

SLAVERY:

AN

ESSAY IN VERSE.

BY

CAPTAIN MARJORIBANKS,

OF A LATE INDEPENDENT COMPANY;

Formerly Lieutenant in His Majesty's 19th Regiment of Foot

HUMBLY INSCRIBED TO

PLANTERS, MERCHANTS,

And others concerned in the MANAGEMENT or SALE of

NEGRO SLAVES,



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LETTER,

SENT WITH THE

FOLLOWING ESSAY,

FROM THE

AUTHOR to Mr. HALIBURTON,

SECRETARY OF THE EDINBURGH SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION
OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

SIR,

THE inclosed Poem (if, unembellished by fancy or fiction, a plain unvarnished narration of mere melancholy matter of fact can be so called), coincides so exactly, in many particulars, with the evidence comprised in the Abstract lately published by your Society; that, had it been the production of a stranger, and the two, successively shewn to me, I should, without hesitation, have pronounced the one to be little more than a versification of a great part of the other. I assure you, however, upon my honour, that these verses were written in Jamaica, in October 1786; a period, I imagine, when no society of the kind was in contemplation; and when I was far from numbering any such institution among the probable events of the eighteenth century. I have not now made the addition of a single couplet to my original manuscript; from which also great part of the Notes are transcribed.

A ij

It

It may be asked why has this Essay been so long concealed; or to what purpose is it now produced? I can only answer, That my opinion of the Slave-Trade, and my compassion for the sufferings of the Negroes in the West-Indies, of which I was for several years an indignant eye witness, have been long and invariably the same; which in private conversation, even in Jamaica, I have ever avowed. Indispensible avocations, however, put it out of my power at the proper period, and in a regular way, to step forward as a voluntary witness in the cause of truth. Nor, while I saw with exultation the brightest talents, and most distinguished characters in the kingdom, ranged on the side of justice and humanity; did I presume to think of obtruding upon the public, in any other mode, the sentiments of so obscure an individual as myself.

It was within these few days only, on perusing the Abstract, and comparing the great mass of evidence with what had fallen under my own knowledge, that my conscience, though the omission was involuntary, in some measure reproached me for having neglected to contribute my humble mite towards the raising of this mighty structure.

It occurred to me, that by stating to you in writing a few facts and observations, I might perhaps illustrate or corroborate some part of the evidence. The only kind of memorandum I had kept in Jamaica, either of incidents or reflections arising from them,

them, consisted of a number of little poetical pieces inserted in a sort of common place-book. As Slavery was naturally the subject of several of them; to this source, on the present occasion, in order to refresh my memory I recurred.

On a re-perusal of the composition in question, so long neglected, and almost forgotten; struck with the remarkable coincidence I have mentioned, I first conceived that these artless effusions, meant only at the time to give vent to the painful feelings of my heart, excited by the distressful scenes which surrounded me; written at the moment that the impression was fresh upon my mind, would not only have more weight than any thing I could now compose upon the subject; but might perhaps even carry with them stronger conviction than evidence drawn forth on distant recollection, through the force of interrogation.

Abstract reasoning, however just, or ingenious, could probably conduce but little to promote a cause, which hinges entirely upon facts. This little production, whatever may be its other imperfections, is not the offspring of hypothesis, the dream of theory, but the simple recital of what fell under the cognizance of my own senses; and may be considered as an additional link in the chain of evidence. The tastes of mankind, too, are various: though undoubtedly the greater, and perhaps the more intelligent part of the world, would prefer good sense and plain
 prose;

prose; yet there may be no inconsiderable number of others, of a more romantic turn, who could not easily be prevailed upon to peruse a pamphlet, but would seize with avidity on any thing in the form of a poem.

These ideas induce me (conscious as I am of its total deficiency in point of poetical merit) to take the liberty of requesting you, Sir, to lay this Essay before your Committee; to inform them that, if they consider it capable, in any shape, of promoting the cause they have with so much ardour and benevolence embraced, that it is entirely at their disposal; and to assure them, that it would give me infinite pleasure to indulge the slightest hope, that so feeble a performance could, in the smallest degree, co-operate towards the attainment of objects so desirable to every feeling heart and unbiassed mind.

That the generous exertions of yours, and the other Philanthropic Societies, instituted for the same praise-worthy purposes, may be ultimately and speedily crowned with the success they so richly merit, is the sincere wish of,

SIR,

Your, and their,

Most obedient,

and very humble servant,

EDIN. Feb. 14, 1792.

J. MARJORIBANKS.

S L A V E R Y :

A N

ESSAY IN VERSE.

BRITANNIA'S heroes for fair Freedom fought,
And gain'd, at length, the prize they nobly fought.
On our brave ancestors did Freedom smile,
And fix'd her empire in their happy isle.
There still she flourishes in all her charms,
Each heart enlivens, and each bosom warms.

Ungrateful men! to whom such boons she gave!
Who dare whole nations of mankind enslave!
From the rich ports, where she triumphant reigns,
Forth fly the fleets that carry freights of chains!
From peaceful counting-houses edicts pour,
Afric's wide realms rapaciously to scour.
By Freedom's sons o'er distant oceans borne,
Are helpless wretches from their country torn!
In noisome cells, where fell Distemper glows,
A favour'd part *Death* frees from future woes!
Or happy they, who in the friendly deep
Fly from their tyrants to eternal sleep!

What

What horrid fears must haunt th' untutor'd mind
 (Too *just*, alas!) of torments yet behind !
 On shocking feasts must savage fancy brood *,
 Where pale Europeans prey on human food !
 His bloody limbs, yet quiv'ring on the board,
 Glut the keen stomach of his ruthless lord !
 Or on the shrine of vengeful gods he lies ;
 And, in atonement for a Christian, dies !
 Yes! every slave must yield a master food,
 Who slowly fattens on his vital blood !
 Blest, if at once his cruel tortures ceas'd,
 And gave white cannibals a short liv'd feast !
 Yes! Afric's sons must stain the bloody shrine !
 But all those victims, Avarice, are *thine* !
 On Mercy's God those tyrants dare to call ;
 But Av'rice only is their lord of all !
 To him their rites incessantly they pay ;
 And waste for him the Negro's life away !
 " But hear!" say you. Philosophy will hear ;
 Whoever argues, he will lend an ear.
 " On their own shore those wretches *Slaves* we found †,
 " And only mov'd them to a fairer ground.

Captives

* The general idea of the new Negroes seems to be, that they are to be devoured.

† This, and every other argument I have put into their mouths, I have frequently heard the planters use. Futile as they are, I believe no better can be found.

" *Captives in war* they met this wayward fate ;
 " Or Birth had doom'd them to a fervile state.
 " Oft they are convicts, sentenc'd for their crimes
 " To endless exile from their native climes.
 " With plants they knew not on those sterile lands,
 " *Here* are they nourish'd by our friendly hands ;
 " Of our own properties we give them share,
 " And food or raiment never cost them care.
 " On them no debts, no difficulties prey,
 " Not Britain's peasants half so blest as they !"
 Hold, impious men ! the odious theme forbear !
 Nor with such treason wound a Briton's ear !
 The British peasant ! healthy, bold, and *free* !
 Nor wealth, nor grandeur, half so blest as he !
 The state of life, for *happiness the first**,
 Dare you compare with this the *most accurs'd*
You found them slaves—but who that title gave !
 The God of Nature never form'd a slave !
 Tho' Fraud, or Force acquire a master's name,
 Nature and Justice must remain the same !
 He who from thieves their booty, conscious, buys,
 May use an argument as sound and wise :
 That he conceives no guilt attends his trade,
 Because the booty is already made.

B

For

* I would here be understood to allude to the peasantry of England.

For your own honour, name not Afric's wars !
 Ye, whose curs'd commerce rais'd those civil jars !
 Each petty chief, whose tribes were drain'd for you,
 For *your vile traffic* roams in quest of new ;
 For you in guiltless blood imbrues his hands,
 And carries havoc o'er his neighbour's lands !
 They whom the feebler rage of war may spare,
 A harder fate from you and Slavery share !
 For you—*sole instigators to the wrong**,
 The brutal victor hurries them along,
 From Afric's far interior regions driven,
 To you—and Anguish are those wretches given †

Nor yet are you, for any *righteous cause*,
 The *executioners of Afric's laws* ;
 Th' *atrocious criminals* I oft have view'd,
 European Justice has so far pursu'd ;
 Emblems of Innocence they met my eyes,
 In soft simplicity and young surprise † !

But I, alas ! may spare my idle strains,
 Which ne'er can wrest them from European chains †
 For Int'rest speaks in language far too strong,
 Either to heed a sermon, or a song !

For

* I must here remind the reader that the lines are addressed to *all* concerned in the Slave-Trade ; but the planters, for whose use the negroes are ultimately intended, may be considered as the original instigators of the traffic.

† Of the great number of new negroes I have seen, a very considerable proportion appeared to me to be under 14 years of age.

Yet happy I, and not in vain I write,
 If I could render but their chains more light ;
 Could I but wipe one tear from SLAVERY'S eye,
 Or save his heart one agonising sigh !

Grant then your plea :—“ Necessity demands
 “ The toil of foreign slaves' unwilling hands.”
 Yet no necessity could e'er excuse,
 The more than savage cruelty you use* !

“ Those creatures are so obstinate,” you say,
 “ That but from punishment they will obey ;
 “ No kindness soothes ; no gratitude they know” —
 Ah ! little gratitude, indeed, they owe !
 Ere you this virtue to their race denied,
 Th' effects of kindness might have well been tried !

Come, now, reflect what *tender* modes you take
 To make those beings labour—*for your sake* !
 First, then, you are so generous and good
 To give them time to rear a *little* food ;
 On the same selfish principle, of course,
 You feed (*far better though*) your mule or horse,
 Small is the portion, poor the granted foil,
 Till'd by the Negroe's restless Sabbath's toil !
 What loud applause a master must deserve,
 Not to permit his property † to *starve* !

B ij

But

* While I speak of the cruelty practised by planters in general,
 I would not be understood to say that there may not be exceptions.

† So they term them ; but I deny that, in the sight of God,
 any human being can be the *property* of another.

But worn by toils he can no more renew,
 The helpless wretch is turn'd adrift by you*!
 Ye, who destroyed, refusing to sustain
 The few unhappy days that yet remain!
 To render misery itself more hard,
 You term it Favour, Freedom, and Reward :
 Can we your generosity deny—
 Who grant your victims—*liberty to die!*

SOON

* I have seen several of these unfortunates expire, literally of hunger who had been picked up on the road by soldiers; but too late for their preservation. I have known a good many others, who had been abandoned by their owners, supported for years by the humanity of those poor fellows.

One old debilitated negro had resided for several years at Stoney-hill barracks; and I believe remained there at the time I left the Island. He was the property of the Honourable (*ex officio*) Paul Phipps, then Custos, or Chief Magistrate of Kingston, one of the representatives for that town in the House of Assembly, Colonel of the regiment of Saint Andrew's Militia, and one of the judges of the Common Pleas of that parish.

If such an act of deliberate cruelty, as the abandoning this helpless wretch, could be committed by a man who united in his own person the conspicuous characters of a judge, a legislator, a militia commander, and in these several capacities, as well as in his private profession as a merchant, uniformly maintained an unblemished reputation; who was, I believe, free from pecuniary embarrassments; and who being himself advanced in years, might have been expected to have felt some degree of sympathy for the infirmities of age. I think I should have been justified from this single instance, (even if a variety of others had not fallen under my observation) in inferring that this practice of turning out old, or unserviceable slaves to *pick*, as they emphatically term it, must be generally prevalent among persons in more obscure stations, of less respectable characters, or in more indigent circumstances.

Soon as the trembling crew are landed *here*,
 Their quiv'ring flesh the burning pincers fear ;
 Proudly imprinting your degrading brand
 On men, created by your Maker's hand !
 A dreadful specimen, we may suppose,
 This *warm* reception gives of future woes !

Ere the poor Savage yet can understand
 The haughty language of a foreign land ;
 Ere he conceive your meaning, or your view,
 The whip directs him what he is to do.
 No sex, no age, you ever learn'd to spare,
 But female limbs indecently lay bare ;
 See the poor mother lay her babe aside *,
 And stoop to punishment she must abide !
 Nor midst her pangs, her tears, her horrid cries,
 Dare the sad husband turn his pitying eyes.

Amongst your numbers, do we never meet
 Villains so most atrociously complete,
 Who, with curs'd accuracy, count the days,
 The hours of labour pregnancy delays ;
 Who Nature's wond'rous work attempt to spoil
 By stripes, by terrors, and excess of toil †.

Aqualta's

* The negro women who have young children, carry them fastened on their backs, while they are at work in the field.

† To the villainous principle, that it is *cheaper* to purchase Guinea negroes ; than, by better usage, and lighter labour, to encourage population among those of *this* country, may, in a great

Agualta's* stream by rains become a flood,
 Once by its side a fearful female flood ;
 Th' attempt to cross it was a certain death—
 To tarry worse, perhaps—her tyrant's wrath !
 Some anxious hours, *unwilling*, did she stay ;
 Then thro' the less'ning torrent fought her way.
 Prostrate she lay before her despot's feet,
 Imploring mercy she was not to meet !
 For ah ! the ruffian's heart was hard as steel !
 No pity *he* had e'er been known to feel !
 While the lash tore her tir'd and tortur'd frame,
 The pangs of labour prematurely came.
 She clasp'd her murder'd infant to her breast ;
 Stretch'd her fore limbs, and sunk in endless rest † !

Your ingenuity we must confess,
 In finding various methods to distress :
 See the wretch fasten'd to an emmet's nest,
 Whose stings in myriads his whole frame molest !
 Or smear'd with cowheage all his body o'er,
 His burning skin intolerably fore !
 Chains, hooks, and horns, of every size and shape,

Mark

measure, be ascribed the necessity of so vast an annual importation from Africa.

* Agualta, a rivulet which takes its rise in the Liguanea mountains. It is vulgarly known by the name of Wag-water.

† This happened during my residence *here*, within little more than a mile of the spot where I now sit : viz. on Norbrook mountain ; the property of Mr Long, compiler of the History of Jamaica. Stoney-hill, 16th. October. 1786.

Mark those who've once attempted an escape.
 A fitter isle first us'd, but *this* improves,
 That curs'd invention call'd Barbadoes Gloves*.
For your own sakes, your malice and your whim
 But *rarely* sacrifice a Negroe's limb.
 Unless a Slave of sedentary trade,
 (A luckless Taylor well may be afraid);
 Where there's no great occasion for a pair,
 You may lop off the leg he has to spare †.
 Were there a surgeon—and there may be such ‡,
 Whose heart compassion had the power to touch;
 Who dar'd the horrid office to decline,
 Your laws condemn him in a heavy fine ||.

If int'rest teaches you their limbs to spare,
Immediate § murders must be still more rare.
 Tho' 'tis this selfish sentiment alone
 That oft deters you to destroy *your own*.

But

* Slips of wood are placed between every two fingers, and the whole screwed or wedged close together, so as to give most exquisite torture. I have known this infernal machine kept on house slaves for many days together.

† The reason assigned to a gentleman of my acquaintance, by his overseer, for cutting off the leg of one of his negroes in his absence; was, that the fellow having run off, he thought this the most effectual method of preventing his trying it a second time; adding, that as *he was a taylor*, the *property* was not a bit less valuable.

‡ I mean, even in the West-Indies.

|| The penalty, I think, is 50l. currency.

§ *Immediate*; in contradistinction to the slow murder of toil and torment.

But should your passions hurry you away
Another person's property to slay,
 The guilt's consider'd in a venial light,
The proof is difficult ; the sentence slight *.
 Nay, Malice, safe, may find a thousand times
 When no *white evidence* can prove his crimes.
 Since, 'tis establish'd by your partial laws,
 No slave bears witness in a *white* man's cause †.
 'Tis said your equitable laws confine
 The Negroe's punishment to *thirty-nine* ‡.
 A specious sound !—which never gave redress,
 Since who the dev'l can prove when you transgress,
 Or curs'd pretences you can find, with ease,
 For nine and thirties num'rous as you please,
 A jealous mistress finds a ready sham
 To give a handsome maid the sugar dram || ;
Closely

* Generally payment of the price of the negro to his owner. It is then, it may be remarked, as expensive to kill another man's slave as your own. But this does not follow ; in the former case, the loss is certain ; in the latter, the fact must be proved (which is often impossible) before the damages can be incurred.

† Not only slaves, but free negroes, and people of colour, are excluded. They are, however, admitted as evidences *against each other*.

‡ As there is seldom more than one white man in the field the futility of this law is clear. (Original note, 1786.) For the same reason it is obvious, that the late Act of Assembly of Jamaica, in favour of slaves, must be ineffectual. (Feb. 1792.)

|| An equal mixture of rum and salt.

With her fair hands prepares the naufeous draught,
 And pours the scalding mixture down her throat ;
 Closely confin'd for mad'ning nights and days,
 Her burning thirst no liquid drop allays.

Nay, well I know a proud revengeful dame,
 Who gave a dose too loathsome here to name*.

It must be own'd you *all* do wond'rous well,
 Yet still in *torturing* the fair excel.

What strange inventions has their genius found,
 (Impell'd by Jealousy) to plague and wound !
 And in *those modes* we should the least suppose
 That *female delicacy* would have chose.

Bad is at best the Slave's most easy state !

Yet some are destin'd to a harder fate.

Villains there are, who, doubly bent on gain,
 Most nicely calculate the toil and pain ;

Who fix the time (Oh ! Heav'n ! why sleeps thy wrath ?)

They may, *with profit*, work their gangs to death.

“ Whether shall we,” those precious scoundrels say,

“ Grasp Fortune quickly, or make long delay ?

“ A hundred slaves we have no fund to buy ;

“ The strength of *half that number* let us try,

“ With *mod'rate toil*, from practice it appears

“ These slaves might live, perhaps, a dozen years ;

C

“ To

* A lady of my acquaintance caused a slave, in presence of her family and strangers, to swallow a glass of rum mixed with human excrement.

“ To us, you know, the matter will be even,
 “ If we can make as much of them in seven*.”

The price of property they only weigh,
 Regardless, else, what *lives they take away!*

In mild Britannia many of you dwell,
 Where tortur'd Slavery ne'er is heard to yell.
 You fly wherever Luxury invites,
 And Dissipation crowns your days and nights;
 The dire reflection never meets your view,
 What pangs, what bloodshed, buy those joys for you!
 Your injur'd slaves, perhaps, you *never saw* †;
 And doubt the picture I *so truly* draw.

Such would not willingly, I hope, impose
 The last extremity of human woes.

But, if from Freedom's land you never stray'd,
 By false descriptions you may be betray'd.

Self-interested men have met your ear;

I, *without int'rest* ‡, will be more sincere!

Wretches by want expell'd from foreign climes ||;

Escap'd from debts, or justice due their crimes;

I

The

* This diabolical practice is called *driving* a gang. I have repeatedly heard calculations made on this subject, with all the coolness and accuracy of an innkeeper estimating the probable expenditure of his post-horses.

† Many proprietors of estates in this country have never been in the island.

‡ At least, no other than the interest of humanity.

|| The life of a *book-keeper* is, in general, such a complication of drudgery and disease, pride and poverty, despotism and fer-

The base, the ignorant, the ruffian steer,
 And find a desperate asylum *here*.
 Abject and servile tho' themselves they be
 To those above them but in one degree ;
 O'er the subordinate, sad, sable crew
 They have as absolute controul as you.
 Men uninform'd, uncultivated, rude,
 Whose boist'rous passions ne'er have been subdu'd ;
 Whose tempers, never naturally mild,
 Care and misfortune render still more wild ;
 Their furious hearts a short relief procure,
 To wreak on others more than they endure ;
 By such caprice are Negroes doom'd to bleed,
 The Slaves of Slavery—They are low indeed !

He who has made an independence *here*,
 At home in splendor hurries to appear ;
 London, or Bath, with lying fame refounds,
 " A fresh Creole!—worth Fifty Thousand Pounds!"

C ij

Tho'

vility, that no man of birth, education, spirit, or sensibility would, if previously acquainted with its nature, ever engage in it. That there are, however, among this class of men some unfortunate people of the above description, is certain; (though, as matters are now conducted, they could not well be possessed of less essential qualifications:) But a far greater proportion of them are low and illiterate, (for it is far from requisite that a *book-keeper* should be able to read) many of them are desperadoes, fraudulent bankrupts, jail-birds, deserters from the troops, run-away seamen, and other vagabonds of all countries and denominations. Several of them enlisted in the 19th regiment, and rejoiced greatly at their change of situation.

Tho' ten he knows the limit of his store,
 He must keep up the figure first he wore.
 Thoughtless, he riots in the gay career ;
 And finds himself half ruin'd in the year.
 Duns grow importunate—and friends but cool ;
 Back to Jamaica comes the bankrupt fool.
 First goes the Pen* ; the Polink † ; worse and worse ;
 At last the Sugar-work is put to nurse,
 He strives with Jews and Marshalls long—in vain—
 Once thus involv'd, he ne'er gets clear again.
 Worse ev'ry year his situation grows,
 'Till in a prison he concludes his woes ;
 Unless, perhaps, a seat at Council-board
 A sure protection should for life afford ;
 Or in the Lower House enacting laws—
 The laws eluding faster than he draws.
 But while he parries off from year to year,
 The Negroes' suff'rings are indeed severe !
 For their vain lord the most supplies to raise,
 Ill fed ; hard work'd ; they know no resting days ‡ !

Perhaps

* The villa.

† A mountain farm for raising provisions and flock.

‡ Indeed, none of them do ; but the Sunday, which they ought to be allowed to work for themselves, is generally stiled a resting day. When the master is hard pushed, I believe there may be found instances of the negroes being cheated out of a great part even of this their *own* day.

Perhaps to greedy jobbers lent on hire*,
 Who from excess of toil their gain require ;
 Who have no int'rest in them to preserve ;
 And if they labour, care not how they starve.
 Or seiz'd by marshalls, and to market brought ;
 By various masters families are bought.
 Amidst their unregarded sighs and tears,
 The wife and husband fall to diff'rent shares ;
 Their clinging offspring from their arms are tore,
 And hurried from them, ne'er to meet them more!

I knew a foetus, in mere wanton play,
 Sold from the mother in whose womb it lay,
 Unhappy mother! doom'd for months to bear
 The luckless burden, thou art not to rear †!

What

* Bad as the situation of slaves is in general, it will easily be credited that those on bankrupt estates (of which God knows, there is no scarcity) are more peculiarly wretched. But the most super-eminently miserable of the human race are, undoubtedly, the negroes belonging to *jobbing gangs*. Should the person who hires them, dispose of a negro; should he shoot him through the head, or stab him to the heart; he would, I dare say, be obliged to pay the price of him to his owner. But it does not appear that he is liable to replace those who may be lost by accidental, or natural deaths—and no death, surely, is so *perfectly natural*—none, I will aver, so frequent, in *jobbing gangs*, as from the effects of hunger, want of accommodation, violent blows, excessive labour, severe flogging, and every other possible species of cruelty and bad treatment.

† The bargain was struck in hearing of the unfortunate mother.

What dreadful partings, for Revenge's sake,
 Do furious females in a moment make!
 Their fav'rite maids, with whom from youth they grew;
 As fine their shape; and scarce less fair their hue*;
 For some slight error; some unlucky chance;
 A tea-cup broken; or a lover's glance;
 Feel all the fury of their quenchless flame;
 And meet the punishments of pain and flame.
 The parent's, sister's, ev'ry tender tie—
 All are dissolv'd—and round the isle they fly!

Accursed state! where Nature, and where Love,
 Rude violations must for ever prove!
 You, brutal ravishers! pretend in vain
 That Afric's children feel no jealous pain.
 Untaught EUROPEANS, with illib'ral pride,
 Look with contempt on all the world beside;
 And vainly think no virtue ever grew,
 No passion glow'd beneath a sable hue.
 Beings you deem them of inferior kind †;
 Denied a human, or a thinking mind.
 Happy for Negroes were this doctrine true!
 Were *feelings lost to them—or giv'n to you!*

But

* The ladies are generally attended by girls of colour, who, frequently, are their own near relations; in the third or fourth generation, many of them are almost as fair as Europeans.

† I have often heard planters, talking of their negroes, very gravely style them their *Cattle*.

But Love and Passion ne'er had more controul,
 Than o'er the African's hot, haughty soul.
 Oft, 'mongst your slaves, a once proud chief we find,
 Of dauntless courage, and exalted mind ;
 His body cover'd o'er with many a scar,
 Proofs of his prowess in the field of war ;
 More keen his *mental* than *corporeal* pains,
 While his fierce *spirit feels* your lash and chains.
 In vain the noble pride, which glory gave,
 You would subdue, and " *break the stubborn slave.*"
 Resolv'd to perish by a hero's hand,
 He seeks in suicide his native land*.

Or, should he take a bolder, juster course,
 And try to vindicate his rights by force ;
 Thro' coward numbers you the hero take,
 And hell's own torments wait him at the stake.

There are, of gentler race and low degree,
 Who were not ever *nominally free*.
 But while they loiter'd on their native soil,
 Slight was the nature of th' exacted toil.
 Taught but, perhaps, the savage chase to rouse ;
 Or guard the scanty flocks, or goats to brouse.

Perhaps,

* This is more particularly the case with the high spirited, (or, as the planters call them, the sulky, contumacious) Coromantees. I never conversed with any African negro, who did not seem to consider *death* as a *certain passport to Guinea*.

Perhaps, the only task they ever knew,
 To sow the seeds that half spontaneous grew;
 No complicated agriculture there;
 No modes of luxury made toil severe.
 No bloody fields their peaceful nature fought;
 But am'rous combats all they ever fought.
 Thus, slaves, perhaps, in nothing but the name,
 They never felt it—till Europeans came—
 In happy indolence life flipp'd away,
 And ease and sun-shine bless'd them every day*.
 But when the Christians came, in evil hour,
 They found the rigour of a tyrant's power;
 Some dragg'd by force, and some by fraud beguil'd †,
 The despot reigns—rich Monarch of a Wild!
 In dumb despair these helpless wretches pine,
 Yet are their feelings *exquisitely fine* ‡!
 Think you the silent slave beholds, *unmov'd*,
 The rape committed on his best-belov'd?

With

* The two blessings they seem most to relish.—To *sleep* in the sun, they consider as one of the highest luxuries. This state of ease and tranquillity appeared, from their artless accounts, to have been the original lot of most of the Guinea negroes I have interrogated on the subject.

† This also is from the information I have often received from African slaves.

‡ If I have not had proofs sufficient to warrant this assertion, they have at least been such as to carry to my own mind the fullest conviction of its truth.

With keenest pangs his am'rous heart is wrung,
Rage fires his soul, tho' fear restrains his tongue.

Oh! friendless race! for whom I, only, sigh*;
Who scarce have ever met a pitying eye!
Oh! had I power to melt, by tender strains,
Your lawless lords to mollify your pains!
Could I excite one sympathetic tear,
To make long-lost Humanity appear!
Could I but teach them—what they never knew,
The sacred rights which Nature gave to you!
But had I music—magic in my strain,
Music or magic had been giv'n in vain!

Here the rough planter looks profoundly wise;
"A pretty fellow this, indeed!" he cries.
"What would *your* conduct be, I'd gladly know,
"Should Chance on you some hundred slaves bestow:
"Pray would you set the worthless rascals free?
"Or would you keep them—*just the same as we †?*"
How he would act, till tried, no man can say,
But may temptation still be kept away!

D

I am

* Thank Heaven! *this* is no longer the case! I have now the pleasure to see thousands of my fellow Britons espouse the cause of this injured race of men, who appeared to me, at the time the above lines were written, to be for ever abandoned by the rest of the human species.

† I have frequently had these, and the like *knock me down* arguments dashed into my teeth.

I am an erring man, as well as you,
 And might by Av'rice be corrupted too ;
 But, be *my* conduct whatso'er it might,
 That ne'er could alter either Wrong or Right.

Altho' no wealth should e'er be defin'd mine ;
 Nay, were I doom'd in poverty to pine,
 Still with contempt I'd inwardly behold
 The greedy tribe whose guilt had purchas'd gold ;
 Content that Fortune may be still denied,
 If by the pangs of Innocence supplied !
 For *me* be never struggling victim tore
 From friends, from freedom, and his native shore !
 Give me no fields where fruits luxuriant wave,
 Whose culture ever curs'd a single slave !
 To me how bitter were the sweetest food,
 Whose feed was nourish'd by one wretch's blood !
 To me no beauties e'er could grace the soil,
 That ow'd its tillage to reluctant toil !
 Nor Flattery's voice, nor Music's notes I'd hear, [ear!
 Still whips would wound, and shrieks would pierce mine
 And, tho' I own'd whate'er was rich or rare,
 I'd dream of chains, of exile, and despair !
 Then take, ye tyrants, all that gold can grant !
 Be *mine* the heartfelt recititude you want* !

Do

* This is not addressed to planters in general (among whom there are undoubtedly many men of integrity) ; but the speculators in human blood *only*.

Do your fair fields with pipe or song resound?
 No! chains and scourges echo all around!
 Thro' verdant meads yon limpid waters flow,
 But scarce a freeman there is seen to go!
 Not gay to me yon gaudy mountain's side,
 There sickly Slavery "work'd and wept," and died!
 Can I behold yon mansion with a smile?
 Unwilling labour rear'd the splendid pile!
 Can all Lucinda's outward charms inspire
 A tender feeling, or a soft desire?
 When ev'ry gem the cruel creature wears,
 Was bought by streams of blood, and floods of tears.

If (Heaven avert it!) slaves e'er work'd for me,
 Easy, *I think*, their daily tasks should be.
 With lodging, raiment, and nutritious food,
 I'd make their lives *as happy as I cou'd*.

Again, perhaps, another sage will say,
 "This is a traitor, *who receives our pay!*
 "He, tho' by duty bound to guard our laws,
 "Dares to espouse the slave's rebellious cause!
 "Should factious Negroes rise against their lord,
 "Durst he refuse to draw his venal sword?
 "Is he not then at least as bad as we,
 "Who helps to *bind* the men he wishes *free?*"

The heavy charge I must confess too true;
 I am accomplice in the guilt with you!

But distant be the day my weapon draws
 Against whoever fights in Freedom's cause!
 If Britain bid, obey her servants must;
 Yet must I fight—if Britain be unjust!
 If by our hands their harmless blood be spilt,
 With Britain's lawgivers remains the guilt!

Statefmen and Patriots! does it well agree
 With you—the guardians of the brave and free!
 For the emolument of fordid trade,
 To give such villanies a legal aid*?
 Be not your pity to one race confin'd;
 But rise the benefactors of mankind!
 Let Afric's children tread their native shore;
 And BRITISH RUFFIANS ravage them no more!
 The galling chains of Servitude remove,
 And leave them all to Liberty and Love†!

STONEHILL BARRACKS, }
 LINGUANA, Oct. 1786. }

STANZAS

* Supposing (which yet remains to be proved) that the African Slave-Trade is actually of commercial advantage to Great Britain.

† If the reader imagine I here recommend the romantic, and as yet impracticable, scheme of emancipating the Negroes in the West-Indies; he greatly misunderstands me. My wishes (however obscurely they may be expressed), though when first formed, not encouraged by the slightest or most distant hopes of gratification; did then, as now, perfectly coincide with what I conceive to be the laudable views of the societies since instituted, for the abolition of the trade to Africa for slaves; the meliorating the condition of those already in the islands; and, perhaps, in time, the gradual establishment of their freedom.

S T A N Z A S

ON THE

*Execution of a NEGRO, at Spanish-town, Jamaica,
August 1785*.*

WHEN Brutus struck the fatal steel
Through the Imperial Cæsar's breast,
The glorious deed, the patriot's zeal,
Stood thro' the subject world confess'd.
Nor yet has time destroy'd the name,
Impartial ages love to praise ;
In story brightly shines his fame,
Immortal as the poet's lays.
Yet Brutus stabb'd a gen'rous heart,
In whose affections fast he grew ;
To whom he ow'd a filial part,
It was a parent Brutus slew.
He never felt the galling chain,
The lash that lacerates the slave ;
But favours (all conferr'd in vain)
Were the sole fetters Cæsar gave !

But

* This unhappy man had run off the estate to which he belonged. Having been some time afterwards met by one of the book-keepers, who attempted to seize him, a struggle ensued, in which the white man was killed.

But fee ! poor Azubal in torments dies !

At which my foul in agonies recoils !

See how he writhes ! Ah hear his horrid cries !

Whilst with slow cruelty the furnace boils !

Say, what was Azubal's atrocious crime,

Compar'd to Brutus' celebrated deed ?

(Candour regards no colour and no clime ;

And Freedom smiles as oft as tyrant's bleed !)

No friendly bosom did he wound ;

No acts of kindness had he known ;

Compell'd to till a foreign ground,

For ever exil'd from his own !

Still agonising mem'ry drew

The sweets that bless'd his Afric's shore ;

The days of slumb'ring ease he knew ;

The friends he must behold no more !

Indignant still recalls the day

European ruffians first drew near ;

When, vainly struggling, forc'd away,

From all that ever could be dear !

Beneath reluctant labour faint,

Say what reward awaits his pains ?

The whip's the solace of his plaint ;

And rest is granted but in chains !

Ideal lofs of Liberty inspir'd

The haughty Roman to destroy his friend ;

But keener injuries the Negro fir'd

To end a tyrant, and to kill a fiend.

Brutus still seems a parricide to me,

And Reason gives reluctantly applaufe ;

But to poor Azubal my praise is free,

Who boldly perish'd in a jufter caufe*.

* The name of *Azubal* is fictitious ; I wish I could add alfo that the circumftances are imaginary. But thefe verfes were actually written a few days after the execution of a Negro, who was *roasted to death at a flow fire* on the race-course near Spanifhtown, for the crime before mentioned. Of the many ftrong arguments which have been urged in favour of the abolition of the Slave-Trade, one of the moft obvious and incontrovertible, is furely this : That the constant importation of savage and untamed fpirits into the iflands, not only fubjects the white inhabitants to frequent alarm, danger, and fometimes death itfelf (to which they are feldom or never expofed from the Creole Negroes) ; but alfo affords the plea of neceffity to punifhments the moft fhocking to humanity, and highly difgraceful to the colonies of a civilized nation.

THE END.

ENTERED IN STATIONERS HALL.

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