

the planters were become so generally odious, that for a time they dared not to appear in the streets of Paris. These were the arts by which Gregoire, Condorcet, La Fayette, Brissot, and Roberspierre disposed the publick mind to clamour for a new and explanatory decree, in which the rights of the coloured people should be placed beyond all future doubts and dispute. The friends and advocates of the planters were overpowered and confounded. In vain did they predict the utter destruction of the colonies if such a proposal should pass into a law. "Perish the colonies," said Roberspierre, "rather than sacrifice one iota of our principles." The majority reiterated the sentiment, and the famous decree of the 15th of May 1791 was pronounced amidst the acclamation and applause of the multitude.

By this decree it was declared and enacted, "that the people of colour resident in the French colonies, born of free parents, were entitled to, as of right, and should be allowed the enjoyment of, all the privileges of French-citizens, and, among others, to those of having votes in the choice of representatives, and of *being eligible to seats both in the parochial and colonial assemblies.*" Thus did the national assembly sweep away in a moment all the laws, usages, prejudices, and opinions concerning these people, which had existed in the French colonies from their earliest settlement, and tear up by the roots the first principle of a free constitution:—a principle founded on the clearest dictates of reason and justice, and expressly confirmed to the inhabitants of the French West Indies by the national decree of the 8th of March 1790; I mean, *the sole and exclusive right of passing laws for their local and interior regulation and government.* The colonial committee,