

# Sir Hudson Lowe and the East India Company <sup>1</sup>

## I

In July 1815, the date when it was decided to exile Bonaparte to St Helena, the island was the exclusive possession of the East India Company by royal charter,<sup>2</sup> the allegiance of the inhabitants being reserved to the Crown. The chief reason why it was chosen as a place of detention was that neutral shipping (excepting American which enjoyed a treaty right to water there but not to trade), could be excluded from its shores, thus very much lessening the chances of escape.<sup>3</sup>

The chairman of the company was sounded privately on the proposal, and offered no objection to the company lending its island, remarking that as escape was very easy it would not accept any responsibility for Bonaparte's safe custody, and that king's troops would have to be sent as the company's own were quite unreliable and of the 'worst description.'<sup>4</sup> In the result the company lent St Helena under a gentleman's agreement by which the Crown would compensate the displaced governor and bear the increased cost of the administration, whilst the company would appoint the crown's nominee to be governor, but - and the company attached importance to the point - the arrangement was 'to innovate no further and no longer upon the present constitution of Government' than the custody of Bonaparte should require.<sup>5</sup> Plantation House, the governor's residence, was reserved to the company.

The prolonged mystifications and doubts of Lord Eldon on Bonaparte's legal status were not set at rest until early in September,<sup>6</sup> when Sir Hudson Lowe

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been compiled from the Public Records of the Island of St Helena except in some cases where important references have been obtained from the Lowe Papers, and in others from the Records of the East India Company in the India Office Records. On account of the war there has been no opportunity for examining the Minutes of the Committee of Correspondence of the Court of Directors of the Company, and they may show their actions in a more favourable light than it is possible to throw on them in St Helena. But in that solitary island, the great company's acts are plain for all to read, and they provide a footnote to its history and the part it played, to use its own words, 'in effectually securing the person of a man whose conduct . . . proved so fatal to the happiness of the world'.

<sup>2</sup> 16 December 1673. A transcript made in 1687 is preserved in the island, the original being in the India Office Records.

<sup>3</sup> W. Hone, *Interesting Particulars of Napoleon's Deportation to St Helena* (London, 1816), p. 18; Library of Congress, Washington, *Treaties and Other Acts of the United States, 1776-1818*, ii.

<sup>4</sup> India Office Records, St Helena, vol. 162, Bosanquet to Buckingham (private), 27 July 1815.

<sup>5</sup> St Helena Records (cited hereafter as S.H.R.), Letters from England, 1 August 1815.

<sup>6</sup> Hist. MSS. Commission, Bathurst Manuscripts (1923), Eldon to Bathurst, pp. 375 seqq.

was instructed on the general line of conduct he was to adopt as governor; he was informed that he was to address his correspondence, when he arrived at his post, to the president of the Board of Control through the secret committee of the court of directors.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime he was getting married and asking for the K.C.B., and did not leave England until January 1816.<sup>8</sup> Shortly before his departure, being under the impression that his captive's legal status would come before parliament, he asked for more precise instructions about it and was told that he was to treat him as a prisoner of war.<sup>9</sup> On 11 April two acts of parliament,<sup>10</sup> both relating to Bonaparte, received the royal assent, and on the 14th Lowe landed at St Helena. The second of these two acts, declaring that the exile was detained on St Helena, contains a very important provision on the rights of the company: Section VIII declares that 'nothing in this Act shall prejudice or infringe the rights of the Company to and over the said island and its inhabitants'. By some mistake the ministers had overlooked the fact that the Board of Control had no jurisdiction in St Helena, since the relative acts that established it applied only to the possessions of the company in 'the East Indies'; the island, it will be remembered, being situated in the remote south Atlantic, separated from the East Indies by the continent of Africa and some thousands of miles of ocean.<sup>11</sup> These preliminaries, therefore, left the constitutional position of the East India Company very much where it had been before, and by no means absolved it from responsibility for anything that might happen there. What the rights and position of the Crown were is most obscure; Canning, then at the India Office, very justly observed, 'it is very difficult to say with what authority the responsibility at home rested', and suggested that Lowe should be instructed to correspond direct with the secretary of state.<sup>12</sup> There can be no doubt at all that the company was anxious to get rid of any liability for Bonaparte, but it had no wish to lose its exclusive rights over a valuable fortress, vital to the preservation of its great interests, and if it had raised the subject, it might have lost its very unusual rights over the island.

'It is too beautiful a spot',<sup>13</sup> wrote Warren Hastings, 'to be a State Prison', and Lowe arrived on St Helena to find an entirely British community with slaves for their servants, a Chinese labour corps to supply their artisans and

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<sup>7</sup> W. Forsyth, *The Captivity of Napoleon at St Helena* (London, 1853), i. 438.

<sup>8</sup> Hist. MSS. Commission, Bathurst Manuscripts, p. 400.

<sup>9</sup> 5 W. Forsyth, *op. cit.* p. 445.

<sup>10</sup> 56 Geo. III., cap. 22 and 23.

<sup>11</sup> Government of India Acts, 1784 and 1793.

<sup>12</sup> Hist. MSS. Commission, Bathurst Manuscripts, Canning to Bathurst, 27 June 1816, p. 413.

<sup>13</sup> Hist. MSS. Commission, Rawdon-Hastings Manuscripts (1934), p. 378.

craftsmen, and much troubled by about 600 so-called ‘free blacks’, little better, in their condition, than helots. Everybody lived, directly or indirectly, on the company, and it was content that they should do so, to the tune of an expenditure of £106,345, with an annual revenue of £2456,<sup>14</sup> as long as the fortress did not fall into foreign hands and so cripple an ever-expanding eastern empire and trade. Lowe’s salary was £12,000 a year, a very well-paid appointment, and his official residence, Plantation House, he called a superb establishment ‘, a description with which those familiar with that gracious house and its beautiful grounds, will not be inclined to quarrel. The hidden emoluments were on a most generous scale, table, lighting, heating, servants, and stabling, all being furnished at the company’s expense for the governor, his family, and his guests. The two home farms produced all the fresh meat, vegetables, poultry, and forage that he was likely to require, but Lowe found it advisable to lease another 46 acres on private account so as to be on the safe side. More than thirty-five servants ministered to his needs, including a tailor, butcher, and poulterer, all assisted by a horde of blacks, the company’s slaves, to do the heavy work for them. Sixteen Chinamen filled the cisterns of the w.c.’s. every Thursday,<sup>15</sup> and the sole employment of another was to carry fish jacks, old wives, soldiers, yellow tails, and cavallies - to the governor’s table daily. As Government Houses go, Plantation House is small, having no more than six bedrooms and five servants’ rooms, but Lowe kept open house, entertaining in a lavish and most generous fashion, frequently giving dinner parties for fifty guests in a dining room in which, according to modern standards, only twenty-five can be seated in comfort. He added many improvements, including the present library, which contains some of his books, as well as the nursery. The charm and comfort of St. Helena’s Government House is almost entirely due to him.<sup>16</sup>

The social life that surrounded him was the result of its restricted environment. British communities living in very small islands are much exposed to the squabbling, intrigue, and jealousy of the cliques into which they unhappily divide themselves; St Helena was no exception to this rule. In Lowe’s time, as indeed it always has been, the community was divided into two factions, one rallying around the governor, who commanded the largest and most influential following, and the other around those who from time to time felt compelled, on public or private grounds, to differ from him. The rivalry between the two was the predominant feature in the island life, and as nothing personal was ever private, the failings and delinquencies of the one were the principal subject of

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<sup>14</sup> S.H.R., Paymaster’s accounts, 1815.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Chinese accounts, 1816.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Consultations, book 123, p. 288; minute by Lowe, book 122, p. 79. His plans for altering the house are exhibited in the castle.

conversation and recreation to the other. It was into this society that Lowe stepped, to be acclaimed, we must suppose, with the traditional salutation that, since time immemorial, has greeted every governor of St Helena on his arrival, 'bad goes, worse comes'.

## II

The two farms at Longwood and Plantation had been the special care of Governor Beatson, to whom the island is indebted for his well-known work, *Tracts Relative to the Island of St Helena*. He had used them for the experiments that he had described with so much care and attention to detail in his publication, the *St. Helena Register*, the journal he employed for exhorting the general public to greater perseverance in tilling the soil. His vigorous reforming zeal (he once sentenced a soldier to be hanged for stealing six bottles of his beer) led to the mutiny of 1811, of which there is a well-documented account in his book. He rests in Frant Churchyard, Sussex, beneath a modest epitaph; and, so that the documentation of the great mutiny may not be incomplete, here is another that circulated about him in St Helena, which gives a view of its causes, rather different from the account that he has bequeathed to us:

Inscription for a Monument  
to Colonel Sir (sic) Alex:  
Beatson.

Appointed to govern this Great Island  
He commenced His Career by shewing its  
Inhabitants the comforts of arbitrary  
power and to the Hon'ble Court of  
Directors a modesty and economy only  
Comprehended by Himself.  
To This End his labours were indefatigable  
The finest pictures were drawn in his book  
called *The St Helena Register* open only  
his own Lucubrations which were never  
allowed to be contradicted and Experiments  
and Calculations never realised were  
described in the most plausible manner  
to secure a pension and a -- (sic) name  
His bold experiments to prove how  
long we could live without eating  
endangered our own and our families'

Lives at the close of 1811 with  
Excellent wisdom he raised the price  
of what the inhabitants had to  
buy and lowered that which they had to sell  
showing them how to be rich without  
Property and FAT WITHOUT FOOD.<sup>17</sup>

Lowe had been scarcely six months in office before his attention was drawn to irregularities in the farms. Thomas Breame, assisted by his son Thomas jun., held the post of company's farmer. He was a protege of Beatson, in whose time he had been appointed; he came from a wealthy Norfolk family, one of whose members, the greatest friend of the Rev. Richard Boys, senior chaplain to the company in the island, was also a persona grata to Mr Edward Parry, a director of the company.<sup>18</sup> Breame also had a daughter who is known to history for rejecting the suit of Barry O'Meara.

The system of farming had been reorganized in 1813, and new regulations were then enacted giving the farmer a share of the profits, as well as providing for a series of elaborate checks and cross-checks on his operations. The retiring governor, Mark Wilks, had warned T. H. Brooke, government secretary, and historian of the island, that Breame was a man who required to be watched with unceasing vigilance ' ; privately he wrote to him to say that 'Breame was a --'<sup>19</sup> (sic.). In October 1816, the accountant detected irregularities in the farm accounts in connexion with the sale of wood, and as the felling of trees had nothing to do with the farmer, he reported the matter to Lowe who minuted, in reply, that he had also observed destruction of timber taking place.<sup>20</sup> A committee of enquiry was, therefore, appointed to report on the management of the farms, and condemned Breame's farming methods in strong terms, the main heads of the indictment being:

1. Trees had been felled as far a field as Horse Point which is about two miles from Longwood House. Breame affirmed that this had been done by the carpenters of the Northumberland when altering the building, but Lowe minuted that he had noticed the stumps were concealed.
2. A valuable herd of swine was unfed.
3. No less than 80 Southdown sheep were missing and no report had been made.

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<sup>17</sup> S.H.R. Consultations, book 114, 6 September 1813.

<sup>18</sup> British Museum, Lowe Papers; Add. MSS. 20,213, fo. 1.

<sup>19</sup> S.H.R., Secret Consultations, minute by Brooke, 15 March 1820.

<sup>20</sup> 4. Ibid. Consultations, books 117, 118, 119. For O'Meara and Cipriani, see book 119, p. 134.

4. Fences were in a thoroughly bad and neglected condition.
5. Draught oxen were hired out for transport instead of being put to the plough.
6. Green barley had been cut to sell, instead of being given as a feed.
7. Presents of cauliflower and lamb had been made to Dr O'Meara.
8. Cipriani's receipts for large quantities of veal had been improperly entered in the ledger.<sup>21</sup>

To this catalogue Lowe produced some interesting evidence on the condition of Bonaparte's garden at this date, when he wrote 'The Governor himself has seen the most shameless devastation committed in the very garden of Longwood House, and pigs rooting up the grass on the lawn outside the garden'.<sup>22</sup> The gravamen of the charges against Breame lay in his method of farming, which, the government contended, was designed to secure him an immediate profit, without regard to proper cultivation and the company's interests. The temptation was obvious. Longwood and troops would buy anything he cared to sell, and the farmer was making hay while the sun shone, taking full advantage of an abnormal situation which under the system of working would give him a substantial profit.

Every opportunity was given Breame for presenting his defence, and after consideration the governor and council decided that although there was ample cause for terminating his employment, he should be given another year's trial on account of his family, in the hope that he would mend his ways. A year had not elapsed before the farmer was again in trouble, and in November 1817 Brooke reported graver irregularities, this time financial, sales of meat and other produce not being brought to account. The defaulting farmer was again arraigned before the governor and council, and after a very fair trial his services were terminated.<sup>23</sup>

A prominent feature of the Breame case is the long series of letters, full of scurrilities and abuse, addressed by the farmer to the governor and council, which were rightly regarded as most offensive. These letters continued throughout the proceedings, and as Breame was illiterate there was much speculation on the authorship. It soon came out that they were all composed and drafted by no less a person than the Rev. Richard Boys who, when taxed with the impropriety, was unable to deny complicity.<sup>24</sup> A perusal of these letters

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<sup>21</sup> S.H.R. loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Consultations, book 118, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Letters to England, 1 March and 18 December 1817, 22 January and 29 April 1818.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Secret Consultations, 9 March 1820.

leads to the conviction that no clergyman - especially one who was a subordinate of the governor's - should have drafted them.

Full reports of the two parts of the Breame case were dispatched to the company between March 1817 and April 1818, and in the latter month Boys left the island to take long leave in England. In doing so he acted wisely, but almost on the point of sailing he was guilty of a much more serious imprudence. Not long before, he and the junior chaplain had buried Cipriani, and for their services on that occasion O'Meara presented them each with a snuff-box in Bonaparte's name, not choice pieces from the Imperial cabinet, but a cheap variety purchased from the stores of Mr Lewis Gideon Solomon, brother of the more celebrated Saul, whose name appears in the Establishment List holding the part time post of 'Clock and Instrument Cleaner' at a salary of £2 ls. 8d. per month.<sup>25</sup> Most foolishly Boys accepted the present, and if it had not been for his colleague who persuaded him to return it, his fate would have been certain. The incident, as O'Meara so obviously intended it should, greatly increased the tension between the governor and clergyman, it being impossible to believe that Boys was as ignorant, as he professed to be, of the menacing regulations on the subject of accepting gifts from the fallen emperor.

On the arrival of Boys in England, he hastened to Leadenhall Street to enlist support for his friend Breame. There he found an eager helper in the person of Edward Parry, the director, who secured the help of Pulteney Malcolm (that suave admiral whose chief ambition was to jockey Lowe out of his job), Beatson, and so-called 'other sensible people'.<sup>26</sup> For close upon three years the company had left Lowe alone in civil affairs but from the end of 1818, until the death of Bonaparte in the spring of 1821, it waged a campaign of opposition to his wishes which must have caused him deep personal resentment as well as adding to the not inconsiderable burdens that he was already carrying. Chief among the plotters was Edward Parry, who abused his position to write privately to Lowe's subordinates encouraging them to oppose the governor, and warning Brooke that unless he adopted a more independent attitude, he would find himself in trouble.<sup>27</sup> The disgruntled received private information that Lowe's recommendations on their affairs would be reversed, while the dishonest were told that they would be restored to their positions of trust.

It is unlikely that the great company, that is the chairman and the whole body of directors, were a party to this policy; but they signed all the formal letters, perhaps without reading them, and not knowing to what they were lending their names and signatures.

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<sup>25</sup> S.H.R. Establishment List, 1815.

<sup>26</sup> RM., Adds MSS. 20,140, fo. 84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 20,235, fo 132.

### III

The results of the company's new policy is to be observed in its treatment of Sir George Bingham. This distinguished officer was in command of the troops of both the Crown and the company, and was one of Lowe's strongest supporters. On the retirement of Sir William Doveton, Lowe was left with only one adviser on the council, Thomas Henry Brooke, and to fill the vacancy he proposed to appoint Bingham who, besides being officer commanding troops, had been designated to succeed him 'in certain events 'He believed it to be important that his successor should have a full knowledge of all his duties, not only of those connected with 'his charge', but also of his civil duties as well. It may, perhaps, be added that the appointment of a person with Bingham's qualifications, in a place like St Helena, was an obvious one. But the post carried with it the right to certain houses as well as some handsome emoluments, both of which were the perquisite of the next senior civil servant on the list, so the proposal was referred to Brooke, the senior of them all, who recommended that the appointment should be additional to, but not in lieu of, a civil servant.<sup>28</sup> It was a sensible recommendation because the extra cost would fall on the Crown, and not on the company under the terms of the agreement between the two. Bingham, therefore, was appointed as a provisional member, and held the post until 10 May 1819, when his appointment was abruptly terminated by the company which ordered that the vacancy was to be filled by Mr Greentree, the next civil servant on the list.<sup>29</sup> Greentree was an obscure officer of estimable character and modest attainments, whose principal qualification for the post was that he was Sir William Doveton's son-in-law. His advancement had been unusually rapid, as he had only recently been promoted to the grade of senior merchant, and his further appointment to the highest post open to a civil servant is ample proof, if nothing else, that Doveton had been successful in retaining the dignity and emoluments for the family. Bingham was deeply offended at the company's action, and immediately left the island on his supersession, resigning his command to do so. The last word was with him when he observed for the information of the company: 'the rank he held in the service of their Sovereign, and his own, should have entitled him to more attention and regard'.<sup>30</sup> The loss of Bingham was a severe blow to Lowe; he lost a strong supporter and generous friend who spoke the same language as he did; he had already had three years of Napoleon and St Helena, and had two more to go;

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<sup>28</sup> SHR., Consultations, book 119, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Consultations, book 119, p. 138, 19 January.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Consultations, book 120, p. 205,



and life would have been much easier for him if Bingham, who lived at Knollcombe's about half a mile from Plantation House, had been at hand for discussion and consultation. He summed-up the transaction in the following terms:

'The Governor desires to express his regret at the loss of Sir George Bingham's services in a military as well as in a civil capacity. It was at Lieut.-General Sir Hudson Lowe's special request, not however until the Court had designated Sir George Bingham as his eventual successor in the Government, that Sir George Bingham from a desire to render him every support and assistance in his power, consented to undertake the duties as member of Council provisionally until the Court's directions should be received.

'The real difficulty the Governor was under on this occasion does not appear to have been considered by the Court, the unavoidable consequences of whose decision, or rather the manner in which it became conveyed was that Lieut.-General Sir Hudson Lowe became deprived of Sir George Bingham's military, as well as civil, aid on the Island.'<sup>31</sup>

#### IV

It was customary for the East India Company and the people of St Helena to affirm that whilst it was true that slavery was to be found in the island, it existed in 'very mild form' only, a contention that is not borne out by the long and painful catalogue of cruelty to be found in the public records before, during, and after Napoleon's captivity. When the exile and his garrison came to the island, they were shocked to find that slavery was a flourishing institution in a community that prided itself on its British way of life, all of whom were British subjects 'as if they had been born within this realm of England'.<sup>32</sup> Curiously enough, it is to Bonaparte that the credit for the emancipation movement must be given. Whilst still at the Briars, he had come across Toby,<sup>33</sup> one of Balcombe's slaves, and very shortly after his arrival at Longwood he met a slave, Harry, the property of William Julio, a small-holder of Shark's Valley, who told him he had been carried off by force from Sumatra and had been taken to England, eventually being brought to St Helena. In light of this information

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<sup>31</sup> S.H.R. Letters to and from England, 1818-9, 5 February and 25 July 1821.

<sup>32</sup> Royal Charter of 1673. Confirmed in all later enactments.

<sup>33</sup> Mrs. E. Abell, *Recollections of the Emperor Napoleon*, 1845, p. 57; Dr B. O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile, or a Voice from St Helena*, 1822, p. 10.

Bonaparte judged that it was an illegal act to hold Harry in slavery.<sup>34</sup> On 6 January 1816 he gave a dinner party at which the guests were Admiral Cockburn, Major and Mrs. Hodson, and according to accounts, Major and Mrs. Fehrzen; when he recounted the story of his encounter with Harry, Major Hodson observed that there were many such cases in the island. The point of the conversation was not lost on Cockburn, and on 9 January he reported the incident to Governor Wilks, who was due to open the quarter sessions the next day with an address to the grand jury. In his charge Wilks later adverted to the case of Harry, and invited the grand jury to lay an information; but this body, all slave owners, refused to be drawn and stood mute. As a result of this address, the magistrate's court was flooded with applications for emancipation on the grounds of persistent contravention of the slave code, when the case of Harry, who did not apply, was investigated; two or three claims only were allowed, whilst a number were referred to London for decision on the point whether a visit to England constituted valid reasons for release. Neither Harry, nor Toby, who had made an application, obtained an order, and the only person to suffer<sup>35</sup> was the harmless and industrious Major Barnes, to whom the island is indebted for his book, *A Tour of St Helena*, as well as one of the most beautiful maps of it that has ever been drawn.<sup>36</sup> He was fined £50.

From his arrival, Lowe worked hard to ameliorate the lot of slaves, like his predecessors, Robert Brooke (1792), Patton (1805), and Wilks (1814). It was Patton who introduced the Slaves Medal 'among other rewards, which, if it was won in three successive years, did not, as might be supposed, entitle the slave to be freed, but only to have his merits to be completely established'. In 1818 there occurred a dispute between Bingham, magistrate, and Lieut. Des Fountain of the St Helena Artillery, and the last of the island Huguenots, over the flogging of a woman slave in revolting circumstances. The subaltern appealed against the extremely light sentence to the governor and council, and in the proceedings Bingham has bequeathed to posterity the following noteworthy minute:

I have stigmatised with the appellation of Coward an individual who has done it. I avow it. I justify it. I am borne out in the opinion I have expressed by the best of writers, ancient or modern who have branded with that epithet a man who strikes a woman. "The man who lifts his hand against a woman,

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<sup>34</sup> Dr Arnold Chaplin, *A St Helena Who's Who* (2nd edn., London, 1919), p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> H.R., *Law Letters*, 10 April 1816; *Judicial Consultations*, 24 January 1816, pp. 93-150; *Court of Sessions*, book D, 1810-16. The account given of the abolition of slavery is taken entirely from these records.

<sup>36</sup> *Plan of the Island of St Helena*, Barnes, 1811. Unpublished.

save in the way of kindness, is a wretch whom t'were gross flattery to call a coward." How much more then is this appellation due to a man who, having tied up a mother in the presence of her four children, held up a watch to count the minutes between each lash to increase the degree of torture he felt himself justified in inflicting.<sup>37</sup>

In the same year there was another, and much more horrible, case which has not been reported.<sup>38</sup> A slave woman belonging to Captain Robert Wright of the St Helena Infantry had been to Bingham, acting as magistrate, to complain of her treatment at her master's hands. She had failed to obtain a certificate of the fact of her having done so, a proceeding required of her under the code, and on her return to her master's house was flogged for absence without leave. She went to complain again, made the same mistake, and was again flogged on her return. Summonses were taken out against Wright, but failed on the grounds of the woman's contraventions of the code in not obtaining the requisite certificate. A few weeks later, when six months pregnant, she was again flogged by her master for some trivial complaint, and this time she fled to Plantation House to show her back to Lowe and claim his protection. He was so outraged that he immediately ordered the woman to be purchased for the use of the company. Criminal proceedings were of no avail; so Lowe reported the case to the company, observing that as

'Captain Wright was principally dependent on the liberality of the Court of Directors for his future means of support, they may be thus better able to judge the propriety of continuing their indulgences to him.'<sup>39</sup>

Wright was dismissed the service, politely termed 'retirement'. The time was now ripe for all the inhabitants to take some unanimous action on slavery, so a great meeting was held in the Court House where the following resolution, among others, was passed:

'Unanimously resolved that from and after the 25th day of December next ensuing, being the anniversary of the Birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, that all children born of slaves shall be considered free.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> S.H.R., Minute by Bingham, 12 October 1818.

<sup>38</sup> S.H.R., Consultations, book 119, pp. 388-70.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Judicial Consultations, pp. 280-98.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Judicial Consultations, 14 August 1818; Proclamation, 17 August.

This so-called abolition of slavery in 1818 was a measure that Lowe's defenders have made too much of in their published works, these accounts giving the impression that in order to find something good to say about him, the value of his labours for slaves has been exaggerated. The enactment of a law that children born of slaves should be free after a prescribed date, whilst it may be regarded as an important long-term social reform, cannot be described, with any attention to accuracy, as the abolition of slavery as long as 695 men, 295 women, and 658 children continued to lie in that condition.<sup>41</sup> An investigation into the subject reveals that neither the East India Company, Sir Hudson Lowe, nor the Rev. Richard Boys emerge very well in the matter, since the governor and the clergyman both owned and employed slaves, and nowhere in their solemn exhortations and sermons is there any indication of a willingness on their part to set them free.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Lowe's reform did attract some attention in England, the *Morning Chronicle* twisting the news of the event into an attack on Lowe by remarking that there was still a flagitious 'traffic in slaves and that the real credit for the reform should be ascribed to the Rev. Richard Boys.'<sup>43</sup>

The little community was proud of its resolution, which was certainly gracefully worded, and much indignation was expressed at the 'calumnious attack' made in the *Morning Chronicle*, as well as any idea that the work was due to Boys, who was not even on the island. They petitioned the governor that the company be asked to publish a disclaimer, but this it refused to do. Slaves continued to be bought and sold on the island, and they were not finally freed until 1833, when 645 were redeemed for a payment of £28,062.<sup>44</sup>

## V

With the receipt of two lengthy dispatches from the company in the spring of 1820,<sup>45</sup> the company's new anti-Lowe policy was made plain to all in the island, and from these it is clear that it had been at pains to search the governor's correspondence, during the previous four years, for points on which he might be snubbed and rebuffed. The main heads dealt with were:

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<sup>41</sup> S.H.R. Census Returns, 1818.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Family Returns, signed by each householder, 1820; also for 10 September 1821.

<sup>43</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 22 November 1818.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Consultations, book 133, 18 July 1832.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Letters from England, 22 December 1819 and 23 February 1820.

- The expedition to Angola.
- Appointments of Register Attendant and Major Pritchard.
- Separate Letters.
- The case of Breame.

The expedition to Angola was a trivial matter in which Lowe had dispatched a private ship to obtain supplies from Lobito, instead of sending the local schooner, the *St Helena*, at much less expense. Although the company had approved of the proceeding about three years before, the argument was still going on. The post of Register Attendant was a sinecure usually held by a civil servant, who employed his clerk, or more often his servant, to do the job which was worth a few pounds a month. Lowe had been unable to find anybody to do the work, which was that of a preventive officer, in the exacting manner in which he conceived it should be done, so he appointed a reliable N.C.O. instead, and the company saw fit to quarrel about it. In the case of Captain H. H. Pritchard, *St Helena* Artillery, the death of the commanding officer, and the belief that the second-in-command, then absent from the island, was retiring, presented an opportunity for bringing new blood into the regiment. The command was given to Hodson, an officer of the island Infantry, whilst Pritchard was promoted to major. Encouraged by Lowe's enemies to believe that he had just pretensions to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, he refused to accept his major's commission and disciplinary action was taken against him. The company warmly espoused his cause and reversed Lowe's decision, action which seems difficult to justify in the case of a general officer commanding so remote a station as *St Helena*.

The subject of 'Separate' letters was more important. This class of communication might be said to resemble a 'private' letter on public business passing between the governor and the company, and Lowe, in his letter of appointment, had been enjoined to use this form of letter for confidential matters. Being so heavily over-burdened with writing, he had developed the procedure a logical stage further, and had instructed Brooke to communicate with the secretary of the company in this way so as to take some of the load off his own shoulders. Exception was taken to a confidential letter relating to the unsuitability of certain civil servants for promotion, and the company now forbade further use of this type of letter. Lowe's reply to this must have staggered the directors, who were not accustomed to be addressed in such terms, particularly from *St Helena*:

'The Governor having thus stated the real grounds upon which he thought it his duty to address the Court separately, will now proceed to reply to that

para. of the Court's letter which enjoins that it is only on occasions which require secrecy, that he may address himself to the Chairman or Secret Committee.

The subjects of the Governor's letter were all such as appeared to him to furnish matter for separate representation though none of them which he should have considered it necessary to regard as Secret.

The Court of Directors having interdicted him from addressing them on any subject connected with Napoleon Bonaparte, there remains consequently hardly any possible subject which could render it necessary to address them in a secret manner.

If the Court however persevere notwithstanding what he has said, in interdicting the Governor from addressing them in a separate manner, the Governor has humbly to intreat that they would not permit any particular Member of the Court to carry on a private correspondence with persons under his authority, respecting those concerns of the East India Company for the management of which he with the Council are . . . alone responsible. He is grounded in this request from the extraordinary circumstance of the Company's Senior Chaplain having since his return to the Island, referred to a letter from one of the Members of the Court to Mr Brooke . . . as containing a rule by which he was to form his own judgement and opinions upon matters, insignificant in themselves but not at all so in the wide relations which they have borne.<sup>46</sup>

In the Breame case the decisions were humiliating to men of the calibre of Lowe and Brooke, the company ruling that the proceedings 'gave not the slightest ground for any criminal charge', or 'any real cause' for Breame's removal, and ordering that he was to be restored to his post under the provisions of the 1813 regulations, and admonished for his use of 'intemperate language.'<sup>47</sup> Brooke, with his usual ingenuity, found a way of escape. In the prevailing conditions, the regulations were a dead letter, so it was impossible to re-instate Breame and the case should, therefore, be referred back to the company, when Lowe took the opportunity of telling the directors that the governor and council 'had drawn forth censure when they confidently trusted to have merited approbation'. In the final result Breame was retired on a pension of £150 a year, but this decision was not received until long after Lowe had

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<sup>46</sup> S.H.R., Second General Letter to England of 24 July 1821, book, p. 235.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Separate letter 6 March 1820, and Secret Consultations, 1822.

left the island, the former, in the meantime, very sensibly withdrawing to England in August 1820 on grounds of ill-health.<sup>48</sup>

The slavery incident gave Lowe an opportunity for a last dig at the company on the subject of ‘separate’ letters. On his return, Boys informed Lowe that he had been authorized by Edward Parry to say that he had been prevented from publicly disclaiming the credit for the abolition of slavery, which the *Morning Chronicle* had attributed to him; whereupon the governor wrote in these terms:

‘The Governor does not presume to dispute the propriety of the Court’s general resolution upon the subject, although there is a wide difference between undertaking to repel a calumnious attack against others and taking to oneself the merit of which another may be unjustly deprived, and whilst the Governor is interdicted from addressing the Court in a separate manner, he certainly feels himself warranted in soliciting their attention to the following matter.

‘The Rev. Mr Boys, on his return to the Island, wrote to Lieut. General Sir Hudson Lowe, to acquaint him that he had Mr Parry’s authority to assure the Governor that he Mr Boys, was prevented from his purpose of correcting the error stated in the *Morning Chronicle* expressly at his, Mr Parry’s desire, and Mr Boys at the same time referred to a private letter Mr Parry had written to Mr Brooke, the Senior Member of Council on the Island, acquainting him of having given such advice to Mr Boys.’<sup>49</sup>

## VI

Lowe’s reaction to the campaign waged against him by the company was to report it to Bathurst, asking for the intervention of the Board of Control. He had never been informed that this body had no jurisdiction over St Helena. In reply, Goulburn informed him that his letter would be sent to the company, but the Crown had no right of interference whatsoever, since the island was excluded from the operation of the relative acts and in a very peculiar position, and the company was very jealous of its right to exclusive possession.<sup>50</sup> Lowe should not have been left, for over four years, working under the delusion that the Crown could exercise some authority over the company, and its inability to do so, of which the company was fully aware, had enabled Parry to conduct

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* In the William Pitt on 5 August 1820. Letters to England, 31 July 1820, and Consultations, book 128, 28 September 1826.

<sup>49</sup> *Dunira* letter post.

<sup>50</sup> B.M., Add. MSS. 20, 130, fo. 83, Goulburn to Lowe, 21 May 1820.

a campaign against him in which the next move was to foment insubordination in his own office.<sup>51</sup>

Shortly after the return of Boys, six junior civil servants, headed by Mr Anthony Beale, a direct descendant of the governor who had cast away the island to the Dutch in 1673, combined to present a memorial praying for the redress of grievances which at this distance of time are difficult to understand. But the petition contained an insulting reference to Lowe, which was cut out from the record copy.<sup>52</sup> When transmitting the petition to the company, he observed that its actions had bewildered the community, and that they had loosened ‘the bonds of willing subordination ‘which had prevailed between the ‘Government and the governed’.<sup>53</sup> In this case his complaint to Bathurst did some good, because the company replied with most unusual promptitude, demolishing the unfortunate civil servants in terms that must have made them shudder, and suspending Mr Beale for twelve months.<sup>54</sup> This was the last of Lowe’s conflicts with the company. He left St Helena in the *Dunira* on 25 July 1821, with the unrepentant Boys preaching valedictory sermons at his departing head. A pamphlet has been published purporting to print the text of these sermons, but students should be aware that the introduction to them contains many grievous errors of fact, whilst the sermons, if compared with Lowe’s minute on them, will be seen to have been heavily expurgated before printing.<sup>55</sup> This famous minute is one of the remarkable archives of the captivity published by the late Dr Chaplin, and although it was signed by Lowe, those familiar with Brooke’s style and vocabulary will have no difficulty in recognizing the real author.<sup>56</sup>

With the *Dunira* sailing away from the island, the combatants drew out of range. The company’s last word, also published by the late Dr Chaplin, complaining, with a good deal of justice, of the governor’s ‘Tone and Stile’ and ‘Tone and Temper’ did not reach him until after he had left the island, whilst

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<sup>51</sup> S.H.R., book 121, Beale to Brooke.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 72.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Special letter to England, 25 August 1820.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Special letter from England, 29 November 1820. The question ‘When is the green bag going to be given out?’ is believed to refer to the colour of the mail bag reserved for Secret correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> 1 Rev. Markby Janeiro Thornton Boys, *Personal Recollections* (Brighton, 1900). The author was aged three years when the sermons were delivered, and acquired his second name from having been born at Rio. The sermons were delivered on 1, 8, and 15 July. First general letter to England, 24 July 1821, and book 122, minute by Brooke, 16 July, states the preacher prayed that nothing terrified by the power of man he might shew forth the whole Council (sic) of God’.

<sup>56</sup> Dr A. Chaplin, *op. cit.* p. 178.



Lowe took his rejoinder with him.<sup>57</sup> It is, however, satisfactory to be able to record that when tempers had cooled, and at a time when Lowe's fortunes were at their darkest, the company rose above faction, and ordered that restitution was to be made to him of the Napoleonic furniture which his successor had tried to appropriate. Nor did Lowe, at any stage in his administration of the island, ever allow the interests of the company to suffer, however deep his resentment or sense of injury, for which it must be admitted, he had every reason for feeling, especially in the case of Bingham.

Sir Hudson Lowe was not one of the better-known generals of the Napoleonic wars, and had never commanded any large formations or any of the fighting troops, but in the opinion of Sir John Moore, the best of all judges, he was a good soldier, and he need not ask for any better reference. He had unusual qualifications for his unique duty, having considerable command of languages and unrivalled experience of continental armies, their campaigns, and the politics of their courts, who found him an agreeable personality. No other officer, except possibly his friend Bunbury, could assemble such an array of qualifications. He was not, by any means, one who might be called a brilliant officer, nor had he the character of a forceful fighting general, but he was serious minded, and could be extremely shrewd; neither Bonaparte, or his entourage, was ever able to impose on him. Although he probably owed much to Bunbury's interest, it was a considerable achievement to rise to be a lieutenant-general in an age when, without the help of friends in politics, money, or relations in the peerage, promotion to the highest ranks was an ambition almost impossible of attainment. Popular in the rough Prussian bivouacs, he had never had the chance to acquire, or perhaps the ability to learn, the graces to equip him for the life of the court; and more at home in the field, his manners and habits in his office were an almost intolerable burden to his staff. Paper, not Bonaparte, was his 'greatest enemy',<sup>58</sup> and if he had left all the interminable writing to his staff (Brooke and Gorrequer were extremely able men) he would have left very much less behind him for his critics to rejoice in. He was physically incapable of leaving a draft alone, and the mere sight of a few lines of handwriting on a sheet of foolscap impelled an irresistible urge to alter them, and go on altering them, always for the worse. Weighed down by his responsibilities, he had not the ability to rise above them, and must do everything for himself, always immersed in a bog of detail. As a result he has come down to us, except in the opinion of the historian of the British Army, as a fussy, stupid,

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<sup>57</sup> S.H.R., The *Dumira* Letter, being governor and council's second general letter of 24 July 1821; contained in book a, p. 235, bound with a slip to say that it was entirely the work of Sir Hudson Lowe.

<sup>58</sup> Dr W. Henry, *Events of a Military Life*, 2nd edn. (London, 1843), p. 80.

obstinate sort of officer, rather than one who was often shrewd where others might have made quite serious mistakes, and who was always generous, kind, and even soft-hearted, respected by everybody for his personal integrity and high sense of public duty. He fell a victim to the political intrigues of the day, meeting the hard fate of those who have faithfully discharged unpleasant duties that have been the target of rival political factions. Instead of coming to his aid, as they were in honour bound to do, the government, whose instructions he had so punctiliously fulfilled, threw him over to the mercy of their enemies. The fair-minded find it difficult to read the story of the last twenty years of his life without indignation.

Cold-shouldered by the modest society in which he moved, Lowe could never be quite sure that when he went for a walk in the street, he would not be insulted. Even at Mauritius, when travelling home from Ceylon, public demonstrations were twice staged against him,<sup>59</sup> and it was at St Helena only, always renowned for the courtesy, consideration, and friendliness of its people, that he was greeted with acclamation, the garrison voting that his portrait should hang in their mess.<sup>60</sup> But all that has come down to us is Wyvill's incomplete pencil sketch, widely reproduced, and an atrocious forgery of which every French historian should be ashamed.<sup>61</sup>

Lowe's services to history, gratefully acknowledged by both friend and foe, were monumental. For over twelve months Gorrequer remained behind in the island, collecting and sorting the Lowe papers, and there in this immense documentation may be read every detail of Bonaparte's exile and death, from the condition of his bowels to congratulatory letters to Lowe on the birth of a daughter - weight 10 lb. No one has been able to impugn these remarkable papers; no one has been able to say that Lowe destroyed basic documents or altered others to his own advantage; and they lie in the British Museum as the memorial of a fundamentally honest and humane man.

G. C. KITCHING.

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<sup>59</sup> Asiatic Journal, October 1828 and May 1832.

<sup>60</sup> B.M. Add. MSS. 20,238.

<sup>61</sup> R. C. Seaton, *Napoleon's Captivity in relation to Sir Hudson Lowe* (London, 1903), p. 261. The forgery is by Fremy, and it was engraved in London by Goulburn in 1836, a copy being in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

## APPENDIX

### THE POSSIBILITIES OF ESCAPE FROM ST HELENA

Lowe's security and defence measures are often ridiculed. He offered Bonaparte the free run of the island, except Jamestown, provided he would shew himself to a British officer twice within twenty-four hours. The offer was refused.

Wellington, at a much later date, is supposed to have said, when remarking on what he would have done if he had been in charge, that he would have dealt with the situation in this way, not knowing, of course, that the proposal had been tried in 1818.

Critics of Lowe's security measures, including Balmain, whose knowledge of the island was confined to the amenities of Rosemary Hall, an amble down to Jamestown, and an occasional picnic, base their claim that it was ridiculous to have so many sentries and guards on the grounds, either that it was impossible to escape from the island in any case, or that Bonaparte did not want to escape, and that he was a sick man. The view that it was impossible to escape is founded on nothing more than a sight of St. Helena's grim and terrible coast line, very large stretches of which cannot be seen from the interior of the island, and have to be visited by rowing boat.

The possibility of escape, or otherwise, must be judged on contemporary opinion and facts. The East India Company, who had owned the island for close upon two hundred years, thought this was very easy, and it is an opinion that is confirmed by other contemporary writers who had the benefit of personal knowledge. The facts will be found in the numerous instances of slaves, soldiers, and deserters who are recorded in the public records as having made good their escape, including nearly one hundred years later, one Boer prisoner of war. The known facts, therefore, fully justify the contemporary opinion.

About a hundred years ago, R. F. Seale, the first colonial secretary under the Crown, to whom we are indebted for an immense amount of unusual knowledge of the island, recorded that he had reached the interior from forty-six landing places all passable to light troops. Similarly, the islanders of to-day know of, and use, innumerable tracks either cutting across the island or leading down to the coast line where there were also no guards. It might be also said that any St. Helenian, whose home was at Longwood, would reach any part of the island, either on the coast or in the interior, without Lowe's guards knowing anything about it, supposing them all to be in position. It would be folly to suppose that their ancestors did not possess a similar knowledge.

Ability to pass through a line of sentries, such as Lowe had around Longwood House at night, need not detain us in view of the multitude of cases in

modern and ancient history where this has been successfully accomplished. A case in point is Mr Churchill at Pretoria in 1899 where modern inventions of wire and lighting had to be overcome. Having passed the line of sentries, three pre-requisites were necessary to ensure success:

1. Determination and hard physical condition.
2. Accomplices both within and without the island.
3. A small boat able to sail, of the whaler or gig type, on the coastline.

Nobody is likely to question Napoleon's determination, but his health is an important factor in consideration of the subject of escape. The late Dr Chaplin, the leading authority on the subject, who would not have wished to be described as anything but an ardent admirer of Bonaparte, tells us that up to the time of his deportation to St Helena, he had enjoyed 'the most uniform robust health' and that 'not a day had been lost on account of illness'. Bunbury, who saw him on the Bellerophon, has told us that he never saw a man better able to endure fatigue, and the island, itself, provides excellent evidence on the state of his health during the first half of 1816. No man can visit Chubb's Spring and Maldivia from the Briars, or the bottom of Sane Valley and back again from Hut's Gate, or gallop round the eastern district via Rock Rose and Sandy Bay without being in fine physical condition. We are, therefore, entitled to assume that Bonaparte in the first year of his exile was quite well and fit enough to have attempted an escape.

Few, with personal knowledge of St Helena, would ever dare to venture the opinion that escape from that island, in spite of all Lowe's sentries, would be impossible. We are privileged to know, with every source of information open to us, that Bonaparte had no wish to escape, and that after 1816 he allowed his health to deteriorate to such an extent that he would have been incapable of doing so even if he had wished to; but Lowe did not know this, and it is on the information in his possession that he must be judged.

The defensive measures are scarcely open to criticism. the garrison was as follows:

	<b>King's</b>	<b>Company's</b>	<b>Total</b>
1816	1,536	745	2,281
1817	1,675	820	2,495
1818	1,328	702	2,040
1819	1,536	745	2,281
1820	1,483	698	2,181
1821	840	1,168	2,048

This strength would be regarded as excessive by the East India Company but with the complication of Napoleon, the troops were heavily overworked and there was much sickness among them.

Finally, it may be of interest to students to know that in an unpublished survey in the India Office Records, drawn by Lieut.-Colonel James Cocks of the island troops, in 1804, that the name of Longwood House is recorded as 'WOOD LODGE', and that in the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in W. J. Burchell's St Helena sketch book, there is a view of this house as it stood in 1807, i.e. before Napoleon was deported there.

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