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A LETTER

TO

BRYAN EDWARDS, ESQUIRE,

CONTAINING

OBSERVATIONS

ON SOME PASSAGES OF HIS

HISTORY

OF THE

WEST INDIES.

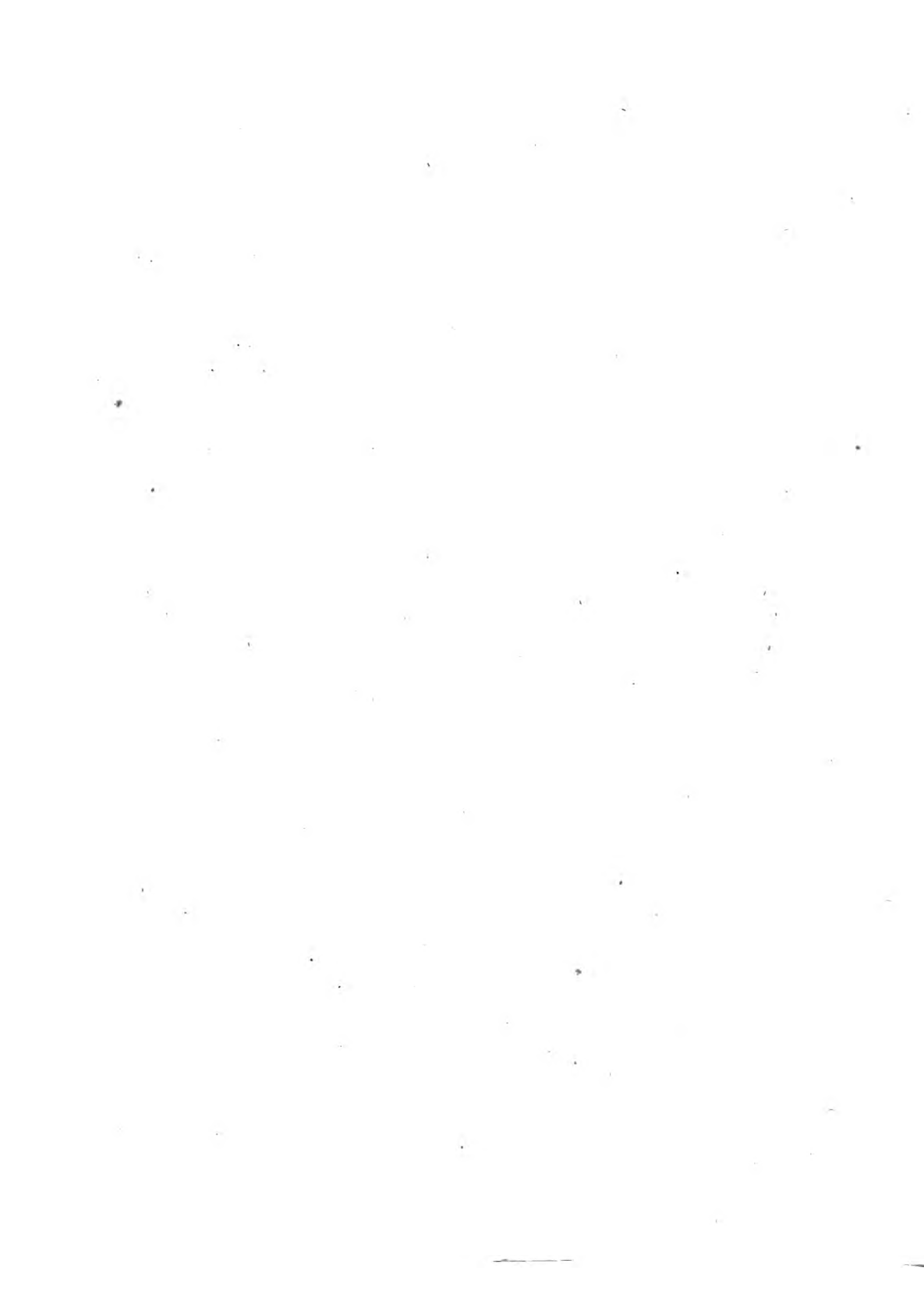


*By
Wm. Preston*

LONDON:

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1795.



SIR,

FROM your animated and highly entertaining production, I drew many conclusions and opinions, very different from those, which the author wished to impress or inculcate. I must own, I perused your book with an equal mixture of pain and pleasure, perceiving, as I did, so good an understanding warped by prejudice, and such fine talents employed in the degrading task of pleading the cause of oppression. I cannot believe, that a liberal and ingenuous spirit would knowingly and deliberately commence the advocate of barbarity, and prostitute the dignity of the historic page to the propagation of error and the support of abuses. Your book is a strong proof how far education and use may harden the tenderest natures, and mislead the strongest understandings; and how incapable men are of seeing in a just point of view, or in it's proper colours, what is either too near them, or too constantly before their eyes.

To show you, that I am warranted in what I say, I shall take the liberty of adverting to some positions contained in your book, and of examining the arguments, on which they are founded. You are, indeed, the most formidable advocate I have seen for the continuance of the slave trade, and the more formidable, from your not appearing the direct advocate. Your determination in favour of this cruel traffic seems to be the reluctant sacrifice, of your humanity and candour, to the resistless authority of facts, and the cogent voice of truth and reason. Your arguments in favour of slavery, though strongly put in
A 2
substance,

substance, yet, in form, are produced with a tone of moderation, and a seeming reluctance of hesitation and doubt, which, certainly, must give them greater weight with the reader.

Your conclusion in favour of a continuance of the slave trade seems to be grounded on the following considerations.—That the slave trade is not a practice contrary to humanity, as we have been taught to think it, but perfectly reconcileable to philanthropy, and even conducing to the preservation of the human race.—The *negroes* are an inferior species of beings, gross in their intellects, and perverse in their dispositions; they are only to be governed by severity, and do not deserve to be considered or treated as men. But, supposing the traffic in human flesh as contrary to humanity and justice as we please, yet must it be continued; for, were it relinquished by *Great Britain*, the islands would lie uncultivated, for want of hands, and the exportation of slaves from *Africa* would not be diminished, but the profits of the slave trade would pass from us to other nations.

As to the first point, you seem persuaded, that a great part of the world is in an error respecting the slave trade; and that both those nations who have already abolished it, and the well meaning persons in the *British* dominions who are advocates for abolishing it, labour under a gross mistake, inasmuch as the continuance of slavery, and the traffic by which the stock of slaves is upheld, are perfectly reconcileable to humanity, and, instead of being, as they are commonly supposed, destructive of the human species, materially conduce to it's preservation. You defend the general humanity of the treatment, which the negroes experience on their passage from *Africa* to the West Indies from the captains and supercargoes of slaves, previous to their being brought to market, and from their respective owners, after they become the property of planters; and you question, as wholly false, or highly exaggerated, the evidence which has been adduced of particular acts of barbarity.

Allowing

Allowing what you say to be just, and, certainly, no man could have better opportunities of knowing the truth, and no man, I am certain, would be farther from an intention of disguising it ;—yet, is it nothing to rend asunder all the ties of nature? to outrage all the feelings of humanity? to tear the wife from her husband, the virgin from her lover? to deprive the tender and helpless infant of the care and attention of it's parents, and the aged and decrepid parents of the duty and support of their offspring? You admit yourself that suicide is frequent among the negroes. No very favourable symptom of their being treated with humanity.

You give a flattering picture of the condition of the slaves in the *West Indies*, and compare it with that of our peasantry at home. But, is the comparison fair?—The marked, distinguishing feature, the great essential difference, the inestimable blessing that endears every scene and recommends every condition, that fills the *Laplander* with enthusiastic love for his snowy wastes and his caverns—Freedom, is wanting. The peasant, if he chooses to sleep and fast, is not compelled to labour. If he finds one neighbourhood unpropitious, he may change it for another. The *strange power of home*, as the poet terms it, sweetens his toil, and if his misfortunes and despondency should be such as to extinguish in his heart that strong and universal feeling, he can emigrate to some other land where brighter hopes allure him ; and amidst wretchedness, toil, and want, he is free from stripes and bonds, his person is sacred, he reposes in the shade of the constitution, the guardian power of the law is about his path, and about his bed, and he reflects, with pride, that he too, mean as he is, has a place and weight in the scale of civil existence.

Is nothing to be allowed for the feelings of the mind? Are the *negroes* such mere machines, indeed, that exemption from death and torture, and the necessary sustenance of animal duration are sufficient to their happiness? Are there not ingredients mixed in their cup sufficient to poison all enjoyment—dire necessity and stern compulsion?

pulsion? Day succeeds to day, without hope of change, and brings to the miserable *negro* toil without respite, and sufferings without consolation.

You seem to think that the condition of the greater part of the *negroes* in the *West Indies* is not altered for the worse by their being sold into slavery in our colonies, inasmuch as most of them were slaves in their own country; it appearing in evidence, as you state, that there are many individuals in *Africa*, who possess large numbers of slaves, and occasionally drive a traffic in those poor creatures, who constitute a considerable part of their wealth. But, supposing this to be the fact, in their own country, slaves as they are, the *negroes* are surrounded by their wives, children, and near connexions; and when they come to the slave market, they are torn from all these. We know, too, that conditions, to which we have been accustomed, and evils, which we have long endured, appear more tolerable from habitude, and that new and untried situations appear more dreadful from their novelty; and we may naturally conclude, that a *negro* will not deem servitude in his own country, to a person of his own tribe, hue, and religion, so dreadful, as slavery accompanied with banishment to a foreign land, where he becomes the property of a stranger, whose hue, whose language, religion, and manners, are all revolting alike to his feelings and apprehensions.

You allow, that no certain or precise account is easily to be obtained of the means by which the market for slaves is annually kept up and supported in *Africa*; the several instances that are given, arising from captivity in war, delinquency, and debt, justly appear to you inadequate to so great and abundant a supply; and, as you observe, it is difficult to imagine, that casual contributions of this kind can possibly furnish out an annual export of 74,000 persons*.

Suppose, as you state, that there is among the *African* nations a

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

numerous class of people born only to the dismal inheritance of bonds and stripes; yet, are we to reject, as fabulous, the accounts of peaceful towns fired on, and the unoffending inhabitants made prisoners, by the crews of *European* ships, or of nations engaged in hostilities without provocation, and solely actuated by the desire of making slaves? Have not the bonds of society been loosed, and the ties of nature dissolved? Is not the hand of brother armed against his brother? Are not the hearts of parents steeled against their offspring, by the corrupting influence of a baneful traffic, and the contagious example of *European* avarice and *European* treachery? Indeed, you yourself seem to give up this part of the cause when you come to speak of “450,000 reasonable beings, (in the English islands only) “in a state of barbarity and slavery, of whom, I will not say the “major part, but—great numbers assuredly, have been torn from “their native country and dearest connexions, by means which no “good mind can reflect upon but with sentiments of disgust, com- “miseration, and sorrow*.”

You seem to be persuaded that the prospect of a slave market is a motive to clemency and a source of mercy, while the warrior is induced to save the life of his captive, and the magistrate to spare the criminal, by the prospect of that gain, which may accrue from a sale of their persons. Let it be granted, that many might be put to death who are now reserved for the slave market—what is the amount and value of that mercy, which only exchanges an immediate, for a continued death, and reserves the human victim to wring or crush out miserable existence, as it were, drop by drop, or atom by atom?

To proceed to the treatment which the slaves experience in the *English* islands, you give the following favourable representation of it †

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II. chapter 2.

† Vol. II.

“ Moderate

“ Moderate labour, unaccompanied with the wretched anxiety to
 “ which the poor in *England* are subject in making provision for the
 “ day that is passing over them, is a state of comparative felicity.
 “ Men in savage life have no incentive to emulation, persuasion is lost
 “ on such men, and compulsion, to a certain degree, is humanity and
 “ charity.”—I cannot agree with you, that in savage life men have
 no incentive to emulation: all history and experience show the con-
 trary. The thirst of fame and desire of superiority reign in savage life
 with more strength, perhaps, than in polished society; the motives of
 action are less varied in form, and less uniform in operation; but their
 temporary and interrupted impulse, when it does act, is more ener-
 getic, their effect more instantaneous and rapid. Two of the
 strongest emotions, that agitate the human bosom, and, of course, two
 of the most powerful sources of action, prevail particularly in *savage*
 life—the love of freedom, and the desire of vengeance. Your expres-
 sion is inaccurate—you, manifestly, confound *savage* life and *slavish*
 life; they differ as widely as north from south. The *savage* state is
natural to man, and the germ or parent of all civil society; the *slavish*
 state is *unnatural* to man, the corruption and disease of civil society,
 the fungous excrescence of avarice and luxury. The *slavish* state is
 without incentives to emulation; and why? because it is hopeless.
 It is without motives of action; and why? because it degrades the
 nature of man, and benumbs his faculties. If the *slavish* state leaves
 no incentives to emulation, no motives of action, it is manifestly un-
 natural to man, and subversive of the designs of his Creator, who im-
 planted in him passions and faculties susceptible of both.

COMPULSION IS HUMANITY and CHARITY! Severe sentence!
 What must be the state that justifies it? The baneful desponding in-
 fluence of slavery degrades the human creature, extinguishes his facul-
 ties, and leaves him no source or spring of activity or motion; and
 then, by a reflex act, slavery endeavours to counteract the torpitude
 itself

itself has induced, to restore the activity and vigour itself has destroyed; and substitutes cruelty and compulsion for the incentives of emulation, and legitimate motives of exertion.

Compulsion to a certain degree is humanity and charity!—Behold the blessed effects of that humanity and charity—a yearly consumption of 38,000 of the human species in the *English* islands alone! It is observed by a sensible writer, that the slaves in the *West India* islands are the only class of beings that do not increase their numbers; and why? Through the blessed influence of that compulsive humanity and charity. Here is an acknowledged fact, from which an inevitable conclusion arises stronger than a thousand witnesses, and in contradiction to all the flattering pictures of the condition of slavery*.

Let us examine the humanity and charity of the slave trade a little more minutely. We will begin at the *African* slave market. How are the aged, the infant, and the female, the sickly and the feeble, fitted to endure the horrors of a voyage on board a slave ship? Would it not be better to be put to death at once, as you insinuate is the fate of such slaves as are rejected by the buyers, than to perish by the lingering misery that awaits them in the possession of *Europeans*? I do not mean to repeat what has appeared in evidence respecting the sufferings of the *negroes*, on board slave ships; I wish to take every fact on your own statement. You allow that the *negroes*, in general, are strongly attached to their countrymen †, that they have a fond affection for their native soil, inasmuch, that, in absence, they look on death with transport, as the welcome instrument of their return. What then must be the sensations of those UNFORTUNATES, torn from their countrymen and their native land, loaded with chains, and violently borne far distant, without the chance or hope of again beholding objects so justly dear! Wherever you speak of the *negroes*, I am sorry to observe that you seem to speak of them as mere *animals*, and do not admit the

* See Christie on the French Revolution.

† Vol. II. Hist. of the West Indies.

feelings of the mind as forming any part of your estimate of their sufferings. You detail particularly the treatment of the *negroes* on board the slave ships—they are nourished with wholesome food, occasionally exhilarated with drams, furnished with pipes and tobacco, if they choose them, and invited to amuse themselves with the dance and song*. The frequent attempts to regain their liberty, and the many instances of self-destruction among the *negroes*, during the passage from *Africa* to the *West Indies*, show that they are not as sensible as might be expected of all the comforts and *agremens* of this situation. Partnership of sufferings and mutuality of sorrows prove the basis of the dearest attachment and firmest connexion. New terms of relationship are devised, new ties of fondness are formed between the oppressed and the miserable, the helpless, and the hopeless; while human nature expands itself to grasp at comfort, and embraces objects of affection and attachment, even in the bosom of misery and despair. We may conceive what must be the feelings of these *unfortunates*, and how great must be the sufferings and the sorrows of their dreadful voyage, on board a slave ship, from the deep and melancholy impression which seems to remain on their minds, and the new and fond attachments which arise on the passage. You state that the term SHIPMATE is understood among the *negroes* † as signifying a relationship of the most endearing nature; “perhaps, as recalling the time when the sufferers were cut off together from their common country and kindred, and awakening reciprocal sympathy from the remembrance of mutual affliction.”

I must add to this, that the slave market yearly occasions the destruction of a number of miserable victims, for whom no purchasers are

* It is admitted on all hands, that the men slaves are secured in irons when they first come on board: the mode is by fastening every two men together, the right ankle of one being fastened by means of a small iron fetter to the left of the other. *Hist. of the West Indies*, Vol. II.

† *Hist. of the West Indies*, Vol. II.

found. I take the fact on your own statement *.—“ The slave merchant, not having it in his power to maintain his captives for any length of time, avows his intention of destroying them, if not sold by a certain day; and the work of death is sometimes performed within sight of the English ships.” Many of the slaves are brought to market, from remote regions, by needy and rapacious persons, neither able nor willing to maintain them for any length of time; murder, therefore, is the consequence of any delay, which not only deprives their owners of the prospect of immediate profit, but subjects them to an expence which they are ill able to sustain. At whose door is the guilt of this to be laid? Surely of the *Europeans* who frequent the market, and incite the natives to this criminal commerce.

I will allow, with you, that the stories of excessive whipping and barbarous mutilation are much exaggerated, both as to frequency and atrocity †. It may even be true, that instances of cruelty (by which I take it for granted, you mean excessive cruelty extending to life and limb) are not only rare, but universally reprobated, when discovered, and even punished when capable of legal proof. From the very nature of slavery such instances must frequently pass undiscovered, and will seldom, very seldom indeed, be capable of legal proof. Taking facts on your statement, and as they appear through your softened colouring, I cannot think, that any unprejudiced person will be persuaded, that the general treatment of the slaves is mild, temperate, and indulgent. The legislature, it is true, has interfered to soften the horrors of their condition; but you allow, that it has been impossible, to carry into effect some of its best provisions—that, for instance, that in the sale of slaves care shall be taken not to separate the different branches of the same family.

Take the *negro* on his landing.—You confess there is something extremely shocking in “ beholding a numerous body of unfortunate

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† Ibid.

“ fellow creatures in captivity and exile, exposed naked to public
 “ view, and sold like a herd of cattle. Yet I could not observe (say
 “ you), that the *negroes* themselves were oppressed with many of
 “ those painful sensations, which a person unaccustomed to the scene
 “ would naturally attribute to such apparent wretchedness.”—If
 they are men, they must feel it.—It is not very easy for the cur-
 sory, perhaps the prejudiced spectator, interested to apologize to his
 own heart for the share he takes in what is passing, and unac-
 quainted, as he is, with the language and the manners of the
negroes, it is not easy for him to discern, what is passing with-
 in their bosoms. The seeming unconcern of these unhappy beings
 may be variously accounted for.—It may be the frantic paroxysm
 of despair, looking to death, as a prompt relief from anguish. It
 may be the determined effort of a hardy and ferocious courage, pre-
 pared alike to suffer and to dare; which, collected within itself, takes
 a pride in showing its contempt of pain and affliction.—But most
 probably the cause is different from both these motives, and this con-
 duct may result from fear, or prudence.

The *negro*, before he is long in the possession of *Europeans*, learns,
 from the severity of his condition, to repress his emotions, and disguise
 his feelings. The dejection of sorrow is imputed to him as fullen-
 ness. His tears are criminal, and his complaints perhaps expose
 him to punishment. This being the case, it requires no extraordinary
 sagacity in him to perceive, that it is necessary for him to conform
 to his situation, and that, were he to show any extraordinary sensi-
 bility, he would be regarded with a jealous eye, as a mutinous and
 disaffected slave, who would seize the first opportunity to effect his
 escape.

Some of the arguments, which you employ, to defend a continu-
 ance of the importation of negroes, are strong, to convince me, that
 the condition of the slave must be truly wretched.—The plantations,
 you

you state, are all understocked. How then must the miserable negro be overlaboured! The farms are understocked—yet there is a yearly importation of about forty thousand *negroes* to the British islands alone!—What then must be the annual consumption of the human species in this small portion of the inhabited globe? “It is computed,” says Mr. *Hume*, “that a stock of slaves grows worse five per cent, every year, unless new slaves be bought to recruit them*.” The words of that discerning and philosophic writer are very strong on this subject. “The practice of slavery being so common in antiquity, must have been destructive, to a degree, which no expedient could repair. All I pretend to infer from these reasonings, is, that slavery is in general disadvantageous both to the happiness and the populousness of mankind†.” And the universal prevalence of slavery is one of the chief arguments adduced, by this profound observer, in order to combat the supposed populousness of ancient nations.

It was the practice of the ancients, with very few exceptions, to discourage and prevent, as much as possible, the propagation of the species among their slaves. *Hume* evinces this by various quotations from the classics. The same maxims of policy or economy prevail amongst the proprietors of slaves in the *British* islands, and on similar principles.

“The comparison is shocking between the management of human creatures, and that of cattle; but being extremely just, when applied to the present subject, it may be proper to trace the consequences of it. At the capital, near all great cities, in all rich populous industrious provinces, few cattle are bred. Provisions, lodging, attendance, labour, are there dear, and men find better their account in buying the cattle, after they come to a certain

* *Essays*, Vol. I. *Essay II.* p. 422.

† *Ibid.* p. 428.

“ age, from the remoter and cheaper counties. These are, conse-
 “ quently, the only breeding countries for cattle; and by a parity of
 “ reason, for men too, when the latter are put upon the same foot-
 “ ing with the former. To rear a child in *London* till he could be
 “ serviceable, would cost much dearer, than to buy one, of the same
 “ age, from *Scotland* or *Ireland*, where he had been raised in a cottage,
 “ covered with rags, and fed on oatmeal and potatoes. Those who
 “ had slaves, therefore, in all the richer and more populous coun-
 “ tries, would discourage the pregnancy of the females, and either
 “ prevent or destroy the birth; the human species would perish in
 “ those places where it ought to increase the fastest; and a perpet-
 “ ual recruit be needed, from all the poorer, and more desert pro-
 “ vinces. Such a continued drain would tend mightily, to depopulate
 “ the state, and render great cities ten times more destructive than
 “ with us, where every man is master of himself, and provides for
 “ his children, from the powerful instinct of nature, not the calcula-
 “ tions of sordid interest*.”

These reflections furnish a key, that enables us to comprehend how it happens, that there is so great an annual demand for slaves in the West India islands. A stock of slaves is considered in the same light as a stock of cattle; the principles of rural economy, and the calculations of loss and gain, are more considered, and have greater influence, with respect to them, than the precepts of morality, and the principles of christianity. The planters reason thus with themselves—Provisions, clothing, lodging, attendance, labour—all are dear. We may purchase an adult slave, fit for labour, for a less sum than it would cost to rear him.—You yourself state †, that there is an annual diminution of the number of slaves; which must be the case, since, as you say, notwithstanding the yearly recruit by importation, the farms are still understocked; and you confess, that it must

* Hume's Essays, Vol. I. p. 420.

† Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

be frankly admitted, that slavery, in its mildest form, is unfriendly to population. Hence you draw an argument against the abolition of the slave trade; but, in my mind, this consideration, if duly weighed, furnishes an unanswerable plea against its continuance. What must be that condition of life, if life it may be called, which counteracts all the propensities of nature, all the genial influence of a warm and benignant climate!

You will seek to account for this lamentable waste of the human species, this tremendous and incessant depopulation amongst the unhappy *negroes*, from causes independent of excessive labour or severe treatment.—Not a third of the slaves imported are women, as appears by your statement. Whether this proceeds from choice or necessity, I know not; war and delinquency, as you observe, find fewer victims among the softer kind; and on this principle you would account for the redundancy of males. But war and delinquency, on your own statement, furnish but a small proportion of the slaves, which come to market. We must account for this fact, then, in some other way. The assortment of any vendible thing brought to market will be always determined by the wishes and demands of the buyers. The greatest possible quantity of immediate labour, not the increase of his breed of slaves, will be the object of the planter; of course, he will seek adult males in the market*, to the exclusion of women and children; at least, he will give a decided preference to the former. The direct contrary of this must happen at a *Circassian* slave market, and for an obvious reason. Hence it appears why (independent of other reasons) a smaller number of female negroes are purchased by the slave buyers. And as the more susceptible minds and feebler frames of women must render them more sensible of the horrors of their condition, and less able to encounter the hard-

* It is shocking, as Mr. *Hume* observes, to be obliged to speak thus of the human species. But such are the language and principles of the slave trade.

ships and misery of a voyage on board a slave ship, a larger proportion of the weaker sex will perish during the passage.

From this statement it follows, that two thirds of the negro men must be doomed to celibacy, in addition to all their other miseries. The conjugal union sweetens all the enjoyments, and alleviates all the bitterness of life; but it is peculiarly necessary to render the condition of the poor tolerable, and to prevent gross licentiousness and debauchery among the mean and uneducated. A partner in labour—a confidante in sorrow—a nurse in sickness—who but a wife will adhere to the indigent and outcast? I must consider this solitary doom of a great majority of the negroes as among the prime severities of their fate.

This great redundancy of males among the *negro* slaves does not operate only to prevent the men, who are deprived of female partners, from continuing their species, but is a fatal impediment to the fertility of the women. “The consequence of the redundancy of “males,” say you *, “is shocking licentiousness and profligacy; “among the women (who are exposed to temptations which they “cannot resist) barrenness, frequent abortion, and want of mater- “nal tenderness to their children.”

The number of negro slaves in the West India islands belonging to the *English* may, on a rough calculation, be half a million †. The fe-

* Vol. II.

† The number of negroes in the British West Indies are stated to be as follows :

In Jamaica about	_____	_____	_____	_____	250,000
Barbadoes	_____	_____	_____	_____	63,000
Grenada	_____	_____	_____	_____	24,000
St. Vincent	_____	_____	_____	_____	11,853
Dominica	_____	_____	_____	_____	15,000
St. Christopher	_____	_____	_____	_____	26,000
Antigua	_____	_____	_____	_____	37,808
Montserrat, &c.	_____	_____	_____	_____	10,000
					<hr/> 437,661
					males

See Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. I. under the heads of the respective islands.

males make only one third of the whole number of negroes imported. A promiscuous intercourse with the other sex prevents many of the women from becoming breeders. Suppose, on these accounts, that only one tenth of the negro slaves are women that continue the breed—there are fifty thousand females; a sufficient number, surely, to maintain the stock of slaves, without resorting to importation, were marriages encouraged among those poor people; were any pains taken to correct their licentiousness, and maintain regularity of manners among them; and any reasonable attention bestowed on the preservation of their offspring. But the melancholy truth is, that while, as I said before, a full grown negro can be purchased at less cost than he can be reared, very few negro infants (comparatively speaking) will be born, and of those few a small portion, indeed, will attain to maturity.

In the usual course of population, the number of births is to the whole number of the inhabitants of any country as one to thirty-five. Under the peculiar circumstances of the negroes, the births must bear a yet smaller proportion to the whole number. Let us suppose them to be as one to fifty, there will be ten thousand births; which added to the number of negroes imported, give a yearly accession of fifty thousand to the existing stock of slaves; and yet, it appears that their number, instead of daily increasing, as one might expect, is rather on the decline; and the farms are understocked. How this happens, it is not difficult to conceive. I shall not make the reflections on this statement that the subject naturally suggests; but, surely, it is worthy the consideration of an enlightened nation, that values itself on its humanity, to try whether this enormous prodigality of rational existence may not be avoided, or at least retrenched.

As a sample of the cruel and injudicious manner in which the unfortunate *negroes* are treated, and of the little attention which is paid to their health, their preservation, or their wants, I shall advert to a

fact, which is stated in your book *. The negroes are subject to a certain malady called *mal d'estomac*, or the stomach evil; they become dropfical, and complain of a constant uneasiness in the stomach, for which they find a temporary relief in eating some kind of earth. “ I have heard of owners and managers so savage and ignorant to attempt the cure by severe punishments, considering dirt-eating, not as a malady, but a crime. (You hope) that this race of tyrants is extinct,” but you do not speak, as if such were the case.

I shall not multiply instances of cruelty and brutality, or enlarge on the spectacle of human creatures driven to their task with the scourge, worn out and fainting, under continued and excessive toil; these subjects have been sufficiently detailed by preceding writers. I proceed to another circumstance of wretchedness in the condition of the unhappy *negroes*.—No care is taken to instruct them in the principles of morality, or to lead them, by the mild and patient arts of persuasion, to a knowledge of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION. Nothing of this kind has been attempted, generally or in a legislative manner; and as to the endeavours of a few well-meaning and pious christians, they are too inconsiderable, and too confined in their operation, to form an exception to the position †. If, instead of treating the *negroes* as brute beasts, with respect both to their bodies and their minds, some pains were employed in civilizing and instructing them, the same degree of labour, which is now extorted from sullen and reluctant dispondency, by the terrors of punishment, would be most cheerfully performed from a sense of duty. The

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† Number of converted negroes in	Antigua	————	————	5,465
	St. Kitts	————	————	80
	Barbadoes, and Jamaica	————	————	100
	St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. Jan	————	————	10,000
	Surinam	————	————	400

Yet I would by no means be thought to undervalue the pious labours of the society for advancing christian knowledge.

rude minds of the slaves would be rescued from the terrific and domineering influence of forcerers and necromancers, and the belief in spells and incantations, which, as you state, make such deplorable ravages among them. Believe me, the progress of knowledge, and the propagation of christianity, would be more effectual, than a thousand sanguinary statutes, to deliver the negroes from the destructive consequences of *Obeah* practice*.

You yourself seem to feel the disregard of religion and morality, which appears in the management of the negroes; and with respect to one particular circumstance, the neglect of the sabbath, you express yourself in a manner, which does honour to your heart.—“ A third measure has been recommended, of less doubtful efficacy; it is, to render the sabbath, what it ought to be, a day of rest and religious improvement; to which end, the markets of Sundays ought to be suppressed. **THEY ARE A DISGRACE TO A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY.** And if a market is found absolutely necessary to encourage the *negroes* in labouring for themselves, some other day, once a fortnight, may be appropriated for the purpose †.” But, notwithstanding your eulogium on the mild and humane treatment, which the slaves experience, it appears by your own confession, that so far from the prevalence of a merciful and humane spirit, such is the unrelenting avarice, and such the cruel short-sighted policy of the planters, that this alteration, though pointed out by morality and religion, and even suggested by prudence, is objected to, and would be universally opposed, as depriving the owners of twenty-six days labour in the year of the whole community ‡.

I come now to what you allow to be a cruel hardship in the

* See an account of *Obeah* practice, and the ravage it makes among the slaves. Edw. Vol. II.

Obeah practice is made felony of death:

† See Edwards's Hist. Vol. II.

‡ Vol. II.

condition of the *negroes*, their liability to be sold by creditors, and made subject, in a course of administration by executors, to payment of all debts, both of simple contract and specialty; you describe the misery consequent on this regulation, in such pathetic terms, that I shall transcribe the passage*. “ In a few years a good negro gets comfortably established, has built himself a house, obtained a wife, and begins to see a young family rising about him. His provision ground, the creation of his own industry, affords him, not only support, but the means of adding something to the mere necessaries of life. In this situation he is seized on by the sheriff’s officer, forceably separated from his wife and children, dragged to public auction, purchased by a stranger, and perhaps sent to end his miserable existence in the mines of *Mexico*, secluded from the light of heaven; and all this, without any crime or demerit on his part, real or pretended. He is punished because his master is unfortunate. I do not believe, that any case of force or fraud in *Africa* can be productive of greater misery; neither can it be urged, that, like some unauthorized cases of cruelty in the West Indies, it happens but seldom: unhappily, it occurs every day; and under the present system, will continue to occur. This grievance, so remorseless and tyrannical in its principle, and so dreadful in its effects, though not originally created, is now upheld and confirmed, by a *British* act of Parliament, procured by, and passed for the benefit of *British* creditors. And I blush to add, that its motives and origin have sanctified the measure even in the opinion of men, who are among the loudest declaimers against slavery, and the slave trade. Thus the odious severity of the Roman law, which declared sentient beings to be *inter res*, is revived and perpetuated in a country that pretends to christianity.”—Your indignation is just; your sentiments are liberal

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

and

and pious ; but I am sorry to find so much inconsistency in the compass of a few pages.—How can I reconcile the foregoing extract with your assertions, that the *negroes* are treated with mildness and humanity ? or with your urgent pleas for the necessity of continuing the slave trade ? Is it not a necessary condition of slavery, that the slave must be *inter res*, as much a vendible chattle as a horse or an ox ?

You reprobate the *English* statute in question ; but this statute is a necessary consequence of the existence of slavery. It is not introductory of any new law, or creative of any new rights, but merely explanatory of the old. While slaves continue to be such, the maxims and principles of the law must embrace them, and operate upon them according to their condition. As long as men continue to be as much goods and chattles as a herd of cattle, or household furniture, they must be subject to all the maxims, rules, and regulations, that govern the possession, or the transfer of moveable property. It would certainly be gross injustice toward the planters, as well as a great hardship on them, if they should be debarred from selling what they are allowed to buy. You very justly observe, “ that the state
 “ of the negro should not be left to the capricious mercy, or variable
 “ temperament, of any man, but placed on a footing of permanent
 “ and known security, to bring with it content ; or else the
 “ slave must be exposed to all the horrors of fear and uncertainty—
 “ this hour, the property of a merciful and benignant owner ; the
 “ next, liable, by his death or insolvency, to be sold to a brute and
 “ a tyrant.”—Strange, that you should not perceive, that the certainty of evil, and uncertainty of all good, are such necessary and inseparable consequences, indeed, so much the very essence of slavery, that it is impossible to engraft on that condition any change or regulation, that will bring to the miserable bondman any permanent or known security. In obtaining that he must cease to be a slave.

Whether

Whether ten hours in twenty-four, during which the slaves are compelled by the terrors of the scourge to toil, without remission, in a sultry relaxing climate, be a reasonable and moderate period or not, and whether such a measure of toil, daily continued, must not ultimately exhaust the strength long before it's natural decline, and considerably shorten the existence of a human creature, is more than I can presume to calculate. But I see plainly, that no attempt is made to ascertain what humanity may reasonably demand, and a well-disposed slave freely perform; no regulation is adopted, which might vary the task whether as to exertion or duration, according to the natural strength of the individual, or the occasional influence of indisposition, which, without confining the wretch to the bed of sickness, may incapacitate him for labour, both by depression of spirit and diminution of muscular force. The overseer's whip knows no discretion, and often does it's operation on the fainting victim convert a slight and curable malady into an incurable and mortal disease. The only apportionment of toil to strength, or distinction of ability to labour, is what results from the general division of the *negroes* into three classes—grown men—women and boys—and children—a classification much too general for the purposes of humanity in the equitable distribution of toil. According to this comprehensive division, there is one common measure of labour for all the individuals in a class; and we may presume, that the standard of imputed strength, by which all are tasked to work, is not taken from the weakest among them. You yourself seem to feel the cruelty and injustice of this indiscriminate exaction of labour, this inhuman disregard to the physical powers of the unfortunate individual. You yourself seem to acknowledge, that, in order to render the condition of the *negroes* tolerable, labour should be rendered certain and determinate, and the task should be proportioned to the strength of the labourer; but, at the same time, you frankly confess, that you think any regulation for this purpose impracticable. Undoubtedly it

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is while slavery continues; the owner having purchased an absolute dominion over the person of his slave, a dominion guaranteed by the law of his country, in every thing short of life and limb, considers himself as invested with a right to dispose of his time and labour, and assign him employment, uncontrolled by any thing but his own discretion or humanity; this right he justly supposes to be inseparable from the enjoyment of his service, and would exclaim loudly against any attempt to abridge or regulate it by law, as an infringement of his property. Such a regulation would, in fact, afford no real protection or benefit to the slave, and would involve his owner in daily and insuperable difficulties. It would engage the negro in fruitless resistance and contention with his master, it would diffuse a spirit of discontent and disobedience, and would make every day's task a source of litigation before the magistrate. It is freedom alone, excited by the hopes of gain, that finds in the voluntary exertions of industry the maximum of what the strength and faculties of the human creature can perform.

To recapitulate, in a few words, your statement of the situation of the *negroes* in the *British* islands—They are torn (many of them by force or fraud) from their native land, their homes, their friends, and connexions; they are borne in fetters, without prospect of return, to a foreign country, endure great miseries during the voyage, and are sold like cattle on their arrival; they are driven to their daily labour with the scourge, and no care is taken to proportion the measure of the task to the degree of strength; their minds are neglected as much as their persons are coerced; they are, for the most part, debarred of that happiness which results from a virtuous union of the sexes; their situation for good or ill is wholly precarious, depending on the temper and disposition of their owner; and if any drop of comfort should chance to be mingled in their cup of affliction, it is liable every moment to be dashed from their lips, while gall unmixed is substituted in its place by the death or insolvency of a kind and merciful master, and the

the being suddenly transferred to a brutal unrelenting tyrant ; and as an unanswerable proof of the misery of the wretched slaves, we find that their condition is such as to counteract the strongest natural propensities ; and that, notwithstanding a very great yearly importation of negroes, their number, instead of increasing, is rather on the decline.

You allow the fact of this diminution in the population of the negroes in the *British* islands, but you assert, that human nature must be in very favourable circumstances to increase it's numbers. The direct contrary of this is the truth ; it requires some uncommon circumstances of misery and hardship, some very extraordinary exertion of cruel and unnatural policy, to counteract the genial principle, and prevent the increase of human nature *.

The *Jews* multiplied under the *Egyptian* bondage, the *Spartan* helots multiplied, the *British* villeins multiplied, the northern *serfs* multiply ; no very favourable situations theirs, but wretched, on the contrary, in an extreme degree. “ In the ordinary course of things, human nature exerts its powers to multiply itself in an astonishing manner. In every state, the population of which does not increase, or increases slowly, and is not proportioned to the natural fecundity of the species, you may justly affirm, that there is some defect, as great as the difference, between the actual population as it is, and that which it ought to be, had not the operation of this depopulating cause taken place †.” It follows, that the slavery of the negroes is more cruel and more destructive in its influence, than that of the Jews or helots of old, of the ancient *English* villein, or of the peasant in *Poland* or *Muscovy* at this day. The state of marriage is so attractive, that, unless there is an absolute impossibility of supplying the wants to which it gives birth, every citizen finds himself naturally drawn to it ; the human heart, formed with benevolent sympathies

* See Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† See Encyclopédie, mot Population.

and social passions, feels a dreary void within, and languishes for an object of permanent attachment: what shall we say then of the heartless and unrelenting regimen, that directly proscribes all the best propensities and kindest dispositions in the heart of man?

But the negroes, it should seem, from your account of them, are inferior beings; they are dull and intractable. You dwell on their supposed inferior nature and blameable propensities, their slowness of apprehension, their loquacity and disposition to thieving and lying, as a justification of the severities exercised on them, and a pretence for retaining them in slavery. All this, I must own, is rather insinuated, than directly asserted by you; but I think it is fair to conclude from your manner of speaking, that you are persuaded, and would persuade your readers, that were freedom bestowed on the *negroes* in our islands, their intellectual powers are so confined, and their habits of life and manners so depraved and vitiated, that they would be incapable of making the right use of the vast blessing. A latent self-love is apt to infect and colour the reasonings, not only of the vulgar, but even of the enlightened and philosophic mind. By this internal flatterer we are insensibly led to take our standard of excellence from our own qualities both natural and acquired; and to view, with dislike and contempt, those who materially differ from us in either; nay, to consider human creatures in such a predicament, as a race of beings inferior to ourselves. On such a mistaken principle has the learned and liberal professor *Robertson* endeavoured to justify the unprovoked aggression of the *Europeans* in the conquest of the new world, and to palliate, if not defend, the cruelties committed by them in the prosecution of their design.

It is well known that oppression and severe treatment will degrade the nature and embrate the faculties. The agonizing reveries of hopeless sorrow and wild distraction, or the sullen insensibility of deep despair, reckless of the future, may appear stupidity to the undistinguishing eye and unrelenting mind of the planter. It is not easy to

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appreciate

appreciate the talents, or the moral qualities, whether good or ill, of people with whose language and manners we have little or no acquaintance, and whom, besides, we despise too much to bestow on them the degree of attention requisite for making the estimate. A prejudiced or superficial observer will impute many things to the *negro* as instances of depravity or want of capacity, that are, in truth, only the inevitable result of the difference of manners and religious institutes of the less improved state of society, or of the imperfect progress of arts and manufactures in their own country. Though you seem to be apprized of the difficulty of speaking of the characters and dispositions of the negroes, you allow that many of them possess estimable qualities: the *Coromantins*, in particular, are actuated by a high sense of honour, and an intrepid and daring courage, which, no doubt, are connected with other manly virtues. The profound veneration for old age*, and the fond attachment to *ship-mates*, or those who have been imported in the same vessel from *Africa*, are favourable traits in the character of these unfortunate people. “ Slavery is certainly a situation
 “ that necessarily suppresses many of the best affections of the human
 “ heart; if it calls forth any latent virtues, they are those of sympathy and compassion, towards persons in the same condition of
 “ life.—Of the miserable people thus condemned to exile and servitude, though born in various and widely separated countries, it is
 “ not easy to discriminate the peculiar manners and native propensities. The similar and uniform system of life to which they are
 “ all reduced; the few opportunities, and the little encouragement, that are given them for mental improvement, are circumstances that
 “ necessarily induce a predominant and prevailing cast of character

* Neither is the regard thus displayed towards the aged confined to outward ceremonies and titles of respect. It is founded on active principles of native benevolence, furnishing one of the few exceptions to their general unrelenting and selfish character. Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

“ and

“ and disposition *. The day (says *Homer*) that makes a man a slave
 “ takes away half his value, and, in fact, he loses every impulse to
 “ action, except that of fear †.” I am apt to think that the observa-
 tions which go in derogation of the moral or intellectual qualities of
 the negro, of his selfishness, cruelty, and revengeful disposition, are
 chiefly taken from a review of those who have been habituated to
 slavery, or born into that unhappy condition. The stupidity and in-
 capacity of the *negroes*, and their vicious and depraved propensities, may
 be made a pretext for retaining them in captivity, and treating them
 like brute beasts ; but I must say, that it appears to me rather unjust
 and absurd, to make the very blemishes and defects which the condi-
 tion of slavery either creates or augments, the arguments for retain-
 ing those miserable creatures in a state so unfriendly to all goodness,
 and so degrading to human nature. Slavery, make the best of it, de-
 bases the mind, and disfigures the human character. But what is the
 slavery of the *negro*? Compare his condition with that of a slave
 among the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans* : they educated their slaves
 with care ; they taught them useful arts, and enlightened them with
 science ; and, finally, they cheered and supported them in their bondage
 with the prospect of manumission.

You confess, with a candour that pervades your whole work, that
 you were once of opinion, “ that it became this great and renowned
 “ nation, instead of regulating her conduct by that of other states, to
 “ set a laudable example to them, by an immediate and unqualified
 “ suppression of this reprobated commerce ; and I should still main-
 “ tain and avow the same sentiments (say you †), were I not, on better
 “ information, led to suspect that the means proposed are not adequate

* The negroes when invested with command, give full play to their revengeful passions,
 and exercise all the wantonness of cruelty without restraint or remorse. Their treatment
 of cattle under their direction is brutal beyond belief, &c. Hist. of the West Indies,
 Vol. II.

† See Hist of the West Indies, Vol. II

† Ibid.

“ to the end. I fear that a direct and sudden abolition of the slave
 “ trade, by one nation only, will not serve the purposes of humanity
 “ in *Africa*; and I am fully convinced that such a measure will tend
 “ to aggravate, in a high degree, the miseries of a great majority of
 “ the *negroes* already in the *West Indies*, whose decreasing population
 “ is at present unavoidable, and who therefore, unless recruited by
 “ supplies from *Africa*, may find their labours increase as their
 “ numbers diminish.” And why is the decreasing population of the
negroes at present unavoidable?—Why—but from the unexampled
 misery of their condition.—How long shall we offer human hecatombs
 to the cruel prejudices of avarice? What institutions are these that
 annually, like a devouring and insatiable gulf, demand the destruction
 of fifty thousand helpless, unoffending human creatures?—What
 institutions are these that annually destroy by want, by toil, by sick-
 nefs, by sorrow, by torture, and every species of cruelty, a full tenth
 of the whole *negro* population of the *British West Indies*?—Humanity
 shudders as we read of the spectacles of gladiators among the Ro-
 mans; we turn, with abhorrence, from the detail of the massacres and
 cruelties of *France*: but what are these compared with the cold
 blooded rage of avarice, the sanguinary atrocity of law, that sanctions
 murder and calls it policy; that lavishes the germ of existence; that de-
 stroys the human species both root and branch; that perpetuates
 massacre and extermination from year to year, and from age to age,
 without hope or end, and calls it necessity!

But you doubt whether a discontinuance of the slave trade on the
 part of *Great Britain*, other nations continuing to purchase slaves as
 usual, would contribute to remedy the miseries of the unhappy *negroes*.
 I am afraid your reasonings on this head will not have much weight,
 except with those who wish to be satisfied by them. You say*, that
 should the slave trade be abolished on our part, one or other of these

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

consequences would follow—either the *French*, the *Dutch*, and other maritime nations of *Europe*, would avail themselves of the opportunity by seizing on what we surrender, and increase their trade in proportion to the increased supply. Or, having the choice and refusal of 38,000 slaves annually, more than they have at present, they will be harder to please, and only purchase prime slaves. The old, the very young, the sickly, and the feeble will be rejected on account of this redundancy in the market. “ Behold, then, an excess of 38,000 of “ these miserable people thrown on the market *.” And you give us room to suppose that, not finding purchasers, they will either be put to death immediately, by their owners, or left to perish by famine.—And does a milder doom await those who do find purchasers ?

Let us examine this reasoning more minutely.—In the first place, *Great Britain* must continue the slave trade ; for if she does not, it will pass into the hands of other nations to our detriment, and their emolument.—This topic fairly gives up the morality of the practice and the honour of the nation.—The practice, we grant, is iniquitous, and the cause of exquisite misery to multitudes of our fellow creatures ; but why relinquish it in a fit of mistaken tenderness ? Should we do so, the poor natives of *Africa* will not profit by our good intentions, since, whether the buyers are many or few, the slave market will be equally supplied, and other maritime nations will profit by our squeamishness ; and the same acts of oppression, violence, and fraud, which are said to be committed by princes on their subjects, or by individuals on each other, for the purpose of procuring slaves for sale, will exist, as usual, without regulation or restraint. Some instances of these crimes may still exist ; but will they be as numerous and frequent ? If you answer in the affirmative, you must maintain that crimes will be equally frequent, whether the incentive to commit them be great or small. I cannot suppose that the legislature

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

would

would be so blind and inconsiderate as to prohibit the continuance of the slave trade by *British* subjects in *British* bottoms, while they left the importation of slaves to our colonies free and open for the ships of other nations.—No—I take it for granted, that not only the carrying of slaves in *British* vessels, but the future importation of them into our colonies by any means, must be understood to be prohibited, else the interference of the legislature would be nugatory. See then how the account stands on your statement.

Total number of slaves annually exported from Africa	74,000
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Of these different nations take as follows—The English	38,000
French	20,000
Dutch	4,000
Danes	2,000
Portuguese	10,000
	<hr/>
	74,000*
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So that you see considerably more than one half of the whole export of slaves from *Africa* is made by the *British* alone, and that the *British* have been in the habit of exporting more slaves from *Africa* (whether for their own use or to supply other people) than all the remaining nations of *Europe* put together, when the demand of those nations for slaves was greatest. But we are to consider how the matter stands at present: the *French* and the *Danes* no longer import slaves, we are therefore to subduct 22,000 from the sum total above given. The residue is 52,000; of which the *English* export from *Africa* 38,000, that is to say, nearly three parts in four of the whole amount †! Yet you contend that the slave market would continue the same as before, and the same cruel iniquitous means be used to supply

* See Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† Ibid.

it, though the demand for slaves would be diminished in the proportion of 38 to 14 by the abolition of that cruel commerce on the part of *Britain*.

Your reasoning supposes the slave market governed by principles different from those that govern every other market in the world, and that the diminishing the number of buyers, or, in other words, the call for the commodity, would not diminish the quantity of the commodity brought to market. Demand and supply are commonly supposed to be reciprocal. The incentive to the bringing of any commodity to market is the price it bears, and the price is regulated by the demand. You yourself admit that the prices on the coast have been known to vary, as the market is more or less plentifully supplied * ; and yet, in contradiction to this statement of your own, you suppose the *African* slave merchant so stupid, and devoid of all observation and reflection, as not to know one of the most obvious truths, a truth forced on his mind by daily experience—that demand and supply grow up together, and continue to regulate and support each other. But these you say “ are the arrangements of *well informed and civilized men.*” In my mind they are among the very first and most obvious principles of barter ; and to be known, require no deep or philosophical research, but the simple existence of a commercial intercourse. I cannot, therefore, agree with you in your conclusion, that “ so long as *any* European ships create a market, whether the price of slaves be high or low, it can hardly be doubted that wars between nations for the sole purpose of obtaining slaves, and all the other enormities consequent from this abhorred commerce, will be as frequent as ever †.” I will grant you that the reduction of the number of slaves brought to market will not be instantaneous, or, at first, in pro-

* See Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† Ibid. Where the opinion of admiral *Edwards*, on this subject, is quoted.

portion to the diminution of the number of buyers; but it will certainly follow it, and gradually overtake it, so as in a short time to be exactly proportionate to that diminution. You state that the slave market is partly supplied by prisoners taken in war, and criminals condemned to death or slavery by the civil magistrate; but you add, that the number of persons in these predicaments is very inadequate to an annual demand of 74,000 slaves, the remainder is made up by innocent victims dragged from the bosom of peaceful repose, and torn from their homes and dearest connexions. Reduce the yearly exportation of slaves to 14,000, it is possible, nay highly probable, that such a demand as that may be fully supplied by prisoners of war and offenders against the laws of their respective communities; and we should have the consolation of thinking, that none were doomed to exile and chains, but such as had commuted that destiny with a miserable death at the hand of their enemies; or such as had merited misfortune by their own misconduct and crimes.

But still you would persuade us that the voice of humanity pleads for a continuance of the slave trade. "Behold (say you) 38,000 of those miserable people thrown on the market*." And you give us room to suppose, that they would be either murdered by the *African* proprietors disappointed of purchasers, and weary of the trouble and charge of keeping them and maintaining them, or left to perish miserably by famine. If this should happen at all, which I must doubt, at least to the extent which you seem to apprehend, it could not happen more than once, for the desertion of the buyers would certainly and speedily occasion a contraction of the market by the absence of the sellers; whereas the destruction of the human species by the continuance of the slave trade must be hopeless and uninterrupted. As to the miseries which would result to the slaves already in the *West Indies*, from the circumstance of the farms being already understocked; I do not

* See Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

see why they should follow as necessary consequences. Let the cultivation be contracted for a time; give the negro some respite; wait till the population fully answers the demand of agriculture: this may cause a temporary loss to the planter, but he will be repaid tenfold. And what are temporary losses to the existence of myriads?

I have been unawares betrayed into great prolixity, but your work is written with so much ability, and so highly recommended by the graces of composition, that it must universally command respect and attention; my solicitude to answer some passages that appeared to me to have a cruel tendency, and, at the same time, to admit of an easy answer even from so weak a reasoner as myself, has led me, I fear, into much unnecessary repetition. As I designed an appeal to the candour of a feeling and enlightened mind, I have purposely declined all resort to any other source of information than what your book affords. You seem to deprecate the discussion of this subject as unwise and dangerous, and are apprehensive that the advocates for humanity trampled under foot in the person of the miserable *negro*, may cause the destruction both of him and his master, by ill-timed and injudicious efforts in a virtuous cause. You apprehend, that “by exciting
 “among the slaves a spirit of discontent and disobedience, they may
 “compel, in many cases, the benevolent man to withhold the hand
 “which otherwise would be stretched out for their relief; and thus,
 “by rendering their masters odious in their eyes, those unfortunate
 “people, apprized as they are, that they are held in a subjection which
 “is reprobated in the mother country, may be led to make a general
 “struggle for freedom, through desolation and blood*.” This manner of reasoning, or rather of talking, would preclude all discussion, all examination of the situation and sufferings of the *negroes*, from an apprehension that the investigation might, in the end, come to the knowledge of the poor victims who are the subject of it, and teach

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

them to know and resent their grievances. As if they could not know, or in their hearts resent the calamities of their dreadful situation, until they were suggested to them from *England!* Strange, indeed, if a *negro* fainting with toil, torn to pieces with stripes and bleeding at every pore, is first taught by an *English* declaimer or writer of pamphlets to think himself a miserable creature, and to wish for deliverance.

This sort of argument would preclude the fair discussion, not only of this question, but of every question that involves the rights, the happiness, or the misery, of the mass of the people. If we are to prohibit free inquiry into the state of any body of men, and interdict every movement and every attempt towards the redress of their grievances and removal of their complaints (though it is confessed that they are unhappy), from an apprehension that the many, if their complaints should be attended to, and if any steps should be taken to remove or alleviate their miseries, might throw off all restraint and anticipate redress by force and violence, all grievance, all misfeasance, all tyranny must be perpetual; and if they should be perpetual, it is not their nature to remain stationary; they increase and spread, they double and redouble, in a series of progression far exceeding the geometrical. Untenable, indeed, is the doctrine, that shrinks from a free examination. Unstable and precarious is the authority, or administration, that subsists by suppressing free discussion, by stifling the voice of truth, and extinguishing the light of fair examination. These are the cowardly resources of a moment, unworthy, as they are weak; it is in vain to fly to the shades of night for protection in error or injustice; truth will force herself on the minds of men; sooner or later she will be heard, and must prevail. To what purpose should we reprobate in *Great Britain* the agitation of this great question, a question on which humanity has already decided? our silence and reserve will not chain the secret thoughts of the *negro*. The die is cast,
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the *French* have actually emancipated their slaves; their countryman sees them with arms in the pride of war, fighting in the cause of freedom: thus is the subject brought home to his door; it is forced on his observation, it is feelingly impressed, by the example of his neighbours, by the exhortations that resound from island to island. While we yet speak, perhaps the subject of these pages is become a vain speculation, and we have no islands in the *West Indies* to govern, no *negroes* to emancipate. We cannot suppose the *negroes* to be utterly void of feeling; they are, at present, held by the ties of fear alone. Feeble ties! a moment may dissolve them. They are, perhaps, ere this, dissolved. Hasty measures, you say, however humane in appearance, and plausible in theory, may produce the most calamitous of all contests; a *bellum servile* which will probably never end, but in the extermination of either the whites or the blacks. Yet hasty measures seem to be forced on us by the press of circumstances and the rapid emergency of the times; and if there is a danger of a *bellum servile* from the adoption of hasty measures, much greater danger is there from our refusal to adopt any in the present conjuncture.

I cannot perceive why an emancipation of the slaves, judiciously conducted, should involve both the slave and his owner in one common destruction; no such dreadful consequences have ensued in those parts of America where the emancipation of the negroes has been adopted, no such dreadful consequences are apprehended by the *Danes* from the emancipation of their *negroes*; and yet they enjoy the wisest government, perhaps (*our own excepted*), that modern times have witnessed. But, supposing that the sudden and complete emancipation of the *negroes* would be really attended with danger; or the outcry and alarm, which such a measure would excite, should prove too loud and formidable for the legislature to encounter them; I am convinced there can be no fair and substantial objection to a present mitigation, and to the progressive abolition of the destructive, cruel, and unchristian system that now prevails, by totally and immediately

prohibiting the importation of slaves from *Africa*, and by diffusing partial freedom among the slaves already in the *West Indies*, in such a gentle and judicious manner as may prepare the whole body to expect the mighty blessing in peaceful submission, and, at the same time, form and qualify them to enjoy it with sobriety and good order. Let those who have faithfully served their masters seven years; let the parents of three children born in marriage; let those who obtain certificates from the ministers of the Gospel of a proficiency in the knowledge of the christian religion, be manumitted; and let the children of *negroes* born in matrimony be declared free: such institutions would cheer these unfortunate people with a prospect of freedom, though partial and remote, and, at the same time would hold forth premiums for sobriety, good conduct, and submission to the laws.

But these evils we have reviewed, however deplorable, are without remedy; for the farms are already weak-handed, and understocked, and the *negro* population decreases daily; and should the importation of slaves to supply the greedy stream of vital consumption be prohibited, the same portion of labour, the same galling tasks, which are now with difficulty performed by twenty slaves, will fall to the share of, and be exacted (with the scourge no doubt) from seventeen. So abuse must engender abuse, and cruelty must sanction cruelty for ever, in a course of horrid reciprocation. But will it not be worthy of the magnanimity and justice of the legislature to cut this knot, if they cannot untie it? May not this excessive cultivation beyond the honest means of the planter, and what humanity tolerates, be restrained by law? and may not some measures be devised by the legislature of GREAT BRITAIN, and enforced by the governments of the respective islands, to restrain the unrelenting and improvident avarice of the planter, thus prodigal of human life, and to proportion the quantity of labour to the strength of the labourers?—But the immediate occupier or cultivator of the farm is often obliged, by contract, to remit a certain annual quantity of produce to the actual proprietor or mortgagee,

mortgagee, in GREAT BRITAIN, under whom he derives*.—Here is the rub—here we may find the true source of most of the giant evils that overwhelm the miserable *negroes*, and the true cause why those evils are so clamorous and inveterate against all inquiry or cure.

The native planters who are born among their slaves, and many of them suckled at the breasts of their females, must feel their minds softened in some degree towards them, and must learn insensibly to consider them as their fellow creatures, if not as their brethren; they are acquainted, from their childhood, with the manners of the *negroes*, their customs, their prejudices, and their propensities; and will know how to present to their minds the most powerful motives of cheerful exertion and voluntary labour, and they will take an interest in the perpetuity of their stock of slaves. But a great proportion of the estates in the *West Indies* belong to inhabitants of *Great Britain*, who have never visited their plantations, and are wholly devoid of the requisites I have mentioned; and which, appealing either to policy or humanity, might induce them to become merciful and indulgent masters. Their object is to draw the largest possible revenue from their possessions in the *West Indies*. They know no rule, but the compendious one of force; they are incapable of applying any motive or incentive of action but terror. Their plantations are committed to the care of penurious, griping, and sordid undertakers; of outcasts, perhaps, and felons; of agents equally narrow in their views, and savage and brutal in their dispositions; they require no other test of the abilities and good conduct of their managers, than the largeness and punctuality of their annual remittances. The condition of every estate which is the property of an absentee is usually wretched, and the peasantry belonging to it are in general oppressed and wretched. But how lamentable must the case be, where the owner of the estate is an absentee, and the most part of the estate itself consists in a stock of

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

Human creatures, who look to the mercy and discretion of a low born agent, a hireling manager, not for opulence, peace, and comfort merely, but for their very existence ?

Concerning * the *West India* planters, you say no blame can justly be imputed to them, as they are entirely innocent and ignorant of the manner in which the slave trade is conducted, and have no other concern therein than merely purchasing what *British* statutes have made objects of sale. Is this really the case ? I cannot, with you, think the planters altogether ignorant, and therefore must not hold them altogether innocent, of the manner in which the slave trade is conducted. But if they close their ears against the remonstrances of truth and compassion ; if they unite in a phalanx to stifle all inquiry into the condition of the negroes, all attempts to alleviate their sufferings, how can they be absolved at the bar of humanity ? “ But slavery (you observe) has prevailed in all ages of the world, and perhaps, like pain, poverty, sickness, sorrow, and all the other various calamities of our condition, it has been originally inwoven into the constitution of the world for purposes inscrutable to man †.” This is a concise mode of putting an end to all inquiry, and of reconciling us to all abuses, by laying the faults of our own institutions, and the effects of our own follies, passions, and vices, to the charge of the Author of our nature, and of the dispensations of Providence.

Such are the reflections which have suggested themselves to me from a perusal of your work ; I offer them to the world, such as they are, with despondency. I can scarcely expect success in pleading the cause of humanity at a time when cruel sentiments and sanguinary rage prevail. How should the distant groans of suffering *negroes* be noticed, when the cries of devoted myriads at our very doors pass unheard ? The human heart is steeled, the generation of the day retires from the sight and claims of misery into a proud and senseless apathy.

* Hist. of the West Indies, Vol. II.

† Ibid.

Millions of our countrymen, of the most industrious and valuable part of the community, are perishing around us in all the horrors of famine and despair; yet do we stop for a moment the career of pleasure, or the march of ambition, to contemplate or commiserate the deplorable spectacle? Our brave soldiers, our artificers, and our merchants, are devoted, and shall the slave hope for redress? The free, the opulent, the enlightened, and the virtuous, are vilified and oppressed; and shall the slave be liberated? The liberties of *Britons* are invaded, and shall liberty be imparted to *Africans*? Proscriptions, accusations, divisions, distractions, difficulties, distress, dismay, and debts, prevail at home; danger, calamity, discomfiture, and disgrace, abroad; and leave us little room for a care so trivial as that of the well or ill-being of half a million of footy *Africans*. Every hour, every moment brings on its wings—majestic Britain is in a new situation, all her energies called out to struggle for feverish existence, and has she leisure to regulate the feeble concerns of remote colonies? Yet, even in these unhappy times, it is a proud and boastful consolation to the honest and philanthropic mind, that it has borne witness to the truth; a consolation which shall not desert it in the great and awful scene, where human injustice shall be redressed, and human sufferings be forgotten.

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Jan. 10, 1795.