture and repair of moulds for use in sugar manufacture.® Ships could still be built in Liverpool for Havana merchant houses. Portuguese traders were still very large importers of slaves into Brazil, and also often sold to Havana: in 1837 the English Consul, David Turnbull, calculated that out of seventy-one slave ships operating on Cuban coasts, forty were Portuguese, nineteen Spanish, eleven U.S. and one Swedish;® in 1820–1, eighteen had been Spanish, five French, two Portuguese and one U.S.—if flags were to be believed.® However, exact nationalities should not be considered too closely. Because of the international interference by the English, ships sailed under several flags. We hear, for instance, that the ship Fanzy cleared out of Santiago de Cuba in 1827 under Dutch colours: on her arrival at Calabar she raised a French flag; she sailed back to the American with 238 slaves under that flag but she would have hoisted a new Dutch flag had the pursuing English frigate turned out to be French.® One instruction from Blanco and Carballo of Cadiz to their captain sailing for Africa ran thus:

From the moment that you sail and lose sight of the Morro, you must use no other papers but Portuguese, unless you should be obliged to put into any of the ports of the island [of Cuba], in which case you will make use of Spanish papers. Your route to the coast of Africa must be that which you think the safest; you will touch in going at the Gallinas; there you will see Don Pablo Alvarez; you will hear from him if he will give you the cargo for the merchandise which you will carry, which cargo must be from 200 [slaves] upwards; and the said Pablo ought also to provide provisions for them . . . Should you at last not be able to arrange the business you will set sail without losing a moment and continue your voyage towards the south, where you will settle the matter according to circumstances, taking care to visit the points of Loanda, Ambriz and all other trading places throughout the Congo.®

This instruction also makes clear that now as ever the slaves brought over in the mid-nineteenth century derived from all parts of Africa, and that rather more may have come from the Congo than is sometimes imagined. Few of the Cuban slaves came from the old Gold Coast, the preferred slaving ground of the previous century; the river Bonny was

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9 Moreno Fraginals, 123.  
® Turnbull, 436.  
© P.P. (1820), XXII, 540–1.  
® Ibid. (1827), 225.  
® Turnbull, 453–6.
The European or mulatto factors on the coast of Africa, of course, only the last stations in an immense organization. Europeans had never been permitted by African rulers to go far beyond the coast and, since they were interested in commerce (even if commerce in men), not conquest, this had suited them. Perhaps many slave traders of Liverpool or Cadiz genuinely knew nothing of the complicated arrangements of which they were the final, but by no means the only benefactors: thus in the region of the Niger delta a large trading organization was run by a branch of the Iboos, the Aros, whose influence was based on the Aro Chukwu Oracle, everywhere respected and feared in East Nigeria. The Aros exploited these feelings in order to dominate the economic life of the region and they became the sole middlemen of the hinterland trade, by establishing colonies along the trade routes. Other tribes came to believe that this monopoly was divinely appointed and in addition accepted Aro judicial and political arrangements. The consequence was that the Aros sold most of the slaves at Bonny, which in the 1820s was the most prominent slave port of West Africa; and that the slaves were captured by means of oralcran devices. For instance, the oracle levied fines of slaves on certain communities and groups; these groups believed that the oracle would eat them; whereas in fact the Aros sold them to Da Souza or Diego Martinez and other factors on the coast.21 It might also be added that, bloody though the journey in the Middle Passage certainly was, it was shorter as a rule and often less intolerable than the journeys from the interior of Africa to the coast, often on foot, often by river, and organized by Africans.22 Another prominent slave trading race were the tiny tribe of Efiks of old Calabar, who also enslaved those of their own people who were guilty of adultery or theft and whose descendants in Cuba founded the most persistent of the Cuban sacred cults, the Abakua.23

Many professional slave merchants in the nineteenth century were semi-gangsters like Mungo John (alias John Ormond), the half-caste Theodore Canot, a half-Italian, half-French sailor who described how in Cuba founded the most persistent of the Cuban sacred cults, the Abakua.23

Baltimore or New York-made clippers were usually too fast to be easily caught by the British naval vessels, heavily loaded as they were with food and armaments.20 With these new clippers it was possible to cross the Atlantic several times a year, Joseph Gurney, visiting Cuba in 1841, was told that nine tenths of the vessels employed in the Cuban slave trade were built in North America.27 The trade increasingly relied indeed on U.S. shipbuilders and U.S. capital, and there was no prosecution at any time under the U.S.’s own anti-slave trade laws. This was continuing U.S. trade that really prevented English action from being effective, though U.S. ships sailed under several flags, constantly changing to suit circumstances (even some French men fitting out ships in Baltimore).26 The Brazilian slave merchants, though condemned by the English Consul as ‘twenty to thirty men, principally adventurers of foreign extraction of the basest class – the worst pariahs of the human race’ were far the largest capitalists in the country. Much the same comment could have been made in respect of Havana except that the North American connection was stronger.

Few instances are recorded of English ships engaging in the trade in the mid-century though in 1826 the master of an English palm oil ship the ‘Matta’ was nevertheless found guilty of selling four female Negroes to a Spanish captain in the old Calabar river.20 Occasionally a broker might get a ship under English protection might also do some selling.20 English half-castes such as the Ormonds, Fabens and Skeltons, were active, however, on the West African coast as was Mrs Lighburn, half-African, half-North American.24 Because of the number of U.S. ships anyway in Brazilian waters, sometimes with ‘double papers, double captains and a double flag’, the Royal Navy had a far more delicate task in stopping them.28 Slaves were even taken on board Spanish mail vessels, according to one English commander.25 But most English officers assumed that about half the slave trade to Cuba was, during the 1850s at least, in U.S. hands, an adjunct of the still grandiose slave trade to Texas and the U.S. south (perhaps 300,000 slaves were brought into the U.S. south between 1808 and 1860).24 A number of them came from Cuba, even though the
Despite the continuance of the slave trade in Cuba, the situation was nevertheless slowly changing; thus by 1840 it was already impossible to insure slave ships in Havana since the two main insurance companies (Compañía de Seguros Marítimos y Especulación), which had begun business almost exclusively with slaveers, found that the risks were too great, despite premiums varying from 25% to 40%. But U.S. insurance continued on these ships, at only 25% (it was no doubt mainly for that reason that the Havana firms went out of business), and Brazilian ships at a higher rate, though less than Cuban.

There were of course still insurrections on slave ships, as in the eighteenth century and before. The best known was that of the slave cargo belonging to two planters of Puerto Principe, José Ruiz and Pedro Mantes, which was being carried along the Cuban coast on the Havana vessel Amistad in very bad weather. The Spanish mulatto cook told the slaves (pointing to some barrels of beef and then to an empty barrel) that on arrival at Puerto Principe they would be chopped up and made into salt meat. One master spirit among the slaves (all bozales from different tribes near Sierra Leone) named Cíngues, therefore, led a revolt, broke the slaves’ irons and, after throwing captain and crew overboard, directed Ruiz and Mantes (who had once himself been a sea captain) to sail to Africa, always towards the rising sun. But Ruiz and Mantes secured that they sailed out of course at night so that, after two months, with water and food short, they landed in the U.S. near New York. There the Negros were accused of piracy and murder, while the Spaniards demanded the return of their property. The question was complicated by the fact that there were three little girls and one small boy (mulecén) among the slaves, against whom a plaint of piracy could not legally be preferred. Eventually the slaves were acquitted and thirty-five (out of 484) sent to Sierra Leone by the owners would be in pocket. Thus the original fifty-three, the rest having died) sent to Sierra Leone by the Dutch Consul-General in Havana, Mr Lobe.

There is no evidence to suggest that mortality en passage had lessened in the nineteenth century. Seventy-two slaves out of 238 died on the Segunda María (1825); 73 on the Orestes out of 285 (1826); 47 out of 500 on the Campeador (1826); 271 out of 592 on the Mida (1829); 680 out of 983 on the Pama de Cádiz (1829); 126 out of 348 on the Cristina (1829); 29 out of 144 on the Santiago (1830); 216 out of 492 on the Umbelina (1831). All these were on boats captured by the English and afterwards condemned. There were now no clear regulations for carrying slaves, as there had been in England during the legal period. The vessels were built, in Baltimore or elsewhere, to be as fast as possible and were driven, especially when chased, with the hatches closed down. If anything went wrong and the crew had to abandon ship, they would do so without providing for the slaves, and in most nineteenth-century memoirs of this business there is some such remark as ‘I shall never forget the dreadful shriek of the panic-stricken blacks’ in respect of some atrocious atrocity or other. No doubt the sick as well as the dead were thrown overboard. There are several instances of slaveships sinking; while the macabre voyage of the Rodeur is perhaps symbolic of the whole trade in the nineteenth century. This was a French ship which sailed from the river Bonny to Guadeloupe in 1819: the captain, ‘very good tempered, he drinks a lot of brandy’, told a young planter’s son his views on slave treatment: ‘Flog them as well as feed them . . . of course not maim them . . . for then they would not work; but if you do not

The figure may not have been as high as the 15,000 a year estimated by the Dutch Consul-General in Havana, Mr Lobe. 36

Madden, 228-41; see also Fyfe, Sierra Leone, 222-3. Richard Robert Madden (1798-1880), magistrate appointed to supervise abolition of slavery in Jamaica 1823-41; superintendant of Liberated Africans and Judge arbitrator in Mixed Court, Havana, 1836-40; afterwards Colonial Secretary of Western Australia.

EXPENSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outward cargo for slave purchase</td>
<td>484 slaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(‡ in coin, ‡ in spirits, gunpowder, calico, handkerchiefs)</td>
<td>$84,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 able seamen at $20 a month</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 ordinary seamen at $35 a month</td>
<td>$775</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vessel 10 months absent, and wages if capture had been avoided would</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>have been</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear and tear of voyage</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deduct expenses</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net profit on voyage</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Net profit on voyage $50,000

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The British were entitled to check on the ‘equipment’ of the slave vessel. Slavers bound to Cuba would usually land slaves somewhere on ‘the back of the abolitionists, conditions got worse rather than better. The century essentially based; and it would seem that, with the activities of voyages was the Cuban economy for the first overboard and put in successfully to Guadeloupe. Upon curious similar was fully insured, the captain threw the thirty-nine wholly blind slaves sight... A guard was continually placed with drawn swords at the standing by with a thick rope... yet had hopes of recovering his crew are blind. The captain, the surgeon and the mate are blind. There hardly enough men left out of our twenty-two, to work the ship’. Then a few days later, the boy noted ‘All the crew are now blind but one man. The rest work under his orders like unconscious machines; the captain standing by with a thick rope... yet had hopes of recovering his sight... A guard was continually placed with drawn swords at the storeroom to prevent the men getting at the spirit casks...’

Though it is hard to believe, the Roderus was later nearly run down by another ship, the San Léon from Cádiz, bound for Havana, whose crew turned out to be entirely infected by ophthalmia. At this discovery, the crew of the Roderus broke into macabre laughter, and the two ships drifted apart. Eventually some of the crew recovered. The captain lost an eye, but the other recovered. After being reminded that the cargo was fully insured, the captain threw the thirty-nine wholly blind slaves overboard and put in successfully to Guadeloupe. Upon curious similar voyages was the Cuban economy for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century essentially based; and it would seem that, with the activities of abolitionists, conditions got worse rather than better. In the first period of illegal trade (1820-35), before the Royal Navy was given by Ballou (Due South, 77ff: ‘how with a look of treacherous tranquillity the dark, low hull of a brigantine’ would suddenly appear... ‘the rakish craft was of Baltimore build, and about 400 tons and narrowly escaped a French cruiser. The slaves were apparently Ashanti, the cargo reaching 350 of whom between 30 and 40 had died’.

The British Consul, Turnbull, who made courageous efforts to bring an end to the slave trade by public exposure, wrote in respect of the Ashantis, the cargo reaching 350 of whom between 30 and 40 had died’. An interesting account of the landing of a slave ship given by Ballou (Due South, 7ff): ‘how with a look of treacherous tranquility the dark, low hull of a brigantine’ would suddenly appear... ‘the rakish craft was of Baltimore build, and about 400 tons and narrowly escaped a French cruiser. The slaves were apparently Ashanti, the cargo reaching 350 of whom between 30 and 40 had died’. See report of British Consul at Cape Verde Island, 31 December 1838 (Class B, 1839, F.S., 110, qu. Buxton, 40).
constantly full during the greater part of the time that I remained in Havana. As the barracoon or depot serves the purpose of a market place as well as a prison these two have, doubtless for the sake of reader access and to save the expense of advertising in the journals, been placed at the point of greatest attraction, where the Paseo ends, where the grounds of the Captain-General begin, and where the new railroad passes into the interior, from the carriages of which the passengers are horrified at the unearthly shouts of the thoughtless inmates. 49

These barracoons, kept by a certain Riera, were often thought to be the real showpieces of Havana, and were shown with pride to foreign visitors. They had taken the place of older barracoons which, lining what is now the Prado, had originally been built as barracks for the Spanish navy in 1781. 50

The actual illegality of the trade in the nineteenth century caused it to assume some of the outward (as well as, in English eyes, the formal) characteristics of piracy. Thus one slave captain might be robbed of his slaves by another and recoup himself by pillaging a third. 51 Armed vessels might leave Havana and simply attack Portuguese slavers or even ordinary traders or, in one instance in 1825, a British brigantine escorting two prizes. A whole fleet of fast pirates was established at Galveston, Texas, in the 1820s. 52

It is hard to imagine the manner in which, whatever the intolerable practices which occurred in Africa itself, the labour force of Cuba was dragged out of the dark continent into America, half tortured and in the general belief that numbers only mattered, there to be branded with iron. 63 The instances recorded, mostly deriving, of course, from accounts of English captures, leave no doubt at all that the Spanish slave trade in the nineteenth century, under whatever flag, was handled with at least as great brutality as at any previous time. The decisive factors in enabling it to survive in the nineteenth century were however African conditions themselves. The economy of that continent had been organized for so long for the slave trade that it was everywhere the staple item of trade; yet the English, for a hundred years the biggest shippers, had now changed their policy, and turned policeman. Slaves could therefore be bought for very little in an Africa whose economy was half shattered by English abolition - half the price payable in the 1780s; but they could be sold, due to the insatiable demands of Cuban

94 See for instance Ward, A History of Ghana, 160. 'A heavy blow was struck at the economic system of the country. In 1807 the British Government abolished the slave trade ... There existed a vast organisation of wholesale dealers, brokers, depots for the collection of slaves. The slave trade ... was a trade in which the small man could share. The purchasing power of the people depended on it. Petty chiefs could sell into slavery people who lost their cases in their courts and could not pay ... not only European, but African fortunes were founded on the slave trade'.

and Brazilian planters, at a price several times that which obtained in the eighteenth century. The collapse in Africa and the conversion of what had hitherto been from the European point of view a respectable trade to semi-gangsterism was the most remarkable consequence of abolition. 44 But the worm was turning; and even Francisco Arango, who had done so much to initiate the trade in the 1790s, died as an old man in 1840 - with the title of Marqués de la Gratitud - writing a tract against the trade and encouraging his countrymen to procreate mulattoes in order to 'whiten' (blanquear) the island.

54 See Gurney, A Winter in the West Indies (1840).
55 Mathieson, 25-6.
56 See Ortiz, Negros Enclaves, 164-5, for a description.