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9
SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH,

DELIVERED AT A

PUBLIC MEETING

OF THE

Inhabitants of the City and County of Norwich,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

BRITISH COLONIAL SLAVERY.

JOHN HARVEY, ESQ. IN THE CHAIR.

/////////
BY

JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY.
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NORWICH:

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TO THE
MAYOR OF NORWICH.

We, the under-signed, hereby request the favour of your convening a General Meeting of the Inhabitants of this City, at such a time as may suit your convenience, in order to consider the propriety of petitioning Parliament to carry into effect the Resolutions passed in the last Sessions of the House of Commons, on the subject of Colonial Slavery.

JOHN MORSE
JOHN HARVEY
R. J. HARVEY
J. E. SMITH
R. D. SQUIRE
ROBERT HAWKES
N. BOLINGBROKE
WM. BURT
GEORGE S. KETT
JEREMIAH IVES

W. F. DRAKE, Clk.
JOHN GRAND
JOSEPH GURNEY
JOHN TAYLOR
JOSEPH GELDART
WM. YOUNGMAN
J. J. GURNEY
T. BRIGHTWELL
J. BOWMAN, Clk.

In compliance with the above very respectable Requisition, I hereby appoint a Meeting of the Inhabitants of this City to be held at One o'clock precisely, on Wednesday next, the 28th instant, at the Guildhall.

J. S. PATTESON, Mayor.

Sword-Room, 22d Jan. 1824.

RESOLUTIONS.

1st.—That this Meeting feels the highest satisfaction in considering the following Resolutions, on the subject of Negro Slavery, passed by the House of Commons in the last Session of Parliament.

FIRST.—That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the Slave Population in his Majesty's Colonies.

SECOND.—That through a determined and persevering, but judicious and temperate enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the Slave Population, such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of his Majesty's Subjects.

THIRD.—That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose at the earliest period that may be compatible with the well-being of the Slaves, with the safety of the Colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of all parties concerned therein.

FOURTH.—That these Resolutions be laid before his Majesty.

2d.—That this Meeting considers it an additional cause of satisfaction, that the institution and arrangement of the measures necessary for effecting the great objects expressed in the Resolutions of the House of Commons, should have been undertaken by the Executive Administration of the country.

3d.—That on account of the difficulties which hinder the attainment of these objects, it appears to this Meeting necessary, that the people should express their continued interest in them; and by their Petitions to Parliament endeavour to strengthen the hands of Government in the prosecution of this good work.

4th.—That a Petition be therefore presented without delay from the Inhabitants of this City to the House of Commons, that they would carry into effect, in such a manner as they may deem most wise and salutary, and as speedily as under the circumstances is possible, their late Resolutions on the subject of Colonial Slavery; and that the Members of the City be requested to present it.

5th.—That a Subscription be now entered into in order to defray the expences attendant on this measure.

6th.—That these Resolutions, with the Petition, be printed in the Norwich Newspapers.

PETITION.

To the Honourable the House of Commons of Great Britain and Ireland, in Parliament assembled.

We, the Inhabitants of the City and County of Norwich, consider it our duty to express the cordial satisfaction which we entertain in the Resolutions proposed during your last Session by his Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and unanimously agreed to by your Honourable House, on the subject of the *Slave Population of the British Colonies*.

We consider the pledge thus given by your Honourable House, of your sentiments respecting the evil effects of Colonial Slavery, and of your intentions to use every effort for the amelioration of the condition of the Slaves, and for the gradual Abolition of Slavery itself, to have been founded on the soundest principles of justice and morality, as well as policy; and we consider it an additional cause of high satisfaction, that the prosecution of this important and interesting work has been undertaken by the Executive Administration of the Country.

We are sensible of the difficulty and delicacy which attend the great object we have in view, and we are very far from desiring any such precipitancy in the measures of Government as can endanger the safety of the Colonies, or the fair interests of any of the parties concerned: but under a settled conviction that it is the bounden duty of this country gradually to introduce the Slave Population of our Colonies to a participation in those civil rights, on which they have, in true justice, an equal claim with ourselves; we beg leave humbly, yet earnestly, to petition your Honourable House to continue your attention to the subject, and to effect the great purpose expressed in your Resolutions, in such a manner as you may deem most wise and salutary, and with as little delay, as under the circumstances, is possible.

The following Speech was, with the obliging assistance of a Gentleman who took notes of it, reduced to writing after its delivery, and is now, with a few alterations, submitted to the Public, in the hope that it may in some slight degree promote that important and deeply interesting object—the gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies.

SPEECH, &c.



IN rising for the purpose of once more presenting to my friends and fellow citizens a series of resolutions on the subject of Colonial Slavery, I consider that I have some claim on the sympathy of the present meeting, for I come forward under a deep sense both of the importance of our object, and of the difficulty and delicacy which attend it in various points of view. I may confess that two or three months since I was, as some of my friends well know, numbered among the fearful and faint-hearted in reference to this object, and the visit of our friend Clarkson was the means of re-animating my zeal, and of leading me to take a fresh survey of the principles on which the abolitionists are proceeding, and of the facts by which those principles are supported. This survey has completely convinced me that we are treading on sound and solid ground, and that if we persevere in our course, not only with firmness but with moderation, our ultimate success is inevitable. I may now proceed to lay before you a few resolutions, and in doing so, I beg it to be understood that I am acting only as the organ of a committee, which has for a short time been established in Norwich, and over which our worthy Chairman has been kind enough to preside. In reading these resolutions I shall take the

liberty to explain the reasons which satisfy my own mind of their propriety. The first resolution is intended to express our cordial satisfaction in the resolutions agreed to by the House of Commons during its last session, on the subject of Colonial Slavery. In those resolutions the House declared—first, that it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the slaves in the British Colonies. Such a declaration cannot fail to meet the hearty approbation of the friends of the cause, since it plainly recognises the fact that the condition of the slaves is at present defective and in need of amelioration ; and since it pledges the House to the adoption of measures which should not be weak and merely nominal in their operation, but *effectual and decisive*. In the second resolution of the House of Commons, the ultimate object proposed is, that the negroes should participate in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of the subjects of these realms ; terms which plainly express nothing short of actual emancipation, and the House looks forward to the attainment of this object by the temperate and judicious enforcement of preparatory measures. Here is a perfect coincidence with the sentiments of the Abolitionists—for while the complete emancipation of the slaves is undoubtedly our final object, we have never entertained the opinion that this could be accomplished immediately ; but on the contrary, have always insisted on the necessity of such preparatory measures, as might gradually introduce the negro to a condition adapted to the reception of his freedom. With this part of the resolutions of the House of Commons,

therefore, it is our duty to express a cordial concurrence—and it cannot fail to be a source of much satisfaction that the House goes on to pledge itself, to accomplish the great purpose in view *at the earliest period* that may be compatible with the welfare of the slaves, with the safety of the colonies, and with the fair interests of all the parties concerned. This declaration goes to the full extent of our wishes, and it gives me the opportunity of observing, that it never has been the intention of the Abolitionists to neglect the fair interests of any of the parties, or to shrink from the consideration of such a compensation to the planters, as can justly be claimed under the circumstances of the case. In upholding this view, we have the example of the Columbian Government, which has imposed a tax upon the whole community for the gradual redemption of the slaves, at a fair remunerating price. I adduce this example, not for the purpose of recommending this particular plan, which in my opinion is liable to several objections, but only to exemplify the general principle. Before I leave the consideration of my first resolution, I would just say, that a further ground of satisfaction is afforded by the entire unanimity with which the resolutions of the House of Commons were agreed to; even by those members who were immediately connected with the West Indies, and who have thus virtually engaged themselves, not only to refrain from opposing such wise and salutary measures as the House may have in its view for the purpose of effecting the gradual Abolition of Slavery, but actually to co-operate in the prosecution of this interesting work.

My second resolution is intended to express the satisfaction which we feel in the important fact, that the institution and arrangement of the measures, of which the gradual abolition of slavery is to be the object, has devolved on the executive administration of the country; and I sincerely hope, that with whatsoever party any of us may be connected, and whatsoever may be our particular political sentiments, we shall be unanimous in passing this resolution. That Ministers should have undertaken the prosecution of this object is very satisfactory, for obvious reasons. For in the first place they are possessed of far more power to conduct it successfully than any other persons in the kingdom. Secondly, the situations which they hold, give them an opportunity of obtaining a more accurate knowledge of all the circumstances of the case than could be enjoyed by others; and such a knowledge will, I trust, enable them to carry on their plans for the benefit of the slaves, in a manner at once effective and unobjectionable. I am persuaded, moreover, that the sincerity of Ministers, in reference to the present question, cannot, with any reason, be doubted. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in the course of the debate, did not hesitate so to pledge himself to this cause, that standing as he does in a conspicuous station, in the midst of this great and free country, it would be utterly impossible for him now to withdraw himself from it. This pledge was followed up by the communications of Earl Bathurst to the Governors of the respective colonies, which, though mild and moderate, were at the same time firm and resolute, and one of which I will now take the liberty of reading to the meet-

ing. You will observe the decided tone in which Lord Bathurst here insists upon the immediate and total disuse of the punishment of flogging, as it relates to women ; and in which he recommends, that with regard to men, the whip should no longer be employed as the stimulus to labour ; and you will, I am sure, agree with me in approving the wisdom of his thus making a distinction in the treatment of the two sexes, the foundation of his system for ameliorating the condition of the slaves ; for no society can ever rise from a state of barbarism while this distinction continues to be disregarded.

The third resolution, to which I would now call your attention, expresses, that under all the circumstances of the present question, it is peculiarly desirable that the people should continue to declare their sentiments by petitions to Parliament, in order to strengthen the hands of Government in the efforts which they are making for the benefit of the slaves. That such a resolution is perfectly constitutional will be immediately allowed ; for nothing can be more obviously consistent with British principles, than that the *people* should address their petitions to the *legislature*, in order to assist the *executive administration* in the prosecution of an object which has their own full concurrence. But the point to which I particularly wish to direct your attention, as a ground for the present resolution, is that of the difficulties which have been thrown in our way. Were the abolition of slavery a perfectly easy matter—were there no opposition to encounter, and no difficulty to surmount—it would be wholly unnecessary for the people to repeat their petitions. In

such case we might sit still in the comfortable persuasion, that the Government would effect the object in view without any unnecessary delay. But what is the real state of the question? How has Lord Bathurst's communication to the colonies been received? In several of the islands it has been met by a determined and even furious contradiction. By the legislature of Jamaica, a series of resolutions have been drawn up in opposition to that Minister's recommendations, which, were it not almost too ridiculous to imagine, might even be construed as expressing an intention of rebellion against the mother country. Towards the *administration* of that country this legislature has certainly displayed no peculiar affection; for they have actually appointed a committee for the purpose of drawing up a petition to the King, that he may be pleased to remove Lord Bathurst from his councils for ever. They have even gone so far as to annul the Act passed some years since in the colony for the registration of slaves—an Act which was considered essential to the prevention of the fresh importation of Negroes, which was adopted by the legislature of the island, on an express understanding with the British Parliament. Among the senators of the colonial legislatures, one gentleman in Barbadoes is pleased to meet the injunctions of our Colonial Secretary, respecting the flogging of women, not only with violent opposition, but with vulgar jokes on the gallantry of Englishmen. Such raillery on a subject of so delicate and affecting a nature does, I confess, appear to me to be utterly abominable. In the island of Trinidad a large public meeting of the planters have been instigated, by Earl Bathurst's commu-

nication, to pass a series of resolutions, in which they declare that the flogging of women, as well as of men, is indispensably necessary to the good order of the colonies ; that it is quite a mistake to suppose that the holding of Sunday markets is any profanation of the sabbath ; and that nothing more is needed with respect to the evidence of slaves, since that evidence is already received *when it is corroborated by two free men*. The vengeance of the West Indians has even been wreaked on the Ministers of Religion, and the *gentlemen* of Barbadoes have united their forces in demolishing the meeting-house of a Methodist Missionary, and in forcing him to fly from the island for his life, on account of his supposed connection with the *villainous African Institution*. And when a proclamation was issued by the Governor of the island, offering a reward on the conviction of the offenders, it was received by these gentlemen rioters, with nothing but insult and mockery.

Such is the nature of the opposition, which renders it so desirable for us to strengthen the hands of Government by our petitions to Parliament. And now permit me to make a short digression, that I may consider the subject of *Insurrections*. There is nothing which has so much alarmed the public mind, in reference to the present question, as the vehement declarations of some of the Colonial Legislatures, that the benevolent proceedings of our Government could not fail to be productive of the most formidable insurrections among the slaves, that the planters would be the martyrs to our heedless philanthropy, and that all the islands would unquestionably overflow with blood. On

these declarations I would observe, that the Colonial Legislatures would, in my opinion, hardly be so foolish as to promulgate such inflammatory sentiments, did they really apprehend that there was much danger of rebellion. And, indeed, these gentlemen are prone to contradict themselves on the subject, for I find from the Courier of yesterday, that one of the members of the legislative assembly of Jamaica, about six weeks since, moved a message to the Governor, that the House, on examining the slave law, had found it *complete in all its parts*, and that it was undesirable to take any further measure, at present, to ameliorate the condition of the slaves, since, in consequence of the discussion in Parliament, it might tend to unsettle their minds, which are *now* (viz. six months after the arrival in Jamaica of the first intelligence of that discussion) *perfectly quiet and contented*.

But this is a question on which it will be suitable to advert to some very plain moral principles. Is it kindness? is it benevolence? is it the hope of future relief from hardship which induces a man to rise up in anger against his neighbours? Certainly not, for these things have no other tendency than to pacify and to please. It is the continuance of oppression, it is the despair of any amelioration in the condition of the oppressed, which produces a disposition to rise in arms against the oppressor. Let me suppose for an instant that I was myself a slave in the West Indies, and subject to the many hardships which accompany such a condition. Were I told that the hand of benevolence was to be extended towards me, that through the kind interference of the British Parliament,

my sufferings would be gradually mitigated, and in the end entirely removed, the effect on my mind of such information would, I think, undoubtedly be this, that I should be the more willing to bear my sufferings for a time, because of the bright hope of a future deliverance. But were I at the same time informed that the benevolent instructions of Parliament had been violently opposed by the Colonial Legislature to which I was immediately subject—were I told that a Committee of that Legislature had been appointed, to draw up a petition to the King for the removal from his councils of that Minister who was to conduct these schemes of mercy in my favour—that public meetings of the planters had been passing resolutions, insisting on the continuance of the cruel punishment of the whip as applied both to men and to women, as well as of that unjust provision which prevented my evidence from being received in a court of justice—did the intelligence moreover reach me, that the meeting-house which I had been accustomed to attend was levelled with the ground, and the Minister from whom I received instruction banished from the island, so that I was now to be deprived of the only consolations which my hard lot had admitted—I mean the consolations of religion ;—under such circumstances, I say, however it might still be my Christian duty to suffer rather than rebel, yet I must confess that the incitements to rebellion with which I should then be surrounded would appear to be powerful, pressing, and to the uncultivated mind, almost entirely irresistible. Now what do you think of the fairness displayed by these gentlemen, when they turn round upon us and say the fault is your's—

our blood is upon your heads? Undoubtedly it must be confessed that our proceedings form one link in the chain; for we know that all our actions, however free and spontaneous in themselves, form a connected part of that vast series of events which will assuredly terminate in the glory of God, and in the welfare of those that fear him. But such an admission can in no degree justify the notion that we are responsible for the evil consequences apprehended by the planters. Let us suppose, in order to familiarize our argument, that a tradesman exposes his silks and his muslins at the window of his shop, and that the thief is thereby tempted to break in and steal, and is in consequence brought to the gallows. Now should the thief turn round upon the tradesman and say, You are the cause of my sufferings—if you had not held out the temptation I should not have committed the crime: my blood is upon your head—would it not, in such a case, be competent to the tradesman to reply, No, my friend, the cause of your suffering is not my right, but your wrong. If then the benevolent instructions of the British Government are so abused by the planters, as that they thereby expose themselves to personal danger and distress, however they may be inclined to ascribe their sufferings to our philanthropy, we may, with the utmost justice reply, that they labour under a strange practical error—that their sufferings are to be attributed not to our *right*, but to their *wrong*.

I must now advert more particularly to the only insurrection which has of late actually taken place in our colonies, the insurrection at Demerara. I consider it as one instance of unfairness in an article which has lately ap-

peared in the Quarterly Review, that this insurrection is there attributed, without any reserve or hesitation, to the late discussion in Parliament, and to that cause only; and a similar unfairness has been evinced by many other persons who have endeavoured to impede the course of our proceedings.—Since the facts of the case are at present not fully known, and since they will soon come under the consideration of Parliament, it would be improper, by any decisive assertion, to prejudge the question. In the mean time, however, the correctness of the notion, that the Demerara insurrection originated in that discussion, has not been proved, and in my opinion is very far from probable. Gentlemen perhaps are hardly aware that this insurrection, which has been represented by the colonists as so formidable, and which must have arisen, if we are to believe their statements, out of deep and *long-laid* plots, broke out within three or four weeks of the first arrival of any intelligence at the colony of what had taken place at England. It is also to be observed, that the greater part of the slave population in that colony speak no other language than Dutch, and were therefore, in all probability, wholly unacquainted with these fearful contents of the English newspapers. Should it however appear that some misrepresentation of the declared intentions of our Government at home, when contrasted with the unabated hardships under which they were suffering in the colony, was the means of quickening the insurrectionary movements of these unfortunate negroes, it is still very obvious that the real origin of the mischief is to be found in those hardships. I happen to be acquainted

with a few circumstances relative to Demerara, which throw no little light upon this position ; for I have lately seen a letter from a gentleman of great respectability, resident on the spot, in which some account is given of certain individuals who are accused of having been active in the insurrection. One of these persons, Quamina, is described as being of a humble, quiet, and peaceable disposition, and “always a peace maker;” and it is added by the writer, that if he was really engaged in the insurrection, such a circumstance could be owing only to “*insupportable* provocation.” Another, named Jack, is the son of Quamina. He was married to a young woman who resided on a neighbouring estate, by whom he had two children, but a white man took away his wife from him, and thus destroyed his domestic felicity for ever. Now surely it is a perversion of reason, utterly at variance with all moral philosophy, and which even the most childish system of ethics ever invented would rise up and condemn, to attribute the rebellious conduct of this unhappy negro to the *abstract benevolence* of a distant Parliament, rather than to the *actual and enormous iniquity* of which he was himself the helpless and unoffending victim ; and against which, be it observed, the boasted laws of our colonies afford no protection or remedy whatsoever.

The observations which I have now ventured to offer, may serve to exemplify and confirm a very plain principle of which our friend Clarkson reminded us a few nights since, that we ought ever to distinguish between the *occasion* and the *cause* of events. Whatsoever then may have been the occasion of the insurrections which have at

various times taken place in the West Indies, the *cause* of them is unquestionably to be found in slavery, and in slavery alone. Nor shall we ever get rid of a liability to these frightful disasters, until we are delivered from that unrighteous system out of which they arise.

To return to the resolution, I hope it is now sufficiently clear that the obstructions to the progress of our cause, render it necessary for us to strengthen the hands of Government, by our petitions to Parliament. But were these obstructions absolutely insurmountable, were the opposition of the West Indians such as it was impossible to overcome, were there no hope of scaling the mountain before us, we should sink into flat despair, and soon arrive at the conclusion that all our petitions would be useless. It is therefore with peculiar pleasure that I turn to another branch of the subject, and proceed to shew, that those improvements, which by the Legislature of Jamaica are declared to be undesirable and almost impossible, are by the Legislatures of some others of the Islands cordially approved, and in part already acted on. At Tobago, an act was passed during the last year, which establishes courts of judicature for the trial of slaves, and gives them the benefit of trial by jury; admits the evidence of slaves against white persons; appoints guardians to take cognizance of their complaints; directs persons committed as slaves to be discharged as free, unless an owner prove his title to them within six weeks; secures to slaves the possession and inheritance of their property; abolishes the Sunday market; and grants them one day in every week for the cultivation of their provision grounds, except

during four months of the year. At Grenada, in consequence of the communication of Lord Bathurst, a Committee of the Legislature was appointed to draw up regulations, in order to secure for the slave a sufficient time to work in his ground, a specific allowance of food and clothing, and the right of enjoying and bequeathing personal property ; to limit and record all punishments ; to admit in certain cases the competency of slave evidence ; to discontinue public markets on the Lord's-day ; and to devise some effectual mode for ensuring to the negroes moral and religious instruction. At Nevis, we find the two branches of the Legislature declaring that they can see *no possible objection* to a slave's purchasing his own freedom subject to regulations. We find them also resolving positively that the cart-whip shall be abolished entirely as an instrument of driving ; that as far as practicable the slaves should become *adscripti glebæ*, and should not be separated from the soil ; that measures should be taken towards the admission of slave evidence under certain regulations, and that the punishment of females by cart-whipping and the exposure of the person, should be discontinued. At St. Kitt's, the King's Council has entered into some similar resolutions. " These," say they, " are framed with a view of improving the physical and moral condition of the slave, so as eventually to qualify him for a state of freedom, to *which object this Board will earnestly contribute*, upon such provisions being made for the protection of the person and property of the proprietors of slaves in this island, as may be expected from the wisdom and justice of the British Parliament, and from the benevolent solicitude of our Sovereign."

Now while the intelligence received from these islands of the intentions and acts of their Legislatures, afford us a solid encouragement to believe that the good and great work is really going forward, that intelligence is the more important, because (with every allowance for the different circumstances of different parts of the West Indies,) it must be considered on the whole, as offering to the fiery resolutions passed in Jamaica and some other colonies, a flat, decided, and most satisfactory contradiction.

We learn from the declarations made by these more pliable islanders, that the work of amelioration and emancipation may go forward not only with advantage to the slave, but with safety to the planter. And now that I am on this point of our subject, I would take the opportunity of earnestly recommending to your attention a pamphlet lately published by Thomas Clarkson, entitled, "Thoughts on the necessity of improving the condition of the slaves, with a view to their ultimate emancipation." That pamphlet contains a description of several instances of the emancipation of slaves in large bodies; and in every one of those instances the act of mercy, under the influence of wise and salutary regulations, was found to be perfectly consistent with the safety and advantage of all the parties concerned. A few of the examples alluded to I will take the liberty of briefly reciting. At the close of the first American war, a large body of Negroes, who had been in bondage under American masters, and had joined the ranks of the English army, were conveyed, at the order of our Government, to Nova Scotia, where a settlement was given to them, and where, with their wives and

children, they formed a society of upwards of two thousand persons. They long bore in that colony the character of sobriety and industry; and at length, when it was discovered that the climate of Nova Scotia was destructive to their health, they were transported to the coast of Africa, where they formed the new colony of Sierra Leone. There they continued to exert themselves in procuring their own maintenance, and the greater part of them soon became independent, and many even opulent. A very similar circumstance occurred at the close of the last American war, in 1814. A considerable body of slaves, who had been induced to desert the estates of their masters, and to enlist as soldiers in our army, were then placed on a proper allotment of land, in the island of Trinidad, where *they* also displayed the energy of freemen, and betook themselves with much sobriety and industry to the cultivation of their grounds.

It is probably known to most of the persons whom I am now addressing, that the colony of Sierra Leone has been augmented of late years to a very considerable extent, by large bodies of Negroes, re-captured on the coast of Africa, or during the middle passage, by the British cruisers. Many thousands of these miserable sufferers have been delivered from the holds of slave ships, and have been settled, under the protection of the English, in the vicinity of Sierra Leone. And how have they conducted themselves? Have they become a prey to indolence, or eagerly returned to a wild and undisciplined mode of life? No. They have, on the contrary, evinced, in the most remarkable manner, the tractability of the African character.

They have submitted themselves to the care of Christian pastors, have very generally adopted the principles of our holy religion, and have manifested in their conduct so much industry, sobriety, and order, as to afford a most instructive example to other communities, which boast of a far higher degree of knowledge and civilization.

But of all the examples adduced by this useful and benevolent writer, that of St. Domingo is the most completely in point ; and I have peculiar pleasure in mentioning it, because such is the want of information generally prevailing on the subject, that the history of that island is perpetually cited by our opponents as affording a triumphant argument against the abolition of slavery. In the year 1792, Santonax and Polverel were sent by the Revolutionary Government of France as commissioners to St. Domingo, in order to settle some disputes which had arisen on the subject of constitutional rights, between the free mulatto and the white inhabitants. Such was the destructive fury of the two parties, that the commissioners were obliged to call in the Negroes to their assistance, and this measure presently led to the emancipation of the whole slave population of the island, amounting to half a million in number. The slaves were in the first instance attached to the estates of their masters, as *adscripti glebæ*, for one year ; a term which, by Toussaint, (who came into power in 1794,) was very prudently extended to five years ; and that wise and excellent man added a variety of other regulations, which tended to secure at once the rights of the Negroes, and the safety of the white inhabitants. Now what was the consequence of the emancipa-

tion of slaves, when tried on this extensive scale, and in times of peculiar turbulence and danger? It was this—that the planters continued in the uninterrupted possession of their estates, and that the Negroes quietly worked on those estates for reasonable wages, until the year 1802, when the whole island was thrown into the most horrible confusion, by the iniquitous attempt of Buonaparte, under the fatal influence of the deluded planters, forcibly to reduce the emancipated black population, to their pristine state of slavery.

Still more interesting, if possible, is the narrative given by our philanthropic, author of the proceedings of Joshua Steele. During the course of the great contest respecting the abolition of the British Slave Trade, and when eighty yearsold, this gentleman sailed from London and crossed the Atlantic, in order to undertake the superintendence of his own estate—an estate of £2000 per annum, in the island of Barbadoes, and with the determination to change the whole system of its management. On his arrival he abolished the use of the whip as a stimulus to labour, instituted *task work* for small rewards, and established a court of judicature among the Negroes themselves, by order of which alone all punishments were inflicted. Afterwards, he converted almost the whole of his slaves into copyhold bond tenants, receiving from them a rent for the land which he permitted them to occupy, as well as for his legal interest in their own persons, and on the other hand paying them regular wages for their labour. When he had thus brought them to the very threshold of freedom, this work of mercy and true wisdom was cut short by the

death of the venerable planter, in his 91st year. In the mean time, however, the effects produced by his admirable plans were these—that order and happiness prevailed throughout this little community, and that both the quantity of labour effected in a given time by the Negroes, and the profits of the plantation itself, were multiplied *three-fold*.

It is said that the West Indian slaves are an abandoned race, who, if liberated from their bondage, would not fail to employ their power in the destruction of their former masters. It is said also that they are an incurably indolent race, and that if they were once delivered from the cart-whip, they would for ever cease to exert themselves, either in their own behalf, or in the service of others. But the instances which have now been adverted to, afford the most satisfactory evidence that neither of these assertions is true. They plainly evince that the Negroes are easily won by kindness, and that those who bestow upon them the sweet boon of liberty are perfectly safe in their hands; and further, that like other persons, they need no other stimulus to a willing industry, than those common motives which are found so universally efficacious, in actuating the *free labourer*.

Such, then, are the grounds which I have already laid for my resolution in favour of a petition—first, the difficulties which are thrown in our way; and secondly, the reasonable hope which so much solid evidence enables us to entertain, that all those difficulties may be surmounted to the unspeakable advantage of the slave, and without any danger to the planters. Before, however, I finally offer the resolutions to the meeting I must take the liberty of

adverting to a few of those general principles and facts (in relation to slavery, and to the present condition of the slaves,) on which our whole proceedings are grounded. That these proceedings should be marked by moderation is indeed earnestly to be desired. It is our decided wish that the measures of Government, in the pursuit of our object, should be prudent and temperate; and we are very far indeed from supposing that there may not be many of the West Indian planters, who treat their slaves with real benevolence. It is, I am sure, most agreeable to believe, that this may be the case with the great majority of their body. But while moderation and charity are thus exercised, it would be improper and absurd to shut our eyes either to principles or to facts. Now I suppose that all present will agree with me in the position, that a condition of society in which one large portion of the population is the absolute property of another, *must* have a tendency to corrupt, degrade, and harden the heart. The Quarterly Reviewers, who have treated the sufferings of our West Indian slaves with so light and faint a touch, have, in the very same number, presented to their readers a powerful description of the abominable cruelties practiced on the slaves in some of the states of North America. I will not undertake to calculate what allowance ought to be made for any supposed difference of character between the American and the Englishman; but of this I am fully assured—that man in his natural state, and until he is mended by something better than himself, *is far too prone to evil, to be safely intrusted with unlimited power over his fellow creatures.* Such is one of the principles to which I

wished to advert. Another still more fundamental principle is this—that the slave possesses a right to a property in his own person, much superior to that which can possibly belong to any second person. The right of the slave to a property in his own person is founded on the most unexceptionable of all titles—the *gift of God*. The right of his master to that property, although recognized by law, *and therefore not to be disregarded*, is in fact the mere creature of a depraved custom, and in the present instance has no other *origin*, than the most atrocious system of fraud and rapine which has ever disgraced the history of man.

And now with regard to facts; the Quarterly Reviewer visits with heavy condemnation the assertion of that great and good man, William Wilberforce—an assertion which, in my opinion, does him real credit—that a proposition which has of late been bandied about in almost every part of the kingdom—viz. that the condition of the West Indian slaves is fully equal to that of the free peasantry of this country, is “monstrous in itself, and implies a total insensibility to the native feelings and moral dignity of man.” Now certainly, in persons who are unacquainted with the subject, this proposition may imply little more than total ignorance; but in those who know what Colonial Slavery is, and are acquainted with its effects, it does appear to imply such an insensibility. Let us briefly run through the comparison between the two parties. I apprehend that the views of the persons who are so much attached to this proposition, are limited to the mere physical condition of the degraded negroes. The slaves, it is said, are clothed, fed, and housed; and we

grant that a certain provision of clothing, such as that warm climate requires, is directed by the colonial law to be given to them—that they have a small allowance of salt fish, and have provision grounds, which they are permitted to cultivate principally on the sabbath day. In these two points, I conceive that the comparison is still to the advantage of the British peasant. The same may certainly be said with reference to habitation, as the huts of the Negroes are greatly inferior to the English cottages. And with regard to labour, our peasantry would, I presume, be very unwilling to exchange their condition with that of those unfortunate bondsmen, who not only work like themselves for nine or ten hours during the day, but who for several months in the year, are compelled to continue their drudgery during half of every night, or the whole of every other night. But let it be conceded for a moment, that in point of clothing, food, housing, and labour, the condition of the West Indian slave, and that of the free British peasant, are equal. There are still a few other particulars of no very inferior moment, in which a strange difference will be found between the two parties in the comparison! In the first place the British peasant settles when he pleases in married life, as easily as any other person, and henceforward no man may interfere with his domestic comforts. The West Indian slave who takes a woman for his companion, is for the most part not married at all. And here I would observe, in passing, that the vaunted marriages of slaves, asserted by “the Voice from Jamaica,” to have taken place during the last year in that island, are believed by persons very well acquainted with

the subject, to have been effected in consequence of the discussions in England, and even in the course of a very few hours. But be the slave married in form or not, his connubial connection is totally unprotected by law; and the caprice of his master, or the sale by auction of the property of which he forms a part, may at any time tear his wife from his bosom, and separate his helpless children from their parents.

The Negro works under the stimulus of the lash, and the laws of our colonies bestow upon his master or overseer a full authority for inflicting on him, his wife, or his daughter, thirty-nine lashes for any fault or misbehaviour. Now I do not know what one of our free peasants would say to such assault and battery, but I rather apprehend that he would be found to rise up in his own defence, and that in no very inefficacious way. Be that as it may, however, the law is always open to him, just as open, I am happy to say, as it is to our worthy Chairman himself, or to the King upon his throne. But how is it with the miserable slave? If his master even exceed the prescribed number of his lashes—if he multiply the tens into hundreds—if he absolutely murder him in cold blood, and if there be present ten thousand witnesses; yet, if all those witnesses be slaves like himself, the laws of our colonies afford no effective redress or satisfaction, and the offender may even enjoy an *absolute impunity*. But it is not only as it relates to the evidence of slaves, that British colonial law is of unequal application. During the last year, a case of great notoriety occurred in Jamaica of a capital crime repeatedly committed, under circum-

stances of the most monstrous atrocity, on the person of a child only nine years old. It happened that a free person witnessed the transaction. The offender was prosecuted, and convicted on clear evidence. An arrest of judgment was moved by his counsel, on the ground that the sufferer was a slave. So overpowered were the feelings of the Judges by the atrocity of the case, that they over-ruled the objection, and condemned the criminal to death. But on a cool survey of the case after the trial was over, the Chief Justice of the island was obliged to acknowledge his own opinion, (though I believe the case to be still undecided) that the sentence could not be legally carried into effect; and thus this tremendous crime was likely to descend to the level of a simple misdemeanor, punishable only by a small fine or short imprisonment. Now however many of us may deprecate the punishment of death, even in such a case as I have now described, I am sure we shall be unanimous in condemning so gross an inequality in the application of law.

In short, the British peasant is his own master, and a freeman. The West Indian slave is a mere chattel. He is reduced to the condition of the beast of burden. He may, it is true, be very kindly treated. He may also be bought, sold, divorced from his wife, separated from his children, worked hard, flogged, tortured, branded with red-hot iron, and, under particular circumstances, even murdered, according to the arbitrary determinations of his fellow men. And now I may appeal to the whole of this meeting, whether it be not indeed true, that the proposition to which I have been alluding, is “monstrous; and that it

implies a total insensibility to the native feelings and moral dignity of man?"

In conclusion I beg leave to say, that on every occasion, whether public or private, it is my desire, however inadequately fulfilled, to act on the principles of a Christian. You must allow me, therefore, to say a few words on the notion which has been very much circulated of late, that slavery, as it exists in our colonies, is not inconsistent with those principles. I say that it is utterly at variance with the dictates of Christianity, that one man should be regarded as the mere chattel of another; utterly at variance with those dictates, that we should compel our fellow creatures to labour for us, and give them no wages for their labour; that we should inflict upon them the cruel punishment of the whip at our own discretion; that we should degrade, expose, and torture, even the female sex; that we should subject whole families to writs of *Venditioni exponas*, by which the nearest ties of affection may be forcibly torn asunder; and finally, that we should allow of a system, under which persons who like ourselves possess immortal souls, are regarded and treated like the beasts that perish. Assuredly, all these particulars are in absolute contradiction to that golden rule which has been so appositely quoted by our Chairman—"Do unto others as ye would have others do unto you." Even under the Jewish law, and before the introduction of Christianity, how often were the prophets engaged in proclaiming liberty to the captive! "Is this the fast that I have chosen, saith the Lord, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it that he bow down his head as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth

and ashes under him? Will ye call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not *this* the fast that I have chosen?—to loose the bands of wickedness; to undo the heavy burdens; to let the oppressed go free; and to break every yoke.” While therefore I would encourage every disposition to moderation and charity, while I can sincerely declare that no persons connected with the present question, appear to me to be so much the objects for *deep* commiseration as the oppressors themselves, (for theirs is the worst and most terrible of slavery,) yet I cannot but remember that in grounding our proceedings on the noble principles of the British Constitution, and on the celestial sanctions of Christianity itself, we are standing on a rock which cannot be shaken. I must therefore implore our benevolent and energetic Chairman, I must implore our worthy Member for the county, (now present,) I must implore you all—whatsoever situations you may occupy—never to relax your efforts in this holy cause, but to go forward with a step at once measured and determined—at once gentle and resolute—until that happy day shall arrive when every individual within the whole circuit of the British dominions, shall be able to lift up his head with thankfulness and joy, and say **BEHOLD I AM FREE.**