

A. E. FURNESS

THE THARP ESTATES IN JAMAICA

© Alan Furness, London, 2018

The Tharp Estates in Jamaica

I wrote this account of the Tharp family of Good Hope and their estates in the Parish of Trelawny between 1958 and 1960, when I was a Research Student at Cambridge and at the University College of the West Indies (as it then was) in Jamaica, studying the economic history of the West Indies, particularly Jamaica, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

I had taken my degree in history at Cambridge in 1958, and had been offered financial support from Booker Brothers, McConnell, to pursue studies in this field in the West Indies. Bookers' Chairman at that time, Sir Jock Campbell, had a great interest in what had been achieved in the West Indies on the economic front in the 18th and 19th centuries, notwithstanding the moral degradation of slavery and the slave trade.

My research in this field was much helped by the presence at the County Record Office in Cambridge of the voluminous papers of the Tharp family and their Jamaican estates, which were probably the largest in the island at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. These records had been accumulated and kept by the family after the legal inheritor of the estates had been declared to be a lunatic at the age of 22 in 1816 but lived until he was nearly 90. Arguments and litigation about the management or alleged mismanagement of his estates by agents and attorneys produced a mass of documentation, now lodged in the Cambridgeshire County Record Office (the Tharps having made their home in England at Chippenham near Newmarket in Cambridgeshire).

I also consulted the Colonial Archives at Spanish Town in Jamaica, the records in the Institute of Jamaica at Kingston and the British Government's archives in the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, now at Kew. In addition, I investigated archives in Barbados, Grenada, St Kitts, Antigua and Guyana, besides those in various County Record Offices in England and the records of correspondence between the Jamaican House of Assembly and their Agent in London from 1812 – 1831, George Hibbert, who had been a backer and friend of John Tharp (1744 – 1804), the effective founder of the Tharp estates in Jamaica.

In 1960, however, I decided not to pursue an academic career, but joined HM Diplomatic Service and followed a career as a British diplomat in New Delhi, Brussels, Dakar, Jakarta, Warsaw and Bombay. I put aside my account of the Tharp estates and have only recently returned to it with the encouragement of Rosie Dodd and Robert Barker, to whom I am most grateful for rekindling my interest in Jamaican history.

Alan Furness

Chapter One

John Tharp and Good Hope

John Tharp's sugar plantations were the largest in Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was said that he could ride across the island on his own land. This was an exaggeration, but not too far fetched. In addition to his central estate of Good Hope, he owned all the land, from the mountains to the sea, along the valley of the Martha Brae River on the north side of the island. He also acquired a large estate to the south of the mountains.

When the Tharp family acquired their first possessions in Jamaica is obscure. There were Tharps in Jamaica within a dozen years of the English conquest of the island from Spain in 1655, but it is doubtful what relation they have to John Tharp of Good Hope. John Tharp's earliest relation of whom we have sure knowledge is his great-grandfather, William Tharp, who was granted 600 acres of crown land near Lucea in the north west of the island, some in 1728 and some in 1732. He died in 1738. His property was divided equally between his two sons, William and John. His second son, John, established the sugar plantation of Batchelor's Hall in the parish of Hanover in the north west of the island, with over a hundred Negro slaves. John's son, Joseph, owned the sugar plantation of Pedro in the parish of Hanover.

Joseph Tharp's only son, John, who was later to acquire Good Hope, was born in 1744. Four years later in 1748, his father, Joseph Tharp, died; and after the boy's grandfather also died in 1753, he and his two sisters were brought up by their uncles, Philip Haughton and Edward Chambers. They provided their nephew with a conventional rich man's education by sending him to Eton and entering him as a fellow commoner at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1766 he married Elizabeth Partridge. His wife was joint heiress with her younger sister, Elizabeth Anne, to the large sugar plantation of Potosi in the parish of St James on the north side of Jamaica.¹ Her younger sister later married William Blake, who soon fell into debt to Tharp, for which he pledged his wife's half of Potosi estate.²

Both the Partridge sisters were under twenty-one in 1766, but their guardian gave John Tharp control of Potosi estate. Tharp soon determined to dispose of both Potosi estate and of the estates he had inherited in the parish of Hanover, so that he could acquire land in the Martha Brae valley around Good Hope. This was then in the centre of the most rapidly developing part of Jamaica. He sold his grandfather's estate, Batchelor's Hall, with its hundred slaves to his uncle Edward Chambers (the precise date

¹ This Potosi estate was in the area between the Sandy Gully and the Orange River, east of John's Hall, in the western portion of St James, which remained as St James when the parish of Trelawny was created.

² At this time the Martha Brae valley was in the parish of St James, the eastern portion of which later became the parish of Trelawny.

of the sale and the amount realised are now lost). The sale' of his father's estate of Pedro gave him more trouble. The purchasers were to pay £5,200 currency spread over seven years, but they defaulted. The next purchasers defaulted also, and twenty years passed before Pedro estate was finally off John Tharp's hands.

His purchase of land in the Martha Brae valley in 1769 was a very large one. He bought the three adjoining sugar estates of Good Hope, Wales and Lansquinet from Thomas Williams at a price of £74,000 currency (about £53,000 sterling). Thomas Williams had earlier leased Lansquinet to a tenant until 1773 and had mortgaged Good Hope for £14,000 in 1767 to be repaid over five years. The sale by Williams suggests that he may have been obliged to raise some ready cash. His father, another Thomas Williams, had been the founder of Good Hope estate, having first settled there in 1744, after leaving his original plantation in the parish of Westmoreland on the south side of Jamaica. The three estates of Good Hope, Wales and Lansquinet comprised 3,000 acres in 1769 and possessed 473 slaves. Good Hope and Lansquinet had water power for crushing the sugar canes, being actually on the Martha Brae River.

In part-exchange for these three estates, John Tharp sold Thomas Williams his share of Potosi estate in St James parish, while William Blake at the same time sold his share of Potosi to Williams also. The sale of Potosi to Williams was completed in 1772. There is now no record of the price paid, but it is unlikely that Tharp's share of Potosi, even with the proceeds from his sale of Batchelor's Hall and Pedro, matched the cost of the three estates he bought from Williams. John Tharp presumably had to borrow to make up the difference, but no information about this survives. His extensive purchase of land showed his ambition as a sugar planter, and he must have been able to inspire anyone who lent him money at this time with confidence in his future abilities. The descriptions that survive of his early performance as a sugar planter do not themselves explain why anyone should have thought it prudent to back him very substantially at this time. His London merchants, Muir Son and Atkinson, told him in 1767 that his sugar that year was better than before, as it was "very brown" – the year before's had been "black". Even the black sugar of 1766 had been better than the sugar made in 1765. The first sugar that came from his new estates of Good Hope and Wales did not seem very good to his Bristol merchant, William Miles. In 1771 Miles told him that the sugar from Wales estate as "as bad as can be conceived", and advised him to learn from the methods of his tenant at Lansquinet estate, who produced excellent sugar. It must have taken a good deal of confidence to back Tharp when his sugar was "the colour and consistency of thick tar."

By 1774, however, William Miles at Bristol was praising the quality of Tharp's sugar.³ Miles was later to be Tharp's main source of finance and, if it was he who helped John Tharp to buy Good Hope in 1769, he must have thought his early confidence amply repaid. The subsequent history of Potosi estate, after Tharp and his brother-in-law had sold it to Thomas Williams, provides a good example of the close co-operation Tharp and Miles gave each other. In 1773, Williams sold Potosi to his own brother-in-law,

³ Presumably Tharp took possession of Lansquinet from the tenant in 1773 and this may have affected the overall quality of his sugars.

Samuel Horlock. Horlock was not a successful planter. He fell into debt to Miles, and also mortgaged Potosi to a London merchant, John Wedderburn. Miles lent Tharp the money to buy Wedderburn's claim to the estate. To satisfy this claim, Tharp then ejected Horlock from Potosi and took away the 160 slaves, who were there, for his own estate at Good Hope. Miles pressed his claim against Horlock for the land at Potosi. After this ruthless performance, it is perhaps some comfort to know that Horlock's son later lived, apparently happily, for some time at Good Hope.

Tharp was himself subjected to some brisk treatment over a parcel of land across the river from Good Hope, part of which he had bought and part of which had been granted to him as vacant crown land in 1769. The land seems to have been inadequately surveyed and to have comprised some land already granted by the crown. In 1773, S.W. Barnett, then a minor, brought an action through his guardian against Tharp. The court which heard the case fixed a new boundary between Barnett's property and Tharp's property. As soon as Barnett became twenty-one, however, Tharp bought from him (for £3,848 currency) the land that the court had awarded to him. John Tharp erected a stone inscribed "J.T. 1776" to make plain the new boundary.

The way Tharp acquired slaves from the insolvent Horlock and his lawsuit with S.W. Barnett were not typical of his methods in running and enlarging his estates. Most of his acquisitions were by humdrum purchasing of land in the Martha Brae valley that came on the market or by applying for grants of vacant crown land. In 1771 he bought a hundred and fifty feet of frontage on what was then called Martha Brae harbour for what became Tharp's wharf. Also in 1771, he paid £5,000 currency for nearly three thousand acres near the head of the Martha Brae River next to the mountains. At that time, this land was quite detached from all his other property. Ten years later in 1781, he acquired 7,500 acres of crown land in the Cockpit Country, the mountainous country above the Martha Brae valley. Later, in 1791, he was able to complete his estate next to the mountains by buying the thousand acre Hawkerton plantation from William Guthrie for over £6,000 currency. He gave the name Windsor to this estate he had built up so patiently next to the mountains.⁴

The fact that John Tharp kept on adding to his estates is remarkable. Most planters in Jamaica preferred to enjoy the fruits of their labours rather than use their profits to go on adding to the size of their investment in sugar. On what was John Tharp's confidence in his ability to manage an ever-increasing group of sugar estates based? There seems no reason to suppose that the quality of the sugar produced on the Tharp estates was ever much superior to that grown by any of his neighbours. As we have seen, at the beginning of his career it was markedly inferior. Even after Tharp's sugar improved, some of his neighbours with smaller estates often seemed to have produced sugar of a higher quality than he did. Although the quality of his sugar was obviously important, Tharp seems to have concentrated more on the quantity he produced and on reducing

⁴ The James Robertson, "Map of the County of Cornwall in the Island of Jamaica", London, 1804, does not show a sugar estate at this location. It is therefore most likely that Tharp used this estate as a pen to provide food for the large number of Tharp's slaves and for pasturage/grass for his cattle.

his costs in manufacturing it. His competitors generally relied on wind or animal power to turn the mills that crushed the sugar canes. Tharp relied mainly on water power, which was more reliable and effective than either wind or animals. The main point about his affairs that was dwelt on by the merchants who lent him the money to finance his plantations, was his ability to ensure that all his schemes, even though they were initially ambitious and expensive, managed to make a profit. John Tharp may not have been able to produce better sugar than his competitors, but he was confident in his ability to make sugar as profitably as anyone else in Jamaica.⁵

What could happen to planters who did not manage their plantations profitably is well shown by the career of Tharp's brother-in-law, William Blake. Blake owned the large plantation of Dean's Valley Water Works in the parish of Westmoreland, south of the mountains from Good Hope. This comprised 2,000 acres and had 200 slaves. Blake was always short of money. He mortgaged Dean's Valley to Tharp as early as 1770. In 1775, Blake raised £6,270 sterling from William Webber of London by granting him an annuity of £570 sterling. Blake's merchants, Holme and Boyer, guaranteed this annuity. In 1776, Blake went to England to try to obtain a loan to payoff his previous debts; and John Tharp agreed to give up his mortgage, on the understanding that Blake would repay him from the loan he hoped to obtain in England. Blake's two brothers, left in Jamaica, were, however, pressed by William's creditors, and mortgaged Dean's Valley to the merchants, Holme and Boyer, for £15,000 sterling. When he heard what had been done, Tharp (who was also empowered to act for Blake) made a trust deed for Dean's Valley to secure payment of Blake's debt to him before any other debts were paid. Tharp managed to register this trust deed with the island authorities just two days before Blake's brothers registered their mortgage to Holme and Boyer.

Blake failed to obtain any loan during his visit to England. His debts soon became so large that he could repay either Tharp or the merchants, but not both. Litigation followed. The rights and wrongs of the case are not easy to follow, but Tharp was Blake's earliest creditor and had officially registered the trust deed before the mortgage of Dean's Valley to the merchants had been registered. Sir Adam Williamson, the Governor of Jamaica, acting as the island's Chancellor, decided in 1794, however, that the merchants in England should have prior claim on the estate. Tharp appealed to the Privy Council in London, and they reversed the Governor's decision and gave priority to Tharp. He had already bought out the annuitant, William Webber, in 1793 for £11,000 sterling. Blake died in 1797, before matters had been finally settled, and there was further delay until his son and heir, William Williams Blake, came of age. In 1801, however, Dean's Valley Water Works estate was sold, by the direction of the island's Court of Chancery. Tharp bought it through an agent for £30,000 currency. "It owed me forty [thousand] odd," he commented, "but from nothing, nothing can come."

⁵ The arrangement of the Tharp sugar estates along the Martha Brae appears to have been such that Tharp was able to build and maintain the road network linking the estates to Martha Brae harbour, later called Falmouth, in a very economical fashion. For example, the road from Pantrepant runs past Covey, through Good Hope, through Wales and on to the harbour; whilst the road from Lansquinet runs past Potosi and then on to the sea having joined the former route after it past through Wales.

William Blake had begun his career with a larger property than John Tharp. The main difference between them seems to have been Blake's preference for the life of a politician rather than that of a planter. He was a member for many years of the lower house of the island's legislature, the House of Assembly, and for four years was its Speaker. When he died in 1797, he was on the point of being sold up for debt, and he left his family landless. John Tharp's acquisition of Dean's Valley after Blake's death meant that his property stretched across the island, though not quite from sea to sea. Dean's Valley, south of the mountains, was too far away to be managed from Good Hope, and John Tharp settled it on one of his sons.

Although John Tharp never put political ambitions in front of his attention to his plantations, he did play a leading role in the affairs in his parish. When he bought Good Hope and the neighbouring estates in 1769, the area formed part of the parish of St. James. In 1770, the eastern half of the parish, where Good Hope lay, was separated from the rest of St. James and was formed into the separate parish of Trelawny, named after the Governor of Jamaica, William Trelawny. Each parish on the island was entitled to send two members to the House of Assembly, and when one of the first two members from the new parish resigned in 1772, John Tharp was elected in his place.⁶ He did not become prominent in the Assembly, and when further elections had to be held in Trelawny in 1774 (because of a legal defect in the Act of 1770 which established the parish), he did not stand for re-election. He never again sat in the Assembly. This reflects his reluctance to leave his estates when the Assembly was sitting, in order to attend its meetings at Spanish Town, which was a hundred miles from Good Hope on the other side of the mountains. Tharp remained active in the political life of his own parish as a Justice of the Peace and as a Justice of the Cornwall Assize, which covered the county formed by the five western parishes. In 1786, he was appointed *Custos Rotulorum* of Trelawny, which post he held until 1795.⁷ Tharp was Custos of the parish when the new port town of Falmouth was planned, which replaced the little inland town of Martha Brae on the edge of the Tharp estates as the administrative and commercial centre of the parish. In addition to the buildings that he erected on his own estates, the elegant buildings that remain in Falmouth may also be considered to some extent as a memorial to John Tharp. His role in the early development of Falmouth is still commemorated in the name of Tharp Street.⁸

⁶ The parishes of St Catherine, Port Royal and Kingston which contained the principal towns of Spanish Town, Port Royal and Kingston, each sent three Members to the island's Assembly.

⁷ The title of the chief magistrate of the parish in Jamaica – literally “Keeper of the Records.” [Keeper of the Rolls – in Jamaica not a record keeper or archivist, rather the one who maintained the roll on which was recorded the names of the Justices of the Peace of the parish] It is one of the titles of the Lord Lieutenant of an English county.

⁸ Jean Besson, “Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica”, Chapel Hill and London, 2002, p. 76.

Chapter Two

John Tharp's Backer – William Miles

John Tharp's success as a sugar planter largely depended on the support that William Miles, the Bristol sugar merchant, gave him as he expanded his plantations. Miles wrote to Tharp in 1774:

I promise you I am not uneasy to have you owe me money, if it were £10,000. My fear has ever been that you might want, and I at that period might not have it to lend ...

The relations between Miles and Tharp are important in following Tharp's career, particularly the risks that Miles ran in advancing money on a very large scale to Tharp. Sugar planters were censured at the time and have often been condemned since for being in debt to their merchants, but sugar plantations need a good deal of capital, and the only way planters could raise this in the eighteenth century, except out of their own profits, was by borrowing from their merchants.

Many sugar merchants, it is true, were brought to ruin by advancing money too readily to planters against the security of future crops. Miles had to write off very large advances he had made to Tharp's uncle, Edward Chambers, when the latter's estate became insolvent. The firm of Campbell and Ruthven of Greenock, who regularly sold a part of John Tharp's sugar crop, over-extended its credit and had liabilities of £320,000 in 1804. Their chief creditor made peremptory demands on them in that year and they went bankrupt. Fortunately for John Tharp, he had little at stake in this firm. For a sugar merchant like Miles to express a wish to invest more money in John Tharp's plantations is in itself a tribute to his confidence in Tharp.

William Miles's history is obscure. He went to Jamaica as a young man as a hooper, before returning to set up as a merchant in Bristol. He prospered there and became Mayor of Bristol in 1780. His letters to Tharp are those of an old Jamaica hand, full of advice about making as well as shipping sugar. Miles told Tharp to cure his sugar as much as possible before shipping it, so that all the molasses ran off before it was packed. He advised against running the sugar factories at night when he said the night air was prejudicial to the making of good sugar. He expressed concern in 1782 that Tharp's sugar had a disagreeable taste and smell. It was fetching only £50 a ton, whereas the sugar made by his neighbour McGhie at Hampstead estate fetched as much as £70 a ton. Complaints from the sugar refiners in England about the difficulties they had in processing Tharp's sugar were tracked down to Tharp's mixing the refuse of his rum stills with the manure that was spread over the cane fields as a fertiliser. Miles was never quite content with Tharp's product:

Messrs Hibberts' House were right - its grain is rather too fine. A white cast and strong body are the signs of perfection: what is deemed straw colour or yellow is not so good.

More important to Miles, to judge from the tone of his letters, than changes in the quality of Tharp's sugar was the need to insure it against the dangers involved in shipping it to England and to insure the supplies and equipment sent from England to Jamaica. Miles insured the supplies he sent to Tharp in the autumn of 1774, even though Tharp had instructed him not to do so. The Bristol merchant wrote:

I hope you will approve, though directly contrary to your orders. But I beg for God's sake you will not only approve, but direct me to do it in future. My friend Mr Tamwell lost more last year and this, than would pay for his insurance these twenty years. I have run large risks myself, but I am so totally cured that I am determined not to do it any more.

(A premium of four per cent to insure a cargo of sugar from Jamaica in peacetime was regarded as remarkably low by Miles.)

The dangers of the sea were obvious enough in the eighteenth century. When one of Miles's ships under Captain Frizwell tried to reach Bristol one day ahead of the wartime convoy from the West Indies in 1781 – and thus bring the cargo to the market a day before it was glutted – it was shipwrecked off the south Wales coast. Miles did not harden his heart against Frizwell on this account, and later gave him command of the “Sally”, which had the reputation of being one of the safest ships sailing from Bristol. The “Sally” was one of the ships Miles recommended Tharp to travel in between Jamaica and England. The harbour from where Tharp's sugar was shipped in Jamaica had its difficulties for heavily laden ships putting out to sea. The “Martha Brae” struck the rocks there on her way out of the harbour in 1787. Although she was, fortunately, little damaged, Miles wrote to Tharp after this incident that the Bristol shipowners, with the approval of all the masters of West India ships, were sending anchors and chains to help ships leave the harbour. The Bristol shipowners hoped that the planters of Trelawny would pay for these, but were determined to provide them whether the planters paid for them or not.

The prosperity of Jamaican plantations was menaced by other dangers than risks at sea. On 3 October 1780, the worst hurricane ever known in Jamaica struck the island. The storm surge overwhelmed the entire town of Savanna-la-Mar. The violence of this storm was greatest at the extreme west of the island; and the estates of Tharp's uncle, Edward Chambers, suffered damage estimated at £30,000. When Chambers died the same winter, it was found that even the copy of his will kept in Jamaica had been destroyed in the storm. He was heavily in debt to Miles even before the hurricane, and his insolvent estate was eventually sold up to Miles in 1789. Miles managed to sell it again only in 1803, by when the debt had mounted to over £100,000. John Tharp secured a post in Jamaica as a tax-collecting constable for the almost penniless Chambers heir.

The hurricane in 1780 was followed by prolonged drought. Food would normally have been sent from the British colonies in North America to help feed slaves in Jamaica, but did not come because of the War of American Independence. The following year, 1781, another hurricane struck Jamaica, but damage was concentrated around Kingston towards the eastern end of the island. Jamaica was spared a hurricane in 1782 and 1783, but the homeward wartime convoy from the West Indies in 1782 encountered a terrible storm off Newfoundland. “Mr Tharp,” wrote Miles, “never was a man more

dispirited than I am at the repeated misfortunes of losing my ships.” In 1784, when John Tharp was in England, another hurricane struck Jamaica; and in both of the two succeeding years a hurricane struck again at the much tormented island. Many planters were ruined by such an unprecedented series of hurricanes. There was not even the compensation of an increase in the price paid for the sugar that was produced, despite the hurricane, in Jamaica. The other sugar islands were not affected by these storms over Jamaica; and although some plantations might be devastated, buyers in England maintained that a hurricane in one year could lead to good crops in the next. Miles expressed sympathy for the sufferings of John Tharp and his Negroes, but the parish of Trelawny escaped the worst of the hurricanes in the 1780s. Just before the hurricane of 1786, Miles congratulated Tharp on his rapid recovery from the effects of the previous storms and on the healthy state of his finances.

A worse menace even than hurricanes to the sugar planters was the threat of invasion and conquest by foreign powers. In 1778 France, and in 1779 Spain, declared war on Britain, and allied themselves with the American insurgents in the War of Independence. Towards the end of the war, with its run of British defeats, there developed a real threat that Jamaica would be invaded. The normal processes of war had been damaging enough to planters and merchants, with high wartime insurance rates and long delays in shipping while transatlantic convoys were organized. This war was especially demoralizing, as many Englishmen did not share the enthusiasm of George III and Parliament for subduing their fellow citizens in America. Miles asserted that Bristol merchants found it difficult to pick masters who would not give their ships to the Americans. Too many masters, according to him, favoured the Americans too much. Miles at this time declined to help Tharp's distressed Chambers relatives any more. “Mr Tharp,” he wrote, “I can do no more. The precarious situation of our islands is a bar to all further credit.”

The British fleet under Admiral Rodney put an end to French and Spanish plans to invade Jamaica by dispersing the French fleet at the Battle of the Saints in the eastern Caribbean in April 1782. Miles wrote jubilantly to Tharp in June 1782:

You have had a narrow escape indeed. Had not the brave Lord Rodney and the heroes under his command been victorious in beating the French fleet, Jamaica must have fallen from the great force that was meant to oppose it. Heaven send us a repetition of such decided events!

The shock to the island's sugar industry of being excluded from the protected British market with its high prices, the possible expropriation that a French conquest might have brought to those who refused to forswear their British nationality, and the likely ruin of merchants like Miles with so much invested in Jamaican plantations, were vanished spectres after the battle. The terror of the threat which Rodney's victory removed explains the frantic welcome given to him when he arrived in Jamaica after the battle.

Further threats to Jamaica came during the war against revolutionary France. The collapse of French power in Haiti (formerly St Domingue – France's richest

colony) convinced many that the rising of the slaves there would be followed by risings among the slaves in Jamaica. John Tharp, however, continued to add confidently to his commitments in Jamaica after the rebellion in Haiti as he had during the War of American Independence. Miles continued to support him in both periods. Their confidence in each other and in the future of Jamaica continued to be profitable to both of them.

Chapter Three

John Tharp Completes His Estates

John Tharp visited England every three or four years, but always went back to Jamaica. He had an obvious reason to visit England when he left his children behind there in 1776 to be educated. After his wife died from consumption in 1780, his children had to be left to the care of merchants in England. Tharp never became a target for Miles's criticism of absentee proprietors, who, he said, had “no chance in Jamaica, living here [in England] with the property and people there [in Jamaica].”

During his first ten years at Good Hope, John Tharp did not greatly alter the methods of cultivation and the sugar machinery left by his predecessor Thomas Williams. From about 1780 onwards, however, he began to reorganise his estates and build new sugar works on them. He organised a completely new plantation in 1782 at the northern (seaward) end of his property, which he named Potosi, after his wife's estate which he had long since sold. The water to drive the new watermill at Potosi came by aqueduct from the dam at Good Hope over four miles upstream. It crossed right over the Martha Brae River on the way down to Potosi. The new works at the end of the aqueduct were in the bottom of the Martha Brae valley. The sugar canes, from the thousand acres above the valley devoted to the new estate, were dropped down to the level of the mill via an enormous stone cane chute.

Three years after setting up this works at Potosi, he organised another new plantation and sugar works at the southern (inland) end of his property. To provide the necessary labour for it, he bought Bossue estate and the associated Prospect Pen in the parish of Vere on the south side of the island.⁹ He sold the land almost at once, but kept the slaves. William Miles congratulated him on making these Negroes contented with their change of ownership, and was relieved that they were settled in their new quarters before the hurricane of 1785 struck the island. The purchase of the Negroes together with the estate they were on cost Tharp £15,000 sterling, which he borrowed from Miles. For his new estate, which Tharp called the Covey, he built his largest and most elaborate sugar works, powered by water through an aqueduct which cut off a loop in the Martha Brae River. He pressed Miles to send the rum stills and coppers for boiling the sugar at the new works, in time to be installed when the new buildings were completed in May 1786. After the Covey works were completed, Tharp built a large hospital for the slaves there.

Tharp next turned his attention to acquiring the existing estates of Pantrepant and Cheshire. Pantrepant lay to the south of his new Covey estate. It had

⁹ “Bossue” was presumably the sugar estate, with both a windmill and a cattle mill, called “Bussoo’s” on the Craskell & Simpson, “Map of the County of Middlesex, ... Jamaica”, London, 1763. Immediately to the west of this estate, Craskell & Simpson also showed a sugar estate, “Prospect”, with a windmill and two cattle mills. The subsequent county map, published by Robertson, London, 1804, does not show sugar estates in these two locations.

fertile land and water power. It was part of the bankrupt estate of the late Henry Strudwick, and had been placed by the Jamaican Court of Chancery into the hands of a receiver, Charles Hall, the Custos of the parish of St Andrew. Hall was trying to acquire full possession of the property, and Tharp accused him of buying out the estate's creditors cheaply while charging the estate with the full value of the debts. Tharp told Miles in 1785, however, that he had given up all hope of acquiring Pantrepant himself. Miles tried to console him by saying that with his "army" of sixteen hundred Negroes, he was surely "complete" already. But Tharp replied that he still wanted another hundred Negroes to complete the labour force on his existing property. "There cannot be a more complete one than it is," wrote Miles in reply to this, "and good seasons with your exertions will no doubt do great things for you."

Tharp never quite gave up hope of acquiring Pantrepant. His sister told Miles in 1787 that her brother would never consider himself complete without Pantrepant. In 1789 Tharp came to England to outflank Charles Hall and negotiate with the daughter and heiress of the original owner of Pantrepant, Henry Strudwick. The heiress was married to the Rev. George Warrington. Tharp was no doubt able, when he met Warrington and his wife, to impress them with the size of the Strudwick debts in Jamaica and with the run down state of the estates in the hands of the designing Charles Hall. They agreed to sell all their property in Jamaica to Tharp if he would also take over all the debts. He paid them £3,000. The ultimate day of reckoning with Hall had to be postponed for two years until the Warringtons' son, on whom the property had been entailed, was twenty-one, but Tharp seems to have taken over the running of the Strudwick estates in Jamaica in 1790. (These included Nutfield estate in St Mary, a parish east of Trelawny, in the centre of the north coast of the island. Tharp sold this, but not before he had been obliged to buy out a rival claimant to the land for £2,500 sterling.) On Pantrepant itself, the sugar works were complete with a watermill in good order, and the equipment included (remarkably for a Jamaican plantation) a plough. There were over a hundred slaves and three hundred animals. Tharp later considerably strengthened the estate, and in 1793 he built a new sugar works there.

So certain did Tharp wish to be over securing his title to Pantrepant that even his lawyer in London thought some of his actions unnecessary. The Warringtons' solicitor in Chester, Peter Snow, was, however, impressed by the behaviour of the rich planter from Jamaica. After the business had been finally settled, he wrote to Tharp reminding him of the dispute over the election of Members of Parliament in Chester, which he had described when they met in 1789. This dispute had been settled in the meantime by the House of Lords, and the old wide franchise in the city restored. The independent Freemen of the city were looking for a suitable candidate with "free principles", Snow told Tharp, and went on to suggest:

I really don't mean to flatter you when I say that I don't know of any gentleman more likely to serve us than yourself, possessed as you are, or soon will be, of a princely fortune. When you come here, I hope you'll pardon me for resuming this subject; and if it happens not to meet your ideas, you will at least pardon me for having hinted it.

Nothing came of this suggestion. By this time, Tharp was free of parliamentary ambitions, whether in England or Jamaica.¹⁰

At the final reckoning with Charles Hall over Pantrepant in 1791, Hall had to disgorge over £15,000 currency which he had been paid as receiver for Strudwick's bankrupt estate. On the other hand, Tharp paid £5,000 currency to Hall for fifteen hundred acres of land near Pantrepant, which Hall had been granted by the crown, at a time when he hoped to acquire the Strudwick estates for himself. The only Strudwick debts there is any record of John Tharp's paying are the arrears of the annuities bequeathed by Henry Strudwick to his two coloured children and their mother. Hall had never paid the children's £100 currency each or their mother's £120.¹¹

Also in 1791, Tharp paid James Scarlett, the owner of Peru estate, next to Good Hope, £500 sterling for a piece of land, in order to have a better boundary for Good Hope. He was also able to complete his Windsor estate next to the mountains by buying Hawkerton plantation in the same year.¹² After he had done this, he left his eldest son Joseph in charge of his affairs in Jamaica, while he set out for England. His first purpose in going to England was to negotiate the purchase of Cheshire estate. Cheshire, which bordered Good Hope, had been established as a sugar plantation by Lieutenant-Colonel Spragge, who died in 1767. His widow was still alive in 1791, and with their son Robert received a rent of £1,000 sterling per annum from the tenants of Cheshire. Tharp's lawyer warned him before he set out from Jamaica that the widow Spragge was unwilling to sell, and that young Spragge (who as a young army officer was perhaps more likely to want a lump sum from the sale of the plantation than a steady income from it) was away in Ireland. Cheshire estate had been valued at less than £12,000 currency in 1787, which included the value of 59 slaves, but in 1792, Tharp agreed to pay the Spragges £31,000

¹⁰ Jean Besson, 2002, p.60, states that, whilst Tharp was living in England, he became a Deputy-Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire and campaigned for a seat in the House of Commons.

¹¹ R. C. Dallas, in Letter XIX of his History of the Maroons (London, 1803), gave a lengthy account, though without mentioning any names, of John Tharp's methods in acquiring Pantrepant estate. He did this, to show by implication what scoundrels all Jamaica planters were. According to Dallas, Tharp was told about Strudwick's long-lost daughter living in Chester by a Liverpool merchant, whom Charles Hall, the receiver for the bankrupt Strudwick estates had long before crossed in love. This merchant took his revenge on Hall by encouraging Tharp to acquire Pantrepant. Tharp came to England and offered what was a large sum to Strudwick's daughter and her clergyman husband, though a small sum to him and much less than the true value of the property.

Dallas's account was based on some rather far-fetched gossip. As he wrote to his friend, W. D. Quarrell (who sent a copy of the letter to Tharp), he bore a grudge against Tharp for treating his pretensions with, as he thought, insufficient consideration. It seems more likely that Tharp concealed nothing from Strudwick's daughter and her husband, because he did not need to. Pantrepant, whatever its future prospects, was probably valued not unreasonably at £3,000 in 1789, when there were lawsuits and counterclaims to be contended with. It is not very fruitful to speculate, but it is perhaps unlikely that the Warringtons would have received any more from Hall, had they decided to sell to him.

¹² Tharp used all of his Windsor estate as a pen and did not produce sugar there.

sterling for it. Miles advanced two thirds of this purchase price, and Tharp's merchants in London and Liverpool also contributed.

After he had bought Cheshire estate, Tharp made his first purchase of English land. Miles and he had long corresponded about the nest egg he meant to have in England when his labours in Jamaica were at last complete. By 1791 he had been a widower for over ten years, and although still less than fifty, what he called gout (although it sounds from his descriptions more like a form of arthritis) was making him an old man. Now that his son and heir could take over from him in Jamaica, John Tharp could make plans to retire to England.

The estate he bought in England was Chippenham Park in Cambridgeshire near Newmarket. It cost him £40,691 sterling, after a little tough bargaining with the previous owner, Drummond Smith. What brought him in 1792 to this part of East Anglia is unknown. It may have been where his forbears had come from, but there is no evidence of this. Chippenham's nearness to the centre of English racing at Newmarket may have been an attraction, although Tharp's comparatively quiet life there and his disapproval of the house parties his son gave there in his absence suggest that this may rather have been a disadvantage. What perhaps attracted him most to Chippenham were the opportunities the property offered to an improving landlord. None of the estate's owners in the eighteenth century seem to have found it profitable, but none of them had possessed John Tharp's resources for making improvements. Even his resources were to prove barely equal to the schemes he embarked on at Chippenham.

He did not stay long enough to improve his new English estate on this visit to England in 1791-92, but returned to Jamaica to bring his estates there to perfection before finally retiring to England. His eldest son Joseph had married Lady Susan Murray, a daughter of the Earl of Dunmore, in 1788, and they had come to Jamaica in that year from the Bahamas where her father was Governor. Joseph was left in charge at Good Hope during his father's absence in 1791-92, and he sat in the House of Assembly for Trelawny from 1790 to 1794. Joseph Tharp resigned from the Assembly in 1794, however, and returned to England where he died the same year, leaving his wife with one daughter and one son.

John Tharp married again in October 1794. His second wife, Ann Gallimore, was already a widow, but she was much younger than Tharp, and was lively and attractive. His youngest son, William Blake Tharp, was old enough in 1795 to be left in at least nominal charge at Good Hope. He was helped there by the Tharp family's able man of business, William Green, and by the planting superintendent of the Tharp estates, John Harwood, who was an illegitimate son of John Tharp, born before his first marriage. Everything on the Tharp estates was in excellent condition in 1795. His six sugar estates, with over 2,200 slaves, were capable of producing well over 1,500 tons of sugar a year. Three hundred and forty slaves lived on his cattle pens of Windsor, Top Hill and

Chippenham Park, the latter being a new one he had acquired in the adjacent parish of St Ann and named after his new estate in England.¹³

The income that he received from his Jamaican estates before 1795 is not recorded in surviving documents. The average production of his estates from 1795 to 1800 was just over 1,500 hogsheads of sugar a year, which should have brought him the clear income of £30,000 a year which George Hibbert, his London merchant, mentioned as something to be expected. In 1799, however, his crop was only 1,348 hogsheads, and in the depressed market of that year these made only £20 each. This did not even cover the costs of cultivation, manufacture and shipping. Ninety hogsheads sold by Miles from the 1800 crop fetched over £52 each. After deducting £13 for duty, nearly £6 for the cost of shipping across the Atlantic, and £1 for other expenses, Tharp was left with £32 for each hogshead. At this rate his 1800 crop of 1,569 hogsheads would have made over £50,000 for him. Out of this sum, however, had to come the regular running expenses of his Jamaican estates, which he reckoned at £20,000 a year; and nearly another £7,500 was tied up in payment of interest on loans and of various allowances and annuities. The clear profit for 1800 would thus have been around £25,000.

When John Tharp's neighbour of Pembroke estate and of Cardiff Hall in the parish of St Ann, John Blagrove, retired to England from his estates in Jamaica, he enjoyed twenty years of agricultural pursuits there. John Tharp might reasonably have expected the same. For several years he did lead the pleasant life of a rich man in eighteenth century England. He took a house in London in Portman Square in 1796. Before Christmas 1797, he moved into a grander house in Portland Place. His youngest son, William Blake Tharp, died in Jamaica in 1796, but his two surviving sons both married: John married Anna Maria Philips, the daughter of a St Kitts planter, and Tom married Mary Quarrell, daughter of one of Jamaica's leading planters. Tom went back to Jamaica after William's death in 1796. For John, his father purchased a commission in the Horse Guards. Tharp's only daughter, Eliza, married an East Anglian clergyman, the Rev. Phillipson. Most of Tharp's time was spent on his estate at Chippenham or touring the English spas in search of relief for his gout. In 1797 he bought Snailwell, an estate next to Chippenham, for £27,000. He later regretted that the English land he bought gave small returns, even after he had spent over £100,000 on improving it. He thought how much better off he would have been if he had invested his profits from Jamaica in the government funds, instead of buying land and remaining indebted to Miles to the extent of £80,000. "Land for parade and poverty: the funds for wealth and comfort," he told his son John. Nevertheless, it had long been his ambition to own land in England, and he admitted that his Cambridgeshire estates were the nearest to his heart of all his worldly concerns.

John Tharp came to England with no experience of English farming. He turned first of all for advice to Richard Dashwood, a landowner from Cley in the north of Norfolk. He continued to rely on Dashwood's advice, and made him one of the trustees

¹³ Windsor was at the southern end of the Martha Brae River where it springs from the hills of the Cockpit Country. Top Hill was about a mile and a half south-west of the village of Martha Brae.

of his will, but he also consulted the country's leading authority on agriculture, Thomas Coke of Holkham in Norfolk. Coke visited Chippenham in 1802, and showed interest in the possibility of Tharp's experimenting with his new methods in Jamaica.

Tharp's predecessor at Chippenham, Drummond Smith, had demolished the mansion house built there by one of the previous owners, the Earl of Orford, earlier in the eighteenth century, and had built a much smaller one in its place. A large house was hardly in keeping with John Tharp's needs or his character, but he felt he needed something more impressive to accommodate the parties of great men like Coke. There was some talk of his using the most fashionable architect of the day, James Wyatt, but before any definite plans for a new house had matured, Tharp decided to go back to Jamaica.

Chapter Four

Return to Jamaica and Death

John Tharp spent much of his time in England trying the fashionable eighteenth century cure for gout of taking the waters at Bath, Harrogate and Buxton. At times he improved sufficiently to be able to walk about on crutches, but at other times he could not even stand up. While he was taking the waters at Bath or Buxton, or else devoting himself to agricultural pursuits in Cambridgeshire, his wife normally stayed in London. She was gay and sociable – a characteristic letter from her gives an amusing account of a dinner with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's father, just before his marriage:

I could not listen to his conversation with any degree of patience to hear a little half-grown lad of seventeen talking of his intended marriage with more ease and self-consequence than a man would have done. I cannot but think Mr Clarke will repent of his mercenary motives. This premature child left London in his barouche and four and two outriders. He talks as much of his fifteen thousand a year as his uncle George did, do you remember?

This letter was written, however, after her husband had returned to Jamaica without her. She proved too attractive to – of all men – her stepdaughter's husband, the Rev. Phillipson. Tharp was away at Buxton when Phillipson and Mrs Tharp were together in London. Tharp was horrified and heartbroken when he learnt in 1800 that his wife was with child by Phillipson. He poured out his feelings to his nephews in Jamaica, the Brissett brothers. They begged their uncle to return to Jamaica. One of Tharp's friends in Jamaica regretted that Tharp and his wife had not returned to the island after the death of his youngest son in 1796. Everyone afterwards said that they had noticed Phillipson's intentions, but Tharp, normally acute, had refused to see anything but good in his daughter's husband, and he was too formidable a man for anyone to dare to disabuse him.

Tharp at once separated from his wife. A separation was also planned between his daughter and Phillipson; but Eliza was still content to go on living with her "Profligate parson", as her relations called her husband. They already had three children. Nothing would ever reconcile her father to Phillipson. "As to him," Tharp wrote, "If the devil had him on the precipice as he had Ambrosio in The Monk, it would be lenity to his deserts."

Tharp was moved by the advice of his friends to return to Jamaica. He began to wonder if his estates there were making all they could. He decided in 1801 to return to Good Hope in the following spring. His plans for a peaceful retirement in England were abandoned. He reached Good Hope again in July 1802, and found that, under his attorney, William Green, everything had been maintained in excellent order. Five hundred and thirty children had been born to his slaves in the eight years from 1795 to 1803, and his total number of slaves had increased from 2,551 in 1795 to 2,786 in 1803. A large

new hospital had been constructed at Good Hope for the slaves. Soon after reaching Good Hope again, John Tharp wrote to his son John:

My negroes have increased, and are very happy. They kill me with their constant visits and attentions. It gives pleasure, though I am fatigued to death before the day is half gone, for I must talk and shake hands with every one of them.

Only a prolonged drought in 1802 was preventing the production of two thousand hogsheads of sugar. Despite the very low price for sugar at this time (as low as £8 a ton), he did not hesitate to change from the old species of sugar cane to the new Eastern canes, which gave a higher yield. In March 1804 he told his son John that to be what he then called "complete" would require £100,000 more. By this time, he had bought Merrywood estate, another sugar property bordering on his own near the sea, for £30,000.

Merrywood was the last Jamaican property of Henry Cuniffe, who had been Tharp's predecessor as Custos of Trelawny. He had left Jamaica and retired to Ireland. If Tharp had not intervened in 1803, it is likely that his Merrywood estate would have fallen into the hands of his close-dealing merchant, John Wedderburn. Merrywood was mortgaged to Wedderburn, but Cuniffe had managed to pay off this mortgage by selling the other estate he possessed in Jamaica. Tharp knew in 1803 that Cuniffe was a dying man and that his only son was mentally deranged. He made him an offer of £30,000 sterling for Merrywood. Cuniffe was surprised to hear that Tharp had returned to Jamaica (for the sake of his health, Tharp told him), and he was glad to be able to realise such a sum for Merrywood. Cuniffe died in July 1803, but made provision in his will for the sale of Merrywood to be completed.

Wedderburn was mortified to see that Merrywood had slipped from his grasp. As Cuniffe's executor he put various obstacles in the way of Tharp's purchase. But Tharp was all eagerness to be in possession. Both George Hibbert and Philip John Miles in Bristol offered to advance the money to Tharp for the purchase, and were even willing to appease the "bonny Scot", as Hibbert called Wedderburn, by paying the purchase money before the title deeds were drawn up. When everything had at last been settled, Tharp wrote thanking his lawyer Richard Grant for his exertions in meeting Wedderburn's obstructiveness:

I assure you that I feel more comfortable now than previously, for if plain matters of business are to be attended with so much difficulty and perversion in their accomplishment, I shall not hastily seek for a repetition.

Towards the cost of Merrywood, which, as George Hibbert commented, would account for a whole year's income from Tharp's Jamaican estates, Tharp was able to put up £10,000 of his own, the remaining, £20,000 being advanced by Philip John Miles (his father William Miles, Tharp's old backer, died in 1803).

The purchase of Merrywood made Tharp, without a doubt, the largest single proprietor in Jamaica. He had seven large sugar estates, five of them with water power, and three thousand slaves. His aim after purchasing Merrywood was to

produce 2,200 hogsheads of sugar a year, which, as Miles told him, would give him a princely income - so long as prices remained good.

* * * * *

Before he left England, Tharp decided to sell his London house and invest the proceeds in a cargo of Eboe or Koromantee slaves from Africa. His house was sold in 1804 for £7,350. It was not a new thing for Tharp to deal in the slave trade, although little information survives about his earlier slaving ventures. They were evidently a profitable side-line. He preferred creole slaves for his own estates, who were accustomed from birth to West Indian conditions, including disciplined work on sugar plantations.¹⁴ This did not prevent him from selling over four hundred Negroes freshly imported from the Gold Coast in 1782 for what was described as an exorbitant price. William Miles told him that he could not congratulate him on this sale, when money was short for planters to buy slaves. Miles himself never seems to have engaged directly in the slave trade, at least in the period when he was dealing with Tharp, although he underwrote some of Tharp's slaving ventures. In the 1780s, Tharp acted as agent in Trelawny for Coghlan's of London, who named one of their slave ships the "Tharp".

When he decided to return to Jamaica in 1802, Tharp wrote to Richard Walker's of Liverpool asking them to finance a slaving voyage to Africa for him, now that he would be able to sell the slaves himself in Jamaica. But Richard Walker, who had been a friend of Tharp, had died, and the surviving partners in his firm wanted to quit the slave trade. They passed on Tharp's request to another Liverpool merchant, Caleb Fletcher, who agreed to send a ship to Bonny for Eboe slaves to be sold in Trelawny. Two such voyages were made while Tharp was alive. Fletcher commented to Tharp that the sale of Eboe slaves would no doubt be helped by the news that Wilberforce had carried his motion to abolish the slave trade as far as the committee stage in the House of Commons. (This was three years before Wilberforce's campaign to end the slave trade in British dominions was successful in Parliament.)

* * * * *

Despite the war against Napoleon, despite the depression in the sugar market, and despite the drought that met him on his return to Good Hope in 1802, John Tharp went on at a tremendous rate. He knew that for a man half-crippled with gout, he tried to do too much:

If my anxiety to be seeing after my own affairs did not lead me to[o] often into what I call excess, I possibly would have less gout; but I know not how it is - instead of indulging in bed and nursing my formidable foe, I must crawl on horseback and be doing something. The negroes have a forcible expression for such zeal and exertion: they say "Mamma bring me so."

¹⁴ In this context, the word creole does not mean mixed-race; rather it is a description of slaves born on the island.

Not even a worse drought in 1803 than the one in 1802 could deter him from developing his estates further. The drought in 1803 was so bad that there was not enough water to turn the watermills at his three northern estates at Good Hope, Lansquinet and Potosi. Philip John Miles did not hesitate to advance all the money Tharp required for his further plans for expansion. In the end Miles advanced over £100,000. George Hibbert commented on Tharp's plans to increase further the output of his estates that his whole life had shown that "economy does not always consist in spending little." Tharp's plans were not extravagant. While he proposed to establish a new cattle pen adjoining his Windsor lands, he planned to sell Chippenham Park Pen in the next parish, as it was too far removed from his Trelawny estates to be worked in conjunction with them. The new buildings he erected at this time are built roughly though solidly, and probably include some material salvaged from earlier structures. They are unlike the beautifully finished freestone buildings built at the Covey works in 1785.

Although so active in his affairs in Jamaica, Tharp did not forget his other estates that he had left in England. From Good Hope came a stream of instructions about Chippenham in Cambridgeshire. The herons should be destroyed if they ate the fish in the ornamental lake; the game should be preserved; the rabbits and hares should be kept down, and a gamekeeper from the Wolds of Yorkshire (where they were "a hardy desperate set of people") engaged to do this. Tharp planned for ten thousand trees to be planted every year on his Cambridgeshire estates, and wrote to his son about the trees:

They are ornamental, will be profitable, and in so open a country beautiful. The fen planting, when a little more advanced and complete, will be the prettiest thing in England; and if Mr Coke's red willow take, the profit will be great.

After he had been back in Jamaica a year, he began to wonder how soon he might be well enough to bear another crossing of the Atlantic so that he could return to see his estates in England. By 1803, however, war had broken out again between Britain and France, and Tharp said he would not risk a passage across the Atlantic so long as there was any risk of being captured at sea. He continued to live alone at Good Hope – his son Tom was on the south side of the island at Dean's Valley, usually ignoring his father's good advice about planting matters.

Having abandoned his political career in Jamaica when he thought he was leaving the island for good in 1795, Tharp's political ambitions, such as they were, were now distantly fixed on Cambridgeshire. About the time of the British general election of 1802, he wrote to his son John about the control that the Duke of Rutland and the Earl of Hardwicke exercised over the choice of Members of Parliament from Cambridgeshire:

I plainly see that if those two great luminaries are in quiet possession of the county, it will be impossible to any other than their families to get in. I look forward to the large accumulations I have made and the sums expended to my little boy's ambition some day or other ...

John Tharp died at Good Hope after a short illness on 30 July 1804. Had he lived another year, he would have seen his Jamaican estates at their zenith. Over 2,500 hogsheads of sugar were made in 1805. Even this enormous output, which brought in £78,000 currency, was not enough to meet the cost of the developments that Tharp had ordered to be made in that year, which cost almost £100,000 currency. Not until 1808 was there to be enough profit from the estates in Jamaica to make much inroad into the £100,000 sterling debt to Miles. Tharp had foreseen, however, that there would be time enough to pay for all the improvements to his estates before his heir was to succeed to the estates on his twenty-fourth birthday in 1818.

At the time of his death in 1804, John Tharp's personal property in Jamaica (this included his slaves) was estimated to be worth £364,000 currency. His real estate, which included most of his sugar processing machinery, buildings and infrastructure, cannot have been worth very much less. This property of roughly half a million sterling in Jamaica was much less than the property of many landowners in England, but it put John Tharp at the head of the great proprietors in Jamaica. His large estates had been built up from his skill and enterprise as a planter and manufacturer of sugar. Some of his actions were ruthless, but there seems to have been little deceit or fraud about them. He had no connection with any of his seven capital sugar estates before he paid an apparently fair price for them. He did not, in contrast to many Jamaican planters, achieve his wealth by swindling others of the estates they had entrusted to him. The only bankrupt plantation he took over was Pantrepant, and he had there to take over all the Strudwick debts with it. The Privy Council found in his favour over his possibly dubious actions in possessing himself of Dean's Valley Water Works estate. By the standards of his time at least in Jamaica, John Tharp was an honourable man as well as being enormously successful.

Chapter Five

The Tharp Family and the Estates

John Tharp left his estates in both Jamaica and England in trust for his infant grandson, John, the only son of Joseph Tharp who died in 1794. He had little expectation of living until his grandson was grown up; and his insistence that he should be his sole heir meant that the estates would have to be managed by trustees during a long minority. He was not swayed from this by any pretensions of his two surviving sons, even though his grandson did not seem (to them, at least) a very bright boy. Richard Dashwood, on whose advice he greatly relied, sustained him:

I declare I perfectly agree with you in your parental and honest attachment to the son of my late respected Joseph T. He is your lawful heir; and I think though he may not at present be so bright, he will hereafter be full as honest and respected as any offspring of those who may disrespect and ridicule him.

* * * * *

John Tharp made his will in 1801, after the seduction of his second wife by his daughter's husband.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, neither his wife nor Phillipson received anything in the will. (Mrs Tharp already had an annuity settled on her at the time of their marriage in 1794.) Although the will is enormously lengthy and elaborate, to provide for every possible contingency in the succession to the estates, its main points are clear. All the estates in Jamaica and England were left in trust for the grandson, until he was twenty-four. John Tharp had inherited his own father's estate when he was eighteen; but he wanted to allow time enough to pay off the large debt to Miles and also enable the heir to have something in hand before he inherited. The trustees were all from outside the family. They were the men who had helped him to build up his wealth, the merchants William Miles and his son Philip John Miles at Bristol, George Hibbert and Charles Oswin in London, his Norfolk friend Richard Dashwood and also Sir Gilbert Affleck from Suffolk, and in Jamaica his friend Simon Taylor and his man of business William Green. To protect the heir from his own possible extravagance and from the rapacity of others, he was to be tenant for life of the property, which was entailed on his eldest son – this meant that the heir could sell none of the estates. The heir's sister was to receive a marriage portion of £20,000; and various small legacies and annuities were left to her, and to their mother, also to Tharp's two sisters, to his daughter Eliza, to his illegitimate son and planting superintendent in Jamaica John Harwood, and to his illegitimate daughter Mary Hyde Tharp.¹⁶ His elder surviving son John was to receive an annuity of £2,500 sterling and a sum of £6,000 disposable in his will, besides £40,000 for his children after his death. He

¹⁵ UK National Archives, Wills – Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Will of “John Tharp of the Good Hope in the Parish of Trelawny in the County of Cornwall in the Island of Jamaica and of Chippenham Park in the County of Cambridge in Great Britain Esquire”, PROB 11/1423/18, proved 6 March 1805.

¹⁶ Mary Hyde Tharp was born in Jamaica four or five years after his first wife died in 1780. She accompanied her father to England, and in 1801 married Robert Hayward of Fordham in Cambridgeshire.

was also to be able to live at Chippenham rent free until the grandson was twenty-four. John and his eldest son were confirmed as the next heirs if the grandson died without children. His other surviving son, Tom, was given the plantation at Dean's Valley.

There were some characteristic directives in the will. If the estates in Jamaica were ruined by earthquake, disease, invasion or insurrection, all the benefits listed in the will were to be reduced so as to leave a clear estate of £50,000 sterling to the heir. On the other hand, the trustees and the heir were directed to maintain 2,800 slaves on the properties in Trelawny (this was before the purchase of Merrywood). The heir would lose the title to the estates if he did not agree to this. The trustees were recommended in the will to keep John Harwood as general superintendent of the plantations and works in Jamaica, and if he died or had to leave, another "good and skilful" planter was to be appointed. Ten thousand trees were to be planted every year at Chippenham; and any surplus cash during the heir's minority was to be used to buy neighbouring land in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. The grandson was to be liberally provided for until he was twenty-one; and he was then to receive £1,000 a year while in England or £3,000 while living abroad. Finally John Tharp directed in his will that his sugar was to be shipped to the various merchants he had dealt with in his lifetime, with the first 700 hogsheads going each year to Miles at Bristol to payoff the debt to him.

John Tharp made no significant changes to his will before he died. Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, who owned Jamaican properties almost as great as his own, was added to the roll of trustees. Charles Oswin, whose mercantile house went bankrupt, was dismissed. A direction was added to sell Chippenham Park Pen in the parish of St Ann. Otherwise the will remained unchanged from 1801. Although its provisions for his two surviving sons do not appear ungenerous, given that their young nephew was to be confirmed as the heir, both John and Tom were disappointed by it. They had expected more from their father.

Tom's affairs were the more immediately affected by his father's death, as he had depended on his father for ready cash in running Dean's Valley estate. As soon as the estate had been settled on him, he had asked for ten or eleven thousand sterling from his father to buy more slaves with, "as if," wrote his father, "he really thought I had so many thousands for asking for." George Hibbert complained about Tom's debt to him of £2,000 and about the poor sugar he was making. Hibbert wrote to his father that he did not wish to refuse to advance money to Tom, "as I hope that will never happen to any of your direct descendants." Hibbert was always ready to smooth out difficulties with a phrase, and wrote:

I heartily wish that my friend Tom, who has begun his planter's career in such very discouraging times, may take a leaf out of the Book of Experience, and grow both a more prudent and a more happy man than if delusive fortune had smiled on his commencement.

His father was less optimistic, though he kept on paying Tom's debts to Hibbert. He wrote, "I suspect his ability as a planter, but I must go down and see what he

is about. He seems determined to take my advice, which would be better for him if he had done so long ago." Tom spent four years representing the parish of Hanover in the House of Assembly, but he resigned when his father returned to Jamaica. Tom's wife was forced by ill health to leave Jamaica in 1803, but her husband had to stay and work on his plantation to reduce his debts – with his father's help: "Had I not come out, [he] must have been in a jail before this." The death of his father in 1804 was a severe setback, for it removed the possibility of his receiving a further £5,000 sterling to help pay his debts and further improve Dean's Valley. By 1806, Tom's debts had increased to £16,000. William Green, his father's man of business, then offered to take over his estate to re-establish it for him, "if his wild goose seeking could be laid aside." Green took over Tom's debts and his plantation in 1807 – but, he complained, not before Tom had driven off the estate's animals to sell for ready money. Tom died in 1815, by when Dean's Valley was almost free of debt and ready for his eldest son to take over as soon as he was twenty-one.

John had higher expectations than Tom before their father died. If the unprepossessing boy who was the heir should die, he understood that he would be likely to succeed to all or most of his father's estates. Even if the boy lived, it would be several years before he could control his own affairs, during which time, his uncle could enjoy at least some of the pleasures of an heir. John always thought that his father could afford to pay him more than he did. In 1799 he had wanted to leave the army, but had wanted his father to make up the loss of income from his commission. His father was already giving him £1,200 a year, but as soon as Tom was settled at Dean's Valley, his father promised that he should have an extra £300 a year. Once out of the army, John went to live at the newly fashionable resort of Brighton, whose great attraction was the presence of the royal princes. John was happy to enjoy his relationship with them through his sister-in-law, Lady Augusta Murray (his late brother Joseph had married her sister), who had (illegally) married Prince Augustus. His father wrote a half-admiring and half-warning letter to John in December 1801 about his entertainment of the princes, including the Prince of Wales, and their lady companions:

The company of princes and lords are very well if they do not lead to evils that they never will remedy; and I am firmly of your opinion that the best company may be cheaper and more creditable than indifferent. Yet if entertainments to princes are too frequent (for they are not like other guests), they must press hard on your income, comfortable as it now is. I am told besides the Prince's attention, you have two Demi-princesses in your train, and that one of them assisted to arrange your preparations for His Royal Highness. It is right to make what use of them they will allow, provided they do not expect to look for a tenfold recompense.

The Prince of Wales (later the Prince Regent) did well enough for John, for he encouraged him to carry out trials of Merino sheep in the royal park at Kew and also gave his eldest son a commission in the Guards.

John wanted his father to give him Chippenham in Cambridgeshire, as he had given Dean's Valley in Jamaica to Tom. Words of longing escaped him even when he understood that the grandson was to have Chippenham as well as all the estates at Good Hope. He became angry at the haughtiness of his father's steward at Chippenham,

James Shepard, as he was convinced that “were I to be your heir, I should find him in the other extreme.” His father explained that the income from Chippenham barely covered expenses there, so long as improvements were being made, “so that you see what an English estate does; and to make you a present of it would be signing your ruin.” (It did not help to reconcile John to this situation to know, as his father also knew, that if the profits from the Jamaican estates had been invested in government funds rather than in land, his father might have been better able to make provision for his surviving sons without having to concentrate so much on maintaining the estate intact for a sole heir.)

His father was irritated by John's extravagance, when he knew that he did not have the resources free, even if he had been so inclined, to be more generous to him. Reports of extravagance came to John Tharp in Jamaica from George Hibbert and Richard Dashwood. The house in Portland Place was “a seduction to John's wife, who loves a little spring gaiety;” the young Tharps were off to London, “not for cheap living, I suppose;” and Mr John Tharp “has not exceeded his allowance but a mere trifle.” His father was particularly irritated by the episode of the French Ambassador's wines, which had been sold at knock-down prices when the Ambassador had to return to France on the declaration of war in 1803. He expostulated angrily at the young Tharps' purchase of a large selection of these, besides a new horse, at a time when,

Be assured, things are verging fast to that crisis when all of you may want a joint of meat without the means of paying for it. Therefore, had it not been better to have wanted ambassadors' wines, hunters, &c., &c., than retained them at such risk?

Later he wrote even more angrily:

I have been so long in the habit of hearing professions, reading calculations, and hearing how well things were to go on, that I now begin to suppose that they were all used as a matter of amusement, without any meaning at all, for no one who thinks, or can make use of figures would let things run on so desperately without being sensible of it.

George Hibbert observed:

Even your vast possessions will not suffice to a mind that has not accustomed itself to self-denial and to respect certain limits which are on no account to be exceeded.

John did not consider that he was being very extravagant. His wife wrote that they had tried to economise by buying all their food at Bury St Edmund's (where their eldest son had started to go to school) for cheapness. They blamed Richard Dashwood and the officious steward James Shepard for broadcasting the news of every purchase they made. A comedy of errors was enacted between Dashwood (who had himself first proposed that John should live at Chippenham during his father's absence in Jamaica, until the heir grew up) and Shepard on one side, and the young Tharps on the other. To begin with, all had gone well. John had even praised Shepard, about whom he later became almost hysterically abusive. Dashwood and Shepard went steadily on with their work – “I say nothing of my friend Mr John, in such matters. As you know, business of such nature is not his delight, having no experience.” But it became irksome to John, as he understood more of what was going on, to be treated like a child and prevented from interfering. He became enraged when Shepard refused to let him do anything on the estate, and at the same time reported all the diversions he contrived to pass his idleness.

He began to spy on Shepard, who he thought was feathering his nest at the expense of the estate. When Dashwood and Shepard tried to placate him by encouraging him to enjoy himself and expect his benevolent father to pay a few debts, he exploded. They were trying to poison his father's mind against him by encouraging his luxuries and then reporting them, at the same time as his father was enjoining the strictest economy! Shepard in particular was the target for his wrath, as he had to live at Chippenham, and he treated John's attempted interventions on the estate as merely a nuisance. In the end, Dashwood admitted that Shepard had been too officious. He urged – too late – that Tharp should return from Jamaica and settle everything. The rather crabbed Dashwood lamented the turmoil in the family, and told Tharp sanctimoniously that he was glad that his own family were not at variance about who should get the most after his own death. The more generous George Hibbert appreciated that John's envy of Tom, who had been given his own estate at Dean's Valley, was a reasonable one; and he urged John Tharp to show equal generosity to both sons.

John went to Thomas Coke's sheep shearing in 1804, and found that his complaints about Dashwood and Shepard produced ready agreement. "I added to my stock of knowledge about the copartnership not much to their credit," he told his father:

Indeed it is the common report that neither of their words are worth a half-penny... If any doubts remain as to Dashwood's real character, only apply to Mr Coke, Mr Galwey, Mr Mosely, Mr Host, Sir John Sebright, and twenty others, all of Norfolk – who are not a little astonished at the confidence placed in him by you.

Countrymen usually find it easy to agree with the grumbles of another, especially about Dashwood who disliked the jollifications of Thomas Coke and his friends. Sir John Sebright was less complaisant when it came to business. There had been a proposal for him to take over part of the estate at Chippenham; but when terms had been arranged in 1806, young John Tharp backed out, and Sebright wrote bleakly to George Hibbert, "I can never again interfere in his affairs."

* * * * *

In the last months of his life, John Tharp's attitude mellowed towards his second wife. She kept on writing to him from England, trying to soften him with her gossip. She also discussed with William Green, who looked after her interests in Jamaica, the future of her family by her first marriage. George Hibbert met her in London, and confirmed that "she seems to think her best possession now is your friendship." John Tharp began to regret his earlier hostility, and asked his son to invite her to stay at Chippenham, but she was still too embarrassed to bring herself to do this.

* * * * *

The most important member of the family to John Tharp was obviously his grandson born in 1794. He was determined to bring him up himself when he was left fatherless within weeks of his birth. He did not think that the influence of his grandson's mother would be at all beneficial. Lady Susan married again and was widowed again

before John Tharp made his will in 1801. His views on her are sufficiently described by what he wrote to his son John before Christmas 1801:

Lady Susan has made two requests in her letter to me, first to ask for my grandson to spend the holidays with her, and next for £500 more per annum to keep her carriage. I believe my answer will prevent a second application: neither request will she get.

The grandson was placed in the care of a private tutor, Thomas Sisson. One of George Hibbert's relatives was also with Sisson; and Hibbert wrote in 1803 that little John was progressing well with him – “My opinion of Sisson is that he has few equals for the task he undertakes.” Dashwood also saw the boy at Sisson's, before he went to his mother for the summer holidays of 1803. He was rather shy (this is understandable when even at the age of seven, he found difficulty in speaking clearly), but he was growing tall. He could read reasonably well, although Latin was beyond him. “I have known boys like him alter greatly before they were seventeen,” wrote Dashwood, “so much so as hardly to be behind; and as I know that your hopes are in favour of him, I sincerely wish you may find him turn out as we all wish.” Sisson himself wrote at the same time that John was growing up, and that his mind was expanding in all its faculties. He looked forward to his education being completed successfully, and hoped that his pupil would outshine his cousins, “becoming a more creditable and a more useful man than any whose forward conduct may for a time make a more favourable impression.” His grandfather in Jamaica wrote eagerly to his son at Chippenham: “Let me know what you think of John now that he has been with you. He is a boy that is affectionate if made much of, but otherwise very shy.”

His uncle at Chippenham was not the man to be patient and considerate with this awkward dull boy who stood between him and his father's great wealth. He recommended that he should be sent to a public school. His grandfather did not agree. He wrote in 1804, “If I could have him with me, I am certain that diffidence would wear off, for he is affectionate and ought to be made anything of by kind and gentle means.” The boy's mother would not risk her son again with his rough uncle at Chippenham, but she wrote to her father-in-law in Jamaica that Sisson was sending good reports. Sisson himself sent a hopeful report about his nine year old pupil in March 1804, accompanied by a specimen of John's handwriting sent by the boy himself. The pupil was happy at the progress he was making, and Sisson said, “I have succeeded in the course of my engagements in more than one instance not at all more encouraging.”

* * * * *

The boy was quite clearly, even in the biased eyes of his grandfather, not a promising child, but he stood, however inadequately, for the continuity of his grandfather's accumulation of property in Jamaica and England. The estates in England should at least be safe for him: who could know what might happen in Jamaica by the time he was twenty-four in 1818? John Tharp knew that,

in all distant events much must be left to the chapter of accidents. Man may arrange, and God disappoint the best laid plans.

Chapter Six

The Trustees take over the Estates

John Tharp's estates in Jamaica produced an average of over 1,750 hogsheads of sugar a year for ten years after his death – not as much as he had hoped for, but enough to pay for the expensive improvements he had ordered and to pay off most of his debt to Miles. Much of the credit for this achievement can probably be attributed to his illegitimate son, John Harwood the planting superintendent, who lived at Good Hope after the death of his father. When Tharp left for England in 1795, Harwood had been joined with his half brother William Blake Tharp and with William Green and Simon Taylor in the control of the estates. Taylor and Green were trustees of Tharp's will after 1804, whereas Harwood merely received a salary of £400 a year from the trustees for managing the cultivation and manufacture of the sugar.

While John Harwood managed the planting and sugar-making, and a clerk at Good Hope organised the distribution of supplies to the other estates from the central store there, and presumably did the actual preparation of the estate accounts for Green to submit to the Master in Chancery, Green drew the whole of the attorney's commission of six per cent of the proceeds of the estates. He received over £17,000 currency for the four years 1805 to 1808 – a substantial contribution to the fortune of £231,000 currency which he left at his death in 1812. Although Green had thirty other properties to supervise as attorney, he probably gave as much attention to the Tharp estates as most attorneys gave to their charges.

The official of the Court of Chancery in Jamaica who authorised Green to take this commission was John Shand. This able and unscrupulous man was, amongst other things, a Master in Chancery, who examined cases and made recommendations to the Chancellor. The Chancellor in Jamaica was the hard-pressed Governor, who nearly always accepted the recommendations of the Masters in Chancery. As John Shand was the ablest Master in Chancery, the business of the large Tharp estates was delegated to him. He managed it well enough – there was no possibility of petty corruption, and petty corruption was anyway beside the point for Shand, who was well placed to take over the Tharp estates completely. In December 1808, Simon Taylor made his will, appointing John Shand and his brother William Shand as executors especially to look after the Jamaican concerns of the nephew who was his heir, including Taylor's responsibilities towards the Tharp estates. The Shand brothers would of course share these responsibilities for the Tharp estates with the other Tharp trustee in Jamaica, William Green. This at least suggests why John Shand, as Master in Chancery, should have allowed Green to take the full commission from the Tharp estates, while this was concealed from Taylor, who was jointly responsible with Green and as entitled as he to take any commission from the Tharp estates.

Any hopes of the Shand brothers were rather overcast by Simon Taylor's continuing to live on for nearly five years after making his will. It was in fact William Green

who died first in February 1812. Green's failing health before his death made the septuagenarian Taylor exert himself to examine the affairs of the Tharp estates. He now discovered that Green had been taking a full attorney's commission from them. It seemed scandalous to him that this jumped-up clerk, who had insinuated himself into his late friend Tharp's favour, should quietly have taken £17,000 in four years, when he himself had taken nothing. Taylor asserted that he had made no demands for commission, so that his old friend's estates could more quickly pay off the great debt to Miles. Now, however, when he saw what Green had done, he demanded in the Court of Chancery that half of the £17,000 should be paid over to him, and that he should also receive half of any other commission received by Green before his death in 1812. In June 1812, the acting Governor of Jamaica transferred the Tharp business to another Master in Chancery, Charles Oswin. It is an interesting comment on how small a world the West Indies were that John Tharp had intended to make Charles Oswin a trustee of his will. He cancelled the appointment when Oswin's mercantile affairs had ended in bankruptcy. Oswin had now come to earn his living as a law officer in Jamaica.

It is charitable and probably at least partly correct to attribute Green's somewhat ambiguous conduct towards the end of his life to ill health. He had served the estates well enough to convince John Tharp that he could be relied on as a trustee. He was still resourceful enough in 1809 to make an interesting petition to the House of Assembly about the management of the Tharp estates. Tharp's will imposed the penalty of disinheritance if the heir allowed the number of slaves on the estates in Trelawny to fall below 2,800. After the slave trade had ended in British dominions in 1808, the value of all slaves rose. Green saw that it would be impossible for the Tharp estates to purchase any new effective field Negroes, unless money was first raised by selling some slaves of mixed race and their children, who he thought should fetch a good price for non-manual work elsewhere. Under the terms of the will it was impossible to sell them, since a sale would mean that there were fewer than 2,800 left. Green therefore petitioned the Assembly to legislate to set aside this particular clause of the will for this one occasion. John Shand was a member of the committee appointed by the Assembly to consider Green's petition. The committee recommended that a Bill should be prepared to make the petition law. Unfortunately for Green's plans, the Bill met opposition, almost certainly on humanitarian grounds. It was considered abhorrent, even by slave-owners, to tear slaves away from their homes by selling them to another master. This disregard for human feelings seemed worst when slaves of mixed race, who were usually reckoned to be the most civilized, were involved in such a sale. The Act that was eventually passed by the Assembly did not allow any slaves of mixed colour to be sold from the Tharp estates to other masters, but only to be set free, and their number replaced by the purchase of Negroes. Setting them free would bring in no money; and Green's plan to strengthen the labour force on the estates was thus made ineffective. Not even John Shand's support in the Assembly could carry it through.

More characteristic of Green's conduct at this time was his slackness in dealing with the firm of Lewis Simond of New York, and his disregard for the clause in John Tharp's will which enjoined the trustees to sell Chippenham Park Pen. It was a welcome relief for the white employees to go up to this pen in the hills of the next parish

for a change of air; and Green evidently preferred their welfare to the interests of the Tharp family. No great damage was done by this, except that the proceeds of a sale could have gone to reduce the debt. Green's relations with Lewis Simond were more reprehensible. Simond sent supplies to Good Hope until the war between Britain and the United States in 1812 ended the connection. Payment was made as far as possible by the Tharp estates in rum; and because of the war and the intermittent American embargoes on foreign trade which preceded it, the Tharp estates were considerably in arrears with their shipments of rum to pay for the supplies of provisions and lumber sent by Simons from New York and Canada. Green ordered the supplies for the Tharp estates and shipped the rum in his own name. After his death, it was found that Green had taken money from the Tharp estates to pay for these supplies, but that Simond had never received it. There is no evidence that Green deliberately planned to defraud the estates of this money, but at best his conduct had been very lax. Simond sued for the money, which he claimed amounted to \$26,000; but he was frustrated by the legal obstacles in the way of a United States citizen suing an estate divided between England and Jamaica which was held in trust for a minor. His lawyers advised him badly, and his suit did not succeed until after his death, twenty years after the last of the supplies had been sent. Eventually in 1833, his executors received £3,500 sterling in settlement of his original claim. Green had advanced other sums from the Tharp estates to himself as a convenient way of conducting their business. As he died insolvent – despite his assets of £231,000 currency – there were endless delays before at least some of the money could be regained. The final dividend on his estate was not announced until 1837, when it was hoped that £2,000 would be returned to the Tharp estates.

Green's affairs were in confusion at his death and he left no will. The acting Governor, on the basis of some papers he had written, appointed his widow and William Fairclough, a planter and attorney, as administrators of his estate. Fairclough was another attorney for several properties who was to die insolvent, but in 1812 he was suddenly as well placed as the Shand brothers to lay hands on the Tharp estates. Like them, Fairclough had to wait until old Simon Taylor died before he could gain a share in the control of the estates. After Taylor's death in 1813, the Governor of Jamaica, the Duke of Manchester, appointed John Shand, in place of Simon Taylor, and William Fairclough, in place of William Green, to administer the Tharp estates. If Taylor had long outlived Green, Fairclough would probably have been excluded from Tharp affairs, because the Governor soon replaced him as administrator of Green's estate by William Harris of Kingston. But Fairclough still retained his responsibilities for the Tharp estates.

* * * * *

The death of Green and Taylor produced a great change in the Tharp estates. Yet the change was made in an orderly way. The legal executors of the two trustees in Jamaica were appointed to manage the Tharp trust there. George Hibbert and Sir Simon Haughton Clarke in England could but confirm these appointments. Both Shand and Fairclough were experienced men. Hibbert was under some obligation to John Shand for his help in persuading the Assembly in Jamaica to appoint Hibbert as its Agent in London in 1812. Fairclough was employed by Sir Simon Haughton Clarke as attorney on

his own Jamaican estates, and apparently managed them with success. Yet whereas the Tharp estates had been in the hands of John Tharp's friends, they were now in the hands of strangers to the family. There was still some continuity in the person of John Harwood, and Hibbert and Clarke promoted him to be their joint attorney with John Shand for the Tharp estates. But within a month of Taylor's death, John Harwood died also, aged fifty-one. No one now remained in Jamaica in whom John Tharp had trusted, and there were still five years to go before the heir was due to inherit.

Chapter Seven

The Expectations of the Heir

In England, the heir and his friends and relations were complacently awaiting the day when he would inherit control of his grandfather's property. Their notions of the wealth of Good Hope were wildly exaggerated. They forgot how much the estates in Jamaica depended on re-investment of the profits. They forgot the debt of over £100,000 to Miles that the estates had been paying off during the heir's minority. They thought they might expect an annual income of £130,000, which made the schemes of the heir's mother and his uncle John to take £20,000 each from the estates when the heir succeeded seem almost moderate. Nearer to the truth (which was that the net income of the Jamaican estates was unlikely ever to exceed £30,000 a year), someone recalled that John Harwood had once said that the estates had produced £80,000 a year. So they had once in the outstanding year of 1805, but it was £80,000 of depreciated Jamaica currency, and from it all the expenses of running the estates had to be deducted. Inflated notions of West Indian wealth were universal, and the fact that John Tharp had not entrusted any responsibility for his Jamaican estates to his family during the heir's minority meant that they had little occasion to question their dream of boundless wealth in store for them.¹⁷

The heir had not developed as his grandfather had hoped. He had been entrusted to a wonderfully patient tutor, Thomas Sisson; but when his mother took him away from Sisson at the age on nineteen in 1813, he still had the mind of a child. He also suffered from epileptic fits. At times it seemed doubtful if he would live very long, even long enough to inherit the estates in 1818. The size of his property, and still more the exaggerated reports of it, made him a helpless target for the avarice of others. It was partly to remove him from the enticements of his tutor's daughters that his mother took him away from Sisson's in 1813.

The trustees of his grandfather's will began to think that it would be best for the heir to be married young to someone whose main object might be to gain a fortune but could still look after a weak-minded husband. This seems a rather dubious plan, and the objection to it was later put very clearly by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, when he had to consider the Tharp case. Eldon said that the heir needed a nurse and not a wife. But the designing families of two young women seem to have offered bribes to the heir's mother (who was embarrassed by heavy debts), besides playing on her natural wish that her son should marry and lead a natural life. One prospective bride was rather hurriedly rejected in favour of another with greater social pretensions. On 1 June 1815, a few days after his twenty-first birthday, the bewildered young John Tharp was married privately in London to Lady Hannah Hay, a sister of the Marquis of Tweeddale.

¹⁷ Sterling £100 was worth Jamaica £140 currency and so Jamaica £100 currency was worth just over sterling £71. 8 shillings.

The marriage was a complete failure from the beginning. After a succession of unpleasant scenes in London, Lady Hannah removed her husband to her family's house in Scotland. His wife's contempt for him, his mother's misery when she realised her mistake in forwarding the marriage, and his own removal from every thing familiar to him acted upon John Tharp's defective mind, further disturbed by epileptic fits, to produce a state of insanity. He became obsessed by his wife's unfaithfulness. In November 1815 he managed to compose a letter, accusing his wife of adultery, and send it to someone who had looked after his affairs in London.

This was the signal for his uncle John to act. He had looked with no pleasure on the marriage of his nephew, whose death had sometimes seemed as likely as any idea of marriage had seemed impossible. He would lose all prospects of inheritance if any sons were born to his nephew, and would even lose his present home at Chippenham. He could hardly argue in public against his nephew's marriage on these grounds, but when there were reports of his nephew's insanity and his wife's adultery, he could act with propriety. Accompanied by his legal advisers, he went to see his nephew in Scotland. The Hay family were relieved to see him. The marriage ensured Lady Hannah a stake in her husband's fortune, but his residence with the Hays was merely a nuisance. There was an idea of taking him back to his mother and trying to forget about the whole unfortunate affair. The heir's uncle resisted this. If the heir was insane and this fact was concealed, his property would be exposed to the exploitation of Lady Hannah and her family. It was in her interest to take as much as she could during the precarious lifetime of her husband. It was in the uncle's interest, however, and in the interest of the rest of the Tharp family, to have the heir declared a lunatic who was unfit to manage his property. His uncle, as the next heir, would then probably be given control over it by the Court of Chancery.

This was done in 1816. The heir and his wife, with the uncle and his lawyers, returned to London. Lady Hannah formally applied for a legal enquiry into her husband's mental condition. This declared that he was insane. In November 1816, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, committed the care of his person to Lady Hannah and the care of his property to the uncle. Soon after, with everyone's approval, he was placed in a small private institution at Much Hadham in Hertfordshire. There he lived for the rest of his life, happily enough, since he gradually recovered from his complete derangement and also, it seems, ceased to suffer from epileptic fits. He was able to play cricket, go hunting, and make visits in the neighbourhood. His life was to be enormously long, despite its precarious beginning. This kept the estates in Jamaica under the ultimate control of the English Court of Chancery; and although he never again played any part in running his affairs, the heir was the unwitting cause of a crisis in the Tharp estates.

Chapter Eight

The Heir's Uncle and the Estates

On 24 May 1818, the trust set up by John Tharp expired. If all had gone well, the heir would then have taken over his property. The heir's uncle, acting on his behalf, now had to struggle to assert his position. The Receiver in Chancery, who had been appointed to control the English estates, was quietly discharged by the Court. The uncle continued to live at Chippenham, now at last able to manage the estate himself. The Jamaican estates were not so easily controlled. Before the heir's twenty-first birthday, George Hibbert and Philip John Miles had taken the precaution of being appointed by the Court of Chancery as Consignees of the produce of the Tharp estates. This role gave them considerable control over the management of the estates as well as over the marketing of its produce. Such control could plausibly be justified after the death of the two original trustees in Jamaica. It was anyway normal practice to make an estate's creditors its Consignees, and there was still £25,000 of the debt to Miles to be paid off in 1814.

For the first eleven years after the death of John Tharp in 1804, the sale of sugar from his estates had averaged nearly £30,000 a year, with prices that were generally reckoned as poor. This meant nearly £1,000 a year to Hibbert and Miles in commission alone (at 2½ per cent), besides their charges for shipping the sugar, shipping supplies to Jamaica, and various interest charges unavoidable in a trade where there could be long delays in making even regular payments. The heir's uncle was told that Hibbert was making £10,000 a year out of the Tharp estates. This was an exaggeration, but he probably made about a quarter of this. (Neither Hibbert nor Miles ever volunteered how much profit they made from the Tharp estates.) This was fuel to the uncle's ambition to replace Hibbert and Miles as Consignees of the estates' produce. Even if he had to employ middlemen to sell the sugar, he should then be able to draw some of the commission himself.

He sought counsel's opinion early in 1818 about the likelihood of dismissing Hibbert and Miles as Consignees and appointing himself. The opinion he received was a strong recommendation against making any such application. If the Court of Chancery considered that established West India merchants were necessary as Consignees for the estate of a minor, then was it more likely to consider them necessary for the estate of a lunatic. The uncle nevertheless pressed his petition to be appointed sole Consignee in place of Hibbert and Miles. Lady Hannah was alarmed at the prospect of the uncle having immediate control of the Jamaican estates, fearing that they would be in the hands of a man who would grudge her every shilling. She put forward a vexatious counter-proposal of her own, that her husband should be taken from Much Hadham and should live at Chippenham under the care of his old tutor, Thomas Sisson. (The trustees had anticipated such a move by making Sisson Vicar of Chippenham – to the disgust of the uncle, who had hoped that one of his own sons might have the living.) This proposal would mean expelling the uncle and his family from Chippenham. It was rejected by the

Master in Chancery in 1819, on the grounds that it offered no benefit to the heir and would produce no economies.

The uncle's petition to be made Consignee was heard by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, in the summer of 1818. Confronted by the vigorous opposition to the uncle's Proposals, both by Lady Hannah and by the existing Consignees, Eldon ordered a thorough examination of the case to be made by a Master in Chancery. This was bound to take time, but Eldon's court lived up to its reputation for delay. The examination did not begin until May 1819, and it was not until late in 1821 that he gave judgment. This delay, which left the Jamaican estates in at least a degree of confusion, was the more reprehensible, as no point of law was involved, merely the choice of someone to control the estates.

The examination of the case ordered by the Lord Chancellor was biased in favour of the uncle, deliberately so according to Eldon, who said that so long as the interest of the heir did not suffer, the rest of the family ought to benefit as much as possible. Thus the Master in Chancery had to decide not if the uncle could improve on the existing Consignees' standard of management, but merely if he could maintain it. The examination became an investigation into the management of William Shand and William Fairclough, the two attorneys remaining in Jamaica after John Shand had left for England in 1816. George Hibbert became their spokesman in England. Sir Simon Haughton Clarke supported Hibbert, and so did Philip John Miles, although he was less active than the other two. This was understandable since he lived over a hundred miles away from London at Bristol, but it also reflects his sympathy with the uncle, who indeed appealed to him in 1818 not to oppose his petition to be made sole Consignee. Miles was afterwards alone among the trustees in admitting that they might be partly responsible for any mismanagement in Jamaica.

The statistics that were used in the examination were to the discredit of Shand and Fairclough. The average cost of supplies sent to Good Hope from England in the days of Taylor, Green and Harwood before 1810 had been £11,500 a year. From 1810 to 1818, they had cost almost £20,000 a year. During John Harwood's lifetime the estates had produced over 1,750 hogsheads of sugar a year. For the three years from 1818, they had produced an annual average of 1,211 hogsheads. Harwood in the last year of his life had paid £131 currency for additional labour hired for work on the estates. In 1818 over £500 was paid for this, and in 1820 £764. Yet despite all this additional labour, the Tharp estates were being outshone by their neighbours. John Blagrove's estate of Pembroke with 259 Negroes produced 280 hogsheads in 1818, whereas Good Hope, its next door neighbour, with 448 Negroes produced only 224 hogsheads. In almost every way, it was easy to show that the Tharp estates seemed to be deteriorating under the management of Shand and Fairclough.

Powerful arguments were needed to explain away these figures. The Hibbert party produced some ingenious ones. One argument was always used on such occasions, that sugar canes exhausted the soil and that some decline in production was therefore inevitable. Sir Simon Haughton Clarke claimed that the soil of Trelawny parish

(where he himself owned estates, though not near Good Hope) was peculiarly liable to such exhaustion. The use of manure could halt a decline in production, but manure was only available in sufficient quantity for this when the pastures of an estate had been well maintained. (This argument seemed tacitly to admit the neglect of the Tharp pastures, thousands of acres in extent; and although it was asserted that John Tharp had intended to turn Merrywood estate into a cattle pen, none of his successors had actually done this.) The Hibbert party conceded that production on the Tharp estates was lower than it had been ten years earlier, but argued that the high output under Harwood and Green had been due to the then new Bourbon (or Eastern) canes. These had everywhere produced great yields when first introduced, but had soon begun to exhaust the soil even more rapidly than the old canes. The Hibbert party reminded the Court that rainfall in Jamaica is always very haphazard, and almost appeared to imply that Mr Blagrove's estates were blessed with frequent showers year after year, while the poor Tharp estates were left dry and burnt every year. They admitted that the Tharp estates possessed a great army of Negroes, but insisted that numbers alone, were no criterion of strength. William Green had tried to strengthen the labour force in 1809 by selling the less needed coloured slaves, but his attempt had been frustrated. Old John Tharp had acquired many of his slaves by buying them in large groups which inevitably included many weak and infirm Negroes – this seems an unconvincing argument to use so long after John Tharp had died, since when a new generation of slaves had grown up on the Tharp estates.

None of these arguments could conceal the fact that production on the Tharp estates was declining more rapidly than on the surrounding estates. Many of the arguments were also exposed by other reports from Jamaica. Attorneys like the Shand brothers were often able to deceive people in England, but respect for the great John Tharp was not yet dead enough for them to get away with deceiving the Tharps in England. Two letters reached Chippenham early in 1819 from W. J. Hall in Jamaica, whom Shand and Fairclough regarded as a spy. It was well known, he wrote, that the Tharp Negroes were not well managed, especially on the Covey estate where they were unruly – a dangerous thing in a slave country. Any future manager would have a tough job in reclaiming the Negroes from their indolence and insubordination. The pastures and the cane fields were not well maintained. All this was due, Hall reported, to the laxness and laziness of William Fairclough who lived on the spot at Good Hope.

Another correspondent wrote in 1820: William Tharp, a son of Tom Tharp who had dissipated his father's gift of Dean's Valley estate in Jamaica. William Tharp seems to have inherited at least a measure of the ability in sugar planting of his grandfather, though in 1820 he was still a young man with his way to make. He had, rather surprisingly, been appointed overseer of Lansquinet estate by the easy-going Fairclough, who was, however, confident of his goodwill, because he had completed William Green's work in restoring the estate at Dean's Valley. William Tharp was distressed at the poor management of his grandfather's estates in Trelawny, and not a little ambitious to manage them himself one day. He wrote to his uncle at Chippenham explaining his opinions, and emphasising as far as he could, without seeming ungrateful to Fairclough, the unnecessary expenses incurred by the estates and the insubordination of the Negroes.

His uncle responded to this overture; and when he had learnt of the acrimonious controversy in England, William Tharp became more forthright

The great defection in the crops is easily accounted for, nor is there one single planter in the island but is of my opinion. In fact, Mr F[airclough]'s bad management is the universal topic of conversation throughout the island. He not only forbids the overseers to make the negroes work, but actually appears to me to wish to encourage them in all manner of idleness and insubordination, to the great annoyance of the neighbouring properties and to the utter ruin of my ancestors'.

William Tharp's predecessor at Lansquinet had been a notorious drunkard and had let everything go to ruin, although Fairclough at Good Hope was only a mile away. When young William Tharp tried to show his prowess at planting sugar, Fairclough intervened to prevent him from making the Negroes work hard;

and told me – I will quote his own words – that it was both ridiculous and unnecessary to push the negroes, as sugar was not worth sending home. These circumstances are too glaring.

The case against Shand and Fairclough seemed strong, even if their integrity were left unquestioned. The heir's uncle had still to show that the control of three thousand slaves and over fifteen thousand acres of land could be safely transferred to him. He had several friends with experience of West Indian estates who were prepared to say that a change of management was the best cure for a decline in production. His brother-in-law, F. J. Philips, who was a proprietor in the small but prosperous eastern Caribbean island of St Kitts, said that the Negroes would be far from upset by a change of management; they generally rather enjoyed it. What they dreaded was a change of ownership. To a slave on a slave estate, this was almost like a change of nationality. The weakest part of the uncle's case was that (as he had often loudly complained) he was a man without capital. He had no money to tide him over a lean year, or to enable him to wait for sugar prices to rise before selling. His friends, however, were ready to state that Consignees with capital were unnecessary for the Tharp estates as they were free from debt, and even after the management of Shand and Fairclough the produce of the estates was still ample enough to cover all expenses.

J. E. Dowdeswell, the Master in Chancery who conducted the examination, reported in March 1821 that it would be no disadvantage to the Tharp estates in Jamaica if John Tharp the uncle were to be appointed sole Consignee in place of Hibbert and Miles. On 12 November 1821, Lord Eldon confirmed this report. He commented that the desire to benefit the family was no reflection on the respectability of Hibbert and Miles. Eldon was even more generous to the uncle than the Master had recommended, for he insisted that the uncle himself was not to be personally liable for the expenses of the Tharp estates, not even for the maintenance of the heir. He also allowed the uncle eight months in which to payoff any balance owing to Hibbert and Miles. Eldon's decision was clear and sympathetic enough, but it soon transpired that Eldon had delayed it too long for the uncle. Whilst Chancery had been ruminating on the Tharp case, the Tharp estates had fallen heavily into debt, and the uncle was quite unable to bear this burden.

Chapter Nine

The Estates Fall into Debt

How could the great Tharp estates, which had repaid an investment of £100,000 within ten years, besides paying nearly £5,000 a year in various annuities, have sunk into debt? As recently as December 1819, the Master in Chancery in charge of the Tharp case had assumed that the profits from the Jamaican estates would be at least £17,000 a year, and those from the English estates at least £4,000 a year. The allowance by the Master of £4,000 a year to the heir's wife from the date of her husband's twenty-fourth birthday did not therefore seem extravagant, even when the estates had to pay as well £5,000 of annuities and £1,200 for the maintenance of the heir himself.

In 1818 the Jamaican estates made a profit of £13,000. From this would normally have been advanced the cost of sending supplies to the estates for the following year. But all the profits from sugar made before 24 May 1818, the heir's twenty-fourth birthday, were locked away in a special trust fund and became part of the heir's capital. All the expenses of preparing for the 1819 crop and sending supplies from England had, therefore, to be met by Hibbert and Miles on credit. They advanced nearly £20,000 from May 1818 before receiving any proceeds from the 1819 crop to cover them. It was an unfortunate handicap for the estates that the heir's birthday was at the end of the sugar crop in May rather than, say, at its beginning in January. To be thus a year in arrears in paying for supplies (especially the extravagant quantity of supplies ordered by Shand and Fairclough) was expensive for the estates, since it involved paying interest at five per cent on the advances made by Hibbert and Miles. To add to the estates' difficulties, the price of sugar was falling rapidly. A brief boom at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which had helped [to] inflate the family's expectations in 1815, ended in peacetime depression. Sugar sold for £50 a hogshead in 1815, but it fetched only £30 in 1818, while the import duty on West Indian sugar of thirty shillings a hundredweight was nearly three times its pre-war level. Receipts for the Tharp estates for the three years after 1818 were only half what they had been for the preceding three years. Expenses were not however reduced. By the time the heir's uncle was to be appointed Consignee in May 1822, the estates owed Hibbert over £54,000, and this debit was only slightly offset by a favourable balance of £2,000 with Miles.

In this situation, Eldon's decision that the heir's uncle could be Consignee was worthless. To accept it, he would have had to raise over £50,000 to pay off the arrears to Hibbert. He had no hope of being able to do this. Under the terms of his father's will, he could not mortgage or sell part of the estates to do this. He had to come to terms with Hibbert and Miles, although he remained suspicious that the debt had been incurred just at the time when he would have taken over from them. It was now agreed that Hibbert and Miles should remain Consignees until the arrears were paid off. Miles took over a half share of the arrears from Hibbert. They conceded, however, that Shand and Fairclough should be dismissed and that, in their place, F. J. Philips, the uncle's-brother-in-law,

should be appointed attorney at Good Hope with a fixed salary of £1,000 a year. A junior attorney, to be nominated by Hibbert and Miles, was also to have £1,000 a year.

These arrangements were not made without acrimony and some lasting bitterness. The urbane George Hibbert wrote to try to mollify the uncle:

It was natural that all parties should defend, as far far as they judged it right and honourable to do so, their own interests, and more especially that they should vindicate their own characters and proceedings, which professional gentlemen sometimes treat with unlicensed freedom.

The uncle was only a little appeased, and was soon incensed to find that the estates would have to pay for insurance of the heir's life as security for the debt. This was necessary if Hibbert and Miles were to have any security for the debt. The heir, under his grandfather's will, was tenant for life only of the estates. They could not be seized to pay for any debts he contracted, and his death would extinguish all the debts he owed from the estates. Besides paying five per cent interest on the debts to Hibbert and Miles, the estates had now to pay life insurance premiums at a similar rate to cover the debt. Despite these new heavy burdens, the estates were freed from the mismanagement of Shand and Fairclough. With honest and economical management, it was hoped that they might now payoff their arrears to Hibbert and Miles and be fully restored to the family.

The full extent of the depredations made by Shand and Fairclough was, however, now revealed. Shand had deliberately neglected the estates' pastures and pens, so that he could supply them with his own cattle (described as infamous) at a high price. The ruin of the pastures was said to be indescribable when F. J. Philips, the new attorney, arrived in 1823. Fairclough's depredations had included supplying himself with seventy pounds of fresh beef each week from the estates, without paying for it. This robbery in particular shocked William Tharp, for it was unheard of for an attorney receiving commission to take the estate's animals as well. Shand and Fairclough shared over £4,000 a year in commission – it was supposed that most of this went to Shand. Besides lavishing the resources of the estates on themselves, the two attorneys squandered its products on the estate slaves. A scandalous waste of rum was one of the first of their delinquencies to be revealed by F. J. Philips. Both Shand and Fairclough exploited the lax ways of accounting on the estates. These had already led to considerable losses after William Green's insolvency on his death, but Green's estate had considerable assets, and repayments were made from time to time of the sums he had taken from the estates. Most of these repayments seem to have gone no further, however, than the pockets of Shand or Fairclough. Legal action was taken to recover some of the money embezzled by Fairclough, and a judgment obtained for £5,665; but, as Fairclough died insolvent, the money was lost. The uncle was advised that it was useless then to sue Shand for the money taken by Fairclough.

It is doubtful whether Shand and Fairclough had been altogether in harmony. Fairclough actually lived at Good Hope, but it was asserted that he was old and ill and completely under the control of William Shand, who appointed clerks for the estates himself and took most of the commission. F. J. Philips confirmed that Fairclough had left most of the work to the head clerk, who was a "bad character." Fairclough left the great

house at Good Hope in as ruined a condition as the estates around it. How hopeless had been the prospects of the Tharp estates under Fairclough is perhaps best shown by the misleading remark he made about the estates to William Tharp, who reported it to his uncle in 1821:

You mention that the estates are in arrears £25,000. How astonishing! Why, Mr Fairclough] stated not many months ago that they had £100,000 in bank.

It is easy to see from this why the heir's uncle blamed the laxness and depredations of Shand and Fairclough, from 1813 to 1823, as the principal reason why the prospects of the Tharp family in Jamaica were blighted after the heir was due to succeed to the estates in 1818. The depression of the sugar market, after the end of the brief post war boom, was regarded by contemporary politicians and has since been regarded by historians as the main cause of the decline of the old Jamaica sugar plantations. This depression did not seem at the time to the Tharp family to be the main cause of their troubles in Jamaica. Though the price of sugar was low in 1819, it was higher than it had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century when John Tharp had invested on an enormous scale at Good Hope. And however high the price of sugar had been in 1819, the Tharp estates would still have been in arrears, because the lawyers tied up the proceeds of the 1818 crop as part of the heir's capital before they could be used, as usual, to cover the outgoings made in preparation for the 1819 crop. Although the arrears to Hibbert and Miles amounted to nearly £20,000 before any proceeds of the 1819 crop could be devoted to clearing them, even this large debt should not have become a long standing embarrassment to the Tharp estates, if their productive powers had been properly maintained. Jamaica planters were used to clearing off long arrears to their merchants. If the Tharp estates had enjoyed economical management from 1813 to 1823, then it is not too difficult to agree with the heir's uncle's view at the time that they could soon have recovered from the debt to Hibbert and Miles that confronted him in 1821.

Chapter Ten

The Fight for Recovery

All Jamaica concerns in the 1820s were having to make economies, as the price of sugar continued to be depressed. Even George Hibbert had to accept a reduction in his salary as the Jamaican House of Assembly's Agent in London from £2,100 currency a year to £1,600 in 1821. At Good Hope, the new attorney, F. J. Philips, was to receive a fixed salary of £1,000 a year (plus supplementary allowances for his first two years in Jamaica), and the same amount was to be paid to his deputy. The Tharp estates thus saved some £2,000 a year, compared with the £4,000 a year which the previous attorneys had usually reckoned to receive in commission on sales. Moreover, Philips and his colleague, unlike the old attorneys who were supposed to be able to supervise many different properties all over the island, were to confine their activities to the Tharp estates alone. The fact that they received fixed salaries rather than a commission based on sales also meant that they had no incentive to try to force large crops at whatever cost. They would lose nothing by putting out of production marginal land on the estates, which the reduced price for sugar made it no longer profitable to cultivate. This meant giving up some of the benefits of John Tharp's large scale planning and the estates could not afford any investment for re-equipment to run on a reduced scale, as this would involve further borrowing and indebtedness.

F. J. Philips found the work hard enough when he arrived at Good Hope in 1823. He thought that all the local people, black and white, were combining to throw obstacles in his path – they were anyway unlikely to welcome stricter discipline after Fairclough's lax regime. To him, Jamaica seemed inferior in every way to his own island of St Kitts. He did, however, approve of the deputy attorney whom Hibbert and Miles appointed, William Kerr, a local planter.

One can deduce something of the achievement of Philips and Kerr by comparing the total expenses of the Tharp estates in Jamaica (including the expenses of the merchants in England) in the period after they had taken over with those in the period before they came. From 1818 to 1821, Hibbert and Miles paid out an average of nearly £45,000 sterling a year to meet the costs of the Tharp estates; from 1823 to 1828, they paid out just over £22,000 a year. This reduction is the more impressive because the lower figure includes higher interest charges on the accumulated arrears and from 1821 the premiums on the insurance policies on the heir's life. In particular, the cost of supplies shipped from England to Good Hope fell from an average of over £10,000 a year from 1818 to 1821 to £7,000 a year from 1823 to 1828 (herrings for the Negroes were the biggest single item in the list of these supplies – in many years over £1,000 worth were shipped). George Hibbert had advanced over £11,000 a year to cover expenditure in Jamaica by Shand and Fairclough; Philips and Kerr reduced these advances to £3,600 a year. The reduction of costs was accompanied by a considerable reduction in the output of sugar. From 1818 to 1821, Shand and Fairclough produced an average of 1,211 hogsheads a year; from 1823 to 1828, the average was 770. This period included two

very poor years, 1823 and 1825, when well under 600 hogsheads were produced. In 1825, all seven of the Tharp sugar estates produced only 517 hogsheads – just over forty more than one alone (Wales) had produced in the great year of 1805. One reason for this extraordinarily bad year was dry weather, and another the great preparations being made for the next crop, when for the first time in four years, over 1,000 hogsheads were made.

The progress achieved in Jamaica was watched anxiously by George Hibbert. He became pessimistic about the ability of the estates to pay off their debts so long as the sugar depression deepened; and as Agent for Jamaica in London, he knew that there was hardly any prospect of relief for the West Indies. He did not even dare to press the British Government to reduce the import duty on sugar, which at 28 shillings a hundredweight amounted to half the wholesale price. Any agitation against this burden of taxation might have lost the West Indians the passive support of the Government against the anti-slavery movement. Before the new managers had gone very far with their work at Good Hope, Hibbert proposed that the English estates of the Tharps, as well as the profits accumulated during the heir's minority, should be used to reduce the debt. When it became obvious in 1823 that there would be a very small crop that year, he petitioned the Master in Chancery to inquire whether he and Miles could draw on £22,000 of accumulated profits on the Cambridgeshire estates, in order to pay the immediate expenses of the Jamaican estates, which would otherwise go to swell the debt still further. This was refused, but he and Miles were allowed to take out more policies of insurance on the heir's life to cover the increased debt, the premiums to be paid from the proceeds of the Jamaican estates alone. The debt increased from over £54,000 in 1822 to over £86,000 in 1826, with insurance policies increased from £30,000 to £60,000 to secure it. With better crops in the next two years, the debt fell slightly to just over £81,000. The conclusion which Hibbert drew from year to year was that although the estates, if properly managed, could pay their way, they would never be able to pay off the accumulated debt as well.

Various factors prevented the situation from reaching a crisis. The terms of John Tharp's will made it impossible for the estates to be sold for debt, so the Tharp family was protected from complete ruin. The decrees of the Court of Chancery nevertheless allowed Hibbert and Miles to secure their great advances by insurance policies, so they too were protected from ultimate loss. Both the family and the Consignees thus had an interest in maintaining production on the estates in Jamaica. Hibbert and Miles wanted a steady income to service the debt, even if it was impossible to pay it off; and John Tharp, the heir's uncle and himself the next heir, wanted the estates to be maintained for the day when he or his eldest son would succeed to them. Hibbert and Miles would then obtain payment of their insurance policies, and the estates would be free of all encumbrances.

The next change in the management of the estates was made without any of the furious controversy that had preceded the dismissal of Shand and Fairclough. F. J. Philips had only gone to Jamaica because of the entreaties of his brother in law, and he wanted to be released as soon as possible. He thought that his task at Good Hope was sufficiently completed when he had stopped the decay there and restored as much as was necessary to the reduced scale of production. Grooming himself to succeed

Philips at Good Hope was William Tharp, the only descendant of old John Tharp who showed much ability as a sugar planter. He had been brought up by his mother in England, but had always expected to have to make his living in Jamaica. He had offered his services in Jamaica to his uncle, when he was fighting to dismiss Shand and Fairclough. His offer was not then taken up, and he went to manage his father's old property at Dean's Valley, which now belonged to his elder brother.

While in England, William Tharp had, despite his youth, gained the confidence of his uncle, who considered sending his second son (another John Tharp) to Jamaica to learn how to be a sugar planter from his cousin William. William was delighted with this idea, which contained the prospect that he and his cousin might before long be placed in charge of Good Hope. His cousin came to Jamaica in 1825 to learn how to be a planter at Dean's Valley. The two young men were almost of the same age, but William wrote patronisingly of his inexperienced cousin, "*I think John has been very prudent in coming out to this country, as an idle life for a young man is highly improper and must be unpleasant.*" He understood that John, although inexperienced, meant to take over from Philips and Kerr at Good Hope as soon as he felt able to do so. Philips was anxious enough to arrange for a successor, although he would have preferred to hand over to someone more experienced than the two young Tharp cousins. William Kerr, however, who had visited Europe in 1827 for the sake of his health, returned to Jamaica a year later, and was prepared to help the two young men at Good Hope.

Hibbert and Miles as the estates' creditors and Consignees had to agree to any change of management, and they would not agree at this stage to let the uncle appoint his son John as a manager at Good Hope, because of his very limited experience. They could not deny the experience of William Tharp, who had been an overseer or manager since 1820, and was able to produce impressive testimonials to his ability from neighbouring planters in the parishes of Westmoreland and Trelawny. Hibbert proposed and the uncle agreed that William Tharp should replace F. J. Philips as joint manager with William Kerr, while young John Tharp should continue for the time being to learn the art of planting from them. After dashing John's immediate hopes, George Hibbert wrote almost lyrically of his future prospects:

Nothing can give Mr John Tharp a better chance and opportunity for qualifying himself for being a manager of the estates than a steady and diligent attention to the instructions and example of Mr William, assisted, as he will be, by the ability and experience of Mr Kerr. To become a successful planter is by no means an easy task, or one unworthy of the study of the first talents. It requires perfect acquaintance with the art and process, great temper, steadiness, and discretion in the management of the negroes, and constant attention to the variations which seasons and the course of cropping are apt to produce; and you will do well to impress on Mr John's mind [Hibbert was writing to his father] that if he wishes to ensure success, he must never lose sight of those important objects.

No one would guess from this letter that George Hibbert had never seen a sugar plantation! Young John Tharp was understandably annoyed that Hibbert had not agreed to his father appointing him as a manager, although he had agreed to the appointment of William. John went to Good Hope for a few years, but he never became a manager there.

It was bold enough of George Hibbert to agree to the appointment of William Tharp in 1828 when he was still under thirty. He confirmed his confidence in William in 1830 by agreeing to his appointment as sole attorney and manager of the Tharp estates in Jamaica. The main consideration behind this move was a desire to save the £1,000 a year salary paid to Kerr as joint manager. Kerr still agreed to stand in for William Tharp in an emergency or if he had to leave the island. One of the results of saving the post of joint manager was to remove any prospects for young John Tharp at Good Hope as long as his cousin William remained there.

* * * * *

William Tharp had admired F. J. Philips's methods from a distance in 1825, but when he took over himself at Good Hope in 1828, he saw many things he thought he could improve. For four years he made notable improvements in production while still reducing costs. Hibbert and Miles had met bills of Philips and Kerr for over £3,600 a year; by 1833, William Tharp had only to ask them to meet bills for £1,169. Goods worth just over £7,000 a year were shipped to Philips and Kerr; less than £3,500 worth were shipped to William Tharp each year. Despite the still increasing debt, overall expenditure by Hibbert and Miles was held at about £22,000 a year. The average production of sugar rose from 770 hogsheads a year to over 950 a year, with over 1,000 hogsheads in both 1829 and 1832. George Hibbert retired in 1830; and most of the letters William Tharp received thereafter were written by various members of his mercantile house. They praised every economy made at Good Hope and suggested many more. They approved of his selling all the rum he could in Jamaica; and in 1835, he covered most of the running expenses of the estates by doing this. George Hibbert himself wrote once more in 1831, promising to send information on how a large sugar property was administered in one of the smaller islands, in case there might be useful hints for Good Hope. He commented that, "prudent economy will gradually be forced, by powerful necessity, into the practice of those who are now slow to adopt it."

Although William Tharp increased production considerably and still managed to reduce expenditure, the debt went on increasing. After his first year in charge it stood at under £85,000; in 1831 it rose to over £107,000; and even after the good crop of 1832 it was still over £103,000. Hibbert's firm acknowledged that the Tharp sugar was improving in quality as well as in quantity, and they expressed the hope that this improvement would continue, although the prospect that the estates would ever pay off the debt grew increasingly remote. They declared that there was "something in the system that requires a radical reform." The only reform that seemed at all likely was the disastrous one (to them) of emancipating the slaves. The Government gave no hope of ever being able to reduce the import duty on sugar, and all the time, competition was increasing from other sugar growing areas. Bad crops in the West Indies in the eighteenth century had brought the compensation of higher prices; but now Mauritius or India might produce a heavy crop and keep prices down the same year that the West Indies' crop fell short. Although everything at Good Hope seemed to be going better than it had been for some time, the prospect for the West Indies in general seemed gloomier than ever.

Few estates in Jamaica enjoyed management as careful and efficient as that of William Tharp. Most of them had still to pay annuities and allowances whose level had been fixed in the old days of prosperity. By 1830, most of them were doing their best to economise, but were sinking deeper and deeper into debt. Nearly everything had been lavishly planned in Jamaica when sugar made profits almost anywhere, but no one would advance money to the struggling island to begin again on a smaller scale. William Tharp hoped in 1825 that a West India association would be formed to provide capital on favourable terms for the plantations. This would have meant that the Tharp debt to Hibbert and Miles (then £85,000) could be paid off, and the estates, freed of their enormous charges for interest on the debt of five per cent and for life insurance premiums at the same rate, could be properly reorganised. Various schemes of a similar nature were proposed in this period. None of them came to much, and the Tharp estates never benefited. They had to carry on with as much of the old equipment and arrangements as could be restored after the period of neglect and could still be profitable. The public were unwilling to lend money to an impoverished region whose future prospects seemed increasingly doubtful, and whose very existence seemed threatened by the possible abolition of slavery.

Chapter Eleven

The Emancipation of the Slaves

Since their first settlement early in the seventeenth century, slavery had been the foundation of the British West Indies. The slave trade to them from Africa had been prevented since 1808, although their sugar producing rivals in Cuba and Brazil imported fresh slaves from Africa for another half century. More serious than the end of the slave trade was the movement begun in earnest in 1823 to abolish slavery itself within the British Empire. Men like William Tharp, who laboured on in the West Indies, now did so largely in the blind faith that the British Government would never overturn an established system of society. Jamaican politicians clutched at the argument that because slaves were property, to set them free would be confiscation. Only if the British Government first bought all the slaves from their present owners, would they be lawfully entitled to set them free. The amount of compensation involved for nearly three quarters of a million slaves within the British Empire would run into many millions of pounds; and it was hoped that the impossibility of raising such an enormous sum would prevent emancipation. The anti-slavery movement in Britain was too widespread and too forceful to be ignored; and the Government steered a middle course between the slave owners and the abolitionists. Ministers hoped that if the conditions of the slaves were improved, their bonds of slavery would spontaneously wither away. A constant stream of exhortations went out from Whitehall to the slave colonies, urging this policy of so-called amelioration of slavery.

The noisy controversy in England about slavery raised excitement among the Negroes in the West Indies. As the slave owners and attorneys in Jamaica were for ever denouncing the crypto-abolitionists in the British Government as well as the leaders of the anti-slavery movement itself, the Negroes assumed that England was full of friends wishing to help them. Whenever a debate on the West Indies took place in the House of Commons, the slave owners in Jamaica burst out with more threats and denunciations. Rumours began to spread among the slaves that they really had been set free in England, but that the news of their freedom had been suppressed by their masters in Jamaica. The illusion that they were being cheated of their freedom encouraged rebellion. There had been great excitement in British Guiana in 1823 when a white missionary died in prison, convicted of inciting the slaves to rebel in order to obtain their freedom. Various small rebellions occurred among the slaves throughout the West Indies from the same illusion; but it was in Jamaica, where the local planters were (with the possible exception of Barbados) most defiant of the British Government, that the most serious slave rebellion of the nineteenth century broke out.

Christmas was always an anxious time for slave owners, in case the celebrations of the Negroes should get out of hand. After Christmas 1831, many slaves in the parish of St James refused to go back to work and broke out in an ill-concerted rebellion. All through 1831 the planters had become more truculent in their language. Many of them were looking forward to acts of insubordination by the slaves, so that they could have a pretext for stamping out any thought of freedom. The Governor of Jamaica,

the Earl of Belmore, had, however, been persuaded that the slaves were peaceful, and he had not even published the British Government's proclamation to the slaves, telling them that no orders had been given for their freedom. The planters in the local militia rushed to the work of dealing out drumhead justice to the rebellious slaves; and although the rebels did damage estimated at over £1,000,000, their cause was soon hopeless and they all surrendered. Belmore prevented further vengeance by ending martial law at once. None of the Tharp slaves joined the rebellion, although a band of marauding rebels attacked Pantrepant estate. William Tharp reported that few of the Tharp slaves had seemed at all disaffected. He was himself busy in helping to crush the rebellion elsewhere. After Belmore had deprived them of further victims among the slaves, many white planters turned to wreak vengeance on the dissenting missionaries, whom they accused of turning the slaves' minds to rebellion. Some Anglican clergymen joined in this work of hatred. Thomas Burchell's chapel at Montego Bay (besides many others) was wrecked by an angry crowd, among whom were reported to be William Kerr and John Tharp.

Many of the planters thought that this rebellion would demonstrate to the British Government that emancipation, or even much more amelioration, was impossible. But a new king in England, William IV, brought a new government to power, whose members wanted to carry out great measures of reform. A new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Edward Stanley, decided in 1833 that the problems of the West Indies could never be solved so long as there was uncertainty about their future, and that there could be no certainty until slavery had been completely abolished. The British House of Commons had voted loans of half a million pounds, besides other forms of relief to Jamaica after the rebellion, and Stanley hoped that it might now be possible to provide compensation on a substantial scale to the soon-to-be expropriated slave owners.

The news of emancipation stunned the minds of Jamaican politicians. Their former boldness about defying the British Government vanished, and their opposition became mere petulance. On 1 May 1833, when Stanley's purpose was known but before he had announced the details of his plan, Hibbert's house wrote to William Tharp that they expected him to propose compensation, but that they doubted whether this would be granted, so hostile had public opinion become to slavery. They were wrong, however, for Stanley proposed a loan of fifteen million pounds to the slave owners, which was increased in the House of Commons to an outright grant of twenty millions. This represented barely half the former value of the slaves in the British Empire, but once emancipation was announced their value had disappeared, and most owners were surprised at the extent of the compensation fund. Otherwise, although few people expected violence after 1 August 1834, the date set for emancipation, most slave owners imagined that Stanley's Act would solve the problems of the West Indies by putting them out of their misery altogether. The slaves were not to be set completely at liberty from the date of emancipation, as the majority of them were then to be bound as apprentices for eight years, obliged to work on their old plantations for forty hours a week. But as Hibbert's wrote to William Tharp, the crop of 1834 might be the last ever, "as there are not a few experienced men who predict that little sugar will afterwards be produced in Jamaica." It

was an unhappy omen that the sugar crop of 1833 was the worst the western parishes of Jamaica could remember.

The Tharp estates, like most others, had already more difficulties than they seemed able to deal with. The ending of slavery, whatever benefits it might ultimately bring, would certainly increase their immediate problems. William Tharp managed to reduce still further the amount spent in maintaining the estates, which pleased Hibbert's; but they all awaited the conduct of the Negroes after 1 August 1834 with apprehension, although those at Good Hope seemed well disposed. William Tharp's political views before 1834 seem to have been conventional for a Jamaica planter, although he did not appear among the extremists during the 1831 rebellion. He had hoped that the new British Government in 1830 would be more helpful to Jamaica than the previous one had been. But whereas the northside parishes of Jamaica, with their traditional desire to be independent of Spanish Town, had exerted themselves in a reactionary direction before 1833, with their vengeance on the rebel slaves and their destruction of dissenting chapels, once emancipation was inescapable, a strong desire appeared in Trelawny and St James to welcome it as far as possible, and not to resist it. It was this policy that William Tharp, in public at least, henceforward upheld as the one likely to be best for the welfare of the new Jamaica.

William Tharp was one of the witnesses examined by the Jamaican House of Assembly when it investigated how emancipation was working at the end of 1834. His views were half way between those of Samuel Moulton-Barrett, who thought the system of apprenticeship was working much better than he had expected, and those of William Miller (who was facetiously known as the "attorney-general", because he was attorney for nearly fifty properties), who thought the system was working badly. Tharp described the sullen, dissatisfied character of the Negroes on his grandfather's estates. The Negroes on the Covey estate, for instance, were taking twice as long to do their work as they had taken before 1 August although they were still receiving their former allowances of herrings, rum and sugar every day. The long term remedy, which William Tharp proposed to the Assembly's investigating committee, was the introduction of immigrant labourers to Jamaica. He gave credit to the Negroes for the attention they continued to give to their own provision grounds and to their general well-being. They were not, as many had expected, sinking into indolence and squalor. William Tharp said he thought their standards of morality were improving, and ascribed this to the effects of religious teaching and better treatment. The burden of his evidence was that emancipation was good for the Negroes but bad for the sugar plantations. In fact, he doubted whether it would be possible to carry on the cultivation of sugar unless the working of the new system improved.

William Tharp's political career as a liberal planter was recorded, with general approval, in the "Falmouth Post", the independent northside newspaper founded in 1835 by William Castello. At the end of that year, William Tharp was praised for establishing a school for the Negroes at Good Hope. About the same time, an Anglican chapel was set up at Good Hope and a curate appointed there. Dr Christopher Lipscombe, the first Bishop of Jamaica, preached there in 1837, and told the apprentices

of the gratitude they ought to feel for these benefits. The school and the chapel were both housed in what had been the hospital for the Tharp estates. The hospital had been designed on an enormous scale in 1798, but William Tharp had greatly reduced the scope of the medical services in his search for savings, although part of the building was still used as a hospital and there was still a resident doctor in 1837.

In the autumn of 1836 William Tharp was elected at a by-election as a member of the House of Assembly for Trelawny. The "Falmouth Post" approved highly: "The parish scarcely furnishes a gentleman more worthy, more intelligent, more esteemed, or more liberal." On 15 November, he was proposed by Mr Kelly, seconded by Mr Tenison, and returned unopposed – although there was still a poll, so that the customary election banquet could be held. In the Assembly, Tharp opposed a move designed to discriminate against coloured people by obliging estates to keep up the number of their white employees. His approach in the Assembly was consistently liberal, but he was not very happy as a politician, and did not stand for re-election when the House of Assembly was dissolved on the death of King William IV in 1837.

His liberalism in politics was thought to be neither an eccentricity nor a scandal by most of his fellow planters, although one correspondent of the "Falmouth Post" did want at least one candidate with conservative views to stand in 1837. William Tharp's local standing remained unimpaired by his expression of liberal views in the Assembly, and in November 1838 he was foreman of the grand jury at the Cornwall Assizes, covering the five western parishes of the island. He continued to be a prominent figure at race meetings in Trelawny and the neighbouring parishes.

William Tharp's private letters show how difficult the effort to make the best of emancipation was for him. Just before Christmas 1834, he wrote to his aunt at Chippenham Park, giving the same version of events that he had recently given to the investigating committee of the House of Assembly. He was depressed by the unwillingness of the apprentices to work for the estates during their free time, even when high wages were offered; and he again wondered how long sugar cultivation could continue. After his term in the Assembly was over, he wrote gloomily of the future prospects of Jamaica with slavery abolished:

If God, grants me health, I will see out this awful experiment and keep things right as long as I can. I have every reason to think I have the full confidence of the apprentices on Mr Tharp's estates, having always acted towards them with a kind and conciliatory spirit, and endeavoured to convince them and the white people of the benefits that would arise to both from good will to each other.

He wrote this on Christmas Day 1837, and although he continued his efforts, he had little hope that what good will there was in Jamaica would solve the island's problems.

When William Tharp took a trip to the United States in 1835 for the sake of his health, the acting manager at Good Hope, J. H. James, a local planter, wrote a glowing report on the state of the properties. Yet although everything seemed to be in good condition, the area in canes was dwindling year by year and every possible saving was made. The crops declined accordingly. Hibbert's wrote despondently in 1837 that the

entire Tharp consignment to London that year of just over 250 hogsheads had all arrived in one ship. A scurrilous attack on William Tharp and on many other planters in Jamaica was published two years later by an embittered former plantation bookkeeper, Benjamin M'Mahon. He asserted that William Tharp was apathetic and incompetent, and that he kept a mistress on every property with which he was concerned. This last accusation, although no doubt exaggerated, had some truth in it, for William Tharp had several children although he never married. Most of M'Mahon's book is garbled nonsense, but the rumours it contained may possibly have had some effect, for in the year of its publication, William Tharp was suddenly dismissed by the Consignees, P. J. Miles and the successors of George Hibbert who had died in 1837. The heir's uncle protested, but William Tharp never returned to Good Hope. By 1845, he had retired to England and was living in Sussex.

William Tharp's dismissal followed another legal struggle in England, which produced similar bitterness to the uncle's struggle twenty years before to dismiss Shand and Fairclough and take over the management of the estates himself. The uncle raked over all the old ground again, and employed an accountant to try to show that if George Hibbert had not rashly paid out large sums in 1818 and 1819, the estates would never have fallen into arrears, and that in 1836 there would have been a surplus of £13,000 instead of a debt of over £83,000. This could have happened, and all the annuities been paid as well, the uncle asserted, even without taking into account the losses suffered by the estates from the depredations of Shand and Fairclough and the penny-pinching economies forced on the estates by the existence of the debt. John Tharp was advised, however, that it was far too late to reopen the accounts of twenty years ago. He was left to cherish his grudges against George Hibbert.

This rummaging into past history was provoked by the question of who was to receive the compensation money for the Tharp slaves. Compensation was claimed for 2,570 slaves, and the official valuers in Jamaica valued them at £116,965 sterling. The Tharps' share of the £20 million compensation fund was fixed at £48,108. Both Hibbert and Miles, as Consignees, and John Tharp, as the Committee of his nephew's estate, filed claims to the money.¹⁸ The Court of Chancery decided that as the slaves had formed part of the real estate entailed by old John Tharp, the money should be paid into the Court, and a trust fund set up. The interest from this fund was to be paid to Hibbert and Miles as part of the annual income of the estates in Jamaica, which they were entitled to take in order to service the debt and pay the estates' expenses. Unlike many other creditors of West Indian estates, they were, however, unable to appropriate the principal sum of the compensation money, which was preserved for the Tharp family.

¹⁸ This Committee was the person or persons to whom the estates had been "committed" by the Court of Chancery.

Chapter Twelve

The End of the Tharp Estates in Jamaica

After William Tharp had left Good Hope, any faint hope that the Tharp estates could recover was abandoned. Cultivation continued, so that there should still be some income to pay the insurance premiums on the heir's life, but the scale of activity steadily decreased. In 1845 at Merrywood, the smallest of the sugar estates, cultivation ceased altogether, and the estate became a cattle pen. By 1853, less than a tenth of the 6,000 acres on John Tharp's seven old sugar plantations was still planted in canes, compared with two thirds of this acreage in his day (the remaining one third being pastures, roads, gardens and buildings). In 1865, a fifth of the land was described as fit for sugar canes, although as in 1853 only a tenth was actually planted, but half the total area in 1865 was described as ruinate, which meant that it had been abandoned altogether and was reverting to bush. This withdrawal from the active use of the land was carried on by F. R. Coy, a local planter who was in charge at Good Hope.

When the heir's uncle died in 1851, the estates were £217,000 in debt to Hibbert's and Miles's successors (Philip John Miles had died in 1845), and they decided that they had had enough. They gave up their Consigneeship of the produce of the estates in Jamaica, and agreed that these could be leased to a suitable tenant, with the income from the lease being devoted to keeping up, as far as possible, the insurance premiums on the heir's life. It was the new Committee of the heir's estates, Joseph Sidney Tharp, the eldest son of the heir's uncle and now the next heir himself, who urged that the estates should be leased. In theory, this was sound policy, so long as the family did not wish to sell the estates altogether. (This could now be done, as the great-grandchildren on whom old John Tharp had entailed the estates were of age to break the entail.) Leasing the estates to a tenant with capital would ensure a steady income, and would mean that the management of Good Hope was no longer crippled by being able to do nothing that might risk increasing the debt. The tenant could spend his own money on restoring the estates and could increase production and his own profits by doing so. The great obstacle to the success of this plan was finding a good tenant in Jamaica in 1851, when sugar estates were being abandoned all the time, and when the prospects for the remaining planters grew gloomier every year.

Joseph Sidney Tharp's solicitor sent a cousin to Jamaica to try to find a tenant; and in 1853, the manager, F. R. Coy, who clung on at Good Hope as long as he could, was ejected, and Phineas Abraham and Frederick Levy Castle installed there. They took over all the Tharp properties in Trelawny for ten years at a rent of £600 sterling a year, and paid a further £350 a year for hiring the estates' livestock. Another tenant took Chippenham Park Pen in the next parish for a rent of £120 a year. Abraham and Castle can only be described as jumped-up shopkeepers, and it would have seemed incredible before 1833 that they should manage the largest group of properties on the island. But shopkeepers were the men with most capital in Jamaica in 1853, and several of them were taking over estates. Abraham and Castle were allowed to deduct £150 a year from

the rent to make repairs and improvements. They were allowed a further £350 in 1854 for this, despite the fact that considerable repairs had been made, in order to encourage prospective tenants, before they took the lease. They did not find Good Hope very profitable, and in 1859, although the lease still had four years to run, they gave a year's notice in order to terminate it prematurely.

Joseph Sidney Tharp's plan for bringing fresh capital to Good Hope had not succeeded very well, although Abraham and Castle seem to have kept the properties at least up to the standard of 1853. F. R. Coy returned to manage Good Hope and the other estates again, but now on behalf of Joseph Sidney Tharp instead of Hibbert's and Miles's houses. The estates ran at a loss in the 1860s; and it was decided in 1864 to dispose of them. Under the Lord Chancellor's direction, the Tharp estates in Jamaica were all disentailed. They were then made over to the second generation of the creditors, P. W. S. Miles and George Hibbert the younger. Their value was not likely to make any great inroad into the enormous debt, and Joseph Sidney Tharp took a lease of his cousin the heir's estates in Cambridgeshire at a rent of £2,500 a year, to keep up the remaining insurance policies on the heir's life (the heir was now seventy). This was the end of the Tharps' connection with Jamaica. Good Hope and the neighbouring estate, the Covey, were sold to the manager, F.R.Coy; most of the other estates in Trelawny to Nunes Brothers, a Kingston merchant house. Chippenham Park Pen in the next parish was sold to the leasehold tenant there.

* * * * *

The downfall of what had been the greatest single property on the island made little impression in 1866, when most of the sales took place. Although it was less than a century since John Tharp had bought Good Hope in 1769, it was already a quarter of a century since the last member of his family to manage his estates had left the island. The estates had become a shadow of what they once were. This story of the rapid creation of a fortune in the eighteenth century West Indies, followed by a decline nearly as rapid in the nineteenth century, could be told many times. The final outcome for the Tharps was surprisingly satisfactory, considering the general hazards of the time and the personal accidents under which the estates had laboured. The Jamaican estates themselves were entirely lost to the family, but nearly all the compensation money for the slaves was retained. The estates in England of nearly 6,000 acres remained intact. The residual estate, formed mainly from the profits made before the heir inherited in 1818, amounted to over £30,000 at his death in 1883.

The fact that so much remained for the family was due to the terms of John Tharp's will. Like many planters, John Tharp made lavish provision for his relatives: about £4,500 was to be paid out each year to various annuitants. But this did not seem excessive out of an annual income expected to be £30,000 a year, and it was a smaller proportion of his income than many West Indian planters tied up in annuities. Even this amount would have been a crippling burden when the estates fell into debt, if some of the annuitants had not died (the heir's mother with her annuity of £1,000 died in 1826), and if payment of some of the annuities had not been suspended, such as the uncle's of £2,500.

Apart from these provisions, John Tharp's will was designed to give the utmost protection to his vast Jamaican property. This careful protection and the restrictions imposed on the heir were common practice among English landowners, but they were neglected by the majority of West Indian proprietors.

By accident, there was money enough to meet the largest bequest in his will, the £46,000 which his son John's children were to inherit after their father's death. The Court of Chancery decided that the Tharp estates were liable to pay this money, which John Tharp the uncle had duly bequeathed in his will. It was the event of emancipation and the compensation fund of £52,000 which then stood in the name of the Tharp estates that made payment possible. Nearly fifty years after the death of old John Tharp his grandchildren benefited from this wealth. The money shared out amongst them was some consolation for most of the remaining compensation money's being shared out, by order of the Court of Chancery, among the lawyers in the case, to pay their accumulated costs. The lawyers had already been awarded John Tharp's holding of West India Dock stock in 1829, besides many smaller payments from time to time. An estate that was fought over for eighty years in Chancery was inevitably a plentiful source of income to the profession.

Epilogue

The Tharps' Achievement in Jamaica

The decline and ultimate collapse of the Tharp estates in Jamaica in the nineteenth century should not obscure the achievement of John Tharp and his backers in the eighteenth. If any estates were well enough organised to survive the nineteenth century sugar depression in Jamaica, the Tharp estates at Good Hope surely were. Yet in addition to the general depression, the Tharp estates were afflicted by peculiar and cruel accidents among their owners and managers.

If John Tharp had lived as long as his friend Simon Taylor, he would have seen clearly the incapacity of his heir. If he had lived to eighty, like his friend George Hibbert, he might himself have been able to modify his old system in Jamaica to meet the depressed conditions of the nineteenth century. If his eldest son had not died in his twenties in 1794, the estates might have been watched over continuously by their owner. If his friends Taylor and Green and his illegitimate son John Harwood had not all died within months of one another in 1812 and 1813, the estates might not have been at the mercy of reckless and dishonest attorneys in a crucial period. These are fruitless speculations, and despite everything that did happen, the Tharp family preserved their estates in England and received something from Jamaica. In Jamaica, their work did not altogether disappear. The estates formed by John Tharp are still there, growing other crops besides sugar nowadays. The houses built by John Tharp are still lived in; the roads and bridges he constructed are still used; and the appearance of the land, the ruins of ingenious sugar works, the impressive hospital and even the Negro huts in the fields are reminders of the energy of the Tharps, which has still to be surpassed in the parish of Trelawny at least. John Tharp's Jamaica was dominated by slavery, but he, among others, was able to work on a scale, and with a capacity that were rarely found in the British Empire of that time.¹⁹

END

¹⁹ This was written in the 1958 – 1960 period.