

“Narrative of the proceedings of Captain Walker and Mr. Hugh Cathcart, on their mission to the Brigand Chiefs from the Government of Jamaica,” 27 August 1803, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 137-110 page 202.

General Andrew Vernet, commanding at Gonaives, sent his Aid de Camp, onboard the Vanguard, who mentioned that General Dessalines was at Petite Riviere, Mr. Cathcart accompanied him on shore, a letter from Captain Walker and Mr. C(?) was sent to General Dessalines requesting his presence at Gonaives.

General Vernet came on board the Vanguard when he was informed in the course of conversation that it was the wishes of General Nugent and Sir John Thomas Duckworth, that General Dessalines would protect the white inhabitants who fell into his hands, and reinstate them in the profession of their properties and that he would receive back those who had taken refuge in Cuba and in consequence of the War, that was carrying on between him and the French Troops, in the manner Toussaint had done, in this he agreed perfectly. He said unless that measure was adopted it would not be possible to restore confidence, so as to induce Foreign Merchants to trade with them, and to venture their property on shore amongst them, and he promised to use his best endeavours to get that point effected. He was informed in the manner which Jeremie had been evacuated by the French Troops, and that the Inhabitants had remained under a promise from General Ferrou of being protected: which had given satisfaction to the commander in chief of Jamaica, he said he trusted the like would take place, when the French Troops evacuated the different posts they at present possessed. General Dessalines arrive at Gonaives, and in consequence of his request, captain Walker and Mr. Cathcart, went on shore to wait upon him, and delivered him the dispatches from General Nugent and Sir John Thomas Duckworth, they then informed him, that in consequence of his application to General Nugent and Admiral Sir John Thomas Duckworth requesting to be supplied with Ammunition, and the permission of having a free commerce for Saint Domingo, the Vanguard had been ordered to Gonaives for the expressed purpose of learning what his views were, in order that the General and Admiral might be made acquainted with them more fully than they possibly could be, by his letters; of this mark of attention he said he was very sensible.

He was given to understand that the General and Admiral had no orders to grant him any assistance, and that they would not have made any application to him respecting his position in Saint Domingo, nor to have had commercial intercourse with it, had he not written them to that effect. However they were willing to afford him assistance, and to enter into a commercial arrangement upon the condition of his putting them in possession of Tiburon (and of the Mole Saint Nicholas when it was in his power,) with liberty to Garrison it with British Troops. He answered it was

a proposition he could never come into, for to grant it was more than his life was worth, the people he commanded were so very Jealous and ignorant they would give way to the idea, he had sold the colony to England, who would reduce them to slavery, which would cause an internal war amongst themselves and prevent peace being restored. General Henry Christophe and Andrew Vernet, were present at the conversation and joined him in opinion. It was urged that as both the Mole and Tiburon, were not places of trade, and the country around them barren, they were objects of no moment to him, whilst they would serve as a place for the British Merchants to deposit their Merchandise in order to trade with different parts of the colony. That it was not the intention of the British to interfere in any shape with the interior of the country, or with the form of government he might adopt: nor would their troops be permitted to go into the country beyond their lines. He said he was well acquainted with the honourable conduct of the British in Saint Domingo, and that with Toussaint they had strictly adhered to their engagements, he also said that every port should be open to the British, and that their men of war might enter at all times, when they would have whatever supplies the country afforded and that attention would be paid that they were properly treated, so far from entertaining jealousy, that not only one, but twenty men of war; might come into their ports if they chose, for the purpose of procuring refreshments and remain as long as they found it convenient. General Christophe said even six months if they chose.

He added it was thirteen years since he had taken up arms in the cause of liberty. His only view was to restore peace to Saint Domingo, he was too well acquainted with the nature of the Blacks, that unless the Island was completely under their Government, he could not expect that event to take place. Were the two posts in question occupied by the English, Intrigue would get amongst them and be forming plots against his government. If he was to give up Tiburon, in the present stage of his Affairs, he would run the risk of being deserted by his Arms. General Rochambeau has given out amongst the negroes, by means of emissaries that he was entering into a treaty with England to sell them the colony which had caused a number of congo negroes in the neighbourhood of Cape Francois to desert him (2 or 3,000) and enter into a treaty with General Rochambeau.

He was informed it was the desire of General Nugent and Sir John Thomas Duckworth, that he would protect the white inhabitants, who fell into his hands, in the different towns he might take, and when he reflected that these unfortunate people were forced by the French officers to carry arms against him, and that it was not a matter of choice with him, both the General and Admiral flattered themselves he would acquiesce in the measure if they capitulated, he said, he would pledge his honor their persons and properties would be respected, that he would give order to that effect. If the towns were taken by assault he could not answer for the consequences that might ensue. He was strongly urged to give orders to protect them in the event of the places being taken by storm, in the justice of which he

appeared to agree. He said he was sensible they were forced to serve, and that he would consider them in that light.

He was also informed that the General and Admiral trusted he would reinstate the white inhabitants in possession of their estates, and that he would bury in oblivion, what had passed during the revolution he answered that was too much to expect (too strong a doze(?)) for the whites had almost to a man joined the French troops, and aided them, with a view of reducing the negroes again to slavery. That numbers of the white inhabitants who had acted in this manner, had been formerly protected by him upon various occasions and had been put into possession of their estates by Toussaint, which had been sequestered by the French Government, from their having emigrated and served against France. He said they had injured him and his colour so much, he could never agree to their possessing their estates again, for as they would possess much influence over their former negroes, they would be stirring them up continually to revolt against his government and that they would be allways [sic] ready to join with the French if any plans they might form against Saint Domingo. He mentioned as a reason for not agreeing to restore the properties to the White Inhabitants, that General Leclerc had convoked a colonial assembly at Cape Francois, for the purpose of deliberating upon the measure that would be most conducive to restore Saint Domingo to its former prosperity, many of the White Inhabitants had advised the extirpating the negroes in toto, should they find it impracticable to reduce them to slavery, with which measure they would be well satisfied and to form another population by importations from Africa. He named individuals who had recommended this measure to General Leclerc Himself and His Generals had therefore come to the determination not to allow the White Inhabitants to possess their Estates. It was therefore their intention that in future the white should be confined to the different towns in the colony. That the soil should be exclusively possessed by the natives (Blacks and Mulattos) they would never agree to the whites holding property in the soil. The added the plan of putting the Blacks to death, when they fell into the hands of the French, had in the first instance taken rise from the advice of the White planters, which was the reason of their having determined upon adopting this measure.

[marginalia "Thursday 29th"]

Had a meeting with General, at which General Christophe and Vernet were present when every argument was used to persuade him to come into the measure of putting us in possession of the two posts. He was told he must consider it as the basis, upon which he could hope to have any aid from the British or that any commercial arrangement could be entered into. He again repeated ____ that he could never agree to, but that every port should be open for the purposes of Trade and for affording refreshments for the Men of War, and that they should meet with the most friendly Treatment upon all occasions, he was told if he did not acquiesce in the measure of giving up the two posts, the General and Admiral having received no orders from Government relative to the present position of Saint Domingo, would not have it in

their power to enter into his views, consequently they could not grant him the aid he required. He answered he had hitherto succeeded against the French Troops, that he trusted he would be able to drive them out of the island, but if he received no supplies from the British, it would necessarily take him a much longer time to effect his purpose as he was badly supplied with ammunition (to use his own phrase, he must use Musquets, instead of canon) that he was determined to persevere and use every exertion to effect his purpose, that he would prefer to continue in his present state, rather than run the risk he must naturally do, was he to come into the measure of giving us possession of the Two Posts. He said if the French received no supplies by sea, they could not remain long in the colony for that all the town excepting Cape Francois were so closely invested, they could draw no supplies of provisions from the country, but by force of arms. Port au Prince and Saint Marc's were reduced to a state of famine and could not hold out much longer. He expected to hear of the surrender of Jacmel and Aux Cayes. He had understood General Brunet was upon the Point of Evacuating the latter place. If the French troops surrendered to him it was his intention to send them off the island, as soon as vessels could be found for that purpose.

[marginalia "Wednesday 30th"]

Had another Interview with General Dessalines, at which General Christophe and Vernet were present, when the point of giving up the possession of the two ports was again strongly urged, but without effect, for not complying with our request he gave the reasons already mentioned. The restoring the Estates to the White inhabitants, when he became master of the country, was again mentioned, for his not coming into that Measure, he repeated the objections he formerly had done and upon this point he appeared to have made up his mind. He said when the British Men of War put into any of the ports of Saint Domingo for refreshments, they were at liberty to send their sick on shore, under charge of their own surgeons if they judged it adviseable, and to hire houses for their reception, but he never could agree to our landing troops. He was requested to give us in writing the form of Government he meant to adopt, he said that until the French troops were out of the colony he could not determine upon that head, but when peace was established, he intended with the advice of his generals to establish a settled form of government which he would make the governor and admiral at Jamaica acquainted with, for he looked upon the English as his best friends, and he would give them every encouragement to trade with Saint Domingo. It was his intention they should pay one half of the duties upon their imports and Exports, which would be exacted from the other nations trading to Saint Domingo

The following he said was his present view:

To throw off all allegiance to France, and declare the colony independent, under the government of himself and his officers. To permit no communication with France, to subsist under any pretence, should any of her men of war or

merchantmen enter the ports of Saint Domingo to seize them, to treat both Spanish and Dutch ships in the same manner.

To Permit a Free Trade to all nations excepting French, Spanish, and Dutch upon their paying the duties upon imports and exports they may fix, but if they find them evading the duties their vessels will be confiscated.

The whites to be confined to the towns to carry on trade, the country to belong exclusively to the natives, Blacks and Mulattos, their intention is to give encouragement to strangers to settle in the towns to carry on trade, who may come and depart as they find convenient, they will have the liberty of purchasing houses in the towns, but will not be permitted to purchase land. His idea is that the nations should turn their whole attention to agriculture, and have nothing to do with navigation, It is not therefore _____ they should have more than a few small vessels for droggers and fishing boats. He will permit such white French inhabitants to remain in the towns, as he may approve of but no others.

Signed James Walker
Hugh Cathcart.