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THE  
HORRORS  
OF  
*NEGRO SLAVERY.*  
&c.

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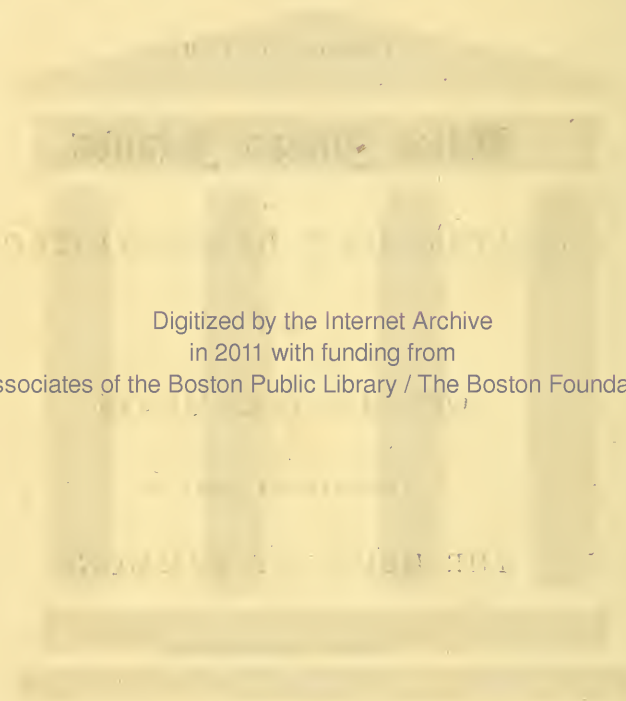
THE  
HORRORS  
OF THE  
*NEGRO SLAVERY*  
EXISTING IN OUR  
*West Indian Islands,*  
*IRREFRAGABLY DEMONSTRATED*  
FROM  
OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS  
RECENTLY PRESENTED TO  
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

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LONDON:  
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1805.

THE HORRORS OF NEGRO SLAVERY

BY JAMES O. WILSON



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THE  
H O R R O R S  
OF  
NEGRO SLAVERY,  
&c.

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IN the last Session of Parliament a variety of papers respecting the Slave Trade was laid on the table of the House of Commons, and among them, the following extract of a letter from Lord SEAFORTH, the Governor of Barbadoes, to Lord HOBART, dated at Barbadoes, the 18th March 1802, viz. “Your Lordship will observe in the last days proceedings of the Assembly, that *the majority of the House had taken considerable offence at a message of mine, recommending an act to be passed to make the murder of a Slave felony. At present the fine for the crime is only fifteen pounds currency, or ELEVEN POUNDS FOUR SHILLINGS STERLING.*”

It was difficult to conceive a stronger proof of the deplorably unprotected condition of the *Negro Slaves* in Barbadoes, the oldest and most civilized of our slave

colonies, than is furnished by the above official document. In a community where even the *life of a Negro slave* is estimated at the cheap rate of *eleven pounds four shillings sterling*, and where a proposition to raise its legal value to a price which may be less revolting to European feelings is resented as an affront by a grave legislative assembly; it would argue an utter ignorance of the nature of man, and of the principles by which his conduct is usually guided, to expect that the general treatment of Negro slaves should be humane and lenient. But we are not at present reduced to the necessity of inferring, by the aid of disputable analogies, the practical nature of the existing slavery, from the state of the laws respecting it. What might, last year, have been considered by some as matter of presumption merely, of presumption, however, sufficiently strong to remove all doubt from unprejudiced minds, is now matter of fact. We have now the practice of slavery so graphically described, in some further documents of unquestionable authority, as to supersede the necessity of reasoning, and to silence the most determined stickler for West Indian humanity.

On the 25th of February 1805, a number of additional papers respecting the Slave Trade was presented to the House of Commons by His Majesty. To these papers it is the purpose of this pamphlet to call the attention of the public, as exhibiting a picture of Negro bondage, with which every individual in the kingdom ought to be made fully acquainted, who has a heart to feel for the miseries of his fellow-creatures, or a voice to raise against that detestable traffic which is the main prop of colonial despotism.

The first thing which occurs in these papers particularly deserving of notice is a continuation of the corre-

spondence between Lord SEAFORTH and the Secretary of State. The following is a transcript of it, with the addition of a few notes intended to illustrate the text :

“ *Extract of a Letter from Lord Seaforth to the Earl Camden, dated Barbadoes, 13th November 1804.*

“ I also enclose four papers, numbered from number 1 to 4, containing, from different quarters, *reports on the horrid murders* I mentioned in some former letters; *they are selected from a great number, among which there is not one in contradiction of the horrible facts*, though several of the letters are very concise and defective: the truth is, that nothing has given me more trouble to get to the bottom of than these businesses, *so horridly absurd are the prejudices of the people* \*; however, a great part of my object is answered, by the alarm my interference has excited, and the attention it has called to the business; bills are already proposed to make murder felony in both the Council and the Assembly; but *I fear they will be thrown out for the present in the Assembly*; the Council are unanimous on the side of humanity.

“ *(President Ince’s Statement.)*

“ On the 10th day of April 1804, on my return to Enmore in the evening, I found Mr. Justice Walton and Mr. Harding, former manager of Prettejohn’s estate, and now the manager of the Society’s estate, attached to

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\* Not of one or two, or of a few individuals, but of THE PEOPLE.

the support of Codrington College. Mr. Walton told me that Mr. Harding had brought before him a man of the name of Henry Halls, a private soldier in the St. Michael's or Royal regiment, who had, in presence of Mr. Harding, in a most wanton, malicious manner, murdered a Negro woman, that he did not know personally, but had since heard she was the property of Mr. Clarke, the owner of the estate called Simmons's; that she was a valuable slave, and *had five or six children*. Mr. Walton said, that *Halls seemed to be very indifferent about the crime*, and that he had called upon me to know what was to be done with him, as Mr. Walton said, *in his situation as a Magistrate, the law of the island admitted him no jurisdiction or authority over him, and he did not consider he had a right to commit him to prison without my order\**. Mr. Harding then gave the following testimony: That he was returning from town, and just above the Line of Pilgrim he overtook several market Negroes, and this man, Halls, on the road; he did not know this man at the time, but he had his musket and bayonet fixed over his shoulder, and his regimentals, as returning from the alarm which had arisen that morning, and discharged at noon; that when he overtook this man it was not six o'clock in the evening; as he drew near him, he heard him muttering some words, and saw him run after some Negroes with his bayonet charged; that the woman was on the other side of the road still going up;

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\* What can more expressively shew the dreadful state of society which prevails in this island, than that a Magistrate should find himself without the power even of commitment in the case of a man apprehended in the very act of perpetrating a most foul and wanton murder?



and as he came up, this man, Halls, stopped until the woman came by, and immediately crossed the road, as *Halls made after the woman, and plunged the bayonet into her body, when the poor creature dropped, and without a groan expired.* He immediately went to him, and spoke harshly to him, and said, he ought to be hanged, for he never saw a more wicked, unprovoked murder, and that he would certainly carry him before a magistrate, and that he should be sent to gaol: and he said, 'FOR WHAT? KILLING A NEGRO\*?' On which he got assistance, and brought him to Mr. Walton the Magistrate, and that he, Mr. Harding, had accompanied Mr. Walton to me, to relate the fact. I told Mr. Walton that I regretted, with real concern, the deficiency in our law; but that there was a penalty due to the King † in such cases; and that, as Mr. Harding had sufficiently substantiated the fact, I would order him to be committed till he paid the forfeiture, or a suit should be commenced against him: accordingly he was sent to prison, where he now remains, and under arrest from Mr. Clarke's representatives, to be recovered according to law, and the King's fine, and will possibly be there for life, as I hear he is not worth a shilling, nor no expectancy ever to pay it. Perhaps, my Lord, it was a stretch

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\* This short, but significant sentence is of more weight than a thousand arguments in favour of the mild treatment of Negro slaves, and furnishes an unanswerable proof, that they are regarded by their oppressors as a different order of beings from themselves; and that under the influence of this sentiment they are naturally enough denied the common rights of humanity, and excluded from the participation of that sympathy which the sense of a common nature and a common extraction is calculated to inspire.

† Namely, the eleven pounds four shillings mentioned above.

of power in me to order commitment before a recovery of the fine; but the evidence of Mr. Harding, a man of unblemished character, the circumstances of the case so horrid, so wickedly deliberate and unprovoked, conspired to induce me to secure his person until the only remedy of some punishment could be applied\*. Lamentable indeed is it, that our Assembly (for I cannot allow Legislature to form the word) should look upon such things with cold indifference, and not provide that just remedy which the law of God and man in every other civilized community but *this*, has in effect, and even upon larger extent of population and slavery; in Jamaica not the smallest inconvenience has ever arisen. Surely! surely! they will be more disposed to hear reason, and to establish justice!!

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\* Mr. President Ince seems properly aware of the illegality of his proceeding: doubtless Halls also is aware of it; nor should I be surprised to hear that he has been able to rouse the popular feeling of the island in his favour, as a man unjustly and illegally oppressed. To have suffered so severe a punishment as that of imprisonment, for so paltry an offence as killing a *Negro slave*, particularly as his commitment was contrary to law, will be likely to excite no small degree of *virtuous* indignation among the Barbadians: and the danger lest such an unauthorized restriction of the freedom of individuals should grow into a precedent may possibly call forth the most vigorous resistance. This expectation seems perfectly justified by what took place some years ago on a similar occasion in the neighbouring island of St. Kitt's, where the prosecution of a man of the name of Herbert, who had treated one of his slaves with the most wanton barbarity, was not only not productive of any punishment to the offender, though the facts were clearly proved, but was likely to have been followed by very inconvenient effects to the prosecutor, in consequence of the popular clamour which was excited against him.

“ To the second query from your Lordship; I believe the fact relates to the case which was instituted by action in the Court of Exchequer, before your Excellency left the Government, as I signed the writ when Chief Baron, at the suit of Colbeck against Crone; and I understand judgment has been admitted without being given to Jury, against Crone in favour of Colbeck; but whether the King’s fine is included in that recovery I really do not know, and your Excellency may be better informed from the present Chief Baron or the Attorney General. The circumstances of that case I do not know exactly; from common report, they must have been richly deserving of the *jus per coll.*”

“ To the third query.—I never heard any official account of the case. I understand from inquiry, that the fact, as to the murder, is true; that the party’s name is Thomas Nowell, a butcher by trade, in the parish of St. Andrew; and that being in the direct vicinity of the Reverend Mr. Payne, and the Honourable Colonel Jordan, your Excellency may obtain a more particular account of this infamous wretch, who, I am told, ought to have been removed from society long ago.”

“ *Advocate General’s Letter to Lord Seaforth; dated  
October 25th, 1804.*”

“ MY LORD, October 25th, 1804.

“ I have many apologies to make to your Lordship for not sending an earlier answer to the several questions respecting the Negroes who have of late been most wantonly and inhumanly murdered. The delay has been owing to the difficulty I have met with in procuring any thing like satisfactory information as to the last of the cases; and therefore I shall hope for your Lordship’s excuse.

“ With respect to the first; a man of the name of Halls, belonging to the Royal regiment, was returning home from his exercising duty, on one of his militia days; several Negroes were upon the road before him going on very quietly, and amongst them a woman big with child. Halls was in liquor, and was constantly bawling out to the Negroes and abusing them, and telling them if they did not get out of his way he would make them. On his beginning to run after them, they all got out of his reach, except this unfortunate woman; Halls ran up to her, and, *without the least provocation on her part, very coolly and deliberately stabbed her several times in the breast with his bayonet. The woman, I believe, was not killed upon the spot, but died soon afterwards.* Mr. Harding, the overseer of the Society’s plantation, was on his way home, and saw the whole transaction; he immediately secured Halls, and had him taken to gaol, where he now is.

“ As to the second; Mr. Colbeck, who lived overseer on Cabbage-tree plantation in St. Lucy’s parish, had bought a new Negro boy out of the yard\*, and carried him home; taking a liking to the boy, he brought him into the house, and made him wait at table. Mr. Crone (the overseer of Colonel Rowe’s estate, and which is near to Cabbage-tree) visited Colbeck, had noticed the boy, and knew him well. A fire happening one night in the neighbourhood, Colbeck went to give assistance, and the boy followed him. On Colbeck’s return home he missed the boy; and as he did not make his appearance the next day, Colbeck sent round to the neighbours, *and particularly to Crone*, informing them that the boy was missing, and desiring them to send him home if they should meet

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\* Meaning the Slave-yard, where Negroes are exposed to sale in the same manner as cattle and sheep in Smithfield-market.

with him. Two or three days elapsed, and the poor creature was first discovered in a gully, near to Colonel Rowe's estate; and a number of Negroes were soon assembled about the place. The boy, naturally terrified with the threats, the noise, and the appearance of so many people, hid himself under a rock in the gully. By this time Crone and some other white persons had come up, *a fire was ordered to be put to the place where the boy was, and he was actually burnt out.* From this hole the boy ran to a piece of water, which was near, and some of the Negroes went in after him. The boy, it is said, took up a stone and threw it at one of them. Crone, who it seems had brought a gun with him, levelled it at the boy, and shot him; and other guns, as I have understood, were also fired. The poor wretch was then dragged out of the water, and, without even sending to his master, a hole was immediately dug, and he was put into it by Crone's order. I have been told that the boy was not quite dead when he was buried. Colbeck, the owner, soon afterwards came up, and had the boy taken out of the ground; and there cannot be the least doubt that Crone must have known him to be Colbeck's new Negro who had been missing. A man of the name of Hollingsworth, it was said, also fired at the boy, and Colbeck brought his action in the Exchequer, under the act of the island, against Crone and Hollingsworth. The cause was ready to be tried, and the Court had met for the purpose, when Crone and Hollingsworth thought proper to pay double the value of the boy, and 25*l.* for the use of the island, with all the costs, rather than suffer the business to go on; and this I am truly sorry to say was the *only* punishment which could be inflicted for so barbarous and atrocious a crime. The Attorney General and myself were retained as counsel for Colbeck, and received instructions to the

above purport. The case did not appear so strong against Hollingsworth; but I verily believe that, as against Crone, it would have been substantiated by the fullest evidence. It is due to Colonel Rowe to observe, that he was in England when the horrid transaction took place.

“As to the third: A man of the name of Nowell, who lives in St. Andrew’s parish, as I understand, had been in the habit of behaving most brutally towards his wife, and one day went so far as to lock her up in a room, and confine her in chains. A Negro woman belonging to this man, *touched with compassion for her unfortunate mistress*, undertook privately to release her; Nowell found it out, and, as I first heard the story, *had the Negro’s tongue immediately cut out nearly by the roots, of which she instantly died*. I have since been told, that Nowell *had the poor creature’s tongue put through a hole in a door, and cut a part of it off himself; but that she is still alive*. This case has been told different ways; and I have not, *after many inquiries*, been able to satisfy myself as to the real truth\*. Thus much I have no doubt is certain, that the wretch, Nowell, has most barbarously and cruelly used this Negro, merely because she acted a kind and compassionate part towards her mistress.

“Permit me now, my Lord, as a Barbadian, to return you my warmest thanks for the zeal you have shewn in this business; and I trust the day is not far distant, when,

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\* If any thing could add to the horror which the shocking barbarity of Nowell must excite, it is the doubt existing, “after many inquiries”—existing too in the minds of the Advocate and Attorney General—as to whether this poor creature was alive or dead. Were there no means of forcing Nowell to produce her? Could no inquest have been instituted? Dreadful state of things!

through your Lordship's exertions, I shall see that act in our statute-book repealed, which remains a disgrace to my country.

“ I have the honour to be, &c.

“ M. COULTHURST.

“ *The Right Honourable Lord Seaforth,*

“ c. c. c.”

“ *Extract from the Reverend Mr. Pilgrim's Letter to Lord Seaforth; dated St. James's Parsonage, September 25th, 1804.*

“ The man who killed the woman near Pilgrim, is, I apprehend, named Halls or Halts, one of Sir John Burney's tenants, and belonging to Saint Michael's regiment of militia.

“ The manager who shot the man in the water is named Crone; living on Mr. H. Rowe's plantation in Saint Lucy's parish. The man was an African, a slave to a Mr. Colbeck, the manager to a neighbouring plantation, and had accidentally strayed from his master: Crone seeing him, pursued him with several Negroes; the poor creature pelted his pursuers with stones, and at length took refuge in a pond, where he was inhumanly shot by the dastardly manager, and taken out of the pond; I repeat, my Lord, what I have heard, though I could hope, for the sake of humanity, my information has been false, and buried him while yet alive.

“ Nowell, a butcher, living in Saint Joseph's parish, is the wretch who murdered the slave for letting his wife out of confinement. The circumstances of this horrid barbarity are almost too shocking to be related. On discovering the poor creature had been instrumental to his

wife's escape, he obliged her to put her tongue through a hole in the board, to which he fastensd it on the opposite side with a fork, and leaving her in that situation for some time, he afterwards drew out her tougue by the roots.

“ This, my Lord, is what I have heard relative to the cases on which your Lordship desires information; and as I have heard the circumstances I have mentioned from different persons, told in nearly the same manner, I am led to suspect that the statement will be found to be but too correct.” Papers, &c. p. 7-10.

“ *Extract of a Letter from the Right Honourable Lord Seaforth to Earl Camden; dated Pilgrim, 7th January 1805.*

“ I enclose the Attorney General's letter to me on the subject of the Negroes *so most wantonly murdered*. I am sorry to say, *several other instances of the same barbarity have occurred with which I have not troubled your Lordship, as I only wished to make you acquainted with the subject in general.*”

“ *Copy of a Letter from Mr. Beckles to Lord Seaforth; dated 19th November 1804.*

“ *Bay Plantation,*

“ MY LORD,

19th November 1804.

“ I have delayed to answer your Excellency's note of the 19th of September, enclosing queries as to some cases of cruel murders committed upon Slaves, with the hope of being able to establish the facts, so as to communicate them to your Excellency without any doubt of their authenticity; but, notwithstanding every inquiry, I can



*make no discovery of the murder which had been currently reported to have been committed by one Nowell, of the parish of St. Andrew* \*. The fact is by many supposed to be true, at the same time that it is denied by others; and all that I can ascertain is, that *Nowell is in general a cruel man to his Slaves.*

“ The militia-man is — Halls, of St. Michael’s regiment. Returning from his duty upon an alarm, after stopping at a dram-shop, where he had drank so as to be rather intoxicated; hearing some Negroes singing before him, who were returning from their daily labour, he called out to them that he would kill them; upon which a Mr. Harding, who was going the same way, told him to take care what he was about; he immediately pursued the Negroes, who not supposing that he really intended to do them any injury, but imagining that what he had said was in joke, did not endeavour to escape, but as he came up to them, they separated to make room for him to pass; the nearest to him being a woman *far advanced in pregnancy, he ran his bayonet into her, without the smallest provocation, and killed her on the spot*: Mr. Harding and another gentleman, who were eye-witnesses, seized him, and carried him before the President, who sent him to prison.

“ In the other case, which happened in the parish of St. Lucy, two white men were concerned, Crone and Hollingsworth. A Mr. Colebeck, the manager of a plantation in the neighbourhood, had some months before purchased an African lad, who was much attached to his person, and slept in a passage contiguous to his chamber.

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\* Had the Attorney General then no means of ascertaining whether the woman was alive or dead?

On Sunday night there was an alarm of fire in the plantation, which induced Mr. Colebeck to go out hastily, and the next morning he missed the lad, who he supposed had intended to follow him in the night, and had mistaken his way. He sent to his neighbours, and to Mr. Crone among the rest, to inform them that his African lad had accidentally strayed from him; that he could not speak a word of English, and that possibly he might be found breaking canes, or taking something else for his support; in which case he requested that they would not injure him, but return him, and he would pay any damage he might have committed. A day or two after Mr. Colebeck was informed that Crone and Hollingsworth had killed a Negro in a neighbouring gully, and buried him there. He went to Crone to inquire into the truth of the report, and intended to have the grave opened to see whether it was his African lad. *Crone told him a Negro had been killed and buried there;* but assured him it was not his, for he knew him very well, and he need not be at the trouble of opening the grave. *Upon this, Colebeck went away satisfied;* but receiving further information, which left no doubt upon his mind that it was his Negro, he returned and opened the grave, and found it to be so. I was Mr. Colebeck's leading counsel, and the facts stated in my brief were as follows: that Crone and Hollingsworth being informed that there was a Negro lurking in the gully, went armed with muskets, and took several Negro men with them. The poor African, seeing a parcel of men come to attack him, was frightened; he took up a stone to defend himself, and retreated into a cleft rock, where they could not easily come at him; they then went for some trash, put it into the crevice of the rock behind him, and set it on fire; *after it had burnt so as to scorch*

*the poor fellow, he ran into a pool of water near by; they sent a Negro to bring him out, and he threw the stone at the Negro; upon which the two white men fired several times at him with the guns loaded with shot, and the Negroes pelted him with stones. He was at length dragged out of the pool in a dying condition, for he had not only received several bruises from the stones, but his breast was so pierced with the shot that it was like a cullender. The white Savages ordered the Negroes to dig a grave, and whilst they were digging it, the poor creature made signs of begging for water, which was not given to him; but as soon as the grave was dug, he was thrown into it, and covered over, and there seems to be some doubt whether he was then quite dead. Crone and Hollingsworth deny this; but Colebeck assured me, that he could prove it by more than one witness; and I have reason to believe it to be true, because on the day of trial Crone and Hollingsworth did not suffer the cause to come to a hearing, but paid the penalties and the costs of suit, which it is not supposed they would have done had they been innocent.*

“ I have the honour to be, &c.

“ JOHN BECKLES\*.

“ *The Right Honourable Lord Seaforth,*

“ *Esq. Esq. Esq.*”

One circumstance of the above narrative may not strike the minds of some readers with its due force, although to us it appears to be the most affecting part of the whole case. They may have been led to conceive, that whatever atrocity there was in the proceedings of CRONE and his companion, yet in COLBECK there was some approximation to European feeling. But how stands the fact with respect to COLBECK? On being coolly told that a

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\* Papers, &c. page 43, 44.

Negro *had* been killed and buried,—told so by the murderer himself, his neighbour and frequent visitor;—is he shocked by the tale? Does he express any horror or indignation on the occasion? No! he goes away *satisfied with the assurance, that the murdered Negro is not his own.* Let the reader give its due weight to this one circumstance, and he will be convinced that a state of society exists in the West Indies, of which an inhabitant of this happy island can form no adequate conception. Had it been his horse instead of his Negro Slave, Colbeck would have been affected in much the same way as he is said to have been.

From this impressive circumstance may also be inferred the value of West Indian testimony, when given in favour of West Indian humanity. Mr. COLBECK, for example, would naturally enough be spoken of as a man of humanity by his West Indian brethren, and they would probably be sincere in giving him that praise. But who is this man of humanity? It is one who, hearing that a fellow-creature has been cruelly and wantonly murdered, goes away SATISFIED, because he himself has sustained no pecuniary loss by the murder! In truth, the moral perceptions and feelings which prevail in that quarter of the globe, are wholly different from those which are found on this side of the Atlantic. An exception may, indeed, be made in favour of a few men of enlightened minds; but the remark is just as applied to the bulk of the community—the *people*, whose *prejudices* are stated by Lord SEAFORTH to be so horribly *absurd*, as to resist all measures for remedying this dreadful state of society.

We shall doubtless hear it argued on the present as on former occasions, when similar barbarities have been incontestably proved, that “individual instances of cruelty, like those which have now been produced, are no

proofs of general inhumanity. Instances of, at least, equal atrocity, might be collected from the annals of the Old Bailey. But how very unjust would it be to regard these as exhibiting a fair view of the English character?"

There is, however, a remarkable defect in the analogy which is here attempted to be established; a defect which seems fatal to the argument. In this happy country, when we hear that crimes have been perpetrated, we hear also that they have been punished: we have at least the satisfaction of knowing, that no practicable means are left unattempted for securing the criminals, and bringing them to justice. But is this the case in Barbadoes? We hear of great crimes indeed; but we hear at the same time of their *impunity*. The criminals are not under the necessity of endeavouring to elude detection, or of screening themselves from prosecution by concealment: they even talk of their crimes with a shocking indifference. The laws themselves conspire to defeat the ends of justice. We find, not the *lawless* part of the community, but the legislative assembly of the island, sanctioning the perpetration of the foulest murders, by their refusal to recognise murder as a felonious act. We find even officers of the Crown neglecting the obvious duty of instituting a legal inquest into these murders. To what is this neglect to be attributed? To the contagious influence of those *prejudices*, and of that savage indifference to Negro life, which evidently pervade the *people* at large? Or is it to be accounted for on the ground that the law has actually deprived His Majesty's Attorney General, and His Majesty's Coroner, of the constitutional power of instituting such an inquest? In either case our colonial system will stand justly chargeable, not only with out-

raging every feeling of humanity, but with violating every acknowledged principle of justice.

But the West Indians and their friends will probably have recourse to another argument. "Granting," they may say, "in its fullest extent, the truth of all that you have stated with respect to Barbadoes, it is yet very unfair to extend the charge of inhumanity, which is justly brought against that island, to the West Indies in general. The Legislatures of all the other islands have passed laws which make the murder of a Slave felony; they have also provided such salutary regulations 'for the support,' and 'for the encouragement, protection, and better government of Slaves,' as serve to place them in a situation of even enviable security and comfort."

It will be readily admitted, that the Legislatures of most, if not all the islands, with the exception of Barbadoes, have passed laws which make the murder of a Slave a felonious act. It must also be admitted, that many regulations have been framed and placed on the insular statute-books, which, if faithfully enforced according to their *apparent* intent, could not fail to produce beneficial results. But have the clauses which contain these regulations been carried into effect? Are they any thing more than a blind, intended to conceal from the eyes of the British public the enormity of our West Indian system? Was it ever even in the contemplation of the lawgivers themselves that these laws should be executed? The papers to which so large a reference has already been made happily contain a distinct answer to these questions: that answer it will now be proper to state.

On the 4th of October 1804, it appears that Earl Camden addressed letters to the Governors of the different West Indian islands, requiring from them information on

a variety of points. A copy of the heads of information transmitted to one of the islands, Dominica, will furnish the reader with a sufficiently clear idea of the nature of these requirements. It is as follows :

“ An account of all the Negro Slaves imported every year since 1788, and of the number re-exported in each year.

“ The most authentic and particular account which can be obtained, of the number of Negro Slaves; dividing them into classes of male and female; children from 1 to 12; youths from 12 to 20, full-grown men and women from 20 to 60; and the aged; and stating, as accurately as possible, the number in each class respectively: also,

“ An account of the total number of free Negroes and coloured people.

“ *N. B.* It is desirable that the manner in which the information is obtained, and the account made up, should be stated as distinctly as possible.

“ You are also desired to transmit at the same time, in original and duplicate, the following further information, viz.

“ A list and abstract, or general account of all returns, made upon oath by owners, overseers, or managers, in pursuance of the 7th and 8th clauses or sections of an act, passed in December 1788, intituled, ‘ An Act for the Encouragement, Protection, and better Management of Slaves\*.’

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\* The 7th clause enacts, that “ *in order to secure, as far as possible, the good treatment of the Slaves, and to ascertain the cause of the decrease of the Slaves, every owner, overseer, &c. shall, in the month of January every year, deliver in on oath a certificate of the increase or decrease of the Slaves under his direction, how many have been born, or how many have died, within twelve months*

“ If it appears that no such accounts or returns have been duly made, or that they have been in any great measure neglected, you are requested further to send,

“ An account or list of all convictions had, and fines or forfeitures recovered, and of all prosecutions commenced against the defaulters, pursuant to the said act of Assembly.

“ If the said returns and accounts have been wholly or generally neglected, and no prosecutions have taken place for that cause, you are to send a certificate to that effect.

“ You will also state whether the island had in 1788, or in 1799, when the act was made perpetual, or yet has, any and what parochial or established clergy, by whom the regulations in sections 3 and 4, have been or can be carried into effect\*.”

previous thereto, and the cause of the death of such Slaves; *which certificate shall be lodged in the Secretary's office of this island*; for the filing of which the Secretary shall be allowed a fee of ninepence: and *if any owner, &c. shall fail to deliver in such certificate on oath at the time appointed, he shall be fined in the sum of fifty pounds.*” The 8th clause enacts, that Slaves, convicted of murder, highway robbery, or burglary, shall suffer death.

\* These clauses run thus: “ *Whereas a knowledge of the doctrines, and a due attention to the exercise of the duties of the Christian religion, would tend to improve the morals, and to advance the temporal and eternal happiness of the Slaves, it is enacted, that all owners, overseers, &c. shall, on every Sunday on their several plantations, convene together the Slaves for the purpose of performing divine worship, and shall not fail to exhort all unbaptized Slaves to receive the holy sacrament of baptism; and all the unbaptized children of Slaves shall receive the said sacrament: and on neglect of these duties the owners, &c. shall be fined in not less than 10l, nor more than 25l. And all owners, &c. shall encourage and exhort all Slaves, arrived at years of maturity, and desirous of entering into a connubial state, to receive the ceremony of Christian marriage, and in neglect of doing so shall be subject to a fine of 5l.*”



To these inquiries no answer appears to have been returned by the Governors, either of Jamaica or the Bahamas. From those of the Leeward Islands, St. Vincent and Grenada, letters have been received, stating the difficulty of immediately complying with the requisitions of Earl Camden, but promising to take measures, without delay, for procuring the desired information. Now here it may be proper to remark, that with respect to several important heads of inquiry, particularly those which relate to the execution of the laws enacted for the protection of Slaves, a very short delay must have been sufficient. The Governors, by referring to the Secretary of the island, or to the clerks of the several courts of record, could have at once ascertained whether the legal provisions mentioned by Earl Camden had or had not been carried into effect. If they had; a copy of the record would have been all the answer which was requisite: if they had not; it was only necessary to say so, and to state the reasons of the failure.

This manly and becoming course has been pursued only in one instance, viz. in that of the Governor of Dominica: and his answers, though defective in some important particulars, yet contain a candid disclosure of facts, and are therefore calculated to throw considerable light, not only on the causes which may possibly have impeded the returns from the other islands, but on the general state of Negro slavery in the West Indies.

Governor Prevost, in his letter to Earl Camden, represents Dominica "as distinguished by the laws it has passed for the encouragement, protection, and government of Slaves;" but he goes on to remark, "*I am sorry I cannot add that they are as religiously enforced as you could wish* \*." Now this is precisely what has been

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\* Papers, &c. page 34.

asserted, with respect to the laws in question, by the advocates of abolition, and as strenuously denied by West Indians. The laws may look well on paper, but they are inefficient: nay, they were never meant to be otherwise. If any one is so extremely ignorant of West Indian affairs, as not to have been already apprized of this fact, let him read the following passage in an official letter of the Governor of Dominica:

“The Act of the Legislature, intituled, ‘An Act for the Encouragement, Protection, and better Government of Slaves,’ *appears to have been considered, from the day it was passed until this hour, as a POLITICAL MEASURE to avert the interference of the mother-country in the management of Slaves*\*. Having said this, your Lordship will not be surprised to learn the clause seventh of that

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\* This representation, it may be presumed, is fairly applicable to all the West Indian Legislatures: indeed it would be unjust to them to suppose, that they were less politic and provident than the Legislature of Dominica. The charge involved in it, however, is certainly far from being light or trivial, especially as it is made by one who is a thorough master of the subject on which he writes, “having passed many years in the West Indies, and having been resident in most of the Colonies.” P. 34. The charge amounts to this: that the individuals composing the legislatures of the Islands, and who we may suppose to be the most honourable part of the community, have entered into a combination to deceive the British Parliament and the British public; that they have prostituted the solemn legislative functions with which they were invested, to the promotion of this dishonourable purpose; and that, with the pretended view of promoting the protection, security, and comfort of the Negroes, they have framed a set of laws, the real object of which is not to benefit the Negroes, but to prevent the mother-country from interfering to mitigate the cruel oppression under which they groan. The reader must form his own judgment of persons capable of such conduct.

Bill has been wholly neglected \*. As to the eighth clause, it is too intimately connected with the public interest to be allowed to sleep.

“ I am apprehensive you will find the *account* of all convictions had, and fines or forfeitures recovered, and of all prosecutions commenced against the defaulters, pursuant to the said act, *very unsatisfactory* ; however, here, now and then, the act has shewn some signs of life.” P. 36.

After examining with the utmost attention the *account* to which Governor Prevost refers (and which is inserted at page 39), it does not appear that *a single fine or forfeiture has been recovered, nor a single prosecution commenced against defaulters, during the SEVENTEEN YEARS* that the act has been, not to say in force, for that would be ridiculous, but in existence. Of convictions there is indeed a considerable number, but, with the exception of two, they are all convictions of Negroes. Of these two, one is for the murder of a Negro : but the record which states the conviction, states also that the convict was par-

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\* If the reader will have the goodness to refer back to p. 19, he will see with what parade this very clause is introduced into the Act. It was framed expressly “ *to secure, as far as possible, the good treatment of the Slaves;*” and yet it appears from the first to have been regarded in the island as an absolute nullity. “ IT HAS BEEN WHOLLY NEGLECTED.” Not one certificate has been filed in consequence of it, nor has one penalty been enforced for the neglect. How different this from the fate of the eighth clause, denouncing the punishment of death on Negro Slaves guilty of certain crimes! *This clause, we are told, has not been allowed to SLEEP!* Here we have a lively picture of the nature of West Indian legislation. When laws are directed *against* the Negro Slave, they operate with certainty and permanent effect. When enacted in his favour, they prove dormant from the moment of their birth.

done by Governor Johnstone. The murderer was a soldier in the 68th regiment. The other case is that of a man who was fined thirty pounds currency for ill-treating a Slave, the property of Doctor Fellan. No other particulars are mentioned respecting this singular trial and conviction. The *signs of life*, therefore, which have been shewn by this act, as far as regards the *protection* of Negro Slaves, must be admitted to be very equivocal.

Governor Prevost refers Earl Camden to a letter from the Rev. John Audain, Rector of St. George's, as explaining "why the clauses 3 and 4 are not carried into effect." Mr. Audain's letter, however, throws little light on the subject. He can furnish no returns of marriages, because (he says) "a very few even of the free coloured people marry, and *not one Slave* since I have been here. Why they do not, I readily conceive, particularly the Slaves. Their owners *do not exhort them to it*, and they shew no dispositions themselves to alter that mode of cohabitation which they have been accustomed to." P. 40.

It appears then, that the 3rd and 4th clauses of this boasted act are as nugatory as the 7th: "they are not," says Governor PREVOST, "carried into effect\*." And yet if the reader will turn back to page 20, he will find that these clauses are introduced by a preamble of peculiar solemnity. They are enacted with the professed view of "*improving the morals and advancing the temporal and eternal happiness of the Slaves.*" What is this but impious mockery? Have they been executed? No. Has a single penalty been enforced for their non-execution?

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\* The act requires owners, &c. to *exhort* their Slaves to marry. Mr. AUDAIN says, that their owners do NOT *exhort* them to it.

No. Surely, after this discovery, it is impossible that such mere mummery of legislation should continue to impose on the good sense of the people of Great Britain. They will see that the difference between Barbadoes, and the other islands, is in fact merely nominal: and that the same lamentable deficiency of legal protection, the same system of unqualified oppression, characterizes Negro bondage throughout the whole extent of our West Indian possessions.

Before the pamphlet closes, it will be proper to devote a few pages to the consideration of a long Report of the Assembly of Jamaica which forms a part of these papers.

The picture given in that Report of the situation of the West Indian islands is in the highest degree discouraging; but it is represented by the reporters as less gloomy than the truth. "A faithful detail," it is said, p. 26, "would have the appearance of a frightful caricature; and unless speedy and efficacious measures are adopted for giving permanent relief, by a radical change of measures, we must suppose that the West Indian islands are doomed to perish as useless appendages to the British empire." Credit is represented to be at an end; the planters, generally, to be labouring under the pressure of accumulating debt; and the greatest distress to pervade all classes of the community. Admitting the fidelity of this representation, a question will still arise respecting the causes which have produced so unfavourable a state of things. The Report affirms, that it has chiefly been produced by the enormous duties imposed on West Indian produce; by the competition of East Indian sugars; and by the attempts made to abolish the Slave trade.

The two first points would lead to very lengthened details, and are foreign from the design of this pamphlet.

It may be observed, however, in general, that notwithstanding the labour employed by the reporters to prove that the additional duties imposed on West Indian produce fall not on the consumer, as in every other instance, but on the grower, no peculiarity appears to exist in the case under consideration, which exempts it from the operation of the general rule; a rule which is familiar to the merest sciolist in political economy. The protecting duties imposed on East India sugar appear also to be sufficiently high to exclude them from competition with West Indian sugar in the British market. A part of the East Indian sugar, it is true, is consumed in this country; but it is a small part, the demand for it being confined to a few individuals, who are willing to pay a high price for sugar rather than wound their consciences, by using what is procured through the oppression of their brethren: the rest is exported.

The attempts made to abolish the Slave trade operate, it is said, to the disadvantage of the island, by increasing the danger of insurrection among the Slaves\*, and by discouraging the hope of a permanent supply of labourers. West Indian property, it is added, is thus so greatly diminished in its value, that merchants will no longer advance money upon it; and without an advance of money, the plantations cannot be carried on with advantage.

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\* The Slaves, it is affirmed, will confound abolition with emancipation. But what proof is there of this? Have they done so in Virginia? The Slave trade has been abolished in that state for near thirty years. Has any such misconception, as is now anticipated, taken place among the Virginian Slaves? Certainly not. Experience therefore is against the reasoning of the West Indian body.

The Report, however, overlooks the effect produced on the value of property in the old islands by the extended cultivation of Trinidad and Dutch Guiana. But is not the great and growing rivalry of these colonies a far more formidable evil than that of the East Indies? Why then have they so much insisted on the latter, while the former, though much more obvious and much more mischievous, is passed over in silence? Is it that the reporters have a sympathy with the owners of Slaves, which even self-interest cannot overcome; and that they dread the precedent of cultivating sugar by free men, as is done in Bengal? They must also feel that it would have been greatly to the advantage of the old islands, had they consented to an abolition of the Slave trade fourteen years ago, before the fertile plains of Guiana had yet been brought into cultivation by the enormous amount of British capital, which has been transferred thither.

The reporters labour to keep out of view the dangers which threaten Jamaica from the example and proximity of St. Domingo, and from an increase of the Negro population in the island; and they absurdly argue, that the more the Negro population is increased, the greater will be the security of the West Indies. As to the plea so strongly urged, of danger, even from discussing the question of abolition in the British Parliament, it is rendered almost ridiculous by the circumstance, that the debates which have taken place on that subject are regularly published, at great length, in the official newspapers of Jamaica; and that even *the present Report*, in which the question of abolition is largely discussed, has been inserted, by authority of the Assembly, in the Royal Gazette of that island.

The reporters are greatly displeased that they should

be thought not to know their own interests, and what is most *likely* to promote them. This however is an imputation which they share in common with a great part of mankind, and which particularly attaches to all who, like them, are engaged in gambling speculations. The West Indian party, it will be remembered, vehemently opposed the bills for regulating the Middle Passage, and yet they have since confessed, that those bills have been productive of great benefit to their concerns: and had they not been so infatuated as to oppose, fourteen years ago, unfortunately with more effect, the abolition of the Slave trade, they would have been saved the ruinous competition of Dutch Guiana; and they would have had at this moment the almost exclusive possession of the sugar-market of Europe.

The reporters insist with much earnestness on their right to the continuance of the Slave trade, on the ground of its having been sanctioned by Acts of Parliament. But is it not absurd to suppose that any Acts of Parliament, which may have been framed to encourage the importation of African labourers into the West Indies, can have conveyed to West Indians the right of establishing such a frightful system of oppression as the preceding part of this pamphlet has proved to exist among them? What act can be produced which binds the Imperial Parliament to uphold a system so outrageously opposed to every principle of British policy and of British law; and not only to uphold it, but to enlarge its influence by the perpetual increase of its wretched victims? Granting that West Indians have that claim to which they pretend on the justice and faith of Parliament, the claim attaches to this country, and not to Africa, which was no party in the contract.



The reporters are very indignant that any of the parliamentary orators should have dared to express an opinion that the Slave trade is “contrary to the principles of justice and humanity;” and they add, that “the particular accusations of oppression, without the means of redress; of avaricious and unfeeling rigour towards our Slaves, unrestrained by a sense of interest, or the dictates of humanity; heaped upon the inhabitants of the British West Indian colonies; *have been repelled and refuted by such irrefragable evidence, that they can now make little impression, except on the prejudiced and uninformed.*” Page 12.

How far a sense of interest or the dictates of humanity are capable of preventing *unfeeling rigour* from being exercised towards Negro Slaves, let the correspondence of Lord Seaforth, already referred to, testify. If farther evidence were required on this point, that of Governor Prevost might be adduced. He expressly declares (p. 34), that “the interest of the master in his Slaves’ well-being is *not* always *a sufficient check.*” But even supposing that a sense of interest should operate with the *owners* of Negro Slaves in restraining cruel treatment, yet what is likely to be the operation of this potent principle in cases where the management of the estates of absent proprietors is left to attornies, whose commissions are enlarged in proportion to the amount of the crops; and to overseers, who hold their office during the pleasure of those attornies, and whose reputation as planters depends not on the increase of Slaves, but on the increase of the yearly produce of the estate? It is the more necessary to make the inquiry, because by far the greater part of the sugar plantations of Jamaica are in this predicament. Allowing, therefore, that the principle of self-interest

possesses all the force which is attributed to it, yet in the present circumstances of Jamaica its operation on the whole is more likely to be injurious than beneficial to the Negro Slaves\*.

But what is this "IRREFRAGABLE TESTIMONY" to which the Assembly of Jamaica refer, as disproving the allegations of abolitionists? It cannot have been the correspondence of Lord Seaforth with Earl Camden, for that had not yet been made public. They ought to have pointed to the chapter and page in which this invaluable testimony lies concealed. For my own part, anxious as I am that this great cause should have an impartial hearing, I still would be willing that it should be decided without referring to any other testimony than that which has already been produced by West Indians and their friends. Even on their own shewing, the charges of "*inhumanity and injustice*," at least to the moral perceptions of Englishmen, are not only not disproved, but incontrovertibly established. West Indians cannot deny that the Negroes whom they purchase are procured in Africa by means the most revolting to *humanity and justice*. BRYAN EDWARDS, their own historian and apologist, has said, that to deny this would be "insult and mockery." They cannot deny that the Negroes are transported in fetters to the West Indies, and there sold like cattle in a fair. Neither can they deny that the Negroes, being sold, become the absolute property of their purchaser, who may separate parents from children and from each other, and sell them when and to whom he pleases: that, moreover,

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\* Suppose a plantation under the management of such a man as Crone, the proprietor being in England; what a sum of misery might be crowded into a short space of time!

West Indian Slaves have no civil rights whatever, which are not equally enjoyed by brutes, the parade of laws in their favour signifying nothing, as has already been proved, while their evidence is inadmissible in a court of justice, and while the men who administer those laws have an interest, real or supposed, in their violation : and that therefore no effectual limit can be put to the master's discretion, either as to the quantity of food to be given, of labour to be enforced, or of punishment to be inflicted. It is a fact equally undeniable, that the labour of Negro Slaves is extracted from them, as it is from a team of oxen, by the lash or the terror of the cart-whip\* : that, in a climate congenial to their own, they nevertheless decrease so fast as to require constant importations to keep up their wasted numbers : and lastly, that they are regarded as an inferior order of beings † ; from which it flows as a corollary that they can have no claim to a participation in those rights of humanity, or in that sympathy which men in general are willing to bestow on those whom they consider as fellow men. Now these are all points of general notoriety : they are either distinctly admitted by the West Indians, who have given evidence before the Privy Council and the House of Commons ; or they are established beyond dispute by written

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\* This horrid feature of our colonial system prevails uniformly throughout the whole range of our West Indian possessions. No one can have visited them without knowing that the practice of *driving* Negroes at their work by means of the whip is *universal* : and yet such is the gross ignorance of the subject prevailing in this country, that the fact, though as notorious in the West Indies as that slavery exists there at all, has been sometimes disputed even in the House of Commons.

† See Long's History of Jamaica, and, in addition to many other proofs which might be adduced, the preceding part of this pamphlet.

documents which the West Indian Legislatures and Governors have officially furnished. That they are confirmed in some important particulars by the papers which have now been reviewed, will scarcely be controverted. If, however, the bare statement of the above facts, facts, let it be remembered, resting on West Indian testimony, should amount (as it will appear to do to all who have not been accustomed to breathe the moral atmosphere of our Slave colonies) to a charge of "injustice and inhumanity," of "oppression," and "unfeeling rigour," against the West Indian system, then surely the bold and unqualified assertion that such a charge has been "*refuted by irrefragable testimony,*" has no foundation on which to stand.

The reporters have incidentally introduced into their Report a comparison between the state of the Negro Slaves and that of "the oppressed peasantry" of Bengal. After giving an exaggerated representation of the wretchedness of the latter, they add, "such is the situation of twenty millions of free subjects of the British empire in India, whilst its legislature is hunting for *imaginary misery*\* in the West Indian colonies, where the lot of the labourer is a thousand times more fortunate." P. 18.

I would here ask the framers of this Report a few questions, which may serve to throw light on the comparison which they have instituted. Do they not know that the Bengal peasant is not dragged from his own country by

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\* *Imaginary misery!* Am I then wrong in having attributed to West Indians a different set of moral perceptions from those which prevail among the inhabitants of Great Britain? If at the time when this Report was framed the reporters were ignorant of the horrors which have recently taken place in the West Indies, they could not be ignorant that such horrors might be practised with impunity.

force or fraud, loaded with fetters, chained to the deck, or stifled in the hold of a Slave-ship; bartered as a mere implement of agriculture; separated at the pleasure of another from his wife and children; worked under the lash without the liberty even of pausing in his toil, but at the bidding of the driver; and liable to be punished to any extent, and with any circumstances of cruelty, which the caprice of his master may direct? Do they not know that the Bengal peasant is not punishable by any other sentence than that of the law, after a regular trial and conviction; that his person and property are as fully secured to him as those of the Governor General of India; and that he is the sole judge both of the labour and the food which suit him? There is only one answer which can be returned to these questions; and that answer will prove it to be no better than absolute mockery in the Assembly of Jamaica thus to compare the condition of the Bengal peasant with that of the Negro Slave.

But this is not all. The reporters enter into tedious calculations to shew how much higher the wages of the Negro Slave are than those of the Bengal peasant; but they omit to advert to one very material point of difference between them. The wages of the Bengal peasant are paid to himself: he labours for his own benefit solely. But it is to his master, and not to himself, that the wages of the Negro Slave are paid. From his thankless toil must be extracted, not only the means of his own subsistence, but the means of pampering the luxury, swelling the pomp, gratifying the avarice, or discharging the debts of his owner. And when the circumstances in which the planters are now placed have been considered, it cannot be expected that a very ample proportion of the Slave's earnings should be applied to his own sustentation,

especially as that proportion, whatever it may be, depends entirely on the will of an insolvent, or nearly insolvent master.

The reporters complain, that they were not permitted, in the session of 1804, to produce fresh evidence at the bar of the House of Commons in favour of their right to a continuance of the Slave trade. But would any evidence which they could produce contradict that statement of the nature of West Indian slavery which they themselves have already furnished, and by which its injustice and inhumanity are clearly demonstrated? And supposing they had been hardy enough to do this, would any credit have been due to such contradictory testimony? Besides, what confidence can the British Parliament or the British Public repose in the declarations of West Indians, even if they should sanction those declarations with all the solemnity of an oath; when it appears from the acknowledgment of Governor Prevost, and from the concurring testimony of their own records, that the most *honourable* men among them could so far forget their high obligations as legislators, as to join in a combination to deceive the Government and the Legislature of this country, and to obtain credit to themselves for humanity, by passing laws which they meant at the time to be wholly inoperative?

I shall only detain the reader while I notice one more argument in favour of the Slave trade which is contained in this Report. The continuance of importations, it is affirmed, will not increase the disproportion of Blacks and Whites so much as the abolition would. This is an argument not very level to common understandings; but the reasoning on which it is built is of this kind. If the Slave trade were abolished, the number of adventurers

who repair to the West Indies in the hope of amassing a fortune would be diminished, and consequently the white population would decrease. But supposing the number of adventurers who go out with such large expectations were diminished, does it follow that an equal number, with more moderate views, might not be procured to supply their place? While emigrations to America are so frequent and numerous, might not a part of them, with proper encouragement, be easily diverted to the filling of vacancies in Jamaica? The planters of that island, however, are far from feeling, on this point, the solicitude which they express. Several proofs of this might be given. In the first place, do they not almost universally refuse to employ on their estates, in any capacity, white men who are married and have families? If they really wished to increase the number of whites, would not men with families be the most desirable persons to employ? Another proof is, that although there is a law of the island requiring the proprietors of estates to maintain a certain number of white servants in proportion to their slaves (about one white to thirty slaves), yet the tax, which is payable in case of a deficiency in that number, is so low, that it is in general a gain to the proprietor to pay the tax rather than to procure the individuals. In short, it is notorious, notwithstanding the language employed in the Report, that no pains have been taken to remedy the disproportion of the black and white population.

The true reason, however, of this argument is to be found, not in the increased danger which will result to the island from abolishing the Slave trade, but in the constitution of the Jamaica Assembly. That Assembly (though containing a small proportion of wealthy planters) is chiefly composed of such adventurers as are

alluded to in the Report, and for whose privileges so much solicitude is manifested: viz. either merchants who are concerned in the sale of Slave cargoes, or agents employed to manage the estates of absent proprietors; to whom are added a few insolvent proprietors of sugar estates, largely indebted, perhaps, to those very merchants and agents. Now it is the voice of these adventurers which is heard on the present occasion, and not that of the real proprietors of Jamaica. The real proprietors, if their voice could be heard, would probably speak a different language; and we see that in some cases they do so. Many of them are sensible, that, added to the fatal rivalry of Guiana, the true cause of their embarrassment (as their historian Long has well shewn), and the grand source of their danger also, is the continuance of the Slave trade: and if they were not influenced by prejudice or party connexions, or deterred by the threats of creditors, or duped by the misrepresentations of agents, they would follow the example which Mr. Barham has set them, and take that part which prudence and policy concur with justice and humanity in dictating; I mean the part of forwarding a legislative abolition of the Slave trade, as the only safe and practicable, and at the same time effectual remedy, which can be applied to the dreadful evils of our colonial system.

THE END.





