The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament (1808) eBook

The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament (1808) by Thomas Clarkson

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



BOOKRAGS

Contents

The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament (1808) eBook....1

Contents....2

Table of Contents....11

Page 1....12

Page 2....14

Page 3....15

Page 4....16

Page 5....17

Page 6....18

Page 7....19

Page 8....20

Page 9....21

Page 10....22

Page 11....23

Page 12....25

Page 13....27

Page 14....29

Page 15....30

Page 16....32

Page 17....33

Page 18....34

Page 19....35

Page 20....36

Page 21....37

Page 22.....38
Page 23.....39
Page 24.....40
Page 25.....41
Page 26.....42
Page 27.....43
Page 28.....44
Page 29.....45
Page 30.....46
Page 31.....47
Page 32.....48
Page 33.....49
Page 34.....50
Page 35.....51
Page 36.....52
Page 37.....53
Page 38.....54
Page 39.....55
Page 40.....56
Page 41.....58
Page 42.....59
Page 43.....60
Page 44.....61
Page 45.....62
Page 46.....63
Page 47.....65

Page 48.....66
Page 49.....67
Page 50.....68
Page 51.....69
Page 52.....70
Page 53.....71
Page 54.....72
Page 55.....73
Page 56.....74
Page 57.....75
Page 58.....76
Page 59.....77
Page 60.....79
Page 61.....80
Page 62.....81
Page 63.....82
Page 64.....83
Page 65.....84
Page 66.....85
Page 67.....86
Page 68.....87
Page 69.....88
Page 70.....89
Page 71.....91
Page 72.....93
Page 73.....94

Page 74.....95
Page 75.....96
Page 76.....97
Page 77.....99
Page 78.....101
Page 79.....103
Page 80.....104
Page 81.....105
Page 82.....106
Page 83.....107
Page 84.....108
Page 85.....109
Page 86.....110
Page 87.....111
Page 88.....112
Page 89.....113
Page 90.....114
Page 91.....115
Page 92.....116
Page 93.....117
Page 94.....118
Page 95.....119
Page 96.....120
Page 97.....122
Page 98.....124
Page 99.....125

Page 100.....126
Page 101.....127
Page 102.....129
Page 103.....130
Page 104.....131
Page 105.....133
Page 106.....134
Page 107.....135
Page 108.....136
Page 109.....138
Page 110.....139
Page 111.....140
Page 112.....141
Page 113.....143
Page 114.....144
Page 115.....145
Page 116.....147
Page 117.....148
Page 118.....149
Page 119.....150
Page 120.....151
Page 121.....152
Page 122.....153
Page 123.....154
Page 124.....155
Page 125.....157

Page 126.....159
Page 127.....161
Page 128.....162
Page 129.....164
Page 130.....165
Page 131.....166
Page 132.....167
Page 133.....168
Page 134.....169
Page 135.....170
Page 136.....171
Page 137.....172
Page 138.....174
Page 139.....175
Page 140.....176
Page 141.....177
Page 142.....178
Page 143.....180
Page 144.....181
Page 145.....182
Page 146.....183
Page 147.....185
Page 148.....186
Page 149.....187
Page 150.....188
Page 151.....189

Page 152.....190
Page 153.....191
Page 154.....192
Page 155.....194
Page 156.....195
Page 157.....196
Page 158.....197
Page 159.....198
Page 160.....199
Page 161.....200
Page 162.....201
Page 163.....202
Page 164.....203
Page 165.....204
Page 166.....206
Page 167.....207
Page 168.....208
Page 169.....210
Page 170.....211
Page 171.....213
Page 172.....214
Page 173.....216
Page 174.....217
Page 175.....219
Page 176.....220
Page 177.....221

Page 178.....223
Page 179.....224
Page 180.....226
Page 181.....227
Page 182.....228
Page 183.....229
Page 184.....230
Page 185.....231
Page 186.....232
Page 187.....233
Page 188.....234
Page 189.....235
Page 190.....236
Page 191.....237
Page 192.....238
Page 193.....239
Page 194.....241
Page 195.....243
Page 196.....244
Page 197.....245
Page 198.....246
Page 199.....248
Page 200.....249
Page 201.....250
Page 202.....251
Page 203.....252

Page 204.....253
Page 205.....254
Page 206.....255
Page 207.....256
Page 208.....257
Page 209.....258
Page 210.....259
Page 211.....260
Page 212.....261
Page 213.....263
Page 214.....264
Page 215.....265
Page 216.....266
Page 217.....267
Page 218.....269
Page 219.....271

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
	1
CHAPTER I.	1
CHAPTER II.	44
CHAPTER III.	72
LIST I.	75
LIST II.	76
LIST III.	76
CHAPTER IV.	128
CHAPTER V.	170
CHAPTER VI.	172
CHAPTER VII.	174
CHAPTER VIII.	180
CHAPTER IX.	185
CHAPTER X.	208
THE END.	217
VOL. I.	217
VOL. II.	218

Page 1

Title: The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament (1808) Vol. II

Author: Thomas Clarkson

Release Date: June 3, 2004 [EBook #12507]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** *Start of this project gutenberg* EBOOK *abolition of the slave trade* V.2. ***

Produced by Carlo Traverso, Robert Morse and PG Distributed Proofreaders. This file was produced from images generously made available by the Bibliotheque nationale de France (BnF/Gallica) at http://gallica.bnf.fr.

The
history
of the
rise, *progress*, *and accomplishment*
of
the abolition
of
the African slave-trade
by the
British parliament.

By Thomas Clarkson, M.A.

1808.

CHAPTER I.

Continuation from June 1788 to July 1789—Author travels to collect further evidence—-great difficulties in obtaining it—forms committees on his tour—Privy council resume the examinations—inspect cabinet of African productions—obliged to leave many of the witnesses in behalf of the abolition unexamined—prepare their report—Labours of the committee in the interim—Proceedings of the planters and others—Report laid on the table of the House of Commons—Introduction of the question, and debate there—-twelve propositions deduced from the report and reserved for future discussion—day of discussion arrives—opponents refuse to argue from the report—require new evidence —this granted and introduced—further consideration of the subject deferred to the next session—Renewal of Sir William Dolben's bill—Death and character of Ramsay.

Matters had now become serious. The gauntlet had been thrown down and accepted. The combatants had taken their stations, and the contest was to be renewed, which was to be decided soon on the great theatre of the nation. The committee by the very act of their institution had pronounced the Slave-trade to be criminal. They, on the other hand, who were concerned in it, had denied the charge. It became the one to prove, and the other to refute it, or to fall in the ensuing session.

The committee, in this perilous situation, were anxious to find out such other persons, as might become proper evidences before the privy council. They had hitherto sent there only nine or ten, and they had then only another, whom they could count upon for this purpose, in their view. The proposal of sending persons to Africa, and the West Indies, who might come back and report what they had witnessed, had been already negatived. The question then was, what they were to do. Upon this they deliberated, and the result was an application to me to undertake a journey to different parts of the kingdom for this purpose.

Page 2

When this determination was made I was at Teston, writing a long letter to the privy council on the ill usage and mortality of the seamen employed in the Slave-trade, which it had been previously agreed should be received as evidence there. I thought it proper, however, before I took my departure, to form a system of questions upon the general subject. These I divided into six tables. The first related to the productions of Africa, and the disposition and manners of the natives. The second, to the methods of reducing them to slavery. The third, to the manner of bringing them to the ships, their value, the medium of exchange, and other circumstances. The fourth, to their transportation. The fifth, to their treatment in the Colonies. The sixth, to the seamen employed in the trade. These tables contained together one hundred and forty-five questions. My idea was that they should be printed on a small sheet of paper, which should be folded up in seven or eight leaves, of the length and breadth of a small almanac, and then be sent in franks to our different correspondents. These, when they had them, might examine persons capable of giving evidence, who might live in their neighbourhoods or fall in their way, and return us their examinations by letter.

The committee having approved and printed the tables of questions, I began my tour. I had selected the southern counties from Kent to Cornwall for it. I had done this, because these included the great stations of the ships of war in ordinary; and as these were all under the superintendence of Sir Charles Middleton, as comptroller of the navy, I could get an introduction to those on board them. Secondly, because sea-faring people, when they retire from a marine life, usually settle in some town or village upon the coast.

Of this tour I shall not give the reader any very particular account. I shall mention only those things which are most worthy of his notice in it. At Poole in Dorsetshire I laid the foundation of a committee, to act in harmony with that of London for the promotion of the cause. Moses Neave, of the respectable society of the Quakers, was the chairman; Thomas Bell, the secretary, and Ellis. B. Metford and the reverend Mr. Davis and others the committee. This was the third committee, which had been instituted in the country for this purpose. That at Bristol, under Mr. Joseph Harford as chairman, and Mr. Lunell as secretary, had been the first. And that at Manchester, under Mr. Thomas Walker as chairman, and Mr. Samuel Jackson as secretary, had been the second.

As Poole was a great place for carrying on the trade to Newfoundland, I determined to examine the assertion of the Earl of Sandwich in the House of Lords, when he said, in the debate on Sir William Dolben’s bill, that the Slave-trade was not more fatal to seamen than the Newfoundland and some others. This assertion I knew at the time to be erroneous, as far as my own researches had been concerned: for out of twenty-four

Page 3

vessels, which had sailed out of the port of Bristol in that employ, only two sailors were upon the dead list. In sixty vessels from Poole, I found but four lost. At Dartmouth, where I went afterwards on purpose, I found almost a similar result. On conversing however with Governor Holdsworth, I learnt that the year 1786 had been more fatal than any other in this trade. I learnt that in consequent of extraordinary storms and hurricanes, no less than five sailors had died and twenty-one had been drowned in eighty-three vessels from that port. Upon this statement I determined to look into the muster-rolls of the trade there for two or three years together. I began by accident with the year 1769, and I went on to the end of 1772. About eighty vessels on an average had sailed thence in each of these years. Taking the loss in these years, and compounding it with that in the fatal year, three sailors had been lost, but taking it in these four years by themselves, only two had been lost, in twenty-four vessels so employed. On a comparison with the Slave-trade, the result would be, that two vessels to Africa would destroy more seamen than eighty-three sailing to Newfoundland. There was this difference also to be noted, that the loss in the one trade was generally by the weather or by accident, but in the other by cruel treatment or disease; and that they, who went out in a declining state of health in the one, came home generally recovered, whereas they, who went out robust in the other, came home in a shattered condition.

At Plymouth I laid the foundation of another committee. The late William Cookworthy, the late John Prideaux, and James Fox, all of the society of the Quakers, and Mr. George Leach, Samuel Northcote, and John Saunders, had a principal share in forming it. Sir William Ellford was chosen chairman.

From Plymouth I journeyed on to Falmouth, and from thence to Exeter, where having meetings with the late Mr. Samuel Milford, the late Mr. George Manning, the reverend James Manning, Thomas Sparkes, and others, a desire became manifest among them of establishing a committee there. This was afterwards effected; and Mr. Milford, who, at a general meeting of the inhabitants of Exeter, on the tenth of June, on this great subject, had been called by those present to the chair, was appointed the chairman of it.

With respect to evidence, which was the great object of this tour, I found myself often very unpleasantly situated in collecting it. I heard of many persons capable of giving it to our advantage, to whom I could get no introduction. I had to go after these many miles out of my established route. Not knowing me, they received me coldly, and even suspiciously; while I fell in with others, who, considering themselves, on account of their concerns and connexions, as our opponents, treated me in an uncivil manner.

Page 4

But the difficulties and disappointments in other respects, which I experienced in this tour, even where I had an introduction, and where the parties were not interested in the continuance of the Slave-trade, were greater than people in general would have imagined. One would have thought, considering the great enthusiasm of the nation on this important subject, that they, who could have given satisfactory information upon it, would have rejoiced to do it. But I found it otherwise, and this frequently to my sorrow. There was an aversion in persons to appear before such a tribunal as they conceived the privy council to be. With men of shy or timid character this operated as an insuperable barrier in their way. But it operated more or less upon all. It was surprising to see what little circumstances affected many. When I took out my pen and ink to put down the information, which a person was giving me, he became evidently embarrassed and frightened. He began to excuse himself from staying, by alleging that he had nothing more to communicate, and he took himself away as quickly as he could with decency. The sight of the pen and ink had lost me so many good evidences, that I was obliged wholly to abandon the use of them, and to betake myself to other means. I was obliged for the future to commit my tables of questions to memory, and endeavour by practice to put down, after the examination of a person, such answers as he had given me to each of them.

Others went off because it happened that immediately on my interview, I acquainted them with the nature of my errand, and solicited their attendance in London. Conceiving that I had no right to ask them such a favour, or terrified at the abruptness and apparent awfulness of my request, some of them gave me an immediate denial, which they would never afterwards retract. I began to perceive in time that it was only by the most delicate management that I could get forward on these occasions. I resolved therefore for the future, except in particular cases, that, when I should be introduced to persons who had a competent knowledge of this trade, I would talk with them upon it as upon any ordinary subject, and then leave them without saying any thing about their becoming evidences. I would take care, however, to commit all their conversation to writing, when it was over, and I would then try to find out that person among their relations or friends, who could apply to them for this purpose with the least hazard of a refusal.

There were others also, who, though they were not so much impressed by the considerations mentioned, yet objected to give their public testimony. Those, whose livelihood, or promotion, or expectations, were dependent upon the government of the country, were generally backward on these occasions. Though they thought they discovered in the parliamentary conduct of Mr. Pitt, a bias in favour of the cause, they knew to a certainty that the Lord Chancellor Thurlow was against it. They conceived, therefore, that the administration was at least divided upon the question, and they were fearful of being called upon lest they should give offence, and thus injure their prospects in life. This objection was very prevalent in that part of the kingdom which I had selected for my tour.

Page 5

The reader can hardly conceive how my mind was agitated and distressed on these different accounts. To have travelled more than two months, to have seen many who could have materially served our cause, and to have lost most of them, was very trying. And though it is true that I applied a remedy, I was not driven to the adoption of it till I had performed more than half my tour. Suffice it to say, that after having travelled upwards of sixteen hundred miles backwards and forwards, and having conversed with forty-seven persons, who were capable of promoting the cause by their evidence, I could only prevail upon nine, by all the interest I could make, to be examined.

On my return to London, whither I had been called up by the committee to take upon me the superintendence of the evidence, which the privy council was now ready again to hear, I found my brother: he was then a young officer in the navy; and as I knew he felt as warmly as I did in this great cause, I prevailed upon him to go to Havre de Grace, the great slave-port in France, where he might make his observations for two or three months, and then report what he had seen and heard; so that we might have some one to counteract any false statement of things which might be made relative to the subject in that quarter.

At length the examinations were resumed, and with them the contest, in which our own reputation and the fate of our cause were involved. The committee for the abolition had discovered one or two willing evidences during my absence, and Mr. Wilberforce, who was now recovered from his severe indisposition, had found one or two others. These added to my own made a respectable body: but we had sent no more than four or five of these to the council when the King's illness unfortunately stopped our career. For nearly five weeks between the middle of November and January the examinations were interrupted or put off so that at the latter period we began to fear that there would be scarcely time to hear the rest; for not only the privy council report was to be printed, but the contest itself was to be decided by the evidence contained in it, in the existing session.

The examinations, however, went on, but they went on only slowly, being still subject to interruption from the same unfortunate cause. Among others I offered my mite of information again. I wished the council to see more of my African productions and manufactures, that they might really know what Africa was capable of affording instead of the Slave-trade, and that they might make a proper estimate of the genius and talents of the natives. The samples which I had collected, had been obtained by great labour, and at no inconsiderable expense: for whenever I had notice that a vessel had arrived immediately from that continent, I never hesitated to go, unless under the most pressing engagements elsewhere, even as far as Bristol, if I could pick up but a single new article. The Lords having consented, I selected several things for their inspection out of my box, of the contents of which the following account may not be unacceptable to the reader.

Page 6

The first division of the box consisted of woods of about four inches square, all polished. Among these were mahogany of five different sorts, tulip-wood, satin-wood, cam-wood, bar-wood, fustic, black and yellow ebony, palm-tree, mangrove, calabash, and date. There were seven woods of which the native names were remembered: three of these, Tumiah, Samain, and Jimlake, were of a yellow colour; Acajou was of a beautiful deep crimson; Bork and Quelle were apparently fit for cabinet work; and Benten was the wood of which the natives made their canoes. Of the various other woods the names had been forgotten, nor were they known in England at all. One of them was of a fine purple; and from two others, upon which the privy council had caused experiments to be made, a strong yellow, a deep orange, and a flesh-colour were extracted.

The second division included ivory and musk; four species of pepper, the long, the black, the Cayenne, and the Malaguetta: three species of gum; namely, Senegal, Copal, and ruber astringens; cinnamon, rice, tobacco, indigo, white and Nankin cotton, Guinea corn, and millet; three species of beans, of which two were used for food, and the other for dyeing orange; two species of tamarinds, one for food, and the other to give whiteness to the teeth; pulse, seeds, and fruits of various kinds, some of the latter of which Dr. Spaarman had pronounced, from a trial during his residence in Africa, to be peculiarly valuable as drugs.

The third division contained an African loom, and an African spindle with spun cotton round it; cloths of cotton of various kinds, made by the natives, some white, but others dyed by them of different colours, and others, in which they had interwoven European silk; cloths and bags made of grass, and fancifully coloured; ornaments made of the same materials; ropes made from a species of aloes, and others, remarkably strong, from grass and straw; fine string made from the fibres of the roots of trees; soap of two kinds, one of which was formed from an earthy substance; pipe-bowls made of clay, and of a brown red; one of these, which came from the village of Dakard, was beautifully ornamented by black devices burnt in, and was besides highly glazed; another, brought from Galam was made of earth, which was richly impregnated with little particles of gold; trinkets made by the natives from their own gold; knives and daggers made by them from our bar-iron; and various other articles, such as bags, sandals, dagger-cases, quivers, grisgris, all made of leather of their own manufacture, and dyed of various colours, and ingeniously sewed together.

The fourth division consisted of the thumb-screw, speculum oris, and chains and shackles of different kinds, collected at Liverpool. To these were added, iron neck-collars, and other instruments of punishment and confinement, used in the West Indies, and collected at other places. The instrument, also, by which Charles Horseler was mentioned to have been killed, in the former volume, was to be seen among these.

Page 7

We were now advanced far into February, when we were alarmed by the intelligence that the Lords of the Council were going to prepare their report. At this time we had sent but few persons to them to examine, in comparison with our opponents, and we had yet eighteen to introduce: for answers had come into my tables of questions from several places, and persons had been pointed out to us by our correspondents, who had increased our list of evidences to this number. I wrote therefore to them, at the desire of the committee for the abolition, and gave them the names of the eighteen, and requested that all of them might be examined. I requested also, that they would order, for their own inspection, certain muster-rolls of vessels from Poole and Dartmouth, that they might be convinced that the objection which the Earl of Sandwich had made in the House of Lords, against the abolition of the Slave-trade, had no solid foundation. In reply to my first request they informed me, that it was impossible, in the advanced state of the session (it being then the middle of March), that the examinations of so many could be taken; but I was at liberty, in conjunction with the Bishop of London, to select eight for this purpose. This occasioned me to address them again; and I then found, to my surprise and sorrow, that even this last number was to be diminished; for I was informed in writing, “that the Bishop of London having laid my last letter before their Lordships, they had agreed to meet on the Saturday next, and on the Tuesday following, for the purpose of receiving the evidence of some of the gentlemen named in it. And it was their Lordships’ desire that I would give notice to any three of them (whose information I might consider as the most material) of the above determination, that they might attend the committee accordingly.”

This answer, considering the difficulties we had found in collecting a body of evidence, and the critical situation in which we then were, was peculiarly distressing; but we had no remedy left us, nor could we reasonably complain. Three therefore were selected, and they were sent to deliver their testimony on their arrival in town.

But before the last of these had left the council-room, who should come up to me but Mr. Arnold! He had but lately arrived at Bristol from Africa; and having heard from our friends there that we had been daily looking for him, he had come to us in London. He and Mr. Gardiner were the two surgeons, as mentioned in the former volume, who had promised me, when I was in Bristol, in the year 1787, that they would keep a journal of facts for me during the voyages they were then going to perform. They had both of them kept this promise. Gardiner, I found, had died upon the Coast, and his journal, having been discovered at his death, had been buried with him in great triumph. But Arnold had survived, and he came now to offer us his services in the cause.

Page 8

As it was a pity that such correct information as that taken down in writing upon the spot should be lost (for all the other evidences, except Dr. Spaarman and Mr. Wadstrom, had spoken from their memory only), I made all the interest I could to procure a hearing for Mr. Arnold. Pleading now for the examination of him only, and under these particular circumstances, I was attended to. It was consented, in consequence of the little time which was now left for preparing and printing the Report, that I should make out his evidence from his journal under certain heads. This I did. Mr. Arnold swore to the truth of it, when so drawn up, before Edward Montague, esquire, a master in chancery. He then delivered the paper in which it was contained to the Lords of the Council, who, on receiving it, read it throughout, and then questioned him upon it.

At this time, also, my brother returned with accounts and papers relative to the Slave-trade, from Havre de Grace; but as I had pledged myself to offer no other person to be examined, his evidence was lost. Thus, after all the pains we had taken, and in a contest, too, on the success of which our own reputation and the fate of Africa depended, we were obliged to fight the battle with sixteen less than we could have brought into the field; while our opponents, on the other hand, on account of their superior advantages, had mustered all their forces, not having omitted a single man.

I do not know of any period of my life in which I suffered so much both in body and mind, as from the time of resuming these public inquiries by the privy council, to the time when they were closed. For I had my weekly duty to attend at the committee for the abolition during this interval. I had to take down the examinations of all the evidences who came to London, and to make certain copies of these. I had to summon these to town, and to make provision against all accidents; and here I was often troubled by means of circumstances, which unexpectedly occurred, lest, when committees of the council had been purposely appointed to hear them, they should not be forthcoming at the time. I had also a new and extensive correspondence to keep up; for the tables of questions which had been sent down to our correspondents, brought letters almost innumerable on this subject, and they were always addressed to me. These not only required answers of themselves, but as they usually related to persons capable of giving their testimony, and contained the particulars of what they could state, they occasioned fresh letters to be written to others. Hence the writing of ten or twelve daily became necessary.

Page 9

But the contents of these letters afforded the circumstances, which gave birth to so much suffering. They contained usually some affecting tale of woe. At Bristol my feelings had been harassed by the cruel treatment of the seamen, which had come to my knowledge there: but now I was doomed to see this treatment over again in many other melancholy instances; and additionally to take in the various sufferings of the unhappy slaves. These accounts I could seldom get time to read till late in the evening, and sometimes not till midnight, when the letters containing them were to be answered. The effect of these accounts was in some instances to overwhelm me for a time in tears, and in others to produce a vivid indignation, which affected my whole frame. Recovering from these, I walked up and down the room. I felt fresh vigour, and made new determinations of perpetual warfare against this impious trade. I implored strength that I might proceed. I then sat down, and continued my work as long as my wearied eyes would permit me to see. Having been agitated in this manner, I went to bed: but my rest was frequently broken by the visions which floated before me. When I awoke, these renewed themselves to me, and they flitted about with me for the remainder of the day. Thus I was kept continually harassed: my mind was confined to one gloomy and heart-breaking subject for months. It had no respite, and my health began now materially to suffer.

But the contents of these letters were particularly grievous, on account of the severe labours which they necessarily entailed upon me in other ways than those which have been mentioned. It was my duty, while the privy council examinations went on, not only to attend to all the evidence which was presented to us by our correspondents, but to find out and select the best. The happiness of millions depended upon it. Hence I was often obliged to travel during these examinations, in order to converse with those who had been pointed out to us as capable of giving their testimony; and, that no time might be lost, to do this in the night. More than two hundred miles in a week were sometimes passed over on these occasions.

The disappointments too, which I frequently experienced in these journeys, increased the poignancy of the suffering, which arose from a contemplation of the melancholy cases which I had thus travelled to bring forward to the public view. The reader at present can have no idea of these. I have been sixty miles to visit a person, of whom I had heard, not only as possessing important knowledge, but as espousing our opinions on this subject. I have at length seen him. He has applauded my pursuit at our first interview. He has told me, in the course of our conversation, that neither my own pen, nor that of any other man, could describe adequately the horrors of the Slave-trade, horrors which he himself had witnessed. He has exhorted me to perseverance in this noble cause.

Page 10

Could I have wished for a more favourable reception?—But mark the issue. He was the nearest relation of a rich person concerned in the traffic; and if he were to come forward with his evidence publicly, he should ruin all his expectations from that quarter. In the same week I have visited another at a still greater distance. I have met with similar applause. I have heard him describe scenes of misery which he had witnessed, and on the relation of which he himself almost wept. But mark the issue again.—"I am a surgeon," says he: "through that window you see a spacious house. It is occupied by a West Indian. The medical attendance upon his family is of considerable importance to the temporal interests of mine. If I give you my evidence I lose his patronage. At the house above him lives an East Indian. The two families are connected: I fear, if I lose the support of one, I shall lose that of the other also: but I will give you privately all the intelligence in my power."

The reader may now conceive the many miserable hours I must have spent, after such visits, in returning home; and how grievously my heart must have been afflicted by these cruel disappointments, but more particularly where they arose from causes inferior to those which have been now mentioned, or from little frivolous excuses, or idle and unfounded conjectures, unworthy of beings expected to fill a moral station in life. Yes, O man! often in these solitary journeyings have I exclaimed against the baseness of thy nature, when reflecting on the little paltry considerations which have smothered thy benevolence, and hindered thee from succouring an oppressed brother. And yet, on a further view of things, I have reasoned myself into a kinder feeling towards thee. For I have been obliged to consider ultimately, that there were both lights and shades in the human character; and that, if the bad part of our nature was visible on these occasions, the nobler part of it ought not to be forgotten. While I passed a censure upon those, who were backward in serving this great cause of humanity and justice, how many did I know, who were toiling in the support of it! I drew also this consolation from my reflections, that I had done my duty; that I had left nothing untried or undone; that amidst all these disappointments I had collected information, which might be useful at a future time; and that such disappointments were almost inseparable from the prosecution of a cause of such magnitude, and where the interests of so many were concerned. Having now given a general account of my own proceedings, I shall state those of the committee; or show how they contributed, by fulfilling the duties of their several departments, to promote the cause in the interim.

In the first place they completed the rules, or code of laws, for their own government.

Page 11

They continued to adopt and circulate books, that they might still enlighten the public mind on the subject, and preserve it interested in favour of their institution. They kept the press indeed almost constantly going for this purpose. They printed, within the period mentioned, Ramsay's Address on the proposed Bill for the Abolition; The Speech of Henry Beaufoy, esquire, on Sir William Dolben's Bill, of which an extract was given in the first volume; Notes by a Planter on the two Reports from the Committee of the honourable House of Assembly of Jamaica; Observations on the Slave-trade by Mr. Wadstrom; and Dickson's Letters on Slavery. These were all new publications. To those they added others of less note, with new editions of the old.

They voted their thanks to the reverend Mr. Gifford, for his excellent sermon on the Slave-trade; to the pastor and congregation of the Baptist church at Maze Pond, Southwark, for their liberal subscription; and to John Barton, one of their own members, for the services he had rendered them. The latter, having left his residence in town for one in the country, solicited permission to resign, and hence this mark of approbation was given to him. He was continued also as an honorary and corresponding member.

They elected David Hartley and Richard Sharpe, esquires, into their own body, and Alexander Jaffray, esquire, the reverend Charles Symmons of Haverfordwest, and the reverend T. Burgess (now bishop of St. David's), as honorary and corresponding members. The latter had written Considerations on the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave-trade upon Grounds of natural, religious, and political Duty, which had been of great service to the cause.

Of the new correspondents of the committee within this period I may first mention Henry Taylor, of North Shields; William Proud, of Hull; the reverend T. Gisborne, of Yoxall Lodge; and William Ellford, esquire, of Plymouth. The latter, as chairman of the Plymouth committee, sent up for inspection an engraving of a plan and section of a slave-ship, in which the bodies of the slaves were seen stowed in the proportion of rather less than one to a ton. This happy invention gave all those, who saw it, a much better idea than they could otherwise have had of the horrors of their transportation, and contributed greatly, as will appear afterwards, to impress the public in favour of our cause.

The next, whom I shall mention, was C.L. Evans, esquire, of West Bromwich; the reverend T. Clarke, of Hull; S.P. Wolferstan, esquire, of Stafford near Tamworth; Edmund Lodge, esquire, of Halifax; the reverend Caleb Rotheram, of Kendal; and Mr. Campbell Haliburton, of Edinburgh. The news which Mr. Haliburton sent was very agreeable. He informed us that, in consequence of the great exertions of Mr. Alison, an institution had been formed in Edinburgh, similar to that in London, which would take all Scotland under its care and management, as far as related to this great subject. He mentioned Lord Gardenston as the chairman; Sir William Forbes as the deputy chairman; himself as the secretary; and Lord Napier, professor Andrew Hunter, professor Greenfield, and William Creech, Adam Rolland, Alexander Ferguson, John

Dickson, John Erskine, John Campbell, Archibald Gibson, Archibald Fletcher, and Horatius Canning, esquires, as the committee.

Page 12

The others were, the reverend J. Bidlake, of Plymouth; Joseph Storrs, of Chesterfield; William Fothergill, of Carr End, Yorkshire; J. Seymour, of Coventry; Moses Neave, of Poole; Joseph Taylor, of Scarborough; Timothy Clark, of Doncaster; Thomas Davis, of Milverton; George Croker Fox, of Falmouth; Benjamin Grubb, of Clonmell in Ireland; Sir William Forbes, of Edinburgh; the reverend J. Jamieson, of Forfar; and Joseph Gurney, of Norwich; the latter of whom sent up a remittance, and intelligence at the same time, that a committee, under Mr. Leigh, so often before mentioned, had been formed in that city[A].

[Footnote A: On the removal of Mr. Leigh from Norwich, Dr. Pretyman, precentor of Lincoln and a prebend of Norwich, succeeded him.]

But the committee in London, while they were endeavouring to promote the object of their institution at home, continued their exertions for the same purpose abroad within this period.

They kept up a communication with the different societies established in America.

They directed their attention also to the continent of Europe. They had already applied, as I mentioned before, to the King of Sweden in favour of their cause, and had received a gracious answer. They now attempted to interest other potentates in it. For this purpose they bound up in an elegant manner two sets of the Essays on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species and on the Impolicy of the Slave-trade, and sent them to the Chevalier de Pinto, in Portugal. They bound up in a similar manner three sets of the same, and sent them to Mr. Eden (now Lord Auckland), at Madrid, to be given to the King of Spain, the Count d'Aranda, and the Marquis del Campomanes.

They kept up their correspondence with the committee at Paris, which had greatly advanced itself in the eyes of the French nation; so that, when the different bailliages sent deputies to the States General, they instructed them to take the Slave-trade into their consideration as a national object, and with a view to its abolition.

They kept up their correspondence with Dr. Frossard of Lyons. He had already published in France on the subject of the Slave-trade; and now he offered the committee to undertake the task, so long projected by them, of collecting such arguments and facts concerning it, and translating them into different languages, as might be useful in forwarding their views in foreign parts.

They addressed letters also to various individuals, to Monsieur Snetlage, doctor of laws at Halle in Saxony; to Monsieur Ladebat, of Bourdeaux; to the Marquis de Feuillade d'Aubusson, at Paris; and to Monsieur Necker. The latter in his answer replied in part as follows: "As this great question," says he, "is not in my department, but in that of the minister for the Colonies, I cannot interfere in it directly, but I will give indirectly all the

assistance in my power. I have for a long time taken an interest in the general alarm on this occasion,

Page 13

and in the noble alliance of the friends of humanity in favour of the injured Africans. Such an attempt throws a new lustre over your nation. It is not yet, however, a national object in France. But the moment may perhaps come; and I shall think myself happy in preparing the way for it. You must be aware, however, of the difficulties which we shall have to encounter on our side of the water; for our colonies are much more considerable than yours; so that in the view of political interest we are not on an equal footing. It will therefore be necessary to find some middle line at first, as it cannot be expected that humanity alone will be the governing principle of mankind."

But the day was now drawing near, when it was expected that this great contest would be decided. Mr. Wilberforce on the nineteenth of March rose up in the House of Commons, and desired the resolution to be read, by which the house stood pledged to take the Slave-trade into their consideration in the then session. He then moved that the house should resolve itself into a committee of the whole house on Thursday, the twenty-third of April, for this purpose. This motion was agreed to; after which he moved for certain official documents, necessary to throw light upon the subject in the course of its discussion.

This motion, by means of which the great day of trial was now fixed, seemed to be the signal for the planters, merchants, and other interested persons to begin a furious opposition. Meetings were accordingly called by advertisement. At these meetings much warmth and virulence were manifested in debate, and propositions breathing a spirit of anger were adopted. It was suggested there, in the vehemence of passion, that the Islands could exist independently of the Mother-country; nor were even threats withheld to intimidate government from effecting the abolition.

From this time, also, the public papers began to be filled with such statements as were thought most likely to influence the members of the House of Commons, previously to the discussion of the question.

The first impression attempted to be made upon them was with respect to the slaves themselves. It was contended, and attempted to be shown by the revival of the old argument of human sacrifices in Africa, that these were better off in the islands than in their own country. It was contended also, that they were people of very inferior capacities, and but little removed from the brute creation; whence an inference was drawn, that their treatment, against which so much clamour had arisen, was adapted to their intellect and feelings.

The next attempt was to degrade the abolitionists in the opinion of the house, by showing the wildness and absurdity of their schemes. It was again insisted upon that emancipation was the real object of the former; so that thousands of slaves would be let

loose in the islands to rob or perish, and who could never be brought back again into habits of useful industry.

Page 14

An attempt was then made to excite their pity in behalf of the planters. The abolition, it was said, would produce insurrections among the slaves. But insurrections would produce the massacre of their masters; and, if any of these should happily escape from butchery, they would be reserved only for ruin.

An appeal was then made to them on the ground of their own interest and of that of the people, whom they represented. It was stated that the ruin of the islands would be the ruin of themselves and of the country. Its revenue would be half annihilated. Its naval strength would decay. Merchants, manufacturers and others would come to beggary. But in this deplorable situation they would expect to be indemnified for their losses. Compensation indeed must follow. It could not be withheld. But what would be the amount of it? The country would have no less than from eighty to a hundred millions to pay the sufferers; and it would be driven to such distress in paying this sum us it had never before experienced.

The last attempt was to show them that a regulation of the trade was all that was now wanted. While this would remedy the evils complained of, it would prevent the mischief which would assuredly follow the abolition. The planters had already done their part. The assemblies of the different islands had most of them made wholesome laws upon the subject. The very bills passed for this purpose in Jamaica and Grenada had arrived in England, and might be seen by the public: the great grievances had been redressed: no slave could now be mutilated or wantonly killed by his owner; one man could not now maltreat, or bruise, or wound the slave of another; the aged could not now be turned off to perish by hunger. There were laws also relative to the better feeding and clothing of the slaves. It remained only that the trade to Africa should be put under as wise and humane regulations as the slavery in the islands had undergone.

These different statements, appearing now in the public papers from day to day, began, in this early stage of the question, when the subject in all its bearings was known but to few, to make a considerable impression upon those, who were soon to be called to the decision of it. But that, which had the greatest effect upon them, was the enormous amount of the compensation, which, it was said, must be made. This statement against the abolition was making its way so powerfully, that Archdeacon Paley thought it his duty to write, and to send to the committee, a little treatise called Arguments against the unjust Pretensions of Slave-dealers and Holders, to be indemnified by pecuniary Allowances at the public Expense in case the Slave-trade should be abolished. This treatise, when the substance of it was detailed in the public papers, had its influence upon several members of the House of Commons. But there were others, who had been as it were panic-struck by the statement. These in their fright seemed

Page 15

to have lost the right use of their eyes, or to have looked through a magnifying glass. With these the argument of emancipation, which they would have rejected at another time as ridiculous, obtained now easy credit. The massacres too and the ruin, though only conjectural, they admitted also. Hence some of them deserted our cause wholly, while others, wishing to do justice as far as they could to the slaves on the one hand, and to their own countrymen on the other, adopted a middle line of conduct, and would go no further than the regulation of the trade.

While these preparations were making by our opponents to prejudice the minds of those, who were to be the judges in this contest, Mr. Pitt presented the privy council report at the bar of the House of Commons; and as it was a large folio volume, and contained the evidence upon which the question was to be decided, it was necessary that time should be given to the members to peruse it. Accordingly the twelfth of May was appointed, instead of the twenty-third of April, for the discussion of the question.

This postponement of the discussion of the question gave time to all parties to prepare themselves further. The merchants and planters availed themselves of it to collect petitions to parliament from interested persons against the abolition of the trade, to wait upon members of parliament by deputation, in order to solicit their attendance in their favour, and to renew their injurious paragraphs in the public papers. The committee for the abolition availed themselves of it to reply to these; and here Dr. Dickson, who had been secretary to Governor Hey, in Barbadoes, and who had offered the committee his Letters on Slavery before mentioned and his services also, was of singular use. Many members of parliament availed themselves of it to retire into the country to read the report. Among the latter were Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Pitt. In this retirement they discovered, notwithstanding the great disadvantages under which we had laboured with respect to evidence, that our cause was safe, and that, as far as it was to be decided by reason and sound policy, it would triumph. It was in this retirement that Mr. Pitt made those able calculations, which satisfied him for ever after, as the minister of the country, as to the safety of the great measure of the abolition of the Slave-trade; for he had clearly proved, that not only the islands could go on in a flourishing state without supplies from the coast of Africa, but that they were then in a condition to do it.

At length, the twelfth of May arrived. Mr. Wilberforce rose up in the Commons, and moved the order of the day for the house to resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to take into consideration the petitions, which had been presented against the Slave-trade.

This order having been read, he moved that the report of the committee of privy council; that the acts passed in the islands relative to slaves; that the evidence adduced last year on the Slave-trade; that the petitions offered in the last session against the Slave-

trade; and that the accounts presented to the house, in the last and present session, relative to the exports and imports to Africa, be referred to the same committee.

Page 16

These motions having been severally agreed to, the house immediately resolved itself into a committee of the whole house, and Sir William Dolben was put into the chair.

Mr. Wilberforce began by declaring, that, when he considered how much discussion the subject, which he was about to explain to the committee, had occasioned not only in that house but throughout the kingdom, and throughout Europe; and when he considered the extent and importance of it, the variety of interests involved in it, and the consequences which might arise, he owned he had been filled with apprehensions, lest a subject of such magnitude, and a cause of such weight, should suffer from the weakness of its advocate; but when he recollected that in the progress of his inquiries he had every where been received with candour, that most people gave him credit for the purity of his motives, and that, however many of these might then differ from him, they were all likely to agree in the end, he had dismissed his fears and marched forward with a firmer step in this cause of humanity, justice and religion. He could not, however, but lament that the subject had excited so much warmth. He feared that too many on this account were but ill prepared to consider it with impartiality. He entreated all such to endeavour to be calm and composed. A fair and cool discussion was essentially necessary. The motion he meant to offer was as reconcileable to political expediency as to national humanity. It belonged to no party-question. It would in the end be found serviceable to all parties; and to the best interests of the country. He did not come forward to accuse the West India planter, or the Liverpool merchant, or indeed any one concerned in this traffic; but, if blame attached any where, to take shame to himself, in common indeed with the whole parliament of Great Britain, who, having suffered it to be carried on under their own authority, were all of them participators in the guilt.

In endeavouring to explain the great business of the day, he said he should call the attention of the house only to the leading features of the Slave-trade. Nor should he dwell long upon these. Every one might imagine for himself, what must be the natural consequence of such a commerce with Africa. Was it not plain that she must suffer from it? that her savage manners must be rendered still more ferocious? and that a trade of this nature, carried on round her coasts, must extend violence and desolation to her very centre? It was well known that the natives of Africa were sold as goods, and that numbers of them were continually conveyed away from their country by the owners of British vessels. The question then was, which way the latter came by them. In answer to this question the privy council report, which was then on the table, afforded evidence the most satisfactory and conclusive. He had found things in it, which had confirmed every proposition he had maintained before, whether this proposition

Page 17

had been gathered from living information of the best authority, or from the histories he had read. But it was unnecessary either to quote the report, or to appeal to history on this occasion. Plain reason and common sense would point out how the poor Africans were obtained. Africa was a country divided into many kingdoms, which had different governments and laws. In many parts the princes were despotic. In others they had a limited rule. But in all of them, whatever the nature of the government was, men were considered as goods and property, and, as such, subject to plunder in the same manner as property in other countries. The persons in power there were naturally fond of our commodities; and to obtain them (which could only be done by the sale of their countrymen) they waged war on one another, or even ravaged their own country, when they could find no pretence for quarrelling with their neighbours; in their courts of law many poor wretches, who were innocent, were condemned; and, to obtain these commodities in greater abundance, thousands were kidnapped and torn from their families and sent into slavery. Such transactions, he said, were recorded in every history of Africa, and the report on the table confirmed them. With respect, however, to these he should make but one or two observations. If we looked into the reign of Henry the Eighth, we should find a parallel for one of them. We should find that similar convictions took place; and that penalties followed conviction.

With respect to wars, the kings of Africa were never induced to engage in them by public principles, by national glory, and least of all by the love of their people. This had been stated by those most conversant in the subject, by Dr. Spaarman and Mr. Wadstrom. They had conversed with these princes, and had learned from their own mouths, that to procure slaves was the object of their hostilities. Indeed, there was scarcely a single person examined before the privy council, who did not prove that the Slave-trade was the source of the tragedies acted upon that extensive continent. Some had endeavoured to palliate this circumstance; but there was not one who did not more or less admit it to be true. By one the Slave-trade was called the concurrent cause, by the majority it was acknowledged to be the principal motive of the African wars. The same might be said with respect to those instances of treachery and injustice, in which individuals were concerned. And here he was sorry to observe that our own countrymen were often guilty. He would only at present advert to the tragedy at Calabar, where two large African villages, having been for some time at war, made peace. This peace was to have been ratified by intermarriages; but some of our captains, who were there, seeing their trade would be stopped for a while, sowed dissension again between them. They actually set one village against the other, took a share in the contest, massacred many of the inhabitants,

Page 18

and carried others of them away as slaves. But shocking as this transaction might appear, there was not a single history of Africa to be read, in which scenes of as atrocious a nature were not related. They, he said, who defended this trade, were warped and blinded by their own interests, and would not be convinced of the miseries they were daily heaping on their fellow-creatures. By the countenance they gave it, they had reduced the inhabitants of Africa to a worse state than that of the most barbarous nation. They had destroyed what ought to have been the bond of union and safety among them: they had introduced discord and anarchy among them: they had set kings against their subjects, and subjects against each other: they had rendered every private family wretched: they had, in short, given birth to scenes of injustice and misery not to be found in any other quarter of the globe.

Having said thus much on the subject of procuring slaves in Africa, he would now go to that of the transportation of them. And here he had fondly hoped, that when men with affections and feelings like our own had been torn from their country, and every thing dear to them, he should have found some mitigation of their sufferings; but the sad reverse was the case. This was the most wretched part of the whole subject. He was incapable of impressing the house with what he felt upon it. A description of their conveyance was impossible. So much misery condensed in so little room was more than the human imagination had ever before conceived. Think only of six hundred persons linked together, trying to get rid of each other, crammed in a close vessel with every object that was nauseous and disgusting, diseased, and struggling with all the varieties of wretchedness. It seemed impossible to add any thing more to human misery. Yet shocking as this description must be felt to be by every man, the transportation had been described by several witnesses from Liverpool to be a comfortable conveyance. Mr. Norris had painted the accommodations on board a slave-ship in the most glowing colours. He had represented them in a manner which would have exceeded his attempts at praise of the most luxurious scenes. Their apartments, he said, were fitted up as advantageously for them as circumstances could possibly admit: they had several meals a day; some, of their own country provisions, with the best sauces of African cookery; and, by way of variety, another meal of pulse, according to the European taste. After breakfast they had water to wash themselves, while their apartments were perfumed with frankincense and lime-juice. Before dinner they were amused after the manner of their country; instruments of music were introduced: the song and the dance were promoted: games of chance were furnished them: the men played and sang, while the women and girls made fanciful ornaments from beads, with which they were plentifully supplied. They were indulged in all their little fancies, and kept in sprightly humour. Another of them had said, when the sailors were flogged, it was out of the hearing of the Africans, lest it should depress their spirits. He by no means wished to say that such descriptions were wilful misrepresentations. If they were not, it proved that interest of prejudice was capable of spreading a film over the eyes thick enough to occasion total blindness.

Page 19

Others, however, and these men of the greatest veracity, had given a different account. What would the house think, when by the concurring testimony of these the true history was laid open? The slaves who had been described as rejoicing in their captivity, were so wrung with misery at leaving their country, that it was the constant practice to set sail in the night, lest they should know the moment of their departure. With respect to their accommodation, the right ancle of one was fastened to the left ancle of another by an iron fetter; and if they were turbulent, by another on the wrists. Instead of the apartments described, they were placed in niches, and along the decks, in such a manner, that it was impossible for any one to pass among them, however careful he might be, without treading upon them. Sir George Yonge had testified, that in a slave-ship, on board of which he went, and which had not completed her cargo by two hundred and fifty, instead of the scent of frankincense being perceptible to the nostrils, the stench was intolerable. The allowance of water was so deficient, that the slaves were frequently found gasping for life, and almost suffocated. The pulse with which they had been said to be favoured, were absolutely English horse-beans. The legislature of Jamaica had stated the scantiness both of water and provisions, as a subject which called for the interference of parliament. As Mr. Norris had said, the song and the dance were promoted, he could not pass over these expressions without telling the house what they meant. It would have been much more fair if he himself had explained the word *promoted*. The truth was, that, for the sake of exercise, these miserable wretches, loaded with chains and oppressed with disease, were forced to dance by the terror of the lash, and sometimes by the actual use of it. “I,” said one of the evidences, “was employed to dance the men, while another person danced the women.” Such then was the meaning of the word *promoted*; and it might also be observed with respect to food, that instruments were sometimes carried out, in order to force them to eat; which was the same sort of proof, how much they enjoyed themselves in this instance also. With respect to their singing, it consisted of songs of lamentation for the loss of their country. While they sung they were in tears: so that one of the captains, more humane probably than the rest, threatened a woman with a flogging because the mournfulness of her song was too painful for his feelings. Perhaps he could not give a better proof of the sufferings of these injured people during their passage, than by stating the mortality which accompanied it. This was a species of evidence which was infallible on this occasion. Death was a witness which could not deceive them; and the proportion of deaths would not only confirm, but, if possible, even aggravate our suspicion of the misery of the transit. It would be found, upon an average of all the ships,

Page 20

upon which evidence had been given, that, exclusively of such as perished before they sailed from Africa, not less than twelve and a half per cent died on their passage: besides these, the Jamaica report stated that four and a half per cent died while in the harbours, or on shore before the day of sale, which was only about the space of twelve or fourteen days after their arrival there; and one third more died in the seasoning: and this in a climate exactly similar to their own, and where, as some of the witnesses pretended, they were healthy and happy. Thus, out of every lot of one hundred, shipped from Africa, seventeen died in about nine weeks, and not more than fifty lived to become effective labourers in our islands.

Having advanced thus far in his investigation, he felt, he said, the wickedness of the Slave-trade to be so enormous, so dreadful, and irremediable, that he could stop at no alternative short of its abolition. A trade founded on iniquity, and carried on with such circumstances of horror, must be abolished, let the policy of it be what it might; and he had from this time determined, whatever were the consequences, that he would never rest till he had effected that abolition. His mind had indeed been harassed by the objections of the West India planters, who had asserted, that the ruin of their property must be the consequence of such a measure. He could not help, however, distrusting their arguments. He could not believe that the Almighty Being, who had forbidden the practice of rapine and bloodshed, had made rapine and bloodshed necessary to any part of his universe. He felt a confidence in this persuasion, and took the resolution to act upon it. Light indeed soon broke in upon him. The suspicion of his mind was every day confirmed by increasing information, and the evidence he had now to offer upon this point was decisive and complete. The principle upon which he founded the necessity of the abolition was not policy, but justice: but, though justice were the principle of the measure, yet he trusted he should distinctly prove it to be reconcileable with our truest political interest.

In the first place, he asserted that the number of the slaves in our West India islands might be kept up without the introduction of recruits from Africa; and to prove this, he would enumerate the different sources of their mortality. The first was the disproportion of the sexes, there being, upon an average, about five males imported to three females: but this evil, when the Slave-trade was abolished, would cure itself. The second consisted in the bad condition in which they were brought to the islands, and the methods of preparing them for sale. They arrived frequently in a sickly and disordered state, and then they were made up for the market by the application of astringents, washes, mercurial ointments, and repelling drugs, so that their wounds and diseases might be hid. These artifices were not only fraudulent but fatal:

Page 21

but these, it was obvious, would of themselves fall with the trade. A third was, excessive labour joined with improper food; and a fourth was, the extreme dissoluteness of their manners. These also would both of them be counteracted by the impossibility of getting further supplies: for owners, now unable to replace those slaves whom they might lose, by speedy purchases in the markets, would be more careful how they treated them in future, and a better treatment would be productive of better morals. And here he would just advert to an argument used against those who complained of cruelty in our islands, which was, that it was the interest of masters to treat their slaves with humanity: but surely it was immediate and present, not future and distant, interest, which was the great spring of action in the affairs of mankind. Why did we make laws to punish men? It was their interest to be upright and virtuous: but there was a present impulse continually breaking in upon their better judgment, and an impulse, which was known to be contrary to their permanent advantage. It was ridiculous to say that men would be bound by their interest, when gain or ardent passion urged them. It might as well be asserted that a stone could not be thrown into the air, or a body move from place to place, because the principle of gravitation bound them to the surface of the earth. If a planter in the West Indies found himself reduced in his profits, he did not usually dispose of any part of his slaves; and his own gratifications were never given up, so long as there was a possibility of making any retrenchment in the allowance of his slaves.—But to return to the subject which he had left: He was happy to state, that as all the causes of the decrease which he had stated might be remedied, so, by the progress of light and reformation, these remedies had been gradually coming into practice; and that, as these had increased, the decrease of slaves had in an equal proportion been lessened. By the gradual adoption of these remedies, he could prove from the report on the table, that the decrease of slaves in Jamaica had lessened to such a degree, that from the year 1774 to the present it was not quite one in a hundred, and that in fact they were at present in a state of increase; for that the births in that island, at this moment, exceeded the deaths by one thousand or eleven hundred per annum. Barbadoes, Nevis, Antigua, and the Bermudas, were, like Jamaica, lessening their decrease, and holding forth an evident and reasonable expectation of a speedy state of increase by natural population. But allowing the number of negros even to decrease for a time, there were methods which would ensure the welfare of the West India islands. The lands there might be cultivated by fewer hands, and this to greater advantage to the proprietors and to this country, by the produce of cinnamon, coffee, and cotton, than by that of sugar. The produce of the plantations might also be considerably increased,

Page 22

even in the case of sugar, with less hands than were at present employed, if the owners of them would but introduce machines of husbandry. Mr. Long himself, long resident as a planter, had proved, upon his own estate, that the plough, though so little used in the West Indies, did the service of a hundred slaves, and caused the same ground to produce three hogsheads of sugar, which, when cultivated by slaves, would only produce two. The division of work, which, in free and civilized countries, was the grand source of wealth, and the reduction of the number of domestic servants, of whom not less than from twenty to forty were kept in ordinary families, afforded other resources for this purpose. But, granting that all these suppositions should be unfounded, and that every one of these substitutes should fail for a time, the planters would be indemnified, as is the case in all transactions of commerce, by the increased price of their produce in the British market. Thus, by contending against the abolition, they were defeated in every part of the argument. But he would never give up the point, that the number of the slaves could be kept up by natural population, and without any dependence whatever on the Slave-trade. He therefore called upon the house again to abolish it as a criminal waste of life—it was utterly unnecessary—he had proved it so by documents contained in the report. The merchants of Liverpool, indeed, had thought otherwise, but he should be cautious how he assented to their opinions. They declared last year that it was a losing trade at two slaves to a ton, and yet they pursued it when restricted to five slaves to three tons. He believed, however, that it was upon the whole a losing concern; in the same manner as the lottery would be a losing adventure to any company who should buy all the tickets. Here and there an individual gained a large prize, but the majority of adventurers gained nothing. The same merchants, too, had asserted that the town of Liverpool would be ruined by the abolition. But Liverpool did not depend for its consequence upon the Slave-trade. The whole export-tonnage from that place amounted to no less than 170,000 tons; whereas the export part of it to Africa amounted only to 13,000. Liverpool, he was sure, owed its greatness to other and very different causes; the Slave-trade bearing but a small proportion to its other trades.

Having gone through that part of the subject which related to the slaves, he would now answer two objections which he had frequently heard started. The first of these was, that the abolition of the Slave-trade would operate to the total ruin of our navy, and to the increase of that of our rivals. For an answer to these assertions, he referred, to what he considered to be the most valuable part of the report, and for which the house and the country were indebted to the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Clarkson. By the report it appeared, that, instead of the Slave-trade

Page 23

being a nursery for British seamen, it was their grave. It appeared that more seamen died in that trade in one year than in the whole remaining trade of the country in two. Out of 910 sailors in it, 216 died in the year, while upon a fair average of the same number of men employed in the trades to the East and West Indies, Petersburgh, Newfoundland, and Greenland, no more than 87 died. It appeared also, that out of 3170, who had left Liverpool in the slave-ships in the year 1787, only 1428 had returned. And here, while he lamented the loss which the country thus annually sustained in her seamen, he had additionally to lament the barbarous usage which they experienced, and which this trade, by its natural tendency to harden the heart, exclusively produced. He would just read an extract of a letter from Governor Parrey, of Barbadoes, to Lord Sydney, one of the secretaries of state. The Governor declared he could no longer contain himself on account of the ill treatment, which the British sailors endured at the hands of their savage captains. These were obliged to have their vessels strongly manned, not only on account of the unhealthiness of the climate of Africa, but of the necessity of guarding the slaves, and preventing and suppressing insurrections; and when they arrived in the West Indies, and were out of all danger from the latter, they quarrelled with their men on the most frivolous pretences, on purpose to discharge them, and thus save the payment of supernumerary wages home. Thus many were left in a diseased and deplorable state; either to perish by sickness, or to enter into foreign service; great numbers of whom were for ever lost to their country. The Governor concluded by declaring, that the enormities attendant on this trade were so great, as to demand the immediate interference of the legislature.

The next objection to the abolition was, that if we were to relinquish the Slave-trade, our rivals, the French, would take it up; so that, while we should suffer by the measure, the evil would still go on, and this even to its former extent. This was, indeed, a very weak argument; and, if it would defend the continuance of the Slave-trade, might equally be urged in favour of robbery, murder, and every species of wickedness, which, if we did not practise, others would commit. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that they were to take it up. What good would it do them? What advantages, for instance, would they derive from this pestilential commerce to their marine? Should not we, on the other hand, be benefited by this change? Would they not be obliged to come to us, in consequence of the cheapness of our manufactures, for what they wanted for the African market? But he would not calumniate the French nation so much as to suppose that they would carry on the trade if we were to relinquish it. He believed, on the other hand, that they would abolish it also. Mr. Necker, the present minister of France, was a man of religious principle; and, in his work upon the

Page 24

administration of the finances, had recorded his abhorrence of this trade. He was happy also to relate an anecdote of the present King of France, which proved that he was a friend to the abolition; for, being petitioned to dissolve a society, formed at Paris, for the annihilation of the Slave-trade, his majesty answered, that he would not, and was happy to hear that so humane an association was formed in his dominions. And here, having mentioned the society in Paris, he could not help paying a due compliment to that established in London for the same purpose, which had laboured with the greatest assiduity to make this important subject understood, and which had conducted itself with so much judgment and moderation as to have interested men of all religions, and to have united them in their cause.

There was another topic which he would submit to the notice of the house before he concluded. They were perhaps not aware, that a fair and honourable trade might be substituted in the natural productions of Africa, so that our connection with that continent in the way of commercial advantage need not be lost. The natives had already made some advances in it; and if they had not appeared so forward in raising and collecting their own produce for sale as in some other countries, it was to be imputed to the Slave-trade: but remove the cause, and Africa would soon emerge from her present ignorant and indolent state. Civilization would go on with her as well as with other nations. Europe three or four centuries ago was in many parts as barbarous as Africa at present, and chargeable with as bad practices. For, what would be said, if, so late as the middle of the thirteenth century, he could find a parallel there for the Slave-trade?—Yes. This parallel was to be found even in England. The people of Bristol, in the reign of Henry the Seventh, had a regular market for children, which were bought by the Irish: but the latter having experienced a general calamity, which they imputed as a judgment from Heaven on account of this wicked traffic, abolished it. The only thing, therefore, which he had to solicit of the house, was to show that they were now as enlightened as the Irish were four centuries back, by refusing to buy the children of other nations. He hoped they would do it. He hoped, too, they would do it in an unqualified manner. Nothing less than a total abolition of the trade would do away the evils complained of. The legislature of Jamaica, indeed, had thought that regulations might answer the purpose. Their report had recommended, that no person should be kidnapped, or permitted to be made a slave, contrary to the customs of Africa. But might he not be reduced to this state very unjustly, and yet by no means contrary to the African laws? Besides, how could we distinguish between those who were justly or unjustly reduced to it? Could we discover them by their physiognomy?—But if we could, Who would believe that the British captains

Page 25

would be influenced by any regulations made in this country, to refuse to purchase those who had not been fairly, honestly, and uprightly enslaved? They who were offered to us for sale were brought, some of them, three or four thousand miles, and exchanged like cattle from one hand to another, till they reached the coast. But who could return these to their homes, or make them compensation for their sufferings during their long journeyings? He would now conclude by begging pardon of the house for having detained them so long. He could indeed have expressed his own conviction in fewer words. He needed only to have made one or two short statements, and to have quoted the commandment, “Thou shalt do no murder.” But he thought it his duty to lay the whole of the case, and the whole of its guilt, before them. They would see now that no mitigations, no palliatives, would either be efficient or admissible. Nothing short of an absolute abolition could be adopted. This they owed to Africa: they owed it, too, to their own moral characters. And he hoped they would follow up the principle of one of the repentant African captains, who had gone before the committee of privy council as a voluntary witness, and that they would make Africa all the atonement in their power for the multifarious injuries she had received at the hands of British subjects. With respect to these injuries, their enormity and extent, it might be alleged in their excuse, that they were not fully acquainted with them till that moment, and therefore not answerable for their former existence: but now they could no longer plead ignorance concerning them. They had seen them brought directly before their eyes, and they must decide for themselves, and must justify to the world and their own consciences the facts and principles upon which their decision was formed.

Mr. Wilberforce having concluded his speech, which lasted three hours and a half, read, and laid on the table of the house, as subjects for their future discussion, twelve propositions, which he had deduced from the evidence contained in the privy council report, and of which the following is the abridged substance:

1. That the number of slaves annually carried from the coast of Africa, in British vessels, was about 38,000, of which, on an average, 22,500 were carried to the British islands, and that of the latter only 17,500 were retained there.

2. That these slaves, according to the evidence on the table, consisted, First, of prisoners of war; Secondly, of free persons sold for debt, or on account of real or imputed crimes, particularly adultery and witchcraft; in which cases they were frequently sold with their whole families, and sometimes for the profit of those by whom they were condemned; Thirdly, of domestic slaves sold for the profit of their masters, in some places at the will of the masters, and in others, on being condemned by them for real or imputed crimes; Fourthly, of persons made slaves by various acts of oppression, violence, or fraud, committed either by the princes and chiefs of those countries on their subjects, or by private individuals on each other;—or, lastly, by Europeans engaged in this traffic.

Page 26

3. That the trade so carried on had necessarily a tendency to occasion frequent and cruel wars among the natives; to produce unjust convictions and punishments for pretended or aggravated crimes; to encourage acts of oppression, violence, and fraud, and to obstruct the natural course of civilization and improvement in those countries.

4. That Africa in its present state furnished several valuable articles of commerce which were partly peculiar to itself, but that it was adapted to the production of others, with which we were now either wholly or in great part supplied by foreign nations. That an extensive commerce with Africa might be substituted in these commodities, so as to afford a return for as many articles as had annually been carried thither in British vessels: and, lastly, that such a commerce might reasonably be expected to increase by the progress of civilization there.

5. That the Slave-trade was peculiarly destructive to the seamen employed in it; and that the mortality there had been much greater than in any British vessels employed upon the same coast in any other service or trade.

6. That the mode of transporting the slaves from Africa to the West Indies necessarily exposed them to many and grievous sufferings, for which no regulations could provide an adequate remedy; and that in consequence thereof a large proportion had annually perished during the voyage.

7. That a large proportion had also perished in the harbours in the West Indies, from the diseases contracted in the voyage and the treatment of the same, previously to their being sold, and that this loss amounted to four and a half per cent. of the imported slaves.

8. That the loss of the newly imported slaves, within the three first years after their importation, bore a large proportion to the whole number imported.

9. That the natural increase of population among the slaves in the islands, appeared to have been impeded principally by the following causes:—First, By the inequality of the sexes in the importations from Africa. Secondly, By the general dissoluteness of manners among the slaves, and the want of proper regulations for the encouragement of marriages and of rearing children among them. Thirdly, By the particular diseases which were prevalent among them, and which were in some instances to be attributed to too severe labour, or rigorous treatment, and in others to insufficient or improper food. Fourthly, By those diseases, which affected a large proportion of negro-children in their infancy, and by those, to which the negros newly imported from Africa had been found to be particularly liable.

Page 27

10. That the whole number of the slaves in the island of Jamaica in 1768 was about 167,000, in 1774 about 193,000, and in 1787 about 256,000: that by comparing these numbers with the numbers imported and retained in the said island during all these years, and making proper allowances, the annual excess of deaths above births was in the proportion of about seven-eighths per cent.; that in the first six years of this period it was in the proportion of rather more than one on every hundred; that in the last thirteen years of the same it was in the proportion of about three-fifths on every hundred; and that a number of slaves, amounting to fifteen thousand, perished during the latter period in consequence of repeated hurricanes, and of the want of foreign supplies of provisions.

11. That the whole number of slaves in the island of Barbadoes was in the year 1764 about 70,706; in 1774 about 74,874; in 1780 about 68,270; in 1781, after the hurricane, about 63,248, and in 1786 about 62,115: that by comparing these numbers with the number imported into this island (not allowing for any re-exportation), the annual excess of deaths above births in the ten years from 1764 to 1774 was in the proportion of about five on every hundred; that in the seven years from 1774 to 1780 it was in the proportion of about one and one-third on every hundred; that between the year 1780 and 1781 there had been a decrease in the number of slaves of about five thousand; that in the six years from 1781 to 1786 the excess of deaths was in the proportion of rather less than seven-eighths on every hundred; that in the four years from 1783 to 1786 it was in the proportion of rather less than one-third on every hundred; and that, during the whole period, there was no doubt that some had been exported from the island, but considerably more in the first part of this period than in the last.

12. That the accounts from the Leeward Islands, and from Dominica, Grenada, and St. Vincent's, did not furnish sufficient grounds for comparing the state of population in the said islands at different periods with the number of slaves, which had been from time to time imported there and exported therefrom; but that from the evidence which had been received respecting the present state of these islands, as well as that of Jamaica and Barbadoes, and from a consideration of the means of obviating the causes, which had hitherto operated to impede the natural increase of the slaves, and of lessening the demand for manual labour, without diminishing the profit of the planters, no considerable or permanent inconvenience would result from discontinuing the further importation of African slaves.

Page 28

These propositions having been laid upon the table of the house, Lord Penrhyn rose in behalf of the planters, and, next after him, Mr. Gascoyne (both members for Liverpool) in behalf of the merchants concerned in the latter place. They both predicted the ruin and misery, which would inevitably follow the abolition of the trade. The former said, that no less than seventy millions were mortgaged upon lands in the West Indies, all of which would be lost. Mr. Wilberforce therefore should have made a motion to pledge the house to the repayment of this sum, before he had brought forward his propositions. Compensation ought to have been agreed upon as a previously necessary measure. The latter said, that in consequence of the bill of last year many ships were laid up and many seamen out of employ. His constituents had large capitals engaged in the trade, and, if it were to be wholly done away, they would suffer from not knowing where to employ them. They both joined in asserting, that Mr. Wilberforce had made so many misrepresentations in all the branches of this subject, that no reliance whatever was to be placed on the picture, which he had chosen to exhibit. They should speak however more fully to this point, when the propositions were discussed.

The latter declaration called up Mr. Wilberforce again, who observed, that he had no intention of misrepresenting any fact. He did not know that he had done it in any one instance; but, if he had, it would be easy to convict him out of the report upon the table.

Mr. Burke then rose. He would not, he said, detain the committee long. Indeed he was not able, weary and indisposed as he then felt himself, even if he had an inclination to do it; but as, on account of his other parliamentary duty, he might not have it in his power to attend the business now before them in its course, he would take that opportunity of stating his opinion upon it.

And, first, the house, the nation, and all Europe were under great obligations to Mr. Wilberforce for having brought this important subject forward. He had done it in a manner the most masterly, impressive, and eloquent. He had laid down his principles so admirably, and with so much order and force, that his speech had equalled any thing he had ever heard in modern oratory, and perhaps it had not been excelled by any thing to be found in ancient times. As to the Slave-trade itself, there could not be two opinions about it where men were not interested. A trade, begun in savage war, prosecuted with unheard-of barbarity, continued during the transportation with the most loathsome imprisonment, and ending in perpetual exile and slavery, was a trade so horrid in all its circumstances, that it was impossible to produce a single argument in its favour. On the ground of prudence, nothing could be said in defence of it; nor could it be justified by necessity. It was necessity alone, that could be brought to justify inhumanity; but no case of necessity could be made

Page 29

out strong enough to justify this monstrous traffic. It was therefore the duty of the house to put an end to it, and this without further delay. This conviction, that it became them to do it immediately, made him regret (and it was the only thing he regretted in the admirable speech he had heard) that his honourable friend should have introduced propositions on this subject. He could have wished that the business had been brought to a conclusion at once, without voting the propositions, which had been read to them. He was not over fond of abstract propositions. They were seldom necessary; and often occasioned great difficulty, embarrassment, and delay. There was besides no occasion whatever to assign detailed reasons for a vote, which Nature herself dictated, and which Religion enforced. If it should happen, that the propositions were not carried in that house or the other, such a complication of mischiefs might follow, as might occasion them heartily to lament that they were ever introduced. If the ultimate resolution should happen to be lost, he was afraid the propositions would pass as waste paper, if not be injurious to the cause at a future time.

And now, as the house must bring this matter to an issue, he would beg their attention to a particular point. He entreated them to look further than the present moment, and to ask themselves, if they had fortified their minds sufficiently to bear the consequences, which might arise from the abolition of the Slave-trade, supposing they should decide upon it. When they abandoned it, other foreign powers might take it up, and clandestinely supply our islands with slaves. Had they virtue enough to see another country reaping profits, which they themselves had given up; and to abstain from that envy natural to rivals, and firmly to adhere to their determination? If so, let them thankfully proceed to vote the immediate abolition of the Slave-trade. But if they should repent of their virtue (and he had known miserable instances of such repentance), all hopes of future reformation of this enormous evil would be lost. They would go back to a trade they had abandoned with redoubled attachment, and would adhere to it with a degree of avidity and shameless ardour, to their own humiliation, and to the degradation and disgrace of the nation in the eyes of all Europe. These were considerations worth regarding, before they took a decisive step in a business, in which they ought not to move with any other determination than to abide by the consequences at all hazards. The honourable gentleman (who to his eternal honour had introduced this great subject to their notice) had in his eloquent oration knocked at every door, and appealed to every passion, well knowing that mankind were governed by their sympathies. But there were other passions to be regarded. Men were always ready to obey their sympathies, when it cost them nothing. But were they prepared to pay the price of their virtue on this great occasion? This was the question. If they were, they would do themselves immortal honour, and would have the satisfaction of having done away a commerce, which, while it was productive of misery not to be described, most of all hardened the heart, and vitiated the human character.

Page 30

With respect to the consequences mentioned by the two members for Liverpool, he had a word or two to offer upon them. Lord Penrhyn had talked of millions to be lost and paid for. But seeing no probability of any loss ultimately, he could see no necessity for compensation. He believed, on the other hand, that the planters would be great gainers by those wholesome regulations, which they would be obliged to make, if the Slave-trade were abolished. He did not however flatter them with the idea that this gain would be immediate. Perhaps they might experience inconveniences at first, and even some loss. But what then? With their loss, their virtue would be the greater. And in this light he hoped the house would consider the matter; for, if they were called upon to do an act of virtuous energy and heroism, they ought to think it right to submit to temporary disadvantages for the sake of truth, justice, humanity, and the prospect of greater happiness.

The other member, Mr. Gascoyne, had said, that his constituents, if the trade were abolished, could not employ their capitals elsewhere. But whether they could or not, it was the duty of that house, if they put them into a traffic, which was shocking to humanity and disgraceful to the nation, to change their application, and not to allow them to be used to a barbarous purpose. He believed, however, that the merchants of Liverpool would find no difficulty on this head. All capitals required active motion. It was in their nature not to remain passive and unemployed. They would soon turn them into other channels. This they had done themselves during the American war; for the Slave-trade was then almost wholly lost, and yet they had their ships employed, either as transports in the service of Government, or in other ways.

And as he now called upon the house not to allow any conjectural losses to become impediments in the way of the abolition of the Slave-trade, so he called upon them to beware how they suffered any representations of the happiness of the state of slavery in our islands to influence them against so glorious a measure. Admiral Barrington had said in his testimony, that he had often envied the condition of the slaves there. But surely, the honourable admiral must have meant, that, as he had often toiled like a slave in the defence of his country, (as his many gallant actions had proved,) so he envied the day, when he was to toil in a similar manner in the same cause. If, however, his words to be taken literally, his sensations could only be accounted for by his having seen the negros in the hour of their sports, when a sense of the misery of their condition was neither felt by themselves nor visible to others. But their appearance on such occasions did by no means disprove their low and abject state. Nothing made a happy slave but a degraded man. In proportion as the mind grows callous to its degradation, and all sense of manly pride is lost, the slave feels comfort. In fact, he is no longer a man. If he were to define a man, he would say with Shakespeare,

Page 31

"Man is a being holding large discourse, Looking before and after."

But a slave was incapable of looking before and after. He had no motive to do it. He was a mere passive instrument in the hands of others, to be used at their discretion. Though living, he was dead as to all voluntary agency. Though moving amidst the creation with an erect form, and with the shape and semblance of a human being, he was a nullity as a man.

Mr. Pitt thanked his honourable friend Mr. Wilberforce for having at length introduced this great and important subject to the consideration of the house. He thanked him also for the perspicuous, forcible, and masterly manner, in which he had treated it. He was sure that no argument, compatible with any idea of justice, could be assigned for the continuation of the Slave-trade. And, at the same time that he was willing to listen with candour and attention to every thing, that could be urged on the other side of the question, he was sure that the principles from which his opinion was deduced were unalterable. He had examined the subject with the anxiety which became him, where the happiness and interests of so many thousands were concerned, and with the minuteness which would be expected of him, on account of the responsible situation which he held; and he averred, that it was sophistry, obscurity of ideas, and vagueness of reasoning, which alone could have hitherto prevented all mankind (those immediately interested in the question excepted) from agreeing in one and the same opinion upon the subject. With respect to the propriety of introducing the individual propositions, which had been offered, he differed with Mr. Burke, and he thanked his honourable friend Mr. Wilberforce for having chosen the only way, in which it could be made obvious to the world, that they were warranted on every ground of reason and of fact in coming to that vote, which he trusted would be the end of their proceeding. The grounds for the attainment of this end were distinctly stated in the propositions. Let the propositions be brought before the house, one by one, and argued from the evidence; and it would then be seen, that they were such as no one, who was not deaf to the language of reason, could deny. Let them be once entered upon the journals of that house, and it was almost impossible they should fail. The abolition must be voted. As to the mode of it, or how it should be effected, they were not at present to discuss it; but he trusted it would be such, as would not invite foreign powers to supply our islands with slaves by a clandestine trade. After a debt, founded on the immutable principles of justice, was found to be due, it was impossible but the country had means to cause it to be paid. Should such an illicit proceeding be attempted, the only language which it became us to adopt was, that Great Britain had resources to enable her to protect her islands, and to prevent that traffic from being clandestinely carried on by

Page 32

them, which she had thought fit from a regard to her character to abandon. It was highly becoming Great Britain to take the lead of other nations in such a virtuous and magnificent measure, and he could not but have confidence, that they would be inclined to share the honour with us, or be pleased to follow us as their example. If we were disposed to set about this glorious work in earnest, they might be invited to concur with us by a negotiation to be immediately opened for that purpose. He would only now observe, before he sat down, in answer to certain ideas thrown out, that he could by no means acquiesce in any compensation for losses, which might be sustained by the people of Liverpool, or by others in any other part of the kingdom, in the execution of this just and necessary undertaking.

Sir William Yonge said, he wanted no inducement to concur with the honourable mover of the propositions, provided the latter could be fairly established, and no serious mischiefs were to arise from the abolition. But he was apprehensive that many evils might follow, in the case of any sudden or unlooked-for decrease in the slaves. They might be destroyed by hurricanes. They might be swept off by many fatal disorders. In these cases, the owners of them would not be able to fill up their places, and they who had lent money upon the lands, where the losses had happened, would foreclose their mortgages. He was fearful also that a clandestine trade would be carried on, and then the sufferings of the Africans, crammed up in small vessels, which would be obliged to be hovering about from day to day, to watch an opportunity of landing, would be ten times greater than any which they now experienced in the legal trade. He was glad, however, as the matter was to be discussed, that it had been brought forward in the shape of distinct propositions, to be grounded upon the evidence in the privy council report.

Mr. Fox observed, that he did not like, where he agreed as to the substance of a measure, to differ with respect to the form of it. If, however, he differed in any thing in the present case, it was with a view rather to forward the business than to injure it, or to throw any thing like an obstacle in its way. Nothing like either should come from him. What he thought was, that all the propositions were not necessary to be voted previously to the ultimate decision, though some of them undoubtedly were. He considered them as of two classes: the one, alleging the grounds upon which it was proper to proceed to the abolition; such as that the trade was productive of inexpressible misery, in various ways, to the innocent natives of Africa; that it was the grave of our seamen; and so on: the other, merely answering objections which might be started, and where there might be a difference of opinion. He was however glad that the propositions were likely to be entered upon the journals; since, if from any misfortune the business should be deferred, it might succeed another year.

Page 33

Sure he was that it could not fail to succeed sooner or later. He highly approved of what Mr. Pitt had said, relative to the language it became us to hold out to foreign powers in case of a clandestine trade. With respect, however, to the assertion of Sir William Yonge, that a clandestine trade in slaves would be worse than a legal one, he could not admit it. Such a trade, if it existed at all, ought only to be clandestine. A trade in human flesh and sinews was so scandalous, that it ought not openly to be carried on by any government whatever, and much less by that of a Christian country. With regard to the regulation of the Slave-trade, he knew of no such thing as a regulation of robbery and murder. There was no medium. The legislature must either abolish it, or plead guilty of all the wickedness which had been shown to attend it. He would now say a word or two with respect to the conduct of foreign nations on this subject. It was possible that these, when they heard that the matter had been discussed in that house, might follow the example, or they might go before us and set one themselves. If this were to happen, though we might be the losers, humanity would be the gainer. He himself had been thought sometimes to use expressions relative to France, which were too harsh, and as if he could only treat her as the enemy of this country. Politically speaking, France was our rival. But he well knew the distinction between political enmity and illiberal prejudice. If there was any great and enlightened nation in Europe, it was France, which was as likely as any country upon the face of the globe to catch a spark from the light of our fire, and to act upon the present subject with warmth and enthusiasm. France had often been improperly stimulated by her ambition; and he had no doubt but that, in the present instance, she would readily follow its honourable dictates.

Mr. (now Lord) Grenville would not detain the house by going into a question, which had been so ably argued; but he should not do justice to his feelings, if he did not express publicly to his honourable friend, Mr. Wilberforce, the pleasure he had received from one of the most masterly and eloquent speeches he had ever heard,—a speech, which, while it did honour to him, entitled him to the thanks of the house, of the people of England, of all Europe, and of the latest posterity. He approved of the propositions, as the best mode of bringing this great question to a happy issue. He was pleased also with the language which had been held out with respect to foreign nations, and with our determination to assert our right of preventing our colonies from carrying on any trade, which we had thought it our duty to abandon.

Aldermen Newnham, Sawbridge, and Watson, though they wished well to the cause of humanity, could not, as representatives of the city of London, give their concurrence to a measure, which would injure it so essentially as that of the abolition of the Slave-trade. This trade might undoubtedly be put under wholesome regulations, and made productive of great commercial advantages. But, if it were abolished, it would render the city of London one scene of bankruptcy and ruin. It became the house to take care, while they were giving way to the goodness of their hearts, that they did not contribute to the ruin of the mercantile interests of their country.

Page 34

Mr. Martin stated, that he was so well satisfied with the speech of the honourable gentleman, who had introduced the propositions, and with the language held out by other distinguished members on this subject, that he felt himself more proud than ever of being an Englishman. He hoped and believed, that the melancholy predictions of the worthy aldermen would not prove true, and that the citizens of London would have too much public spirit to wish that a great national object (which comprehended the great duties of humanity, and justice) should be set aside, merely out of consideration to their own private interests.

Mr. Dempster expected, notwithstanding all he had heard, that the first proposition submitted to them, would have been to make good out of the public purse all the losses individuals were liable to sustain from an abolition of the Slave-trade. This ought to have been, as Lord Penrhyn had observed, a preliminary measure. He did not like to be generous out of the pockets of others. They were to abolish the trade, it was said, out of a principle of humanity. Undoubtedly they owed humanity to all mankind. But they also owed justice to those, who were interested in the event of the question, and had embarked their fortunes on the faith of parliament. In fact, he did not like to see men introducing even their schemes of benevolence to the detriment of other people; and much less did he like to see them going to the colonies, as it were upon their estates, and prescribing rules to them for their management. With respect to his own speculative opinion, as it regarded cultivation, he had no objection to give it. He was sure that sugar could be raised cheaper by free men than by slaves. This the practice in China abundantly proved. But yet neither he nor any other person had a right to force a system upon others. As to the trade itself, by which the present labourers were supplied, it had been considered by that house as so valuable, that they had preferred it to all others, and had annually voted a considerable sum towards carrying it on. They had hitherto deemed it an essential nursery for our seamen. Had it really been such as had been represented, our ancestors would scarcely have encouraged it; and therefore, upon these and other considerations, he could not help thinking that they would be wanting in their duty, if they abolished it altogether.

Mr. William Smith would not detain the house long at that late hour upon this important subject; but he could not help testifying the great satisfaction he felt at the manner, in which the honourable gentleman who opened the debate (if it could be so called) had treated it. He approved of the propositions as the best mode of bringing the decision to a happy issue. He gave Mr. Fox great credit for the open and manly way, in which he had manifested his abhorrence of this trade, and for the support he meant to give to the total and unqualified abolition of it; for he was satisfied, that the more it was inquired into, the more it would be found that nothing short of abolition would cure the evil. With respect to certain assertions of the members for Liverpool, and certain melancholy predictions about the consequences of such an event, which others had held out, he desired to lay in his claim for observation upon them, when the great question should come before the house.

Page 35

Soon after this the house broke up; and the discussion of the propositions, which was the next parliamentary measure intended, was postponed to a future day, which was sufficiently distant to give all the parties concerned time to make the necessary preparations for it.

Of this interval the committee for the abolition availed themselves to thank Mr. Wilberforce for the very able and satisfactory manner, in which he had stated to the house his propositions for the abolition of the Slave-trade, and for the unparalleled assiduity and perseverance, with which he had all along endeavoured to accomplish this object, as well as to take measures themselves for the further promotion of it. Their opponents availed themselves of this interval also. But that, which now embarrassed them, was the evidence contained in the privy council report. They had no idea, considering the number of witnesses they had sent to be examined, that this evidence, when duly weighed, could by right reasoning have given birth to the sentiments, which had been displayed in the speeches of the most distinguished members of the House of Commons, or to the contents of the propositions, which had been laid upon their table. They were thunder-struck as it were by their own weakness; and from this time they were determined, if possible, to get rid of it as a standard for decision, or to interpose every parliamentary delay in their power.

On the twenty-first of May, the subject came again before the attention of the house. It was ushered in, as was expected, by petitions collected in the interim, and which were expressive of the frightful consequences, which would attend the abolition of the Slave-trade. Alderman Newnham presented one from certain merchants in London; Alderman Watson another from certain merchants, mortgagees, and creditors of the sugar-islands; Lord Maitland another from the planters of Antigua; Mr. Blackburne another from certain manufacturers of Manchester; Mr. Gascoyne another from the corporation of Liverpool; and Lord Penrhyn others from different interested bodies in the same town.

Mr. Wilberforce then moved the order of the day, for the house to go into a committee of the whole house on the report of the privy council, and the several matters of evidence already upon the table relative to the Slave-trade.

Mr. Alderman Sawbridge immediately arose, and asked Mr. Wilberforce, if he meant to adduce any other evidence, besides that in the privy council report, in behalf of his propositions, or to admit other witnesses, if such could be found, to invalidate them. Mr. Wilberforce replied, that he was quite satisfied with the report on the table. It would establish all his propositions. He should call no witnesses himself: as to permission to others to call them, that must be determined by the house.

Page 36

This question and this answer gave birth immediately to great disputes upon the subject. Aldermen Sawbridge, Newnham, and Watson; Lords Penrhyn and Maitland; Mr. Gascoyne, Marsham, and others spoke against the admission of the evidence, which had been laid upon the table. They contended, that it was insufficient, defective, and contradictory; that it was *ex parte* evidence; that it had been manufactured by ministers; that it was founded chiefly on hearsay, and that the greatest part of it was false; that it had undergone no cross-examination; that it was unconstitutional; and that, if they admitted it, they would establish a dangerous precedent, and abandon their rights. It was urged on the other hand by Mr. Courtenay, that it could not be *ex parte* evidence, because it contained testimony on both sides of the question. The circumstance also of its being contradictory, which had been alleged against it, proved that it was the result of an impartial examination. Mr. Fox observed, that it was perfectly admissible. He called upon those, who took the other side of the question, to say why, if it was really inadmissible, they had not opposed it at first. It had now been a long time on the table, and no fault had been found with it. The truth was, it did not suit them, and they were determined by a side-wind as it were to put an end to the inquiry. Mr. Pitt observed that, if parliament had previously resolved to receive no evidence on a given subject but from the privy council, such a resolution indeed would strike at the root of the privileges of the House of Commons; but it was absurd to suppose that the house could upon no occasion receive evidence, taken where it was most convenient to take it, and subject throughout to new investigation, if any one doubted its validity. The report of the privy council consisted, first, of calculations and accounts from the public offices, and, next, of written documents on the subject; both of which were just as authentic, as if they had been laid upon the table of that house. The remaining part of it consisted of the testimony of living witnesses, all of whose names were published, so that if any one doubted their veracity, it was open to him to reexamine all or each of them. It had been said by adversaries that the report on the table was a weak and imperfect report, but would not these have the advantage of its weakness and imperfection? It was strange, when his honourable friend, Mr. Wilberforce, had said, “Weak and imperfect as the report may be thought to be, I think it strong enough to bear me out in all my propositions,” that they, who objected to it, should have no better reason to give than this, “We object, because the ground of evidence on which you rest is too weak to support your cause.” Unless it were meant to say (and the meaning seemed to be but thinly disguised) that the house ought to abandon the inquiry, he saw no reason whatever for not going immediately into a committee; and he wished gentlemen to consider whether

Page 37

it became the dignity of their proceedings to obstruct the progress of an inquiry, which the house had pledged itself to undertake. Their conduct indeed seemed extraordinary on this occasion. It was certainly singular that, while the report had been five weeks upon the table, no argument had been brought against its sufficiency; but that on the moment when the house was expected to come to an ultimate vote upon the subject, it should be thought defective, contradictory, unconstitutional, and otherwise objectionable. These objections, he was satisfied, neither did nor could originate with the country gentlemen; but they were brought forward, for purposes not now to be concealed, by the avowed enemies of this noble cause.

In the course of the discussion, which arose upon this subject, every opportunity was taken to impress the house with the dreadful consequences of the abolition. Mr. Henniker read a long letter from the King of Dahomey to George the First; which had been found among the papers of James, first Duke of Chandos, and which had remained in the family till that time. In this, the King of Dahomey boasted of his victory over the King of Ardrah, and how he had ornamented the pavement and walls of his palace with the heads of the vanquished. These cruelties, Mr. Henniker said, were not imputable to the Slave-trade. They showed the Africans to be naturally a savage people, and that we did them a great kindness by taking them from their country. Alderman Sawbridge maintained that, if the abolition passed, the Africans, who could not be sold as slaves, would be butchered at home; while those, who had been carried to our islands, would be no longer under control. Hence insurrections, and the manifold evils which belonged to them. Alderman Newnham was certain that the abolition would be the ruin of the trade of the country. It would affect even the landed interest, and the funds. It would be impossible to collect money to diminish the national debt. Every man in the kingdom would feel the abolition come home to him. Alderman Watson maintained the same argument, and pronounced the trade under discussion to be a merciful and humane trade.

Compensation was also insisted upon by Mr. Drake, Alderman Newnham, Mr. Henniker, Mr. Cruger, and others. This was resisted by Mr. Burke; who said that compensation in such a case would be contrary to every principle of legislation. Government gave encouragement to any branch of commerce, while it was regarded as conducive to the welfare of the community, or compatible with humanity and justice. But they were competent to withdraw their countenance from it, when it was found to be immoral, and injurious, and disgraceful to the state. They, who engaged in it, knew the terms under which they were placed, and adopted it with all the risks with which it was accompanied; and of consequence it was but just, that they should be prepared to abide by the loss which might accrue, when the public should think it right no longer to support it. But such a trade as this it was impossible any longer to support. Indeed it was not a trade. It was a system of robbery. It was a system, too, injurious to the welfare of other nations.

Page 38

How could Africa ever be civilized under it? While we continued to purchase the natives, they must remain in a state of barbarism. It was impossible to civilize slaves. It was contrary to the system of human nature. There was no country placed under such disadvantageous circumstances, into which the shadow of improvement had ever been introduced.

Great pains were taken to impress the house with the propriety of regulation. Sir Grey Cooper; Aldermen Sawbridge, Watson, and Newnham; Mr. Marsham, and Mr. Cruger, contended strenuously for it, instead of abolition. It was also stated that the merchants would consent to any regulation of the trade, which might be offered them.

In the course of the debate much warmth of temper was manifested on both sides. The expression of Mr. Fox in a former debate, “that the Slave-trade could not be regulated, because there could be no regulation of robbery and murder,” was brought up, and construed by planters in the house as a charge of these crimes upon themselves. Mr. Fox, however, would not retract the expression. He repeated it. He had no notion, however, that any individual would have taken it to himself. If it contained any reflection at all, it was on the whole parliament, who had sanctioned such a trade. Mr. Molyneux rose up, and animadverted severely on the character of Mr. Ramsay, one of the evidences in the privy council report, during his residence in the West Indies. This called up Sir William Dolben and Sir Charles Middleton in his defence, the latter of whom bore honourable testimony to his virtues from an intimate acquaintance with him, and a residence in the same village with him, for twenty years. Mr. Molyneux spoke also in angry terms of the measure of abolition. To annihilate the trade, he said, and to make no compensation on account of it, was an act of swindling. Mr. Macnamara called the measure hypocritical, fanatic, and methodistical. Mr. Pitt was so irritated at the insidious attempt to set aside the privy council report, when no complaint had been alleged against it before, that he was quite off his guard, and he thought it right afterwards to apologize for the warmth into he had been betrayed. The Speaker too was obliged frequently to interfere. On this occasion no less than thirty members spoke. And there had probably been few seasons, when so much disorder had been discoverable in that house.

The result of the debate was, a permission to those interested in the continuance of the Slave-trade to bring counsel to the bar on the twenty-sixth of May, and then to introduce such witnesses, as might throw further light on the propositions in the shortest time: for Mr. Pitt only acquiesced in this new measure on a supposition, “that there would be no unnecessary delay, as he could, by no means submit to the ultimate procrastination of so important a business.” He even hoped (and in this hope he was joined by Mr. Fox) that those concerned would endeavour to bring the whole of the evidence they meant to offer at the first examination.

Page 39

On the day appointed, the house met for the purposes now specified; when Alderman Newnham, thinking that such an important question should not be decided but in a full assembly of the representatives of the nation, moved for a call of the house on that day fortnight. Mr. Wilberforce stated that he had no objection to such a measure; believing the greater the number present the more favourable it would be to his cause. This motion, however, produced a debate and a division, in which it appeared that there were one hundred and fifty-eight in favour of it, and twenty-eight against it. The business of the day now commenced. The house went into a committee, and Sir William Dolben was put into the chair. Mr. Serjeant Le Blanc was then called in. He made an able speech in behalf of his clients; and introduced John Barnes, esquire, as his first witness, whose examination took up the remainder of the day. By this step they, who were interested in the continuance of the trade, attained their wishes, for they had now got possession of the ground with their evidence; and they knew they could keep it, almost as long as they pleased, for the purposes of delay. Thus they, who boasted, when the privy council examinations began, that they would soon do away all the idle tales, which had been invented against them, and who desired the public only to suspend their judgment till the report should come out, when they would see the folly and wickedness of all our allegations, dared not abide by the evidence, which they themselves had taught others to look up to as the standard by which they were desirous of being judged: thus they, who had advantages beyond measure in forming a body of evidence in their own favour, abandoned that, which they had collected. And here it is impossible for me not to make a short comparative statement on this subject, if it were only to show how little can be made out, with the very best opportunities, against the cause of humanity and religion. With respect to ourselves, we had almost all our witnesses to seek. We had to travel after them for weeks together. When we found them, we had scarcely the power of choice. We were obliged to take them as they came. When we found them, too, we had generally to implore them to come forward in our behalf. Of those so implored three out of four refused, and the plea for this refusal was a fear lest they should injure their own interests. The merchants, on the other hand, had their witnesses ready on the spot. They had always ships in harbour containing persons, who had a knowledge of the subject. They had several also from whom to choose. If one man was favourable to their cause in three of the points belonging to it, but was unfavourable in the fourth, he could be put aside and replaced. When they had thus selected them, they had not to entreat, but to command, their attendance. They had no fear, again, when they thus commanded, of a refusal on the ground of interest; because these were promoting

Page 40

their interest by obliging those who employed them. Viewing these and other circumstances, which might be thrown into this comparative statement, it was some consolation to us to know, amidst the disappointment which this new measure occasioned, and our apparent defeat in the eyes of the public, that we had really beaten our opponents at their own weapons, and that, as this was a victory in our own private feelings, so it was the presage to us of a future triumph.

On the twenty-ninth of May, Mr. Tierney made a motion to divide the consideration of the Slave-trade into two heads, by separating the African from the West Indian part of the question. This he did for the more clear discussion of the propositions, as well as to save time. This motion, however, was overruled by Mr. Pitt.

At length, on the ninth of June, by which time it was supposed that new light, and this in sufficient quantity, would have been thrown upon the propositions, it appeared that only two witnesses had been fully heard. The examinations, therefore, were continued, and they went on till the twenty-third. On this day, the order for the call of the house, which had been prolonged, standing unrepealed, there was a large attendance of members. A motion was then made to get rid of the business altogether, but it failed. It was now seen, however, that it was impossible to bring the question to a final decision in this session, for they, who were interested in it, affirmed that they had yet many important witnesses to introduce. Alderman Newnham, therefore, by the consent of Mr. Wilberforce, moved, that “the further consideration of the subject be deferred to the next session.” On this occasion, Mr. William Smith remarked, that though the decision on the great question was thus to be adjourned, he hoped the examinations, at least, would be permitted to go on. He had not heard any good reason, why they might not be carried on for some weeks longer. It was known that the hearing of evidence was at all times thinly attended. If therefore the few members, who did attend, were willing to give up their time a little longer, why should other members complain of an inconvenience in the suffering of which they took no share? He thought that by this proceeding the examination of witnesses on the part of the merchants might be finished, and of consequence the business brought into a very desirable state of forwardness against the ensuing session. These observations had not the desired effect, and the motion of Mr. Alderman Newnham was carried without a division. Thus the great question, for the elucidation of which all the new evidences were to be heard at the very first examination, in order that it might be decided by the ninth of June, was by the intrigue of our opponents deferred to another year.

The order of the day for going into the further consideration of the Slave-trade having been discharged, Sir William Dolben rose, to state, that it was his intention to renew his bill of the former year, relative to the conveyance of the unhappy Africans from their own country to the West Indies, and to propose certain alterations in it. He made a motion

accordingly, which was adopted; and he and Mr. Wilberforce were desired to prepare the same.

Page 41

This bill he introduced soon afterwards, and it passed; but not without opposition. It was a matter, however, of great pleasure to find that the worthy baronet was enabled by the assistance of Captain (afterwards Admiral) Macbride, and other naval officers in the house, to carry such clauses, as provided in some degree for the comfort of the poor seamen, who were seduced into this wicked trade. They could not indeed provide against the barbarity of their captains; but they secured them a space under the half deck in which to sleep. They prescribed a form of muster-rolls, which they were to see and sign in the presence of the clearing officer. They regulated their food both as to kind and quantity; and they preserved them from many of the impositions, to which they had been before exposed.

From the time when Mr. Wilberforce gave his first notice this session to the present, I had been variously employed, but more particularly in the composition of a new work. It was soon perceived to be the object of our opponents, to impress upon the public the preference of regulation to abolition. I attempted therefore to show the fallacy and wickedness of this notion. I divided the evils belonging to the Slave-trade into two kinds. These I enumerated in their order. With respect to those of the first kind, I proved that they were never to be remedied by any acts of the British parliament. Thus, for instance, what bill could alter the nature of the human passions? What bill could prevent fraud and violence in Africa, while the Slave-trade existed there? What bill could prevent the miserable victims of the trade from rising, when on board the ships, if they saw an opportunity, and felt a keen sense of their oppression? Those of the second I stated to admit of a remedy, and, after making accurate calculations on the subject of each, I showed that those merchants, who were to do them away effectually, would be ruined by their voyages. The work was called An Essay on the comparative Efficiency of Regulation or Abolition as applied to the Slave-trade.

The committee also in this interval brought out their famous print of the plan and section of a slave-ship; which was designed to give the spectator an idea of the sufferings of the Africans in the Middle Passage, and this so familiarly, that he might instantly pronounce upon the miseries experienced there. The committee at Plymouth had been the first to suggest the idea; but that in London had now improved it. As this print seemed to make an instantaneous impression of horror upon all who saw it, and as it was therefore very instrumental, in consequence of the wide circulation given it, in serving the cause of the injured Africans, I have given the reader a copy of it in the annexed plate, and I will now state the ground or basis, upon which it was formed.

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

Page 42

It must be obvious that it became the committee to select some one ship, which had been engaged in the Slave-trade, with her real dimensions, if they meant to make a fair representation of the manner of the transportation. When Captain Parrey, of the royal navy, returned from Liverpool, to which place Government had sent him, he brought with him the admeasurement of several vessels, which had been so employed, and laid them on the table of the House of Commons. At the top of his list stood the ship Brookes. The committee therefore, in choosing a vessel on this occasion, made use of the ship Brookes; and this they did, because they thought it less objectionable to take the first that came, than any other. The vessel then in the plate is the vessel now mentioned, and the following is her admeasurement as given in by Captain Parrey.

&nb
sp; Ft. In.
Length of the lower deck, gratings, and bulkheads
included at A A, 100 0
Breadth of beam on the lower deck inside, B B, 25 0 Depth of hold O O O, from ceiling to ceiling, 10 0 Height between decks from deck to deck, 5 0 Length of the men’s room, C C, on the lower deck, 46 0 Breadth of the men’s room, C C, on the lower deck, 25 4 Length of the platform, D D, in the men’s room, 46 0 Breadth of the platform, in the men’s room, on
each side, 6 0
Length of the boys’ room, E E, 13 0 Breadth of the boys’ room, 25 0 Breadth of platform, F F, in boys’ room, 6 0 Length of women’s room, G G, 28 6 Breadth of women’s room, 23 6 Length of platform, H H, in women’s room, 28 6 Breadth of platform in women’s room, 6 0 Length of the gun-room, I I, on the lower deck, 10 6 Breadth of the gun-room on the lower deck, 12 0 Length of the quarter deck, K K, 33 6 Breadth of the quarter deck, 19 6 Length of the cabin, L L, 14 0 Height of the cabin, 6 2 Length of the half deck, M M, 16 6 Height of the half deck, 6 2 Length of the platform, N N, on the half deck, 16 6 Breadth of the platform on the half deck, 6 0 Upper deck, P P,

Page 43

The committee, having proceeded thus far, thought that they should now allow certain dimensions for every man, woman, and child; and then see, how many persons, upon such dimensions and upon the admeasurements just given, could be stowed in this vessel. They allowed, accordingly, to every man slave six feet by one foot four inches for room, to every woman five feet by one foot four, to every boy five feet by one foot two, and to every girl four feet six by one foot. They then stowed them, and found them as in the annexed plate, that is, they found (deducting the women stowed in Z of figures 6 and 7, which spaces, being half of the half deck, were allowed by Sir William Dolben's last bill to the seamen) that only four hundred and fifty could be stowed in her; and the reader will find, if he should think it worth while to count the figures in the plate, that, on making the deduction mentioned, they will amount to this number.

The committee then thought it right to inquire how many slaves, the act of Sir William Dolben allowed this vessel to carry, and they found the number to be one hundred and fifty-four; that is, they found it allowed her to carry four more than could be put in without trespassing upon the room allotted to the rest; for we see that the bodies of the slaves, except just at the head of the vessel, already touch each other, and that no deduction has been made for tubs or stanchions to support the platforms and decks.

Such was the picture, which the committee were obliged to draw, if they regarded mathematical accuracy, of the room allotted to the slaves in this vessel. By this picture was exhibited the nature of the Elysium, which Mr. Norris and others had invented for them during their transportation from their own country. By this picture were seen also the advantages of Sir William Dolben's bill; for many, on looking at the plate, considered the regulation itself as perfect barbarism. The advantages however obtained by it were considerable; for the Brookes was now restricted to four hundred and fifty slaves, whereas it was proved that she carried six hundred and nine in a former voyage.

The committee, at the conclusion of the session of parliament, made a suitable report. It will be unnecessary to detail this for obvious reasons. There was, however, one thing contained in it, which ought not to be omitted. It stated, with appropriate concern, the death of the first controversial writer, and of one of the most able and indefatigable labourers, in their cause. Mr. Ramsay had been for some time indisposed. The climate of the West Indies, during a residence of twenty years, and the agitation in which his mind had been kept for the last four years of his life, in consequence of the virulent attacks on his word and character by those interested in the continuance of the trade, had contributed to undermine his constitution. During his whole illness he was cheerful and composed; nor did he allow it to hinder him, severe as it was, from taking any opportunity which offered of serving those unhappy persons, for whose injuries he had so deeply felt. A few days only before he died, I received from him probably the last letter he ever wrote, of which the following is an extract:

Page 44

“My health has certainly taken a most alarming turn; and if some considerable alteration does not take place for the better in a very little time, it will be all over with me; I mean as to the present life. I have lost all appetite; and suffer grievously from an almost continual pain in my stomach, which leaves me no enjoyment of myself, but such as I can collect from my own reflections, and the comforts of religion. I am glad the bill for the abolition is in such forwardness. Whether it goes through the House or not, the discussion attending it will have a most beneficial effect. The whole of this business I think now to be in such a train, as to enable me to bid farewell to the present scene with the satisfaction of not having lived in vain, and of having done something towards the improvement of our common nature; and this at no little expense of time and reputation. The little I have now written is my utmost effort; yet yesterday I thought it necessary to write an answer to a scurrilous libel in The Diary by one Scipio. On my own account he should have remained unnoticed, but our great cause must be kept unsullied.”

Mr. Ramsay was a man of active habit, of diligence and perseverance in his undertakings, and of extraordinary application. He was of mild and humble manners. He possessed a strong understanding, with great coolness and courage. Patriotism and public spirit were striking traits in his character. In domestic life he was amiable: in the ministry, exemplary and useful; and he died to the great regret of his parishioners, but most of all to that of those, who moved with him in his attempts to bring about the important event of the abolition of the Slave-trade.

CHAPTER II.

Continuation from July 1789 to July 1790—Author travels to Paris to promote the abolition in France—attends the committees of the Friends of the Negros—Counter attempts of the committee of White Colonists—An account of the deputies of Colour—-Meeting at the Duke de la Rochefoucauld’s—Mirabeau espouses the cause—-canvasses the National Assembly—Distribution of the section of the slave-ship there—-Character of Brissot—Author leaves Paris and returns to England—Examination of merchants’ and planters’ evidence resumed in the House of Commons—Author travels in search of evidence in favour of the abolition—Opposition to the hearing of it—This evidence is at length introduced—Renewal of Sir William Dolben’s bill—Distribution of the section of the slave-ship in England—and of Cowper’s Negro’s Complaint—and of Wedgewood’s Cameos.

Page 45

We usually find, as we give ourselves up to reflection, some little mitigation of the afflictions we experience; and yet of the evils which come upon us, some are often so heavy as to overpower the sources of consolation for a time, and to leave us wretched. This was nearly our situation at the close of the last session of parliament. It would be idle not to confess that circumstances had occurred, which wounded us deeply. Though we had foiled our opponents at their own weapons, and had experienced the uninterrupted good wishes and support of the public, we had the great mortification to see the enthusiasm of members of parliament beginning to cool; to see a question of humanity and justice (for such it was, when it was delivered into their hands) verging towards that of commercial calculation; and finally to see regulation, as it related to it in the way of being substituted for abolition. But most of all were we affected, knowing as we did the nature and the extent of the sufferings belonging to Slave-trade, that these should be continued to another year. This last consideration almost overpowered me. It had fallen to my lot, more than to that of any other person, to know these evils, and I seemed almost inconsolable at the postponement of the question. I wondered how members of parliament, and these Englishmen, could talk as they did on this subject; how they could bear for a moment to consider their fellow-man as an article of trade; and how they should not count even the delay of an hour, which occasioned so much misery to continue, as one of the most criminal actions of their lives.

It was in vain, however, to sink under our burthens. Grief could do no good; and if our affairs had taken an unfavourable turn, the question was, how to restore them. It was sufficiently obvious that, if our opponents were left to themselves, or, without any counteracting evidence, they would considerably soften down the propositions, if not invalidate them in the minds of many. They had such a power of selection of witnesses, that they could bring men forward, who might say with truth, that they had seen but very few of the evils complained of, and these in an inferior degree. We knew also from the example of the Liverpool delegates, how interest and prejudice could blind the eyes, and how others might be called upon to give their testimony, who would dwell upon the comforts of the Africans, when they came into our power; on the sprinkling of their apartments with frankincense; on the promotion of music and the dance among them; and on the health and festivity of their voyages. It seemed therefore necessary, that we should again be looking out for evidence on the part of the abolition. Nor did it seem to me to be unreasonable, if our opponents were allowed to come forward in a new way, because it was more constitutional, that we should be allowed the same privilege. By these means the evidence, of which we had now lost the use, might be restored; indifference might be fanned into warmth; commercial calculation might be overpowered by justice; and abolition, rising above the reach of the cry of regulation, might eventually triumph.

Page 46

I communicated my ideas to the committee, and offered to go round the kingdom to accomplish this object. The committee had themselves been considering what measures to take, and as each in his own mind had come to conclusions similar with my own, my proposal was no sooner made, than adopted.

I had not been long upon this journey, when I was called back. Mr. Wilberforce, always solicitous for the good of this great cause, was of opinion, that, as commotions had taken place in France, which then aimed at political reforms, it was possible that the leading persons concerned in them might, if an application were made to them judiciously, be induced to take the Slave-trade into their consideration, and incorporate it among the abuses to be done away. Such a measure, if realized, would not only lessen the quantity of human suffering, but annihilate a powerful political argument against us. He had a conference therefore with the committee on this subject; and, as they accorded with his opinion, they united with him in writing a letter to me, to know if I would change my journey, and proceed to France.

As I had no object in view but the good of the cause, it was immaterial to me where I went, if I could but serve it; and therefore, without any further delay, I returned to London.

As accounts had arrived in England of the excesses which had taken place in the city of Paris, and of the agitated state of the provinces through which I was to pass, I was desired by several of my friends to change my name. To this I could not consent; and, on consulting the committee, they were decidedly against it.

I was introduced as quickly as possible, on my arrival at Paris, to the friends of the cause there, to the Duke de la Rochefoucald, the Marquis de Condorcet, Messieurs Petion de Villeneuve, Claviere, and Brissot, and to the Marquis de la Fayette. The latter received me with peculiar marks of attention. He had long felt for the wrongs of Africa, and had done much to prevent them. He had a plantation in Cayenne, and had devised a plan, by which the labourers upon it should pass by degrees from slavery to freedom. With this view he had there laid it down as a principle, that all crimes were equal, whether they were committed by Blacks or Whites, and ought equally to be punished. As the human mind is of such a nature, as to be acted upon by rewards as well as punishments, he thought it unreasonable, that the slaves should have no advantage from a stimulus from the former. He laid it down therefore as another principle, that temporal profits should follow virtuous action. To this he subjoined a reasonable education to be gradually given. By introducing such principles, and by making various regulations for the protection and comforts of the slaves, he thought he could prove to the planters, that there was no necessity for the Slave-trade; that the slaves upon all their estates would increase sufficiently by population; that they might be introduced gradually, and without detriment, to a state of freedom; and that then the real interests of all would be most promoted. This system he had begun to act upon two years before

I saw him. He had also, when the society was established in Paris, which took the name of The Friends of the Negros, enrolled himself a member of it.

Page 47

The first public steps taken after my arrival in Paris were at a committee of the Friends of the Negros, which was but thinly attended. None of those mentioned, except Brissot, were present. It was resolved there, that the committee should solicit an audience of Mr. Necker; and that I should wait upon him, accompanied by a deputation consisting of the Marquis de Condorcet, Monsieur de Bourge, and Brissot de Warwille; Secondly, that the committee should write to the president of the National Assembly, and request the favour of him to appoint a day for hearing the cause of the Negros; and, Thirdly, that it should be recommended to the committee in London to draw up a petition to the National Assembly of France, praying for the abolition of the Slave-trade by that country. This petition, it was observed, was to be signed by as great a number of the friends to the cause in England, as could be procured. It was then to be sent to the committee at Paris, who would take it in a body to the place of its destination.

I found great delicacy as a stranger in making my observations upon these resolutions, and yet I thought I ought not to pass them over wholly in silence, but particularly the last. I therefore rose up, and stated that there was one resolution, of which I did not quite see the propriety. But this might arise from my ignorance of the customs, as well as of the genius and spirit of the French people. It struck me that an application from a little committee in England to the National Assembly of France was not a dignified measure, nor was it likely to have weight with such a body. It was, besides, contrary to all the habits of propriety, in which I had been educated. The British Parliament did not usually receive petitions from the subjects of other nations. It was this feeling, which had induced me thus to speak.

To these observations it was replied, that the National Assembly of France would glory in going contrary to the example of other nations in a case of generosity and justice, and that the petition in question, if it could be obtained, would have an influence there, which the people of England, unacquainted with the sentiments of the French nation, would hardly credit.

To this I had only to reply, that I would communicate the measure to the committee in London, but that I could not be answerable for the part they would take in it.

By an answer received from Mr. Necker, relative to the first of these resolutions, it appeared that the desired interview had been obtained: but he granted it only for a few minutes, and this principally to show his good will to the cause. For he was then so oppressed with business in his own department, that he had but little time for any other. He wrote to me however the next day, and desired my company to dinner. He then expressed a wish to me, that any business relative to the Slave-trade might be managed by ourselves as individuals, and that I would take the opportunity of dining with him occasionally for this purpose. By this plan, he said, both of us would save time. Madame Necker also promised to represent her husband, if I should call in his absence, and to receive me, and converse with me on all occasions, in which this great cause of humanity and religion might be concerned.

Page 48

With respect to the other resolutions nothing ever came of them; for we waited daily for an answer from the president during the whole of his presidency, but we never received any; and the committee in London, when they had read my letter, desired me unequivocally to say, that they did not see the propriety of the petition, which it had been recommended to them to obtain.

At the next meeting it was resolved, that a letter should be written to the new president for the same purpose as the former. This, it was said, was now rendered essentially necessary. For the merchants, planters, and others interested in the continuance of the Slave-trade, were so alarmed at the enthusiasm of the French people, in favour of the new order of things, and of any change recommended to them, which had the appearance of promoting the cause of liberty, that they held daily committees to watch and to thwart the motions of the Friends of the Negros. It was therefore thought proper, that the appeal to the Assembly should be immediate on this subject, before the feelings of the people should cool, or, before they, who were thus interested, should poison their minds by calculations of loss and gain. The silence of the former president was already attributed to the intrigues of the planters' committee. No time therefore was to be lost. The letter was accordingly written, but as no answer was ever returned to it, they attributed this second omission to the same cause.

I do not really know whether interested persons ever did, as was suspected, intercept the letters of the committee to the two presidents as now surmised; or whether they ever dissuaded them from introducing so important a question for discussion when the nation was in such a heated state; but certain it is that we had many, and I believe barbarous, enemies to encounter. At the very next meeting of the committee, Claviere produced anonymous letters, which he had received, and in which it was stated that, if the society of the Friends of the Negros did not dissolve itself, he and the rest of them would be stabbed. It was said that no less than three hundred persons had associated themselves for this purpose. I had received similar letters myself; and on producing mine, and comparing the hand-writing in both, it appeared that the same persons had written them.

In a few days after this the public prints were filled with the most malicious representations of the views of the committee. One of them was, that they were going to send twelve thousand muskets to the Negros in St. Domingo, in order to promote an insurrection there. This declaration was so industriously circulated, that a guard of soldiers was sent to search the committee-room; but these were soon satisfied, when they found only two or three books and some waste paper. Reports equally unfounded and wicked were spread also in the same papers relative to myself. My name was mentioned at full length, and the place

Page 49

of my abode hinted at. It was stated at one time, that I had proposed such wild and mischievous plans to the committee in London relative to the abolition of the Slave-trade, that they had cast me out of their own body, and that I had taken refuge in Paris, where I now tried to impose equally on the French nation. It was stated at another, that I was employed by the British government as a spy, and that it was my object to try to undermine the noble constitution, which was then forming for France. This latter report at this particular time, when the passions of men were so inflamed, and when the stones of Paris had not been long purified from the blood of Foulon and Berthier, might have cost me my life; and I mentioned it to General la Fayette, and solicited his advice. He desired me to make a public reply to it: which I did. He desired me also to change my lodging to the Hotel de York, that I might be nearer to him; and to send to him if there should be any appearance of a collection of people about the hotel, and I should have aid from the military in his quarter. He said also, that he would immediately give in my name to the Municipality; and that he would pledge himself to them, that my views were strictly honourable.

On dining one day at the house of the Marquis de la Fayette, I met the deputies of Colour. They had arrived only the preceding day from St. Domingo. I was desired to take my seat at dinner in the midst of them. They were six in number; of a sallow or swarthy complexion, but yet it was not darker than that of some of the natives of the south of France. They were already in the uniform of the Parisian National Guards; and one of them wore the cross of St. Louis. They were men of genteel appearance and modest behaviour. They seemed to be well informed, and of a more solid cast than those, whom I was in the habit of seeing daily in this city. The account which they gave of themselves was this. The White People of St. Domingo, consisting of less than ten thousand persons, had deputies then sitting in the National Assembly. The People of Colour in the same island greatly exceeded the Whites in number. They amounted to thirty thousand, and were generally proprietors of lands. They were equally free by law with the former, and paid their taxes to the mother-country in an equal proportion. But in consequence of having sprung from slaves they had no legislative power, and moreover were treated with great contempt. Believing that the mother-country was going to make a change in its political constitution, they had called a meeting on the island, and this meeting had deputed them to repair to France, and to desire the full rights of citizens, or that the free People of Colour might be put upon an equality with the Whites. They (the deputies) had come in consequence. They had brought with them a present of six millions of livres to the National Assembly, and an appointment to General la Fayette to be commander in chief over their constituents, as a distinct body. This command, they said, the General had accepted, though he had declined similar honours from every town in France, except Paris, in order to show that he patronised their cause.

Page 50

I was now very anxious to know the sentiments which these gentlemen entertained on the subject of the Slave-trade. If they were with us, they might be very useful to us; not only by their votes in the Assembly, but by the knowledge of facts, which they would be able to adduce there in our favour. If they were against us, it became me to be upon my guard against them, and to take measures accordingly. I therefore stated to them at once the nature of my errand to France, and desired their opinion upon it. This they gave me without reserve. They broke out into lavish commendations of my conduct, and called me their friend. The Slave-trade, they said, was the parent of all the miseries in St. Domingo, not only on account of the cruel treatment it occasioned to the slaves, but on account of the discord which it constantly kept up between the Whites and People of Colour, in consequence of the hateful distinctions it introduced. These distinctions could never be obliterated while it lasted. Indeed both the trade and the slavery must fall before the infamy, now fixed upon a skin of colour, could be so done away, that Whites and Blacks could meet cordially, and look with respect upon one another. They had it in their instructions, in case they should obtain a seat in the Assembly, to propose an immediate abolition of the Slave-trade, and an immediate amelioration of the state of slavery also, with a view to its final abolition in fifteen years.

But time was flying apace, I had now been nearly seven weeks in Paris; and had done nothing. The thought of this made me uneasy, and I saw no consoling prospect before me. I found it even difficult to obtain a meeting of the Friends of the Negros. The Marquis de la Fayette had no time to attend. Those of the committee, who were members of the National Assembly, were almost constantly engaged at Versailles. Such of them as belonged to the Municipality, had enough to do at the Hotel de Ville. Others were employed either in learning the use of arms, or in keeping their daily and nightly guards. These circumstances made me almost despair of doing any thing for the cause at Paris, at least in any reasonable time. But a new circumstance occurred, which distressed me greatly; for I discovered, in the most satisfactory manner, that two out of the six at the last committee were spies. They had come into the society for no other reason, than to watch and report its motions, and they were in direct correspondence with the slave-merchants at Havre de Grace. This matter I brought home to them afterwards, and I had the pleasure of seeing them excluded from all our future meetings.

Page 51

From this time I thought it expedient to depend less upon the committee and more upon my own exertions, and I formed the resolution of going among the members of the National Assembly myself, and of learning from their own mouths the hope I ought to entertain relative to the decision of our question. In the course of my endeavours I obtained a promise from the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, the Comte de Mirabeau, the Abbe Syeyes, Monsieur Bergasse, and Monsieur Petion de Villeneuve, five of the most approved members of the National Assembly, that they would meet me, if I would fix a day. I obtained a similar promise from the Marquis de Condorcet, and Claviere and Brissot, as members selected from the committee of the Friends of the Negros. And Messieurs de Roveray and Du Monde, two Genevese gentlemen at Versailles, men of considerable knowledge and interest, and who had heard of our intended meeting, were to join us at their own request. The place chosen was the house of the Bishop of Chartres at Versailles.

I was now in hope that I should soon bring the question to some issue; and on the fourth of October I went to dine with the Bishop of Chartres to fix the day. We appointed the seventh. But how soon, frequently, do our prospects fade! From the conversation which took place at dinner, I began to fear that our meeting would not be realized. About three days before, the officers of the Guard du Corps had given the memorable banquet, recorded in the annals of the revolution, to the officers of the regiment of Flanders which then lay at Versailles. This was a topic, on which the company present dwelt. They condemned it as a most fatal measure in these heated times; and were apprehensive, that something would grow immediately out of it, which might endanger the King's safety. In passing afterwards through the streets of Versailles my fears increased. I met several of that regiment in groups. Some were brandishing their swords. Others were walking arm in arm and singing tumultuously. Others were standing and conversing earnestly together. Among the latter I heard one declare with great vehemence, "that it should not be; that the revolution must go on." On my arrival at Paris in the evening the Palais Royale was full of people, and there were movements and buzzings among them, as if something was expected to happen. The next day, when I went into the streets it was obvious what was going to take place. Suffice it to say, that the next evening the King and Queen were brought prisoners into Paris. After this, things were in such an unsettled state for a few days, and the members of the National Assembly were so occupied in the consideration of the event itself, and of the consequences which might attend it, that my little meeting, of which it had cost me so much time and trouble to procure the appointment, was entirely prevented.

Page 52

I had now to wait patiently till a new opportunity should occur. The Comte de Mirabeau, before the departure of the King, had moved and carried the resolution that “the Assembly was inseparable from his majesty’s person.” It was expected, therefore, that the National Assembly would immediately transfer its sittings to Paris. This took place on the nineteenth. It was now more easy for me to bring persons together, than when I had to travel backward and forward to Versailles. Accordingly, by watching my opportunities, I obtained the promise of another meeting. This was held afterward at the Duke de la Rochefoucauld’s. The persons before mentioned were present; except the Comte de Mirabeau, whose occupations at that moment made it utterly impossible for him to attend.

The Duke opened the business in an appropriate manner; and concluded, by desiring each person to give his opinion frankly and unequivocally as to what might be expected of the National Assembly relative to the great measure of the abolition of the Slave-trade.

The Abbe Syeyes rose up, and said, it would probably bring the business within a shorter compass, if, instead of discussing this proposition at large, I were to put to the meeting my own questions. I accordingly accepted this offer; and began by asking those present, “how long it was likely that the present National Assembly would sit.” After some conversation it was replied, that, “it would sit till it had completed the constitution, and interwoven such fixed principles into it, that the legislature, which should succeed it, might have nothing more to do, than to proceed on the ordinary business of the state. Its dissolution would probably not take place till the month of March.”

I then asked them, “whether it was their opinion, that the National Assembly would feel itself authorized to take up such a foreign question (if I might be allowed the expression) as that of the abolition of the Slave-trade.” The answer to this was, “that the object of the National Assembly was undoubtedly the formation of a constitution for the French people. With respect to foreign possessions, it was very doubtful, whether it were the real interest of France to have any colonies at all. But while it kept such colonies under its dominion, the Assembly would feel, that it had the right to take up this question; and that the question itself would naturally spring out of the bill of rights, which had already been adopted as the basis of the constitution.”

The next question I proposed was, “whether they were of opinion, that the National Assembly would do more wisely, in the present situation of things, to determine upon the abolition of the Slave-trade now, or to transfer it to the legislature, which was to succeed it in the month of March.”

Page 53

This question gave birth to a long discussion; during which much eloquence was displayed. But the unanimous answer, with the reasons for it, may be conveyed in substance as follows. “It would be most wise, it was said, in the present Assembly to introduce the question to the notice of the nation, and this as essentially connected with the bill of rights, but to transfer the determination of it, in a way the best calculated to ensure success, to the succeeding legislature. The revolution was of more importance to Frenchmen, than the abolition of the Slave-trade. To secure this was their first object, and more particularly, because the other would naturally flow from it. But the revolution might be injured by the immediate determination of the question. Many persons in the large towns of Bourdeaux, Marseilles, Rouen, Nantes, and Havre, who were now friends to it, might be converted into enemies. It would also be held up by those, who wished to produce a counter-revolution, (and the ignorant and prejudiced might believe it,) that the Assembly had made a great sacrifice to England, by thus giving her an opportunity of enlarging her trade. The English House of Commons had taken up the subject, but had done nothing. And though they, who were then present, were convinced of the sincerity of the English minister, who had introduced it; and that the trade must ultimately fall in England, yet it would not be easy to persuade many bigoted persons in France of these truths. It would therefore be most wise in the Assembly only to introduce the subject as mentioned; but if extraordinary circumstances should arise, such as a decree, that the deputies of Colour should take their seats in the Assembly, or that England should have begun this great work, advantage might be taken of them, and the abolition of the Slave-trade might be resolved upon in the present session.”

The last question I proposed was this. “If the determination of this great question should be proposed to the next legislature, would it be more difficult to carry it then than now.”

This question also produced much conversation. But the answer was unanimous, “that there would be no greater difficulty in the one than in the other case; for that the people would daily, more and more admire their constitution; that this constitution would go down to the next legislature, from whence would issue solid and fixed principles, which would be resorted to as a standard for decision on all occasions. Hence the Slave-trade, which would be adjudged by it also, could not possibly stand. Add to which, that the most virtuous members in the present would be chosen into the new legislature, which, if the constitution were but once fairly established, would not regard the murmurs of any town or province.” After this, a desultory conversation took place, in which some were of opinion that it would be proper, on the introduction of the subject into the Assembly, to move for a committee of inquiry, which should collect facts and documents against the time, when it should be taken up with a view to its final discussion.

Page 54

As it now appeared to me, that nothing material would be done with respect to our cause till after the election of the new legislature, I had thoughts of returning to England to resume my journey in quest of evidence; but I judged it right to communicate first with the Comte de Mirabeau and the Marquis de la Fayette, both of whom would have attended the meeting just mentioned, if unforeseen circumstances had not prevented them.

On conversing with the first, I found that he differed from those, whom I had consulted. He thought that the question, on account of the nature and urgency of it, ought to be decided in the present legislature. This was so much his opinion, that he had made a determination to introduce it there himself; and had been preparing for his motion. He had already drawn up the outlines of a speech for the purpose; but was in want of circumstantial knowledge to complete it. With this knowledge he desired me to furnish him. He then put his speech into my hand; and wished me to take it home and peruse it. He wrote down also some questions, and he gave them to me directly afterwards, and begged I would answer them at my leisure.

On conversing with the latter, he said, that he believed with those at the meeting, that there would be no greater difficulty in carrying the question in the succeeding than in the present legislature. But this consideration afforded an argument for the immediate discussion of it: for it would make a considerable difference to suffering humanity, whether it were to be decided now or then. This was the moment to be taken to introduce it; nor did he think that they ought to be deterred from doing it, by any supposed clamours from some of the towns in France. The great body of the people admired the constitution; and would support any decisions, which were made in strict conformity to its principles. With respect to any committee of inquiry, he deprecated it. The Slave-trade, he said, was not a trade. It dishonoured the name of commerce. It was piracy. But if so, the question, which it involved, was a question of justice only; and it could not be decided with propriety by any other standard. I then informed him, that the Comte de Mirabeau had undertaken to introduce it into the Assembly. At this he expressed his uneasiness. “Mirabeau,” says he, “is a host in himself; and I should not be surprised if by his own eloquence and popularity only he were to carry it; and yet I regret that he has taken the lead in it. The cause is so lovely, that even ambition, abstractedly considered, is too impure to take it under its protection, and not to sully it. It should have been placed in the hands of the most virtuous man in France. This man is the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. But you cannot alter things now. You cannot take it out of his hands. I am sure he will be second to no one on this occasion.”

Page 55

On my return to my hotel, I perused the outlines of the speech, which the Comte de Mirabeau had lent me. It afforded a masterly knowledge of the evils of the trade, as drawn from reason only. It was put together in the most striking and affecting manner. It contained an almost irresistible appeal to his auditors by frequent references to the ancient system of things in France, and to their situation and prospects under the new. It flowed at first gently like a river in a level country; but it grew afterwards into a mountain torrent, and carried every thing before it. On looking at the questions, which he had written down for me, I found them consist of three. 1. What are the different ways of reducing to slavery the inhabitants of that part of Africa, which is under the dominion of France? 2. What is the state of society there with respect to government, industry, and the arts? 3. What are the various evils belonging to the transportation of the Africans from their own country?

It was peculiarly agreeable to me to find, on reading the first two questions, that I had formed an acquaintance with Monsieur Geoffroy de Villeneuve, who had been aide du camp to the Chevalier de Boufflers at Goree; but who was then at his father's house in Paris. This gentleman had entertained Dr. Spaarman and Mr. Wadstrom; and had accompanied them up the Senegal, when under the protection of the French government in Africa. He had confirmed to me the testimony, which they had given before the privy council. But he had a fund of information on this subject, which went far beyond what these possessed, or I had ever yet collected from books or men. He had travelled all over the kingdom of Cayor on foot; and had made a map of it. His information was so important, that I had been with him for almost days together to take it down. I determined therefore to arrange the facts, which I had obtained from him, of which I had now a volume, that I might answer the two first questions, which had been proposed to me; for it was of great importance to the Comte de Mirabeau, that he should be able to appeal, in behalf of the statements in his speech to the Assembly, to an evidence on the spot.

In the course of my correspondence with the Comte, which continued with but little intermission for six weeks, many circumstances took place, which were connected with the cause, and which I shall now detail in their order.

On waiting upon Mr. Necker, at his own request, he gave me the pleasing intelligence, that the committee of finances, which was then composed of members of the National Assembly, had resolved, though they had not yet promulgated their resolution, upon a total abolition of all the bounties then in existence in favour of the Slave-trade.

Page 56

The Deputies of Colour now began to visit me at my own hotel. They informed me, that they had been admitted, since they had seen me, into the National Assembly. On stating their claims, the president assured them, that they might take courage; for that the Assembly knew no distinction between Blacks and Whites, but considered all men as having equal rights. This speech of the president, they said, had roused all the White Colonists in Paris. Some of these had openly insulted them. They had held also a meeting on the subject of this speech; at which they had worked themselves up so as to become quite furious. Nothing but intrigue was now going forward among them to put off the consideration of the claims of the free People of Colour. They, the deputies, had been flattered by the prospect of a hearing no less than six times; and, when the day arrived, something had constantly occurred to prevent it.

At a subsequent interview, they appeared to be quite disheartened; and to be grievously disappointed as to the object of their mission. They were now sure, that they should never be able to make head against the intrigues and plots of the White Colonists. Day after day had been fixed as before for the hearing of their cause. Day after day it had been deferred in like manner. They were now weary with waiting. One of them, Oge, could not contain himself, but broke out with great warmth—"I begin," says he, "not to care, whether the National Assembly will admit us or not. But let it beware of the consequences. We will no longer continue to be beheld in a degraded light. Dispatches shall go directly to St. Domingo; and we will soon follow them. We can produce as good soldiers on our estates, as those in France. Our own arms shall make us independent and respectable. If we are once forced to desperate measures, it will be in vain that thousands will be sent across the Atlantic to bring us back to our former state." On hearing this, I entreated the deputies to wait with patience. I observed to them, that in a great revolution, like that of France, things, but more particularly such as might be thought external, could not be discussed either so soon or so rapidly as men full of enthusiasm would wish. France would first take care of herself. She would then, I had no doubt, extend her care to her Colonies. Was not this a reasonable conclusion, when they, the deputies, had almost all the first men in the Assembly in their favour? I entreated them therefore to wait patiently; as well as upon another consideration, which was, that by an imprudent conduct they might not only ruin their own cause in France, but bring indescribable misery upon their native land.

Page 57

By this time a large packet, for which I had sent from England, arrived. It consisted of above a thousand of the plan and section of a slave-ship, with an explanation in French. It contained also about five hundred coloured engravings, made from two views, which Mr. Wadstrom had taken in Africa. The first of these represented the town of Joal, and the King's military on horseback returning to it, after having executed the great pillage, with their slaves. The other represented the village of Bain; from whence ruffians were forcing a poor woman and her children to sell them to a ship, which was then lying in the Roads. Both these scenes Mr. Wadstrom had witnessed. I had collected also by this time, one thousand of my Essays on the Impolicy of the Slave-trade, which had been translated into the French language. These I now wished to distribute, as preparatory to the motion of Mirabeau, among the National Assembly. This distribution was afterwards undertaken and effected by the Archbishop of Aix, the Bishop of Chartres, the Marquis de la Fayette, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, the Comte de Mirabeau, Monsieur Necker, the Marquis de Condorcet, Messieurs Petion de Villeneuve, Bergasse, Claviere and Brissot, and by the Marchioness de la Fayette, Madame Necker, and Madame de Poivre, the latter of whom was the widow of the late Intendant of the Isle of France.

This distribution had not been long begun, before I witnessed its effects. The virtuous Abbe Gregoire, and several members of the National Assembly, called upon me. The section of the slave-ship, it appeared, had been the means of drawing them towards me. They wished for more accurate information concerning it. Indeed it made its impression upon all who saw it. The Bishop of Chartres once told me, that, when he first espoused our cause, he did it at once; for it seemed obvious to him that no one could, under the Christian dispensation, hold another as his slave; and it was no less obvious where such an unnatural state existed, that there would be great abuses; but that, nevertheless, he had not given credit to all the tales which had been related of the Slave-trade, till he had seen this plate; after which there was nothing so barbarous which might not readily be believed. The Archbishop of Aix, when I first showed him the same plate, was so struck with horror, that he could scarcely speak: and when Mirabeau first saw it, he was so impressed by it, that he ordered a mechanic to make a model of it in wood, at a considerable expense. This model he kept afterwards in his dining-room. It was a ship in miniature, about a yard long, and little wooden men and women, which were painted black to represent the slaves, were seen stowed in their proper places.

Page 58

But while the distribution of these different articles thus contributed to make us many friends, it called forth the extraordinary exertions of our enemies. The merchants and others interested in the continuance of the Slave-trade wrote letters to the Archbishop of Aix, beseeching him not to ruin France; which he would inevitably do, if, as then president, he were to grant a day for hearing the question of the abolition. Offers of money were made to Mirabeau from the same quarter, if he would totally abandon his motion. An attempt was made to establish a colonial committee, consisting of such planters as were members of the National Assembly; upon whom it should devolve to consider and report upon all matters relating to the Colonies, before they could be determined there. Books were circulated in abundance in opposition to mine. Resort was again had to the public papers, as the means of raising a hue and cry against the principles of the Friends of the Negros. I was again denounced as a spy; and as one sent by the English minister to bribe members in the Assembly to do that in a time of public agitation, which in the settled state of France they could never have been prevailed upon to accomplish. And as a proof that this was my errand, it was requested of every Frenchman to put to himself the following question, “How it happened that England, which had considered the subject coolly and deliberately for eighteen months, and this in a state of internal peace and quietness, had not abolished the Slave-trade?”

The clamour which was now made against the abolition, pervaded all Paris, and reached the ears of the King. Mr. Necker had a long conversation with him upon it. The latter sent for me immediately. He informed me, that His Majesty was desirous of making himself master of the question, and had expressed a wish to see my Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave-trade. He desired to have two copies of it; one in French, and the other in English; and he would then take his choice as to which of them he would read. He (Mr. Necker) was to present them. He would take with him also at the same time the beautiful specimens of the manufactures of the Africans, which I had lent to Madame Necker out of the cabinet of Monsieur Geoffrey de Villeneuve and others. As to the section of the slave-ship, he thought it would affect His Majesty too much, as he was then indisposed. All these articles, except the latter, were at length presented. The King bestowed a good deal of time upon the specimens. He admired them; but particularly those in gold. He expressed his surprise at the state of some of the arts in Africa. He sent them back on the same day on which he had examined them, and commissioned Mr. Necker to return me his thanks; and to say that he had been highly gratified with what he had seen; and, with respect to the Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave-trade, that he would read it with all the seriousness, which such a subject deserved.

Page 59

My correspondence with the Comte de Mirabeau was now drawing near to its close. I had sent him a letter every other day for a whole month, which contained from sixteen to twenty pages. He usually acknowledged the receipt of each. Hence many of his letters came into my possession. These were always interesting, on account of the richness of the expressions they contained. Mirabeau even in his ordinary discourse was eloquent. It was his peculiar talent to use such words, that they who heard them, were almost led to believe, that he had taken great pains to cull them for the occasion. But this his ordinary language was the language also of his letters; and as they show a power of expression, by which the reader may judge of the character of the eloquence of one, who was then undoubtedly the greatest orator in France, I have thought it not improper to submit one of them to his perusal in the annexed note[A]. I could have wished, as far as it relates to myself, that it had been less complimentary. It must be observed, however, that I had already written to him more than two hundred pages with my own hand; and as this was done at no small expense, time and trouble, and solely to qualify him for the office of doing good, he could not but set some value upon my labours.

[Footnote A: "Je fais toujours mille remercimens plus empresses et plus affectueux a Monsieur Clarkson pour la vertueuse profusion de ses lumieres, de ses reserches, et de ses travaux. Comme ma motion et tous ses developpemens sont entierement prets, j'attends avec une vive impatience ses nouvelles lettres, afin d'achever de classer les faits et les raisonnemens de Monsieur Clarkson, et, cette deduction entierement finie, de commencer a manoeuvrer en tactique le succes douteux de cette perilleuse proposition. J'aurai l'honneur de le recevoir Dimanche depuis onze heures, et meme dix du matin jusqu'a midi, non seulement avec un vif plaisir, mais avec une sensible reconnoissance.

25 Decembre, 1789.

Le comte de mirabeau."]

When our correspondence was over, I had some conversation with him relative to fixing a day for the motion. But he judged it prudent, previously to this, to sound some of the members of the Assembly on the subject of it. This he did; but he was greatly disappointed at the result. There was not one member, out of all those, with whom he conversed, who had not been canvassed by the planters' committee. And though most of them had been proof against all its intrigues and artifices, yet many of them hesitated respecting the abolition at that moment. There was a fear in some that they should injure the revolution by adopting it; others, who had no such fears, wished for the concurrence of England in the measure, and suggested the propriety of a deputation there for that purpose previously to the discussion of the question in France. While others maintained, that as England had done nothing, after having had it so long under consideration, it was fair to presume, that she judged it impolitic to abandon the Slave-

trade; but if France were to give it up, and England to continue it, how would humanity be the gainer?

Page 60

While the Comte de Mirabeau was continuing his canvass among the members of the National Assembly, relative to his motion, attempts were again made in the public papers to mislead them. Emancipation was now stated to be the object of the Friends of the Negros. This charge I repelled, by addressing myself to Monsieur Beauvet. I explained to him the views of the different societies, which had taken up the cause of the Africans; and I desired him to show my letter to the planters. I was obliged also to answer publicly a letter by Monsieur Mosneron de Laung. This writer professed to detail the substance of the privy council report. He had the injustice to assert, that three things had been distinctly proved there: First, that slavery had always existed in Africa; Secondly, that the natives were a bloody people, addicted to human sacrifice, and other barbarous customs; and, Thirdly, that their soil was incapable of producing any proper articles for commerce. From these premises he argued, as if they had been established by the unanimous and uncontradicted testimony of the witnesses; and he drew the conclusion, that not only had England done nothing in consequence, but that she never would do anything, which should affect the existence of this trade.

But these letters had only just made their appearance in the public papers, when I was summoned to England. Parliament, it appeared, had met; and I was immediately to leave Paris. Among those, of whom I had but just time to take leave, were the Deputies of Colour. At this, my last conference with them, I recommended moderation and forbearance, as the best gifts I could leave them; and I entreated them rather to give up their seats in the Assembly, than on that account to bring misery on their country; for that with patience their cause would ultimately triumph. They replied, that I had prescribed to them a most difficult task. They were afraid that neither the conduct of the White Colonists nor of the National Assembly could be much longer borne. They thanked me, however, for my advice. One of them gave me a trinket, by which I might remember him; and as for himself, he said, he should never forget one, who had taken such a deep interest in the welfare of his mother[A]. I found, however, notwithstanding all I said, that there was a spirit of dissatisfaction in them, which nothing but a redress of their grievances could subdue; and that, if the planters should persevere in their intrigues, and the National Assembly in delay, a fire would be lighted up in St. Domingo, which could not easily be extinguished. This was afterward realized: for Oge, in about three months from this time, left his companions to report to his constituents in St. Domingo the state of their mission; when hearing, on his arrival in that island, of the outrageous conduct of the Whites of the committee of Aquin, who had begun a persecution of the People of Colour for no other reason than that they had dared to seek the common

Page 61

privileges of citizens; and of the murder of Ferrand and Labadie, he imprudently armed his slaves. With a small but faithful band he rushed upon superior numbers; and was defeated. Taking refuge at length in the Spanish part of St. Domingo, he was given up; and his enemies, to strike terror into the People of Colour, broke him upon the wheel. From this time reconciliation between the parties became impossible. A bloody war commenced, and with it all those horrors which it has been our lot so frequently to deplore. It must be remembered, however, that the Slave-trade, by means of the cruel distinctions it occasioned, was the original cause; and though the revolution of France afforded the occasion; it was an occasion which would have been prevented, if it had not been for the intrigues and injustice of the Whites.

[Footnote A: Africa.]

Another, upon whom I had time to call, was the amiable Bishop of Chartres. When I left him, the Abbe Syeyes, who was with him, desired to walk with me to my hotel. He there presented me with a set of his works, which he sent for, while he staid with me; and on parting, he made use of this complimentary expression, in allusion, I suppose, to the cause I had undertaken,—"I am pleased to have been acquainted with the friend of man."

It was necessary that I should see the Comte de Mirabeau and the Marquis de la Fayette, before I left Paris. I had written to each of them to communicate the intelligence of my departure, as soon as I received it. The Comte, it appeared, had nearly canvassed the Assembly. He could count upon three hundred members, who, for the sake of justice, and without any consideration of policy or of consequences, would support his motion. But alas! what proportion did this number bear to twelve hundred? About five hundred more would support him; but only on one condition; which was, if England would give an unequivocal proof of her intention to abolish the trade. The knowledge of these circumstances, he said, had induced him to write a letter to Mr. Pitt. In this he had explained, how far he could proceed without his assistance, and how far with it. He had frankly developed to him the mind and temper of the Assembly on this subject; but his answer must be immediate: for the White Colonists were daily gaining such an influence there, that he foresaw it would be impossible to carry the measure, if it were long delayed. On taking leave of him he desired me to be the bearer of the letter, and to present it to Mr. Pitt.

On conversing with the Marquis de la Fayette, he lamented deeply the unexpected turn, which the cause of the Negros had lately taken in the Assembly. It was entirely owing to the daily intrigues of the White Colonists. He feared they would ruin every thing. If the Deputies of Colour had been heard on their arrival, their rights would have been acknowledged. But now there was little probability that they would obtain them. He foresaw nothing but desolation

Page 62

in St. Domingo. With respect to the abolition of the Slave-trade, it might be yet carried; but not unless England would concur in the measure. On this topic he enlarged with much feeling. He hoped the day was near at hand, when two great nations, which had been hitherto distinguished only for their hostility, one toward the other, would unite in so sublime a measure; and that they would follow up their union by another, still more lovely, for the preservation of eternal and universal peace. Thus their future rivalships might have the extraordinary merit of being rivalships in good. Thus the revolution of France, through the mighty aid of England, might become the source of civilization, of freedom, and of happiness to the whole world. No other nations were sufficiently enlightened for such an union, but all other nations might be benefited by it.

The last person whom I saw, was Brissot. He accompanied me to my carriage. With him therefore I shall end my French account; and I shall end it in no way so satisfactory to myself, as in a very concise vindication of his character, from actual knowledge, against the attacks of those who have endeavoured to disparage it; but who never knew him. Justice and truth, I am convinced, demand some little declaration on this subject at my hands. Brissot then was a man of plain and modest appearance. His habits, contrary to those of his countrymen in general, were domestic. In his own family he set an amiable example, both as a husband and as a father. On all occasions he was a faithful friend. He was particularly watchful over his private conduct. From the simplicity of his appearance, and the severity of his morals, he was called The Quaker; at least in all the circles which I frequented. He was a man of deep feeling. He was charitable to the poor as far as a slender income permitted him. But his benevolence went beyond the usual bounds. He was no patriot in the ordinary acceptation of the word; for he took the habitable globe as his country, and wished to consider every foreigner as his brother.

I left France, as it maybe easily imagined, much disappointed, that my labours, which had been of nearly six months continuance, should have had no better success; nor did I see, in looking forward, any circumstances that were consoling with respect to the issue of them there; for it was impossible that Mr. Pitt, even if he had been inclined to write to Mirabeau, circumstanced as matters then were with respect to the hearing of evidence, could have given him a promise, at least of a speedy abolition; and, unless his answer had been immediate, it would have arrived, seeing that the French planters were daily profiting by their intrigues, too late to be effectual.

Page 63

I had but just arrived in England, when Mr. Wilberforce made a new motion in the House of Commons on the subject of the, Slave-trade. In referring to the transactions of the last sessions, he found that twenty-eight days had been allotted to the hearing of witnesses against the abolition, and that eleven persons only had been examined in that time. If the examinations were to go on in the same manner, they might be made to last for years. He resolved therefore to move, that, instead of hearing evidence in future in the house at large, members should hear it in an open committee above stairs; which committee should sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the house itself. This motion he made; and in doing it he took an opportunity of correcting an erroneous report; which was, that he had changed his mind on this great subject. This was, he said, so far from being the case, that the more he contemplated the trade, the more enormous he found it, and the more he felt himself compelled to persevere in endeavours for its abolition.

One would have thought that a motion, so reasonable and so constitutional, would have met with the approbation of all; but it was vehemently opposed by Mr. Gascoyne, Alderman Newnham, and others. The plea set up was, that there was no precedent for referring a question of such importance to a committee. It was now obvious, that the real object of our opponents in abandoning decision by the privy council evidence was delay. Unable to meet us there, they were glad to fly to any measure, which should enable them to put off the evil day. This charge was fixed upon them in unequivocal language by Mr. Fox; who observed besides, that if the members of the house should then resolve to hear evidence in a committee of the whole house as before, it would amount to a resolution, that the question of the abolition of the Slave-trade should be put by, or at least that it should never be decided by them. After a long debate, the motion of Mr. Wilberforce was voted without a division; and the examination of witnesses proceeded in behalf of those who were interested in the continuance of the trade.

This measure having been resolved upon, by which dispatch in the examinations was promoted, I was alarmed lest we should be called upon for our own evidence, before we were fully prepared. The time which I had originally allotted for the discovery of new witnesses, had been taken up, if not wasted, in France. In looking over the names of the sixteen, who were to have been examined by the committee of privy council, if there had been time, one had died, and eight, who were sea-faring people, were out of the kingdom. It was time therefore to stir immediately in this business. Happily, on looking over my letters, which I found on my arrival in England, the names of several had been handed to me, with the places of their abode, who could give me information on the subject of our question. All these I visited with the utmost dispatch. I was absent only three weeks. I had travelled a thousand miles in this time, had conversed with seventeen persons, and had prevailed upon three to be examined.

Page 64

I had scarcely returned with the addition of these witnesses to my list, when I found it necessary to go out again upon the same errand. This second journey arose in part from the following circumstances. There was a matter in dispute relative to the mode of obtaining slaves in the rivers of Calabar and Bonny. It was usual, when the slave-ships lay there, for a number of canoes to go into the inland country. These went in a fleet. There might be from thirty to forty armed natives in each of them. Every canoe also had a four- or a six-pounder (cannon) fastened to her bow. Equipped in this manner they departed; and they were usually absent from eight to fourteen days. It was said that they went to fairs, which were held on the banks of these rivers, and at which there was a regular show of slaves. On their return they usually brought down from eight hundred to a thousand of these for the ships. These lay at the bottom of the canoes; their arms and legs having been first bound by the ropes of the country. Now the question was, how the people, thus going up these rivers, obtained their slaves?

It was certainly a very suspicious circumstance, that such a number of persons should go out upon these occasions; and that they should be armed in such a manner. We presumed therefore, that, though they might buy many of the slaves, whom they brought down, at the fairs, which have been mentioned, they obtained others by violence, as opportunity offered. This inference we pressed upon our opponents; and called upon them to show what circumstances made such warlike preparations necessary on these excursions. To this they replied readily. The people in the canoes, said they, pass through the territories of different petty princes; to each of whom, on entering his territory, they pay a tribute or toll. This tribute has been long fixed; but attempts frequently have been made to raise it. They who follow the trade cannot afford to submit to these unreasonable demands; and therefore they arm themselves in case of any determination on the part of these petty princes to enforce them.

This answer we never judged to be satisfactory. We tried therefore to throw light upon the subject, by inquiring if the natives, who went up on these expeditions, usually took with them as many goods, as would amount to the number of the slaves they were accustomed to bring back with them. But we could get no direct answer, from any actual knowledge, to this question. All had seen the canoes go out and return; but no one had seen them loaded, or had been on board them. It appeared, however, from circumstantial evidence, that, though the natives on these occasions might take some articles of trade with them, it was impossible from appearances, that they could take them in the proportion mentioned. We maintained then our inference as before; but it was still uniformly denied.

Page 65

How then were we to decide this important question? for it was said, that no white man was ever permitted by the natives to go up in these canoes. On mentioning accidentally the circumstances of the case, as I have now stated them, to a friend, immediately on my return from my last journey, he informed me, that he himself had been in company, about a year before, with a sailor, a very respectable-looking man, who had been up these rivers. He had spent half an hour with him at an inn. He described his person to me. But he knew nothing of his name, or of the place of his abode. All he knew was, that he was either going, or that he belonged to, some ship of war in ordinary; but he could not tell at what port. I might depend upon all these circumstances, if the man had not deceived him; and he saw no reason why he should.

I felt myself set on fire, as it were, by this intelligence, deficient as it was; and I seemed to determine instantly that I would, if it were possible, find him out. For if our suspicions were true, that the natives frequently were kidnapped in these expeditions, it would be of great importance to the cause of the abolition to have them confirmed; for as many slaves came annually from these two rivers, as from all the coast of Africa besides. But how to proceed on so blind an errand was the question. I first thought of trying to trace the man by letter. But this might be tedious. The examinations were now going on rapidly. We should soon be called upon for evidence ourselves. Besides, I knew nothing of his name. I then thought it to be a more effectual way to apply to Sir Charles Middleton, as comptroller of the navy, by whose permission I could board every ship of war in ordinary in England, and judge for myself. But here the undertaking seemed very arduous; and the time it would consume became an objection in this respect, that I thought I could not easily forgive myself, if I were to fail in it. My inclination, however, preponderated this way. At length I determined to follow it; for, on deliberate consideration, I found that I could not employ my time more advantageously to the cause; for as other witnesses must be found out somewhere, it was highly probable that, if I should fail in the discovery of this man, I should, by moving among such a number of sea-faring people, find others, who could give their testimony in our favour.

I must now inform the reader, that ships of war in ordinary, in one of which this man was reported to be, are those, which are out of commission, and which are laid up in the different rivers and waters in the neighbourhood of the King’s dock-yards. Every one of these has a boatswain, gunner, carpenter, and assistants on board. They lie usually in divisions of ten or twelve; and a master in the navy has a command over every division.

At length I began my journey. I boarded all the ships of war lying in ordinary at Deptford, and examined the different persons in each. From Deptford I proceeded to Woolwich, where I did the same. Thence I hastened to Chatham, and then, down the Medway, to Sheerness. I had now boarded above a hundred and sixty vessels of war. I had found out two good and willing evidences among them. But I could gain no intelligence of him, who was the object of my search.

Page 66

From Chatham, I made the best of my way to Portsmouth-harbour. A very formidable task presented itself here. But the masters' boats were ready for me; and I continued my pursuit. On boarding the Pegase, on the second day, I discovered a very respectable person in the gunner of that ship. His name was George Millar. He had been on board the Canterbury slave-ship at the dreadful massacre at Calabar. He was the only disinterested evidence living, of whom I had yet heard. He expressed his willingness to give his testimony, if his presence should be thought necessary in London. I then continued my pursuit for the remainder of the day. On the next day, I resumed and finished it for this quarter. I had now examined the different persons in more than a hundred vessels in this harbour, but I had not discovered the person I had gone to seek.

Matters now began to look rather disheartening, I mean, as far as my grand object was concerned. There was but one other port left, and this was between two and three hundred miles distant. I determined however to go to Plymouth. I had already been more successful in this tour, with respect to obtaining general evidence, than in any other of the same length; and the probability was, that, as I should continue to move among the same kind of people, my success would be in a similar proportion according to the number visited. These were great encouragements to me to proceed. At length, I arrived at the place of my last hope. On my first day's expedition I boarded forty vessels, but found no one in these, who had been on the coast of Africa in the Slave-trade. One or two had been there in King's ships; but they had never been on shore. Things were now drawing near to a close; and, notwithstanding my success as to general evidence in this journey, my heart began to beat. I was restless and uneasy during the night. The next morning, I felt agitated again between the alternate pressure of hope and fear; and in this state I entered my boat. The fifty-seventh vessel, which I boarded in this harbour, was the Melampus frigate. One person belonging to it, on examining him in the captain's cabin, said he had been two voyages to Africa; and I had not long discoursed with him, before I found, to my inexpressible joy, that he was the man. I found too, that he unravelled the question in dispute precisely as our inferences had determined it. He had been two expeditions up the river Calabar in the canoes of the natives. In the first of these, they came within a certain distance of a village. They then concealed themselves under the bushes, which hung over the water from the banks. In this position they remained during day-light. But at night they went up to it armed; and seized all the inhabitants, who had not time to make their escape. They obtained forty-five persons in this manner. In the second they were out eight or nine days; when they made a similar attempt, and with nearly similar success. They seized men,

Page 67

women, and children, as they could find them in the huts. They then bound their arms, and drove them before them to the canoes. The name of the person, thus discovered on board the Melampus, was Isaac Parker. On inquiring into his character from the master of the division, I found it highly respectable. I found also afterwards, that he had sailed with Captain Cook, with great credit to himself, round the world. It was also remarkable that my brother, on seeing him in London, when he went to deliver his evidence, recognised him as having served on board the Monarch man-of-war, and as one of the most exemplary men in that ship.

I returned now in triumph. I had been out only three weeks, and I had found out this extraordinary person, and five respectable witnesses besides. These, added to the three discovered in the last journey, and to those provided before, made us more formidable than at any former period; so that the delay of our opponents, which we had looked upon as so great an evil, proved in the end truly serviceable to our cause.

On going into the committee-room of the House of Commons on my return, I found that the examinations were still going on in the behalf of those, who were interested in the continuance of the trade; and they went on beyond the middle of April, when it was considered that they had closed. Mr. Wilberforce moved accordingly on the twenty-third of the same month, that Captain Thomas Wilson, of the royal navy, and that Charles Berns Wadstrom and Henry Hew Dalrymple, esquires, do attend as witnesses on the behalf of the abolition. There was nothing now but clamour from those on the opposite side of the question. They knew well, that there were but few members of the House of Commons, who had read the privy council report. They knew therefore, that, if the question were to be decided by evidence, it must be decided by that, which their own witnesses had given before parliament. But this was the evidence only on one side. It was certain therefore, if the decision were to be made upon this basis, that it must be entirely in their favour. Will it then be believed that in an English House of Commons there could be found persons, who could move to prevent the hearing of any other witnesses on this subject; and, what is more remarkable, that they should charge Mr. Wilberforce, because he proposed the hearing of them, with the intention solely of delay? Yes. Such persons were found, but, happily, only among the friends of the Slave-trade. Mr. Wilberforce, in replying to them, could not help observing, that it was rather extraordinary that they, who had occasioned the delay of a whole year, should charge him with that, of which they themselves had been so conspicuously guilty. He then commented for some time on the injustice of their motion. He stated too, that he would undertake to remove from disinterested and unprejudiced persons many of the impressions, which had been made by the witnesses against

Page 68

the abolition; and he appealed to the justice and honour of the house in behalf of an injured people; under the hope, that they would not allow a decision to be made till they had heard the whole of the case. These observations, however, did not satisfy all those, who belonged to the opposite party. Lord Penrhyn contended for a decision without a moment's delay. Mr. Gascoyne relented; and said, he would allow three weeks to the abolitionists, during which their evidence, might be heard. At length the debate ended; in the course of which, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox powerfully supported Mr. Wilberforce; when the motion was negatived without any attempt at a division.

The witnesses in behalf of the abolition of the Slave-trade now took possession of the ground, which those in favour of it had left. But what was our surprise, when only three of them had been heard, to find that Mr. Norris should come forward as an evidence! This he did to confirm what he had stated to the privy council as to the general question; but he did it more particularly, as it appeared afterwards, in the justification of his own conduct: for the part, which he had taken at Liverpool, as it related to me, had become a subject of conversation with many. It was now well known, what assistance he had given me there in my pursuit; how he had even furnished me with clauses for a bill for the abolition of the trade; how I had written to him, in consequence of his friendly cooperation, to come up as an evidence in our favour; and how at that moment he had accepted the office of a delegate on the contrary side. The noise, which the relation and repetition of these and other circumstances had made, had given him, I believe, considerable pain. His friends too had urged some explanation as necessary. But how short-sighted are they who do wrong! By coming forward in this imprudent manner, he fixed the stain only the more indelibly on himself; for he thus imposed upon me the cruel necessity of being examined against him; and this necessity was the more afflicting to me, because I was to be called upon, not to state facts relative to the trade, but to destroy his character as an evidence in its support. I was to be called upon, in fact, to explain all those communications, which have been stated to have taken place between us on this subject. Glad indeed should I have been to have declined this painful interference. But no one would hear of a refusal. The Bishop of London, Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Wilberforce, considered my appearance on this occasion as an imperious duty to the cause of the oppressed. It may be perhaps sufficient to say, that I was examined; that Mr. Norris. was present all the time; that I was cross-examined by counsel; and that after this time, Mr. Norris seemed to have no ordinary sense of his own degradation; for he never afterwards held up his head, or looked the abolitionists in the face, or acted with energy as a delegate, as on former occasions.

Page 69

The hearing of evidence continued to go on in behalf of the abolition of the trade. No less than twenty-four witnesses, altogether, were heard in this session. And here it may not be improper to remark, that, during the examination of our own witnesses as well as the cross-examination of those of our opponents, no counsel were ever employed. Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. William Smith undertook this laborious department; and as they performed it with great ability, so they did it with great liberality towards those, who were obliged to come under their notice in the course of this fiery ordeal.

The bill of Sir William Dolben was now to be renewed. On this occasion the enemies of the abolition became again conspicuous; for on the twenty-sixth of May, they availed themselves of a thin house to propose an amendment, by which they increased the number of the slaves to the tonnage of the vessel. They increased it too, without taking into the account, as had hitherto been done, the extent of the superficies of the vessels, which were to carry them. This was the third indecorous attempt against what were only reasonable and expected proceedings in the present session. But their advantage was of no great duration; for, the very next day, the amendment was rejected on the report by a majority of ninety-five to sixty-nine, in consequence, principally, of the private exertions of Mr. Pitt. Of this bill, though it was renewed in other years besides the present, I shall say no more in this History; because it has nothing to do with the general question. Horrible as it yet left the situation of the poor slaves in their transportation, (which the plate has most abundantly shown) it was the best bill, which could be then obtained; and it answered to a certain degree the benevolent wishes of the worthy baronet, who introduced it: for if we could conclude that these voyages were made more comfortable to the injured Africans, in proportion as there was less mortality in them, he had undoubtedly the pleasure of seeing the end, at least partially, obtained; though he must always have felt a great drawback from it, by reflecting that the survivors, however their sufferings might have been a little diminished, were reserved for slavery.

The session was now near its close; and we had the sorrow to find, though we had defeated our opponents in the three instances which have been mentioned, that the tide ran decidedly against us, upon the general question, in the House of Commons. The same statements, which had struck so many members with panic in the former sessions, such as that of emancipation, of the ruin and massacre of the planters, and of indemnification to the amount of seventy millions, had been industriously kept up, and this by a personal canvass among them. But this hostile disposition was still unfortunately increased by considerations of another sort. For the witnesses of our opponents had taken their ground first. No less than eleven of them had

Page 70

been examined in the last sessions. In the present, two-thirds of the time had been occupied by others on the same side. Hence the impression upon this ground also was against us; and we had yet had no adequate opportunity of doing it away. A clamour was also raised, where we thought it least likely to have originated. They (the planters) it was said, had produced persons in elevated life and of the highest character as witnesses; whereas we had been obliged to take up with those of the lowest condition. This idea was circulated directly after the introduction of Isaac Parker, before mentioned; a simple mariner; and who was now contrasted with the admirals on the other side of the question. This outcry was not only ungenerous, but unconstitutional. It is the glory of the English law, that it has no scale of veracity, which it adapts to persons, according to the station, which they may be found to occupy in life. In our courts of law the poor are heard as well as the rich; and if their reputation be fair, and they stand proof against the cross-examinations they undergo, both the judge and the jury must determine the matter in dispute by their evidence. But the House of Commons were now called upon by our opponents, to adopt the preposterous maxim of attaching falsehood to poverty, or of weighing truth by the standard of rank and riches.

But though we felt a considerable degree of pain, in finding this adverse disposition among so many members of the Lower House, it was some consolation to us to know, that our cause had not suffered with their constituents, the people. These were still warmly with us. Indeed, their hatred of the trade had greatly increased. Many circumstances had occurred in this year to promote it. The committee, during my absence in France, had circulated the plate of the slave-ship throughout all England. No one saw it but he was impressed. It spoke to him in a language, which was at once intelligible and irresistible. It brought forth the tear of sympathy in behalf of the sufferers, and it fixed their sufferings in his heart. The committee too had been particularly vigilant during the whole of the year, with respect to the public papers. They had suffered no statement in behalf of those interested in the continuance of the trade, to go unanswered. Dr. Dickson, the author of the Letters on Slavery before mentioned, had come forward again with his services on this occasion, and by his active cooperation with a sub-committee appointed for the purpose, the coast was so well cleared of our opponents, that, though they were seen the next year again, through the medium of the same papers, they appeared only in sudden incursions, as it were, during which they darted a few weapons at us; but they never afterward ventured upon the plain to dispute the matter, inch by inch, or point by point, in an open and manly manner.

But other circumstances occurred to keep up a hatred of the trade among the people in this interval, which, trivial as they were, ought not to be forgotten. The amiable poet Cowper had frequently made the Slave-trade the subject of his contemplation. He had already severely condemned it in his valuable poem The Task. But now he had written

three little fugitive pieces upon it. Of these the most impressive was that, which he called The Negro's Complaint, and of which the following is a copy:

Page 71

“Forced from home and all its pleasures,
  Afric’s coast I left forlorn,
To increase a stranger’s treasures,
  O’er the raging billows borne;
Men from England bought and sold me,
  Paid my price in paltry gold;
But, though theirs they have inroll’d me,
  Minds are never to be sold.

“Still in thought as free as ever,
  What are England’s rights, I ask.
Me from my delights to sever,
  Me to torture, me to task?
Fleecy locks and black complexion
  Cannot forfeit Nature’s claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
  Dwells in black and white the same.

“Why did all-creating Nature
  Make the plant, for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
  Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think, ye masters, iron-hearted,
  Lolling at your jovial boards,
Think, how many backs have smarted
  For the sweets your cane affords.

“Is there, as you sometimes tell us,
  Is there one, who rules on high;
Has he bid you buy and sell us,
  Speaking from his throne, the sky?
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,
  Fetters, blood-extorting screws,
Are the means, which duty urges
  Agents of his will to use?

“Hark! he answers. Wild tornadoes,
  Strewing yonder sea with wrecks,
Wasting towns, plantations, meadows,
  Are the voice with which he speaks.
He, foreseeing what vexations
  Afric’s sons should undergo,
Fix’d their tyrants’ habitations
  Where his whirlwinds answer—No.

“By our blood in Afric wasted,
  Ere our necks received the chain;
By the miseries, which we tasted
  Crossing, in your barks, the main;
By our sufferings, since you brought us
  To the man-degrading mart,
All sustain’d by patience, taught us
  Only by a broken heart.

“Deem our nation brutes no longer,
  Till some reason you shall find
Worthier of regard, and stronger,
  Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold! whose sordid dealings
  Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that you have human feelings,
  Ere you proudly question ours.”

This little piece, Cowper presented in manuscript to some of his friends in London; and these, conceiving it to contain a powerful appeal in behalf of the injured Africans, joined in printing it. Having ordered it on the finest hot-pressed paper, and folded it up in a small and neat form, they gave it the printed title of “A Subject for Conversation at the Tea-table.” After this, they sent many thousand copies of it in franks into the country. From one it spread to another, till it travelled almost over the whole island. Falling at length into the hands of the musician, it was set to music; and it then found its way into the streets, both of the metropolis and of the country, where it was sung as a ballad; and where it gave a plain account of the subject, with an appropriate feeling, to those who heard it.

Page 72

Nor was the philanthropy of the late Mr. Wedgwood less instrumental in turning the popular feeling in our favour. He made his own manufactory contribute to this end. He took the seal of the committee, as exhibited in the first volume, for his model; and he produced a beautiful cameo, of a less size, of which the ground was a most delicate white, but the Negro, who was seen imploring compassion in the middle of it, was in his own native colour. Mr. Wedgwood made a liberal donation of these, when finished, among his friends. I received from him no less than five hundred of them myself. They, to whom they were sent, did not lay them up in their cabinets, but gave them away likewise. They were soon, like The Negro's Complaint, in different parts of the kingdom. Some had them inlaid in gold on the lid of their snuff-boxes. Of the ladies, several wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length, the taste for wearing them became general; and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity, and freedom.

I shall now only state that the committee took as members within its own body, in the period of time which is included in this chapter, the Reverend Mr. Ormerod, chaplain to the Bishop of London, and Captain James Bowen, of the royal navy; that they elected the honourable Nathaniel Curzon (now Lord Scarsdale), Dr. Frossard of Lyons, and Benjamin Garlike, esquire, then secretary to the English embassy at the Hague, honorary and corresponding members; and that they concluded their annual labours with a suitable report; in which they noticed the extraordinary efforts of our opponents to injure our cause, in the following manner: "In the progress of this business a powerful combination of interest has been excited against us. The African trader, the planter, and the West India merchant have united their forces to defend the fortress, in which their supposed treasures lie. Vague calculations and false alarms have been thrown out to the public, in order to show, that the constitution and even the existence of this free and opulent nation depend on its depriving the inhabitants of a foreign country of those rights and of that liberty, which we ourselves so highly and so justly prize. Surely in the nature of things and in the order of Providence it cannot be so. England existed as a great nation, long before the African commerce was known amongst us, and it is not to acts of injustice and violence that she owes her present rank in the scale of nations."

CHAPTER III.

Continuation from July 1790 to July 1791—Author travels again throughout the kingdom —Object of his journey—Motion in the House of Commons to resume the hearing of evidence in favour of the abolition—List of all those examined on this side of the question—Machinations of interested persons, and cruel circumstances of the times previously to the day of decision—Motion at length made for stopping all further importation of Slaves from Africa—debates upon it—motion lost—Resolutions of the committee for the Abolition of the Slave-trade—Establishment of the Sierra Leone Company.

Page 73

It was a matter of deep affliction to us to think, that the crimes and sufferings inseparable from the Slave-trade were to be continued to another year. And yet it was our duty, in the present moment, to acquiesce in the postponement of the question. This postponement was not now for the purpose of delay, but of securing victory. The evidence, on the side of the abolition, was, at the end of the last session, but half finished. It was impossible, for the sake of Africa, that we could have then closed it. No other opportunity might offer in parliament for establishing an indelible record in her favour, if we were to neglect the present. It was our duty therefore even to wait to complete it, and to procure such a body of evidence, as should not only bear us out in the approaching contest, but such as, if we were to fail, would bear out our successors also. It was possible indeed, if the inhabitants of our islands were to improve in civilization, that the poor slaves might experience gradually an improved treatment with it; and so far testimony now might not be testimony for ever: but it was utterly impossible, while the Slave-trade lasted, and the human passions continued to be the same, that there should be any change for the better in Africa; or that any modes, less barbarous, should come into use for procuring slaves. Evidence therefore, if once collected on this subject, would be evidence for posterity. In the midst of these thoughts another journey occurred to me as necessary for this purpose; and I prayed, that I might have strength to perform it in the most effectual manner; and that I might be daily impressed, as I travelled along, with the stimulating thought, that the last hope for millions might possibly rest upon my own endeavours.

The committee highly approved of this journey. Mr. Wilberforce saw the absolute necessity of it also; and had prepared a number of questions, with great ingenuity, to be put to such persons, as might have information to communicate. These I added to those in the tables, which have been already mentioned; and they made together a valuable collection on the subject.

This tour was the most vexatious of any I had yet undertaken; many still refused to come forward to be examined, and some on the most frivolous pretences; so that I was disgusted, as I journeyed on, to find how little men were disposed to make sacrifices for so great a cause. In one part of it I went over nearly two thousand miles, receiving repeated refusals. I had not secured one witness within this distance. This was truly disheartening. I was subject to the whims and the caprice of those, whom I solicited on these occasions[A]. To these I was obliged to accommodate myself. When at Edinburgh, a person who could have given me material information, declined seeing me, though he really wished well to the cause. When I had returned southward as far as York, he changed his mind; and he would then see me. I went back,

Page 74

that I might not lose him. When I arrived, he would give me only private information. Thus I travelled, backwards and forwards, four hundred miles to no purpose. At another place a circumstance almost similar happened, though with a different issue. I had been for two years writing about a person, whose testimony was important. I had passed once through the town, in which he lived; but he would not then see me. I passed through it now, but no entreaties of his friends could make him alter his resolution. He was a man highly respectable as to situation in life; but of considerable vanity. I said therefore to my friend, on leaving the town, You may tell him that I expect to be at Nottingham in a few days; and though it be a hundred and fifty miles distant, I will even come back to see him, if he will dine with me on my return. A letter from my friend announced to me, when at Nottingham, that his vanity had been so gratified by the thought of a person coming expressly to visit him from such a distance, that he would meet me according to my appointment. I went back. We dined together. He yielded to my request. I was now repaid; and I returned towards Nottingham in the night. These circumstances I mention, and I feel it right to mention them, that the reader may be properly impressed with the great difficulties we found in collecting a body of evidence in comparison with our opponents. They ought never to be forgotten; for if with the testimony, picked up as it were under all these disadvantages, we carried our object against those, who had almost numberless witnesses to command, what must have been the merits of our cause! No person can indeed judge of the severe labour and trials in these journeys. In the present, I was out four months. I was almost over the whole island, I intersected it backwards and forwards both in the night and in the day. I travelled nearly seven thousand miles in this time, and I was able to count upon twenty new and willing evidences.

[Footnote A: Ten or twelve of those, who were examined, much to their honour, came forward of their own accord.]

Having now accomplished my object, Mr. Wilberforce moved on the fourth of February in the House of Commons, that a committee be appointed to examine further witnesses in behalf of the abolition of the Slave-trade. This motion was no sooner made, than Mr. Cawthorne rose, to our great surprise, to oppose it. He took upon himself to decide, that the house had heard evidence enough. This indecent motion was not without its advocates. Mr. Wilberforce set forth the injustice of this attempt; and proved, that out of eighty-one days, which had been given up to the hearing of evidence, the witnesses against the abolition had occupied no less than fifty-seven. He was strenuously supported by Mr. Burke, Mr. Martin, and other respectable members. At length, the debate ended in favour of the original motion, and a committee was appointed accordingly.

Page 75

The examinations began again on February the seventh, and continued till April the fifth, when they were finally closed. In this, as in the former session, Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. William Smith principally conducted them; and indeed it was necessary that they should have been present at these times; for it is perhaps difficult to conceive the illiberal manner, in which our witnesses were treated by those on the other side of the question. Men, who had left the trade upon principle, and who had come forward, against their apparent interest, to serve the cause of humanity and justice, were looked upon as mercenaries and culprits, or as men of doubtful and suspicious character. They were brow-beaten. Unhandsome questions were put to them. Some were kept for four days under examination. It was however highly to their honour, that they were found in no one instance to prevaricate, nor to waver as to the certainty of their facts.

But this treatment, hard as it was for them to bear, was indeed good for the cause; for, coming thus pure out of the fire, they occasioned their own testimony, when read, to bear stronger marks of truth than that of the generality of our opponents; nor was it less superior, when weighed by other considerations. For the witnesses against the abolition were principally interested. They who were not, had been hospitably received at the planters' tables. The evidence too, which they delivered, was almost wholly negative. They had not seen such and such evils. But this was no proof that the evils did not exist. The witnesses, on the other hand, who came up in favour of the abolition, had no advantage in making their several assertions. In some instances they came up against their apparent interest; and, to my knowledge, suffered persecution for so doing. The evidence also, which they delivered, was of a positive nature. They gave an account of specific evils, which had come under their own eyes. These evils were never disproved. They stood therefore on a firm basis, as on a tablet of brass. Engraved there in affirmative characters; a few of them were of more value, than all the negative and airy testimony, which had been advanced on the other side of the question.

That the public may judge, in some measure, of the respectability of the witnesses in favour of the abolition, and that they may know also to whom Africa is so much indebted for her deliverance, I shall subjoin their names in the three following lists. The first will contain those, who were examined by the privy council only; the second those, who were examined by the privy council and the house of commons also; and the third those, who were examined by the house of commons only.

LIST I.

Andrew Spaarman, physician, botanist, and successor to Linnaeus, traveller on discovery in Africa for the King of Sweden.

Reverend Isham Baggs, chaplain for two voyages to Africa in H.M. ship, Grampus.

Page 76

Captain James Bowen, of the royal navy, one voyage to Africa.

Mr. William James, a master in the royal navy, three voyages, as mate of a slave-vessel.

Mr. David Henderson, gunner of H.M. ship Centurion, three voyages to Africa.

Harry Gandy, two voyages to Africa, as captain of a slave-vessel.

Thomas Eldred, two voyages there, as mate.

James Arnold, three voyages there, as surgeon and surgeon’s mate.

Thomas Deane, two voyages there, as captain of a wood and ivory ship.

LIST II.

Major-General Rooke, commander of Goree, in Africa.

Henry Hew Dalrymple, esquire, lieutenant of the 75th regiment at Goree, and afterwards in all the West Indian islands.

Thomas Willson, esquire, naval commander at Goree.

John Hills, esquire, captain of H.M. ship Zephyr, on the African station.

Sir George Yonge, two voyages as lieutenant, and two as captain, of a ship of war, on the African station.

Charles Berns Wadstrom, esquire, traveller on discovery in Africa for the King of Sweden.

Reverend John Newton, five voyages to Africa in a slave-vessel, and resident eighteen months there.

Captain John Ashley Hall, in the merchant service, two voyages in a slave-vessel as a mate.

Alexander Falconbridge, four voyages in a slave-vessel as surgeon and surgeon’s mate.

Captain John Samuel Smith, of the royal navy, on the West India station.

LIST III.

Anthony Pantaleo How, esquire, employed by Government as a botanist in Africa.

Sir Thomas Bolton Thompson, two voyages as a lieutenant, and two as commander of a ship of war on the African station.

Lieutenant John Simpson, of the marines, two voyages in a ship of war on the African station.

Lieutenant Richard Storey, of the royal navy, four years on the slave-employ all over the coast.

Mr. George Miller, gunner of H.M. ship Pegase, one voyage in a slave-ship.

Mr. James Morley, gunner of H.M. ship Medway, six voyages in a slave-ship.

Mr. Henry Ellison, gunner of H.M. ship Resistance, eleven years in the slave-trade.

Mr. James Towne, carpenter of H.M. ship Syren, two voyages in a slave-ship.

Mr. John Douglas, boatswain of H.M. ship Russel, one voyage in a slave-ship.

Mr. Isaac Parker, shipkeeper of H.M. ship Melampus, two voyages in a slave-ship.

Thomas Trotter, esquire, M.D. one voyage as surgeon of a slave-ship.

Mr. Isaac Wilson, one voyage as surgeon of a slave-ship.

Mr. Ecroyde Claxton, one voyage as surgeon of a slave-ship.

James Kiernan, esquire, resident four years on the banks of the Senegal.

Page 77

Mr. John Bowman, eleven years in the slave-employ as mate, and as a factor in the interior of Africa.

Mr. William Dove, one voyage for slaves, and afterwards resident in America.

Major-general Tottenham, two years resident in the West Indies.

Captain Giles, 19th regiment, seven years quartered in the West Indies.

Captain Cook, 89th regiment, two years quartered in the West Indies.

Lieutenant Baker Davison, 79th regiment, twelve years quartered in the West Indies.

Captain Hall, of the royal navy, five years on the West India station.

Captain Thomas Lloyd, of the royal navy, one year on the West India station.

Captain Alexander Scott, of the royal navy, one voyage to Africa and the West Indies.

Mr. Ninian Jeffreys, a master in the royal navy, five years mate of a West Indiaman, and for two years afterwards in the Islands in a ship of war.

Reverend Thomas Gwynn Rees, chaplain of H.M. ship Princess Amelia, in the West Indies.

Reverend Robert Boucher Nicholls, dean of Middleham, many years resident in the West Indies.

Hercules Ross, esquire, twenty-one years a merchant in the West Indies.

Mr. Thomas Clappeson, fifteen years in the West Indies as a wharfinger and pilot.

Mr. Mark Cook, sixteen years in the West Indies, first in the planting business; and then as clerk and schoolmaster.

Mr. Henry Coor, a mill-wright for fifteen years in the West Indies.

Reverend Mr. Davies, resident fourteen years in the West Indies.

Mr. William Duncan, four years in the West Indies, first as a clerk and then as an overseer.

Mr. William Fitzmaurice, fifteen years, first as a book-keeper, and then as an overseer, in the West Indies.

Mr. Robert Forster, six years, first in a store, then as second master and pilot of a ship of war in the West Indies.

Mr. Robert Ross, twenty-four years, first as a book-keeper, then as an overseer, and afterwards as a planter, in the West Indies.

Mr. John Terry, fourteen years an overseer or manager in the West Indies.

Mr. Matthew Terry, twelve years resident, first as a book-keeper and overseer, than as a land-surveyor in the King's service, and afterwards, as a colony-surveyor, in the West Indies.

George Woodward, esquire, an owner and mortgagee of property, and occasionally a resident in the West Indies.

Mr. Joseph Woodward, three years resident in the West Indies.

Henry Botham, esquire, a director of sugar-works both in the East and West Indies.

Mr. John Giles, resident twelve years in the West Indies and America.

J. Harrison, esquire, M.D. twenty-three years resident, in the medical line, in the West Indies and America.

Page 78

Robert Jackson, esquire, M.D. four years resident in the West Indies in the medical line, after which he joined his regiment, in the same profession, in America.

Thomas Woolrich, esquire, twenty years a merchant in the West Indies, but in the interim was twice in America.

Reverend James Stuart, two years in the West Indies, and twenty in America.

George Baillie, esquire, one year in the West Indies, and twenty-five in America.

William Beverley, esquire, eighteen years in America.

John Clapham, esquire, twenty years in America.

Robert Crew, esquire, a native of America, and long resident there.

John Savage, esquire, forty-six years resident in America.

The evidence having been delivered on both sides, and then printed, it was judged expedient by Mr. Wilberforce, seeing that it filled three folio volumes, to abridge it. This abridgement was made by the different friends of the cause. William Burgh, esquire, of York; Thomas Babington, esquire, of Rothley Temple; the Reverend Thomas Gisborne, of Yoxall Lodge; Mr. Campbell Haliburton, of Edinburgh; George Harrison, with one or two others of the committee, and myself, were employed upon it. The greater share, however, of the labour fell upon Dr. Dickson. That no misrepresentation of any person's testimony might be made, Matthew Montagu, esquire, and the honourable E.J. Eliott, members of parliament, undertook to compare the abridged manuscripts with the original text, and to strike out or correct whatever they thought to be erroneous, and to insert whatever they thought to have been omitted. The committee, for the abolition, when the work was finished, printed it at their own expense. Mr. Wilberforce then presented it to the House of Commons, as a faithful abridgement of the whole evidence. Having been received as such under the guarantee of Mr. Montagu and Mr. Eliott, the committee sent it to every individual member of that House.

The book having been thus presented, and a day fixed for the final determination of the question, our feelings became almost insupportable: for we had the mortification to find, that our cause was going down in estimation, where it was then most important that it should have increased in favour. Our opponents had taken advantage of the long delay, which the examination of evidence had occasioned, to prejudice the minds of many of the members of the House of Commons against us. The old arguments of emancipation, massacre, ruin, and indemnification, had been kept up; but, as the day of final decision approached, they had been increased. Such was our situation at this

moment; when the current was turned still more powerfully against us by the peculiar circumstances of the times. It was indeed the misfortune of this great cause to be assailed by every weapon, which could be turned against it. At this time Thomas Paine had published

Page 79

his Rights of Man. This had been widely circulated. At this time also the French revolution had existed nearly two years. The people of England had seen, during this interval, a government as it were dissected. They had seen an old constitution taken down, and a new one put up, piece by piece, in its stead. The revolution, therefore, in conjunction with the book in question, had had the effect of producing dissatisfaction among thousands; and this dissatisfaction was growing, so as to alarm a great number of persons of property in the kingdom, as well as the government itself. Now will it be believed that our opponents had the injustice to lay hold of these circumstances, at this critical moment, to give a death-blow to the cause of the abolition? They represented the committee, though it had existed before the French revolution or the Rights of Man were heard of, as a nest of Jacobins; and they held up the cause, sacred as it was, and though it had the support of the minister, as affording an opportunity of meeting for the purpose of overthrowing the state. Their cry succeeded. The very book of the abridgment of the evidence was considered by many members as poisonous as that of the Rights of Man. It was too profane for many of them to touch; and they who discarded it, discarded the cause also.

But these were not the only circumstances which were used as means, at this critical moment, to defeat us. News of the revolution, which had commenced in St. Domingo in consequence of the disputes between the Whites and the People of Colour, had, long before this, arrived in England. The horrible scenes which accompanied it, had been frequently published as so many arguments against our cause. In January new insurrections were announced as having happened in Martinique. The Negros there were described as armed, and the planters as having abandoned their estates for fear of massacre. Early in the month of March insurrections in the smaller French islands were reported. Every effort was then made to represent these as the effects of the new principles of liberty, and of the cry for abolition. But what should happen, just at this moment, to increase the clamour against us? Nothing less than an insurrection in Dominica.—Yes!—An insurrection in a British island. This was the very event for our opponents. “All the predictions of the planters had now become verified. The horrible massacres were now realizing at home.” To give this news still greater effect, a meeting of our opponents was held at the London Tavern. By a letter read there it appeared, that “the ruin of Dominica was now at hand.” Resolutions were voted, and a memorial presented to government, “immediately to dispatch such a military force to the different islands, as might preserve the Whites from destruction, and keep the Negros in subjection during the present critical state of the slave-bill.” This alarm was kept up till the seventh of April, when another meeting took place to receive the answer

Page 80

of government to the memorial. It was there resolved, that “as it was too late to send troops to the islands, the best way of preserving them would be to bring the question of the Slave-trade to an immediate issue; and that it was the duty of the government, if they regarded the safety of the islands, to oppose the abolition of it.” Accounts of all these proceedings were inserted in the public papers. It is needless to say that they were injurious to our cause. Many looked upon the abolitionists as monsters. They became also terrified themselves. The idea with these was, that unless the discussion on this subject was terminated, all would be lost. Thus, under a combination of effects arising from the publication of the Rights of Man, the rise and progress of the French revolution, and the insurrections of the Negros in the different islands, no one of which events had any thing to do with the abolition of the Slave-trade, the current was turned against us; and in this unfavourable frame of mind many members of parliament went into the House, on the day fixed for the discussion, to discharge their duty with respect to this great question.

On the eighteenth of April Mr. Wilberforce made his motion. He began by expressing a hope, that the present debate, instead of exciting asperity and confirming prejudice, would tend to produce a general conviction of the truth of what in fact was incontrovertible; that the abolition of the Slave-trade was indispensably required of them, not only by morality and religion, but by sound policy. He stated that he should argue the matter from evidence. He adverted to the character, situation, and means of information of his own witnesses; and having divided his subject into parts, the first of which related to the manner of reducing the natives of Africa to a state of slavery, he handled it in the following manner.

He would begin, he said, with the first boundary of the trade. Captain Wilson and Captain Hills, of His Majesty’s navy, and Mr. Dalrymple of the land service, had concurred in stating, that in the country contiguous to the river Senegal, when slave-ships arrived there, armed parties were regularly sent out in the evening, who scoured the country, and brought in their prey. The wretched victims were to be seen in the morning bound back to back in the huts on shore, whence they were conveyed, tied hand and foot, to the slave-ships. The design of these ravages was obvious, because, when the Slave-trade was stopped, they ceased. Mr. Kiernan spoke of the constant depredations by the Moors to procure slaves. Mr. Wadstrom confirmed them. The latter gentleman showed also that they were excited by presents of brandy, gunpowder, and such other incentives; and that they were not only carried on by one community against another; but that the Kings were stimulated to practise them, in their own territories, and on their own subjects: and in one instance a chieftain, who, when intoxicated, could not resist the demands

Page 81

of the slave-merchants, had expressed, in a moment of reason, a due sense of his own crime, and had reproached his Christian seducers. Abundant also were the instances of private rapine. Individuals were kidnapped, whilst in their fields and gardens. There was an universal feeling of distrust and apprehension there. The natives never went any distance from home without arms; and when Captain Wilson asked them the reason of it, they pointed to a slave-ship then lying within sight.

On the windward coast, it appeared from Lieutenant Story and Mr. Bowman, that the evils just mentioned existed, if possible, in a still higher degree. They had seen the remains of villages, which had been burnt, whilst the fields of corn were still standing beside them, and every other trace of recent desolation. Here an agent was sent to establish a settlement in the country, and to send to the ships such slaves as he might obtain. The orders he received from his captain were, that “he was to encourage the chieftains by brandy and gunpowder to go to war, to make slaves.” This he did. The chieftains performed their part in return. The neighbouring villages were surrounded and set on fire in the night. The inhabitants were seized when making their escape; and, being brought to the agent, were by him forwarded to his principal on the coast. Mr. How, a botanist in the service of Government, stated, that on the arrival of an order for slaves, from Cape Coast Castle, while he was there, a native chief immediately sent forth armed parties, who brought in a supply of all descriptions in the night.

But he would now mention one or two instances of another sort, and these merely on account of the conclusion, which was to be drawn from them. When Captain Hills was in the river Gambia, he mentioned accidentally to a Black pilot, who was in the boat with him, that he wanted a cabin-boy. It so happened that some youths were then on the shore with vegetables to sell. The pilot beckoned to them to come on board; at the same time giving Captain Hills to understand, that he might take his choice of them; and when Captain Hills rejected the proposal with indignation, the pilot seemed perfectly at a loss to account for his warmth; and drily observed, that the slave-captains would not have been so scrupulous. Again, when General Rooke commanded at Goree, a number of the natives, men, women, and children, came to pay him a friendly visit. All was gaiety and merriment. It was a scene to gladden the saddest, and to soften the hardest heart. But a slave-captain was not so soon thrown off his guard. Three English barbarians of this description had the audacity jointly to request the general, to seize the whole unsuspicious multitude and sell them. For this they alleged the precedent of a former governor. Was not this request a proof of the frequency of such acts of rapine? for how familiar must such have been to slave-captains, when three of them dared to carry to a British officer of rank such a flagitious proposal! This would stand in the place of a thousand instances. It would give credibility to every other act of violence stated in the evidence, however enormous it might appear.

Page 82

But he would now have recourse for a moment to circumstantial evidence. An adverse witness, who had lived on the Gold Coast, had said that the only way, in which children could be enslaved, was by whole families being sold when the principals had been condemned for witchcraft. But he said at the same time, that few were convicted of this crime, and that the younger part of a family in these cases was sometimes spared. But if this account were true, it would follow that the children in the slave-vessels would be few indeed. But it had been proved, that the usual proportion of these was never less than a fourth of the whole cargo on that coast, and also, that the kidnapping of children was very prevalent there.

All these atrocities, he said, were fully substantiated by the evidence; and here he should do injustice to his cause, if he were not to make a quotation from the speech of Mr. B. Edwards in the Assembly of Jamaica, who, though he was hostile to his propositions, had yet the candour to deliver himself in the following manner there. “I am persuaded,” says he, “that Mr. Wilberforce has been rightly informed as to the manner in which slaves are generally procured. The intelligence I have collected from my own Negros abundantly confirms his account; and I have not the smallest doubt, that in Africa the effects of this trade are precisely such as he has represented them. The whole, or the greatest part, of that immense continent is a field of warfare and desolation; a wilderness, in which the inhabitants are wolves towards each other. That this scene of oppression, fraud, treachery, and bloodshed, if not originally occasioned, is in part (I will not say wholly) upheld by the Slave-trade, I dare not dispute. Every man in the Sugar Islands may be convinced that it is so, who will inquire of any African Negros, on their first arrival, concerning the circumstances of their captivity. The assertion that it is otherwise, is mockery and insult.”

But it was not only by acts of outrage that the Africans were brought into bondage. The very administration of justice was turned into an engine for that end. The smallest offence was punished by a fine equal to the value of a slave. Crimes were also fabricated; false accusations were resorted to; and persons were sometimes employed to seduce the unwary into practices with a view to the conviction and the sale of them.

It was another effect of this trade, that it corrupted the morals of those, who carried it on. Every fraud was used to deceive the ignorance of the natives by false weights and measures, adulterated commodities, and other impositions of a like sort. These frauds were even acknowledged by many, who had themselves practised them in obedience to the orders of their superiors. For the honour of the mercantile character of the country, such a traffic ought immediately to be suppressed.

Page 83

Yet these things, however clearly proved by positive testimony, by the concession of opponents, by particular inference, by general reasoning, by the most authentic histories of Africa, by the experience of all countries and of all ages,—these things, and (what was still more extraordinary) even the possibility of them, were denied by those, who had been brought forward on the other side of the question. These, however, were chiefly persons, who had been trading governors of forts in Africa; or who had long commanded ships in the Slave-trade. As soon as he knew the sort of witnesses which was to be called against him, he had been prepared to expect much prejudice. But his expectations had been greatly surpassed by the testimony they had given. He did not mean to impeach their private characters, but they certainly showed themselves under the influence of such gross prejudices, as to render them incompetent judges of the subject they came to elucidate. They seemed (if he might so say) to be enveloped by a certain atmosphere of their own; and to see, as it were, through a kind of African medium. Every object, which met their eyes, came distorted and turned from its true direction. Even the declarations, which they made on other occasions, seemed wholly strange to them. They sometimes not only forgot what they had seen, but what they had said; and when to one of them his own testimony to the privy council was read, he mistook it for that of another, whose evidence he declared to be “the merest burlesque in the world.”

But the House must be aware that there was not only an African medium, but an African logic. It seemed to be an acknowledged axiom in this; that every person, who offered a slave for sale, had a right to sell him, however fraudulently he might have obtained him. This had been proved by the witnesses, who opposed him. “It would have stopped my trade,” said one of them, “to have asked the broker, how he came by the person he was offering me for sale”—“We always suppose,” said another, “the broker has a right to sell the person he offers us”—“I never heard of such a question being asked,” said a third; “a man would be thought a fool, who should put such a question.”—He hoped the House would see the practical utility of this logic. It was the key-stone, which held the building together. By means of it, slave-captains might traverse the whole coast of Africa, and see nothing but equitable practices. They could not, however, be wholly absolved, even if they availed themselves of this principle to its fullest extent; for they had often committed depredations themselves; especially when they were passing by any part of the coast, where they did not mean to continue or to go again. Hence it was (as several captains of the navy and others had declared on their examination) that the natives, when at sea in their canoes, would never come near the men of war, till they knew them to be such. But finding this, and that they were not slave-vessels, they laid aside their fears, and came and continued on board with unsuspecting cheerfulness.

Page 84

With respect to the miseries of the Middle Passage, he had said so much on a former occasion, that he would spare the feelings of the committee as much as he could. He would therefore simply state that the evidence, which was before them, confirmed all those scenes of wretchedness, which he had then described; the same suffering from a state of suffocation by being crowded together; the same dancing in fetters; the same melancholy singing; the same eating by compulsion; the same despair; the same insanity; and all the other abominations which characterized the trade. New instances however had occurred, where these wretched men had resolved on death to terminate their woes. Some had destroyed themselves by refusing sustenance, in spite of threats and punishments. Others had thrown themselves into the sea; and more than one, when in the act of drowning, were seen to wave their hands in triumph, “exulting” (to use the words of an eye-witness) “that they had escaped.” Yet these and similar things, when viewed through the African medium he had mentioned, took a different shape and colour. Captain Knox, an adverse witness, had maintained, that slaves lay during the night in tolerable comfort. And yet he confessed, that in a vessel of one hundred and twenty tons, in which he had carried two hundred and ninety slaves, the latter had not all of them room to lie on their backs. How comfortably then must they have lain in his subsequent voyages! for he carried afterwards in a vessel of a hundred and eight tons four hundred and fifty and in a vessel of one hundred and fifty tons, no less than six hundred slaves. Another instance of African deception was to be found in the testimony of Captain Frazer, one of the most humane captains in the trade. It had been said of him, that he had held hot coals to the mouth of a slave, to compel him to eat. He was questioned on this point; but not admitting, in the true spirit of African logic, that he who makes another commit a crime, is guilty of it himself, he denied the charge indignantly, and defied a proof. But it was said to him, “Did you never order such a thing to be done?” His reply was, “Being sick in my cabin, I was informed that a man-slave would neither eat, drink, nor speak. I desired the mate and surgeon to try to persuade him to speak. I desired that the slaves might try also. When I found he was still obstinate, not knowing whether it was from sulkiness or insanity, I ordered a person to present him with a piece of fire in one hand and a piece of yam in the other, and to tell me what effect this had upon him. I learnt that he took the yam and began to eat it, but he threw the fire overboard.” Such was his own account of the matter. This was eating by duresse, if any thing could be called so. The captain, however, triumphed in his expedient, and concluded by telling the committee, that he sold this very slave at Grenada for forty pounds. Mark here the moral of the tale, and learn the nature and the cure of sulkiness.

Page 85

But upon whom did the cruelties, thus arising out of the prosecution of this barbarous traffic, fall? Upon a people with feeling and intellect like ourselves. One witness had spoken of the acuteness of their understandings; another of the extent of their memories; a third of their genius for commerce; a fourth of their proficiency in manufactures at home. Many had admired their gentle and peaceable disposition; their cheerfulness; and their hospitality. Even they, who were nominally slaves in Africa, lived a happy life. A witness against the abolition had described them as sitting and eating with their masters in the true style of patriarchal simplicity and comfort. Were these then a people incapable of civilization? The argument that they were an inferior species had been proved to be false.

He would now go to a new part of the subject. An opinion had gone forth that the abolition of the trade would be the ruin of the West India Islands. He trusted he should prove that the direct contrary was the truth; though, had he been unable to do this, it would have made no difference as to his own vote. In examining, however, this opinion, he should exclude the subject of the cultivation of new lands by fresh importations of slaves. The impolicy of this measure, apart from its inhumanity, was indisputably clear. Let the committee consider the dreadful mortality, which attended it. Let them look to the evidence of Mr. Woolrich, and there see a contrast drawn between the slow, but sure progress of cultivation, carried on in the natural way, and the attempt to force improvements, which, however flattering the prospect at first, soon produced a load of debt, and inextricable embarrassments. He might even appeal to the statements of the West Indians themselves, who allowed that more than twenty millions were owing to the people of this country, to show that no system could involve them so deeply as that, on which they had hitherto gone. But he would refer them to the accounts of Mr. Irving, as contained in the evidence. Waving then the consideration of this part of the subject, the opinion in question must have arisen from a notion, that the stock of slaves, now in the islands, could not be kept up by propagation; but that it was necessary, from time to time, to recruit them with imported Africans. In direct refutation of this position he should prove, First, that in the condition and treatment of the Negros, there were causes, sufficient to afford us reason to expect a considerable decrease, but particularly that their increase had not been a serious object of attention; Secondly, that this decrease was in fact, notwithstanding, very trifling; or rather, he believed, he might declare it had now actually ceased; and, Thirdly, he should urge many direct and collateral facts and arguments, constituting on the whole an irresistible proof, that even a rapid increase might henceforth be expected.

Page 86

He wished to treat the West Indians with all possible candour; but he was obliged to confess, in arguing upon these points, that whatever splendid instances there might be of kindness towards their slaves, there were some evils of almost universal operation, were necessarily connected with the system of slavery. Above all, the state of degradation, to which they were reduced, deserved to be noticed; as it produced an utter inattention to them as moral agents. They were kept at work under the whip like cattle. They were left totally ignorant of morality and religion. There was no regular marriage among them. Hence promiscuous intercourse, early prostitution, and excessive drinking, were material causes of their decrease. With respect to the instruction of the slaves in the principles of religion, the happiest effects had resulted, particularly in Antigua, where, under the Moravians and Methodists, they had so far profited, that the planters themselves confessed their value, as property, had been raised one-third by their increased habits of regularity and industry.

Whatever might have been said to the contrary, it was plainly to be inferred from the evidence, that the slaves were not protected by law. Colonial statutes had indeed been passed; but they were a dead letter; since, however ill they were treated, they were not considered as having a right to redress. An instance of astonishing cruelty by a Jew had been mentioned by Mr. Ross. It was but justice to say, that the man was held in detestation for it; but yet no one had ever thought of calling him to a legal account. Mr. Ross conceived a master had a right to punish his slave in whatever manner he might think proper. The same was declared by numberless other witnesses. Some instances, indeed, had lately occurred of convictions. A master had wantonly cut the mouth of a child, of six months old, almost from ear to ear. But did not the verdict of the jury show, that the doctrine of calling masters to an account was entirely novel; as it only pronounced him “Guilty, subject to the opinion of the court, if immoderate correction of a slave by his master be a crime indictable!” The court determined in the affirmative; and what was the punishment of this barbarous act?—A fine of forty shillings currency, equivalent to about twenty-five shillings sterling.

The slaves were but ill off in point of medical care. Sometimes four or five, and even eight or nine thousand of them, were under the care of one medical man; which, dispersed on different and distant estates, was a greater number than he could possibly attend to.

It was also in evidence, that they were in general under-fed. They were supported partly by the produce of their own provision-ground, and partly by an allowance of flour and grain from their masters. In one of the islands, where provision-ground did not answer one year in three, the allowance to a working Negro was but from five to nine pints of grain per week: in Dominica, where it never failed, from six to seven quarts: in Nevis and St. Christophers, where there was no provision-ground, it was but eleven pints. Add to this, that it might be still less, as the circumstances of their masters might become embarrassed; and in this case both an abridgment of their food, and an increase of their labour, would follow.

Page 87

But the great cause of the decrease of the slaves was in the non-residence of the planters. Sir George Yonge, and many others, had said, they had seen the slaves treated in a manner, which their owners would have resented, if they had known it. Mr. Orde spoke in the strongest terms of the misconduct of managers. The fact was, that these in general sought to establish their characters by producing large crops at a small immediate expense; too little considering how far the slaves might suffer from ill-treatment and excessive labour. The pursuit of such a system was a criterion for judging of their characters, as both Mr. Long and Mr. Ottley had confessed.

But he must contend, in addition to this, that the object of keeping up the stock of slaves by breeding had never been seriously attended to. For this he might appeal both to his own witnesses, and to those of his opponents; but he would only notice one fact. It was remarkable that, when owners and managers were asked about the produce of their estates, they were quite at home as to the answer; but when they were asked about the proportion of their male and female slaves, and their infants, they knew little about the matter. Even medical men were adepts in the art of planting; but when they were asked the latter questions, as connected with breeding and rearing, they seemed quite amazed; and could give no information upon the subject of them.

Persons, however, of great respectability had been called as witnesses, who had not seen the treatment of the Negros as he had now described it. He knew what was due to their characters; but yet he must enter a general protest against their testimony. “I have often,” says Mr. Ross, “attended both governors and admirals upon tours in the island of Jamaica. But it was not likely that these should see much distress upon these occasions. The White People and drivers would take care not to harrow up the feelings of strangers of distinction by the exercise of the whip, or the infliction of punishments, at that particular time; and, even if there were any disgusting objects, it was natural to suppose that they would then remove them.” But in truth these gentlemen had given proofs, that they were under the influence of prejudice. Some of them had declared the abolition would ruin the West Indies. But this, it was obvious, must depend upon the practicability of keeping up the stock without African supplies; and yet, when they were questioned upon this point, they knew nothing about it. Hence they had formed a conclusion without premises. Their evidence, too, extended through a long series of years. They had never seen one instance of ill-treatment in the time; and yet, in the same breath, they talked of the amended situation of the slaves; and that they were now far better off than formerly. One of them, to whom his country owed much, stated that a master had been sentenced to death for the murder of his own slave; but his recollection must have failed him; for the murder of a slave was not then a capital crime. A respectable governor also had delivered an opinion to the same effect; but, had he looked into the statute-book of the island, he would have found his error.

Page 88

It had been said that the slaves were in a better state than the peasantry of this country. But when the question was put to Mr. Ross, did he not answer, “that he would not insult the latter by a comparison?”

It had been said again, that the Negros were happier as slaves, than they would be if they were to be made free. But how was this reconcileable with facts? If a Negro under extraordinary circumstances had saved money enough, did he not always purchase his release from this situation of superior happiness by the sacrifice of his last shilling? Was it not also notorious, that the greatest reward, which a master thought he could bestow upon his slave for long and faithful services, was his freedom?

It had been said again, that Negros, when made free, never returned to their own country. But was not the reason obvious? If they could even reach their own homes in safety, their kindred and connections might be dead. But would they subject themselves to be kidnapped again; to be hurried once more on board a slave-ship; and again to endure and survive the horrors of the passage? Yet the love of their native country had been proved beyond a doubt. Many of the witnesses had heard them talk of it in terms of the strongest affection. Acts of suicide too were frequent in the islands, under the notion that these afforded them the readiest means of getting home. Conformably with this, Captain Wilson had maintained, that the funerals, which in Africa were accompanied with lamentations and cries of sorrow, were attended, in the West Indies, with every mark of joy.

He had now, he said, made good his first proposition, That in the condition of the slaves there were causes, which should lead us to expect, that there would be a considerable decrease among them. This decrease in the island of Jamaica was but trifling, or, rather, it had ceased some years ago; and if there was a decrease, it was only on the imported slaves. It appeared from the privy council report, that from 1698 to 1730 the decrease was three and a half per cent.; from 1730 to 1755 it was two and a half per cent.; from 1755 to 1768 it was lessened to one and three quarters; and from 1768 to 1788 it was not more than one per cent.: this last decrease was not greater than could be accounted for from hurricanes and consequent famines, and from the number of imported Africans who perished in the seasoning. The latter was a cause of mortality, which, it was evident, would cease with the importations. This conclusion was confirmed in part by Dr. Anderson, who, in his testimony to the Assembly of Jamaica, affirmed, that there was a considerable increase on the properties of the island, and particularly in the parish in which he resided.

Page 89

He would now proceed to establish his second proposition, That from henceforth a very considerable increase might be expected. This he might support by a close reasoning upon the preceding facts. But the testimony of his opponents furnished him with sufficient evidence. He could show, that wherever the slaves were treated better than ordinary, there was uniformly an increase in their number. Look at the estates of Mr. Willock, Mr. Ottley, Sir Ralph Payne, and others. In short, he should weary the committee, if he were to enumerate the instances of plantations, which were stated in the evidence to have kept up their numbers only from a little variation in their treatment. A remedy also had been lately found for a disorder, by which vast numbers of infants had been formerly swept away. Mr. Long also had laid it down, that whenever the slaves should bear a certain proportion to the produce, they might be expected to keep up their numbers; but this proportion they now exceeded. The Assembly of Jamaica had given it also as their opinion, “that when once the sexes should become nearly equal in point of number, there was no reason to suppose, that the increase of the Negros by generation would fall short of the natural increase of the labouring poor in Great Britain.” But the inequality, here spoken of, could only exist in the case of the African Negros, of whom more males were imported than females; and this inequality would be done away soon after the trade should cease.

But the increase of the Negros, where their treatment was better than ordinary, was confirmed in the evidence by instances in various parts of the world. From one end of the continent of America to the other their increase had been undeniably established; and this to a prodigious extent, though they had to contend with the severe cold of the winter, and in some parts with noxious exhalations in the summer. This was the case also in the settlement of Bencoolen in the East Indies. It appeared from the evidence of Mr. Botham, that a number of Negros, who had been imported there in the same disproportion of the sexes as in West India cargoes, and who lived under the same disadvantages, as in the Islands, of promiscuous intercourse and general prostitution, began, after they had been settled a short time, annually to increase.

But to return to the West Indies.—A slave-ship had been many years ago wrecked near St. Vincent’s. The slaves on board, who escaped to the island, were without necessaries; and, besides, were obliged to maintain a war with the native Caribbs: yet they soon multiplied to an astonishing number; and, according to Mr. Ottley, they were now on the increase. From Sir John Dalrymple’s evidence it appeared, that the domestic slaves in Jamaica, who were less worked than those in the field, increased; and from Mr. Long, that the free Blacks and Mulattoes there increased also.

Page 90

But there was an instance which militated against these facts (and the only one in the evidence) which he would now examine. Sir Archibald Campbell had heard, that the Maroons in Jamaica in the year 1739 amounted to three thousand men fit to carry arms. This supposed their whole number to have been about twelve thousand. But in the year 1782, after a real muster by himself, he found, to his great astonishment, that the fighting men did not then amount to three hundred. Now the fact was, that Sir Archibald Campbell's first position was founded upon rumour only; and was not true. For according to Mr. Long, the Maroons were actually numbered in 1749; when they amounted to about six hundred and sixty in all, having only a hundred and fifty men fit to carry arms. Hence, if when mustered by Sir Archibald Campbell he found three hundred fighting men, they must from 1749 to 1782 have actually doubled their population.

Was it possible, after these instances, to suppose that the Negros could not keep up their numbers, if their natural increase were made a subject of attention? The reverse was proved by sound reasoning. It had been confirmed by unquestionable facts. It had been shown, that they had increased In every situation, where there was the slightest circumstance in their favour. Where there had been any decrease, it was stated to be trifling; though no attention appeared to have been paid to the subject. This decrease had been gradually lessening; and, whenever a single cause of it had been removed (many still remaining), it had altogether ceased. Surely these circumstances formed a body of proof, which was irresistible.

He would now speak of the consequences of the abolition of the Slave-trade in other points of view; and first, as to its effects upon our marine. An abstract of the Bristol and Liverpool muster-rolls had been just laid before the House. It appeared from this, that in three hundred and fifty slave-vessels, having on board twelve thousand two hundred and sixty-three persons, two thousand six hundred and forty-three were lost in twelve months; whereas in four hundred and sixty-two West Indiamen, having on board seven thousand six hundred and forty persons, one hundred and eighteen only were lost in seven months. This rather exceeded the losses stated by Mr. Clarkson. For their barbarous usage on board these ships, and for their sickly and abject state in the West Indies, he would appeal to Governor Parry's letter; to the evidence of Mr. Ross; to the assertion of Mr. B. Edwards, an opponent; and to the testimony of Captains Sir George Yonge and Thompson, of the Royal Navy. He would appeal also to what Captain Hall, of the Navy, had given in evidence. This gentleman, after the action of the twelfth of April, impressed thirty hands from a slave-vessel, whom he selected with the utmost care from a crew of seventy; and he was reprimanded by his admiral, though they could scarcely get men to bring home the prizes, for introducing such wretches to communicate disorders to the fleet. Captain Smith of the Navy had also declared, that when employed to board Guineamen to impress sailors, although he had examined near twenty vessels, he never was able to get more than two men, who were fit for service; and these turned out such inhuman fellows, although good seamen, that he was obliged to dismiss them from the ship.

Page 91

But he hoped the committee would attend to the latter part of the assertion of Captain Smith. Yes:—this trade, while it injured the constitutions of our sailors, debased their morals. Of this, indeed, there was a barbarous illustration in the evidence. A slaveship had struck on some shoals, called the Morant Keys, a few leagues from the east end of Jamaica. The crew landed in their boats, with arms and provisions, leaving the slaves on board in their irons. This happened in the night. When morning came, it was discovered that the Negros had broken their shackles, and were busy in making rafts; upon which afterwards they placed the women and children. The men attended upon the latter, swimming by their side, whilst they drifted to the island where the crew were. But what was the sequel? From an apprehension that the Negros would consume the water and provision, which had been landed, the crew resolved to destroy them as they approached the shore. They killed between three and four hundred. Out of the whole cargo only thirty-three were saved, who, on being brought to Kingston, were sold. It would, however, be to no purpose, he said, to relieve the Slave-trade from this act of barbarity. The story of the Morant Keys was paralleled by that of Captain Collingwood; and were you to got rid of these, another, and another, would still present itself, to prove the barbarous effects of this trade on the moral character.

But of the miseries of the trade there was no end. Whilst he had been reading out of the evidence the story of the Morant Keys, his eye had but glanced on the opposite page, and it met another circumstance of horror. This related to what were called the refuse-slaves. Many people in Kingston were accustomed to speculate in the purchase of those, who were left after the first day's sale. They then carried them out into the country, and retailed them. Mr. Ross declared, that he had seen these landed in a very wretched state, sometimes in the agonies of death, and sold as low as for a dollar, and that he had known several expire in the piazzas of the vendue-master. The bare description superseded the necessity of any remark. Yet these were the familiar incidents of the Slave-trade.

But he would go back to the seamen. He would mention another cause of mortality, by which many of them lost their lives. In looking over Lloyd's list, no less than six vessels were cut off by the irritated natives in one year, and the crews massacred. Such instances were not unfrequent. In short, the history of this commerce was written throughout in characters of blood.

Page 92

He would next consider the effects of the abolition on those places where it was chiefly carried on. But would the committee believe, after all the noise which had been made on this subject, that the Slave-trade composed but a thirtieth part of the export trade of Liverpool, and that of the trade of Bristol it constituted a still less proportion? For the effects of the abolition on the general commerce of the kingdom, he would refer them to Mr. Irving; from whose evidence it would appear, that the medium value of the British manufactures, exported to Africa, amounted only to between four and five hundred thousand pounds annually. This was but a trifling sum. Surely the superior capital, ingenuity, application, and integrity, of the British manufacturer would command new markets for the produce of his industry, to an equal amount, when this should be no more. One branch, however, of our manufactures, he confessed, would suffer from the abolition; and that was the manufacture of gunpowder; of which the nature of our connection with Africa drew from us as much as we exported to all the rest of the world besides.

He hastened, however, to another part of the argument. Some had said, “We wish to put an end to the Slave-trade, but we do not approve of your mode. Allow more time. Do not displease the legislatures of the West India islands. It is by them that those laws must be passed, and enforced, which will secure your object.” Now he was directly at issue with these gentlemen. He could show, that the abolition was the only certain mode of amending the treatment of the slaves, so as to secure their increase; and that the mode which had been offered to him, was at once inefficacious and unsafe. In the first place, how could any laws, made by these legislatures, be effectual, whilst the evidence of Negros was in no case admitted against White men? What was the answer from Grenada? Did it not state, “that they who were capable of cruelty, would in general be artful enough to prevent any but slaves from being witnesses of the fact?” Hence it had arisen, that when positive laws had been made, in some of the islands, for the protection of the slaves, they had been found almost a dead letter. Besides, by what law would you enter into every man’s domestic concerns, and regulate the interior economy of his house and plantation? This would be something more than a general excise. Who would endure such a law? And yet on all these and innumerable other minutiae must depend the protection of the slaves, their comforts, and the probability of their increase. It was universally allowed, that the Code Noir had been utterly neglected in the French islands, though there was an officer appointed by the crown to see it enforced. The provisions of the Directorio had been but of little more avail in the Portuguese settlements, or the institution of a Protector of the Indians, in those of the Spaniards. But what degree of protection the slaves would enjoy might

Page 93

be inferred from the admission of a gentleman, by whom this very plan of regulation had been recommended, and who was himself no ordinary person, but a man of discernment and legal resources. He had proposed a limitation of the number of lashes to be given by the master or overseer for one offence. But, after all, he candidly confessed, that his proposal was not likely to be useful, while the evidence of slaves continued inadmissible against their masters. But he could even bring testimony to the inefficacy of such regulations. A wretch in Barbadoes had chained a Negro girl to the floor, and flogged her till she was nearly expiring. Captain Cook and Major Fitch, hearing her cries, broke open the door and found her. The wretch retreated from their resentment, but cried out exultingly, “that he had only given her thirty-nine lashes (the number limited by law) at any one time; and that he had only inflicted this number three times since the beginning of the night,” adding, “that he would prosecute them for breaking open his door; and that he would flog her to death for all any one, if he pleased; and that he would give her the fourth thirty-nine before morning.”

But this plan of regulation was not only inefficacious, but unsafe. He entered his protest against the fatal consequences, which might result from it. The Negros were creatures like ourselves; but they were uninformed, and their moral character was debased. Hence they were unfit for civil rights. To use these properly they must be gradually restored to that level, from which they had been so unjustly degraded. To allow them an appeal to the laws, would be to awaken in them a sense of the dignity of their nature. The first return of life, after a swoon, was commonly a convulsion, dangerous at once to the party himself and to all around him. You should first prepare them for the situation, and not bring the situation to them. To be under the protection of the law was in fact to be a freeman; and to unite slavery and freedom in one condition was impracticable. The abolition, on the other hand, was exactly such an agent as the case required. All hopes of supplies from the Coast being cut off, breeding would henceforth become a serious object of attention; and the care of this, as including better clothing and feeding, and milder discipline, would extend to innumerable particulars, which an act of assembly could neither specify nor enforce. The horrible system, too, which many had gone upon, of working out their slaves in a few years, and recruiting their gangs with imported Africans, would receive its death-blow from the abolition of the trade. The opposite would force itself on the most unfeeling heart. Ruin would stare a man in the face, if he were not to conform to it. The non-resident owners would then express themselves in the terms of Sir Philip Gibbs, “that he should consider it as the fault of his manager, if he were not to keep up the number of his slaves.”

Page 94

This reasoning concerning the different tendencies of the two systems was self-evident. But facts were not wanting to confirm it. Mr. Long had remarked, that all the insurrections and suicides in Jamaica had been found among the imported slaves, who, not having lost the consciousness of civil rights, which they had enjoyed in their own country, could not brook the indignities to which they were subjected in the West Indies. An instance in point was afforded also by what had lately taken place in the island of Dominica. The disturbance there had been chiefly occasioned by some runaway slaves from the French islands. But what an illustration was it of his own doctrine to say, that the slaves of several persons, who had been treated, with kindness, were not among the number of the insurgents on that occasion!

But when persons coolly talked of putting an end to the Slave-trade through the medium of the West India legislatures, and of gradual abolition, by means of regulations, they surely forgot the miseries which this horrid traffic occasioned in Africa during every moment of its continuance. This consideration was conclusive with him, when called upon to decide whether the Slave-trade should be tolerated for a while, or immediately abolished. The divine law against murder was absolute and unqualified. Whilst we were ignorant of all these things, our sanction of them might, in some measure, be pardoned. But now, when our eyes were opened, could we tolerate them for a moment, unless we were ready at once to determine, that gain should be our God, and, like the heathens of old, were prepared to offer up human victims at the shrine of our idolatry?

This consideration precluded also the giving heed for an instant to another plea, namely, that if we were to abolish the trade it would be proportionably taken up by other nations. But, whatever other nations did, it became Great Britain, in every point of view, to take a forward part. One half of this guilty commerce had been carried on by her subjects. As we had been great in our crime, we should be early in our repentance. If Providence had showered his blessings upon us in unparalleled abundance, we should show ourselves grateful for them by rendering them subservient to the purposes for which they were intended. There would be a day of retribution, wherein we should have to give an account of all those talents, faculties, and opportunities, with which we had been intrusted. Let it not then appear, that our superior power had been employed to oppress our fellow-creatures, and our superior light to darken the creation of God. He could not but look forward with delight to the happy prospects which opened themselves to his view in Africa from the abolition of the Slave-trade; when a commerce, justly deserving that name, should be established with her; not like that, falsely so called, which now subsisted, and which all who were interested for the honour of the commercial character (though there were no superior principle) should hasten to disavow. Had this trade indeed been ever so profitable, his decision would have been in no degree affected by that consideration. “Here’s the smell of blood on the hand still, and all the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten it.”

Page 95

He doubted, whether it was not almost an act of degrading condescension to stoop to discuss the question in the view of commercial interest. On this ground, however, he was no less strong than on every other. Africa abounded with productions of value, which she would gladly exchange for our manufactures, when these were not otherwise to be obtained: and to what an extent her demand might then grow exceeded almost the powers of computation. One instance already existed of a native king, who being debarred by his religion the use of spirituous liquors, and therefore not feeling the irresistible temptation to acts of rapine which they afforded to his countrymen, had abolished the Slave-trade throughout all his dominions, and was encouraging an honest industry.

For his own part, he declared that, interested as he might be supposed to be in the final event of the question, he was comparatively indifferent as to the present decision of the House upon it. Whatever they might do, the people of Great Britain, he was confident, would abolish the Slave-trade when, as would then soon happen, its injustice and cruelty should be fairly laid before them. It was a nest of serpents, which would never have existed so long, but for the darkness in which they lay hid. The light of day would now be let in on them, and they would vanish from the sight. For himself, he declared he was engaged in a work, which he would never abandon. The consciousness of the justice of his cause would carry him forward, though he were alone; but he could not but derive encouragement from considering with whom he was associated. Let us not, he said, despair. It is a blessed cause; and success, ere long, will crown our exertions. Already we have gained one victory. We have obtained for these poor creatures the recognition of their human nature[A], which, for a while, was most shamefully denied them. This is the first fruits of our efforts.

[Footnote A: This point was actually obtained by the evidence before the House of Commons; for, after this, we heard no more of them as an inferior race.]

Let us persevere, and our triumph will be complete. Never, never, will we desist, till we have wiped away this scandal from the Christian name; till we have released ourselves from the load of guilt under which we at present labour; and till we have extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic, which our posterity, looking back to the history of these enlightened times, will scarcely believe had been suffered to exist so long, a disgrace and a dishonour to our country.

He then moved, that the chairman be instructed to move for leave to bring in a bill to prevent the further importation of slaves into the British colonies in the West Indies.

Colonel Tarleton immediately rose up, and began by giving an historical account of the trade from the reign of Elizabeth to the present time. He then proceeded to the sanction, which parliament had always given it. Hence it could not then be withdrawn without a breach of faith. Hence, also, the private property embarked in it was sacred, nor could it be invaded, unless an adequate compensation were given in return.

Page 96

They, who had attempted the abolition of the trade, were led away by a mistaken humanity. The Africans themselves had no objection to its continuance.

With respect to the Middle Passage, he believed the mortality there to be on an average only five in the hundred; whereas in regiments, sent out to the West Indies, the average loss in the year was about ten and a half per cent.

The Slave-trade was absolutely necessary, if we meant to carry on our West India commerce; for many attempts had been made to cultivate the lands in the different islands by White labourers; but they had always failed.

It had also the merit of keeping up a number of seamen in readiness for the state. Lord Rodney had stated this as one of its advantages on the breaking out of a war. Liverpool alone could supply nine hundred and ninety-three seamen annually.

He would now advert to the connections dependent upon the African trade. It was the duty of the House to protect the planters, whose lives had been, and were then, exposed to imminent dangers, and whose property had undergone an unmerited depreciation. To what could this depreciation, and to what could the late insurrection at Dominica, be imputed, which had been saved from horrid carnage and midnight-butchery only by the adventitious arrival of two British regiments? They could only be attributed to the long delayed question of the abolition of the Slave-trade; and if this question were to go much longer unsettled, Jamaica would be endangered also.

To members of landed property he would observe, that the abolition would lessen the commerce of the country, and increase the national debt and the number of their taxes. The minister, he hoped, who patronized this wild scheme, had some new pecuniary resource in store to supply the deficiencies it would occasion.

To the mercantile members he would speak thus: “A few ministerial men in the house had been gifted with religious inspiration, and this had been communicated to other eminent personages in it: these enlightened philanthropists had discovered, that it was necessary, for the sake of humanity and for the honour of the nation, that the merchants concerned in the African trade should be persecuted, notwithstanding the sanction of their trade by parliament, and notwithstanding that such persecution must aggrandize the rivals of Great Britain.” Now how did this language sound? It might have done in the twelfth century, when all was bigotry and superstition. But let not a mistaken humanity, in these enlightened times, furnish a colourable pretext for any injurious attack on property or character.

These things being considered, he should certainly oppose the measure in contemplation. It would annihilate a trade, whose exports amounted to eight hundred thousand pounds annually, and which employed a hundred and sixty vessels and more than five thousand seamen. It would destroy also the West India trade, which was of

the annual value of six millions; and which employed one hundred and sixty thousand tons of shipping, and seamen in proportion. These were objects of too much importance to the country to be hazarded on an unnecessary speculation.

Page 97

Mr. Grosvenor then rose. He complimented the humanity of Mr. Wilberforce, though he differed from him on the subject of his motion. He himself had read only the privy council report; and he wished for no other evidence. The question had then been delayed two years. Had the abolition been so clear a point as it was said to be, it could not have needed either so much evidence or time.

He had heard a good deal about kidnapping and other barbarous practices. He was sorry for them. But these were the natural consequences of the laws of Africa; and it became us as wise men to turn them to our own advantage. The Slave-trade was certainly not an amiable trade. Neither was that of a butcher; but yet it was a very necessary one.

There was great reason to doubt the propriety of the present motion. He had twenty reasons for disapproving it. The first was, that the thing was impossible. He needed not therefore to give the rest. Parliament, indeed, might relinquish the trade. But to whom? To foreigners, who would continue it, and without the humane regulations, which were applied to it by his country-men.

He would give advice to the house on this subject in the words, which the late Alderman Beckford used on a different occasion: “Meddle not with troubled waters: they will be found to be bitter waters, and the waters of affliction.” He again admitted, that the Slave-trade was not an amiable trade; but he would not gratify his humanity at the expense of the interests of his country; and he thought we should not too curiously inquire into the unpleasant circumstances, which attended it.

Mr. James Martin succeeded Mr. Grosvenor. He said, he had been long aware, how much self-interest could pervert the judgment; but he was not apprized of the full power of it, till the Slave-trade became a subject of discussion. He had always conceived, that the custom of trafficking in human beings had been incautiously begun, and without any reflection upon it; for he never could believe that any man, under the influence of moral principles, could suffer himself knowingly to carry on a trade replete with fraud, cruelty, and destruction; with destruction, indeed, of the worst kind, because it subjected the sufferers to a lingering death. But he found now, that even such a trade as this could be sanctioned.

It was well observed in the petition from the University of Cambridge against the Slave-trade, “that a firm belief in the Providence of a benevolent Creator assured them that no system, founded on the oppression of one part of mankind, could be beneficial to another.” He felt much concern, that in an assembly of the representatives of a country, boasting itself zealous not only for the preservation of its own liberties, but for the general rights of mankind, it should be necessary to say a single word upon such a subject; but the deceitfulness of the human heart was such, as to change the appearances of truth, when it stood in opposition to self-interest. And he had to lament that even among those, whose public duty it was to cling to the universal and eternal

principles of truth, justice, and humanity, there were found some, who could defend that which was unjust, fraudulent, and cruel.

Page 98

The doctrines he had heard that evening, ought to have been reserved for times the most flagrantly profligate and abandoned. He never expected then to learn, that the everlasting laws of righteousness were to give way to imaginary, political, and commercial expediency; and that thousands of our fellow-creatures were to be reduced to wretchedness, that individuals might enjoy opulence, or government a revenue.

He hoped that the house for the sake of its own character would explode these doctrines with all the marks of odium they deserved; and that all parties would join in giving a death-blow to this execrable trade. The royal family would, he expected, from their known benevolence, patronize the measure. Both Houses of Parliament were now engaged in the prosecution of a gentleman accused of cruelty and oppression in the East. But what were these cruelties, even if they could be brought home to him, when compared in number and degree to those, which were every day and every hour committed in the abominable traffic, which was now under their discussion! He considered therefore both Houses of Parliament as pledged upon this occasion. Of the support of the bishops he could have no doubt; because they were to render Christianity amiable, both by their doctrine and their example. Some of the inferior clergy had already manifested a laudable zeal in behalf of the injured Africans. The University of Cambridge had presented a petition to that house worthy of itself. The Sister-university had, by one of her representatives, given sanction to the measure. Dissenters of various denominations, but particularly the Quakers, (who to their immortal honour had taken the lead in it,) had vied with those of the established church in this amiable contest. The first counties, and some of the largest trading towns, in the kingdom had espoused the cause. In short, there had never been more unanimity in the country, than in this righteous attempt.

With such support, and with so good a cause, it would be impossible to fail. Let but every man stand forth, who had at any time boasted of himself as an Englishman, and success would follow. But if he were to be unhappily mistaken as to the result, we must give up the name of Englishmen. Indeed, if we retained it, we should be the greatest hypocrites in the world; for we boasted of nothing more than of our own liberty; we manifested the warmest indignation at the smallest personal insult; we professed liberal sentiments towards other nations: but to do these things, and to continue such a traffic, would be to deserve the hateful character before mentioned. While we could hardly bear the sight of any thing resembling slavery, even as a punishment, among ourselves, how could we consistently entail an eternal slavery upon others?

Page 99

It had been frequently, but most disgracefully said, that “we should not be too eager in setting the example. Let the French begin it.” Such a sentiment was a direct libel upon the ancient, noble, and generous character of this nation. We ought, on the other hand, under the blessings we enjoyed, and under the high sense we entertained of our own dignity as a people, to be proudly fearful, lest other nations should anticipate our design, and obtain the palm before us. It became us to lead. And if others should not follow us, it would belong to them to glory in the shame of trampling under foot the laws of reason, humanity, and religion.

This motion, he said, came strongly recommended to them. The honourable member, who introduced it, was justly esteemed for his character. He was the representative too of a noble county, which had been always ready to take the lead in every public measure for the good of the community, or for the general benefit of mankind; of a county too, which had had the honour of producing a Saville. Had his illustrious predecessor been alive, he would have shown the same zeal on the same occasion. The preservation of the unalienable rights of all his fellow-creatures was one of the chief characteristics of that excellent citizen. Let every member in that house imitate him in the purity of their conduct and in the universal rectitude of their measures, and they would pay the same tender regard to the rights of other countries as to those of their own; and, for his part, he should never believe those persons to be sincere, who were loud in their professions of love of liberty, if he saw that love confined to the narrow circle of one community, which ought to be extended to the natural rights of every inhabitant of the globe.

But we should be better able to bring ourselves up to this standard of rectitude, if we were to put ourselves into the situation of those, whom we oppressed. This was the rule of our religion. What should we think of those, who should say, that it was their interest to injure us? But he hoped we should not deceive ourselves so grossly as to imagine, that it was our real interest to oppress any one. The advantages to be obtained by tyranny were imaginary, and deceitful to the tyrant; and the evils they caused to the oppressed were grievous, and often insupportable.

Before he sat down, he would apologize, if he had expressed himself too warmly on this subject. He did not mean to offend any one. There were persons connected with the trade, some of whom he pitied on account of the difficulty of their situation. But he should think most contemptibly of himself as a man, if he could talk on this traffic without emotion. It would be a sign to him of his own moral degradation. He regretted his inability to do justice to such a cause; but if, in having attempted to forward it, he had shown the weakness of his powers, he must console himself with the consideration, that he felt more solid comfort in having acted up to sound public principles, than he could have done from the exertion of the most splendid talents against the conviction of his conscience.

Page 100

Mr. Burdon rose, and said he was embarrassed to know how to act. Mr. Wilberforce had in a great measure met his ideas. Indeed he considered himself as much in his hands; but he wished to go gradually to the abolition of the trade. He wished to give time to the planters to recruit their stocks. He feared the immediate abolition might occasion a monopoly among such of them as were rich, to the detriment of the less affluent. We ought, like a judicious physician, to follow nature, and to promote a gradual recovery.

Mr. Francis rose next. After complimenting Mr. Wilberforce, he stated that personal considerations might appear to incline him to go against the side which he was about to take, namely, that of strenuously supporting his motion. Having himself an interest in the West Indies, he thought that what he should submit to the house would have the double effect of evidence and argument; and he stated most unequivocally his opinion, that the abolition of the Slave-trade would tend materially to the benefit of the West Indies.

The arguments urged by the honourable mover were supported by the facts, which he had adduced from the evidence, more strongly than any arguments had been supported in any speech be had ever heard. He wished, however, that more of these facts had been introduced into the debate; for they were apt to have a greater effect upon the mind than mere reasonings, however just and powerful. Many had affirmed that the Slave-trade was politic and expedient; but it was worthy of remark, that no man had ventured to deny that it was criminal. Criminal, however, be declared it to be in the highest degree; and he believed it was equally impolitic. Both its inexpediency and injustice had been established by the honourable mover. He dwelt much on the unhappy situation of the Negros in the West Indies, who were without the protection of government or of efficient laws, and subject to the mere caprice of men, who were at once the parties, the judges, and the executioners.

He instanced an overseer, who, having thrown a Negro into a copper of boiling cane-juice for a trifling offence, was punished merely by the loss of his place, and by being obliged to pay the value of the slave. He stated another instance of a girl of fourteen, who was dreadfully whipped for coming too late to her work. She fell down motionless after it; and was then dragged along the ground, by the legs, to an hospital; where she died. The murderer, though tried, was acquitted by a jury of his peers, upon the idea, that it was impossible a master could destroy his own property. This was a notorious fact. It was published in the Jamaica Gazette; and it had even happened since the question of the abolition had been started.

Page 101

The only argument used against such cruelties, was the master's interest in the slave. But he urged the common cruelty to horses, in which their drivers had an actual interest with the drivers of men in the colonies, as a proof that this was no security. He had never heard an instance of a master being punished for the murder of his slave. The propagation of the slaves was so far from being encouraged, that it was purposely checked, because it was thought more profitable and less troublesome to buy a full grown Negro, than to rear a child. He repeated that his interest might have inclined him to the other side of the question; but he did not choose to compromise between his interest and his duty; for, if he abandoned his duty, he should not be happy in this world; nor should he deserve happiness in the next.

Mr. Pitt rose, but he said it was only to move, seeing that justice could not be done to the subject this evening, that the further consideration of the question might be adjourned to the next.

Mr. Cawthorne and Colonel Tarleton both opposed this motion, and Colonel Phipps and Lord Carhampton supported it.

Mr. Fox said, the opposition to the adjournment was uncandid and unbecoming. They who opposed it well knew that the trade could not bear discussion. Let it be discussed; and, although there were symptoms of predetermination in some, the abolition of it must be carried. He would not believe that there could be found in the House of Commons men of such hard hearts and inaccessible understandings, as to vote an assent to its continuance, and then go home to their families, satisfied with their vote, after they had been once made acquainted with the subject.

Mr. Pitt agreed with Mr. Fox, that from a full discussion of the subject there was every reason to augur, that the abolition would be adopted. Under the imputations, with which this trade was loaded, gentlemen should remember, they could not do justice to their own characters, unless they stood up, and gave their reasons for opposing the abolition of it. It was unusual also to force any question of such importance to so hasty a decision. For his own part, it was his duty, from the situation in which he stood, to state fully his own sentiments on the question; and, however exhausted both he and the house might be, he was resolved it should not pass without discussion, as long as he had strength to utter a word upon it. Every principle, that could bind a man of honour and conscience, would impel him to give the most powerful support he could to the motion for the abolition.

The motion of Mr. Pitt was assented to, and the house was adjourned accordingly.

On the next day the subject was resumed. Sir William Yonge rose, and said, that, though he differed from the honourable mover, he had much admired his speech of the last evening. Indeed the recollection of it made him only the more sensible of the

weakness of his own powers; and yet, having what he supposed to be irrefragable arguments in his possession, he felt emboldened to proceed.

Page 102

And, first, before he could vote for the abolition, he wished to be convinced, that, whilst Britain were to lose, Africa would gain. As for himself, he hated a traffic in men, and joyfully anticipated its termination at no distant period under a wise system of regulation: but he considered the present measure as crude and indolent; and as precluding better and wiser measures, which were already in train. A British Parliament should attain not only the best ends, but by the wisest means.

Great Britain might abandon her share of this trade, but she could not abolish it. Parliament was not an assembly of delegates from the powers of Europe, but of a single nation. It could not therefore suppress the trade; but would eventually aggravate those miseries incident to it, which every enlightened man must acknowledge, and every good man must deplore. He wished the traffic for ever closed. But other nations were only waiting for our decision, to seize the part we should leave them. The new projects of these would be intemperate; and, in the zeal of rivalship, the present evils of comparatively sober dealing would be aggravated beyond all estimate in this new and heated auction of bidders for life and limb. We might indeed by regulation give an example of new principles of policy and of justice; but if we were to withdraw suddenly from this commerce, like Pontius Pilate, we should wash our hands indeed, but we should not be innocent as to the consequences.

On the first agitation of this business, Mr. Wilberforce had spoken confidently of other nations following our example. But had not the National Assembly of France referred the Slave-trade to a select committee, and had not that committee rejected the measure of its abolition? By the evidence it appeared, that the French and Spaniards were then giving bounties to the Slave-trade; that Denmark was desirous of following it; that America was encouraging it; and that the Dutch had recognized its necessity, and recommended its recovery. Things were bad enough indeed as they were, but he was sure this rivalship would make them worse.

He did not admit the disorders imputed to the trade in all their extent. Pillage and kidnapping could not be general, on account of the populousness of the country; though too frequent instances of it had been proved. Crimes might be falsely imputed. This he admitted; but only partially. Witchcraft, he believed, was the secret of poisoning, and therefore deserved the severest punishment. That there should be a number of convictions for adultery, where polygamy was a custom, was not to be wondered at. But he feared, if a sale of these criminals were to be done away, massacre would be the substitute.

An honourable member had asked on a former day, “Is it an excuse for robbery, to say that another would have committed it?” But the Slave-trade did not necessarily imply robbery. Not long since Great Britain sold her convicts, indirectly at least, to slavery. But he was no advocate for the trade. He wished it had never been begun; and that it might soon terminate. But the means were not adequate to the end proposed.

Page 103

Mr. Burke had said on a former occasion, “that in adopting the measure we must prepare to pay the price of our virtue.” He was ready to pay his share of that price. But the effect of the purchase must be first ascertained. If they did not estimate this, it was not benevolence, but dissipation. Effects were to be duly appreciated; and though statesmen might rest every thing on a plausible manifesto of cause, the humbler moralist, meditating peace and goodwill towards men, would venture to call such statesmen responsible for consequences.

In regard to the colonies, a sudden abolition would be oppression. The legislatures there should be led, and not forced, upon this occasion. He was persuaded they would act wisely to attain the end pointed out to them. They would see, that a natural increase of their Negros might be effected by an improved system of legislation; and that in the result the Slave-trade would be no longer necessary.

A sudden abolition, also, would occasion dissatisfaction there. Supplies were necessary for some time to come. The Negros did not yet generally increase by birth. The gradation of ages was not yet duly filled. These and many defects might be remedied, but not suddenly.

It would cause also distress there. The planters, not having their expected supplies, could not discharge their debts. Hence their slaves would be seized and sold. Nor was there any provision in this case against the separation of families, except as to the mother and infant child. These separations were one of the chief outrages complained of in Africa. Why then should we promote them in the West Indies? The confinement on board a slave-ship had been also bitterly complained of; but, under distraint for the debt of a master, the poor slave might linger in a gaol twice or thrice the time of the Middle Passage.

He again stated his abhorrence of the Slave-trade; but as a resource, though he hoped but a temporary one, it was of such consequence to the existence of the country, that it could not suddenly be withdrawn. The value of the imports and exports between Great Britain and the West Indies, including the excise and customs, was between seven and eight millions annually; and the tonnage of the ships employed, about an eighth of the whole tonnage of these kingdoms.

He complained that in the evidence the West India planters had been by no means spared. Cruel stories had been hastily and lightly told against them. Invidious comparisons had been made to their detriment. But it was well known, that one of our best comic writers, when he wished to show benevolence in its fairest colours, had personified it in the character of the West Indian. He wished the slave might become as secure as the apprentice in this country: but it was necessary that the alarms concerning the abolition of the Slave-trade should, in the mean time, be quieted; and he trusted that the good sense and true benevolence of the House would reject the present motion.

Page 104

Mr. Matthew Montagu rose, and said a few words in support of the motion; and after condemning the trade in the strongest manner, he declared, that as long as he had life, he would use every faculty of his body and mind in endeavouring to promote its abolition.

Lord John Russell succeeded Mr. Montagu. He said, that although slavery was repugnant to his feelings, he must vote against the abolition, as visionary and delusive. It was a feeble attempt without the power to serve the cause of humanity. Other nations would take up the trade. Whenever a bill of wise regulation should be brought forward, no man would be more ready than himself to lend his support. In this way the rights of humanity might be asserted without injury to others. He hoped he should not incur censure by his vote; for, let his understanding be what it might, he did not know that he had, notwithstanding the assertions of Mr. Fox, an inaccessible heart.

Mr. Stanley (agent for the islands) rose next. He felt himself called upon, he said, to refute the many calumnies, which had for years been propagated against the planters, (even through the medium of the pulpit, which should have been employed to better purposes,) and which had at length produced the mischievous measure, which was now under the discussion of the House. A cry had been sounded forth, and from one end of the kingdom to the other; as if there had never been a slave from Adam to the present time. But it appeared to him to have been the intention of Providence, from the very beginning, that one set of men should be slaves to another. This truth was as old as it was universal. It was recognized in every history, under every government, and in every religion. Nor did the Christian religion itself, if the comments of Dr. Halifax, bishop of Gloucester, on a passage in St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians were true, show more repugnance to slavery than any other.

He denied that the slaves were procured in the manner which had been described. It was the custom of all savages to kill their prisoners; and the Africans ought to be thankful that they had been carried safe into the British colonies.

As to the tales of misery in the Middle Passage, they were gross falsehoods; and as to their treatment in the West Indies, he knew personally that it was, in general, indulgent and humane.

With regard to promoting their increase by any better mode of treatment, he wished gentlemen would point it out to him. As a planter he would thank them for it. It was absurd to suppose that he and others were blind to their own interest. It was well known that one Creole slave was worth two Africans: and their interest therefore must suggest to them that the propagation of slaves was preferable to the purchase of imported Negros, of whom one half very frequently died in the seasoning.

He then argued the impossibility of beasts doing the work of the plantations. He endeavoured to prove that the number of these, adequate to this purpose, could not be

supplied with food; and after having made many other observations, which, on account of the lowness of his voice, could not be heard, he concluded by objecting to the motion.

Page 105

Mr. William Smith rose. He wondered how the last speaker could have had the boldness to draw arguments from scripture in support of the Slave-trade. Such arguments could be intended only to impose on those, who never took the trouble of thinking for themselves. Could it be thought for a moment, that the good sense of the House could be misled by a few perverted or misapplied passages, in direct opposition to the whole tenor and spirit of Christianity; to the theory, he might say, of almost every religion, which had ever appeared in the world? Whatever might have been advanced, every body must feel, that the Slave-trade could not exist an hour, if that excellent maxim, “to do to others as we would wish that others should do to us,” had its proper influence on the conduct of men.

Nor was Mr. Stanley more happy in his argument of the antiquity and universality of slavery. Because a practice had existed, did it necessarily follow that it was just? By this argument every crime might be defended from the time of Cain. The slaves of antiquity, however, were in a situation far preferable to that of the Negros in the West Indies. A passage in Macrobius, which exemplified this in the strongest manner, was now brought to his recollection. “Our ancestors,” says Macrobius, “denominated the master father of the family, and the slave domestic, with the intention of removing all odium from the condition of the master, and all contempt from that of the servant.” Could this language be applied to the present state of West India slavery?

It had been complained of by those who supported the trade, that they laboured under great disadvantages by being obliged to contend against the most splendid abilities which the House could boast. But he believed they laboured under one, which was worse, and for which no talents could compensate; he meant the impossibility of maintaining their ground fairly on any of those principles, which every man within those walls had been accustomed, from his infancy, to venerate as sacred. He and his friends too laboured under some disadvantages. They had been charged with fanaticism. But what had Mr. Long said, when he addressed himself to those planters, who were desirous of attempting improvements on their estates? He advised them “not to be diverted by partial views, vulgar prejudices, or the ridicule which might spring from weak minds, from a benevolent attention to the public good.” But neither by these nor by other charges were he or his friends to be diverted from the prosecution of their purpose. They were convinced of the rectitude and high importance of their object; and were determined never to desist from pursuing it, till it should be attained.

But they had to struggle with difficulties far more serious. The West Indian interest, which opposed them, was a collected body; of great power, affluence, connections, and respectability.

Artifice had also been employed. Abolition and emancipation had been so often confounded, and by those who knew better, that it must have been purposely done, to throw an odium on the measure which was now before them.

Page 106

The abolitionists had been also accused as the authors of the late insurrection in Dominica. A revolt had certainly taken place in that island. But revolts there had occurred frequently before. Mr. Stanley himself, in attempting to fix this charge upon them, had related circumstances, which amounted to their entire exculpation. He had said, that all was quiet there till the disturbances in the French islands; when some Negros from the latter had found their way to Dominica, and had excited the insurrection in question. He had also said, that the Negros in our own islands hated the idea of the abolition; for they thought, as no new labourers were to come in, they should be subjected to increased hardships. But if they and their masters hated this same measure, how was this coincidence of sentiment to give birth to insurrection?

Other fallacies also had been industriously propagated. Of the African trade it had been said, that the exports amounted to a million annually; whereas, from the report on the table, it had on an average amounted to little more than half a million; and this included the articles for the purchase of African produce, which were of the value of a hundred and forty thousand pounds.

The East Indian trade, also, had been said to depend on the West Indian and the African. In the first place, it had but very little connection with the former at all. Its connection with the latter was principally on account of the saltpetre, which it furnished for making gunpowder. Out of nearly three millions of pounds in weight of the latter article, which had been exported in a year from this country, one half had been sent to Africa alone; for the purposes, doubtless, of maintaining peace, and encouraging civilization among its various tribes! Four or five thousand persons were said also to depend for their bread in manufacturing guns for the African trade; and these, it was pretended, could not make guns of another sort.—But where lay the difficulty?—One of the witnesses had unravelled it. He had seen the Negros maimed by the bursting of these guns. They killed more from the butt than from the muzzle. Another had stated, that on the sea-coast the natives were afraid to fire a trade-gun.

In the West Indian commerce two hundred and forty thousand tons of shipping were stated to be employed. But here deception intruded itself again. This statement included every vessel, great and small, which went from the British West Indies to America, and to the foreign islands; and, what was yet more unfair, all the repeated voyages of each throughout the year. The shipping, which could only fairly be brought into this account, did but just exceed half that which had been mentioned.

In a similar manner had the islands themselves been overrated. Their value had been computed, for the information of the privy council, at thirty-six millions; but the planters had estimated them at seventy. The truth, however, might possibly lie between these extremes. He by no means wished to depreciate their importance; but he did not like that such palpable misrepresentations should go unnoticed.

Page 107

An honourable member (Colonel Tarleton) had disclaimed every attempt to interest the feelings of those present, but had desired to call them to reason and accounts. He also desired (though it was a question of feeling, if any one ever was,) to draw the attention of the committee to reason and accounts—to the voice of reason instead of that of prejudice, and to accounts in the place of idle apprehensions. The result, he doubted not, would be a full persuasion, that policy and justice were inseparable upon this, as upon every other occasion.

The same gentleman had enlarged on the injustice of depriving the Liverpool merchants of a business, on which were founded their honour and their fortunes. On what part of it they founded their honour he could not conjecture, except from those passages in the evidence, where it appeared, that their agents in Africa had systematically practised every fraud and villainy, which the meanest and most unprincipled cunning could suggest, to impose on the ignorance of those with whom they traded.

The same gentleman had also lamented, that the evidence had not been taken upon oath. He himself lamented it too. Numberless facts had been related by eye-witnesses, called in support of the abolition, so dreadfully atrocious, that they appeared incredible; and seemed rather, to use the expression of Ossian, like “the histories of the days of other times.” These procured for the trade a species of acquittal, which it could not have obtained, had the committee been authorised to administer an oath. He apprehended also, in this case, that some other persons would have been rather more guarded in their testimony. Captain Knox would not then perhaps have told the committee, that six hundred slaves could have had comfortable room at night in his vessel of about one hundred and forty tons; when there could have been no more than five feet six inches in length, and fifteen inches in breadth, to about two thirds of his number.

The same gentleman had also dwelt upon the Slave-trade as a nursery for seamen. But it had appeared by the muster-rolls of the slave-vessels, then actually on the table of the House, that more than a fifth of them died in the service, exclusive of those who perished when discharged in the West Indies; and yet he had been instructed by his constituents to maintain this false position. His reasoning, too, was very curious; for, though numbers might die, yet as one half, who entered, were landsmen, seamen were continually forming. Not to dwell on the expensive cruelty of forming these seamen by the yearly destruction of so many hundreds, this very statement was flatly contradicted by the evidence. The muster-rolls from Bristol stated the proportion of landmen in the trade there at one twelfth, and the proper officers of Liverpool itself at but a sixteenth, of the whole employed. In the face again of the most glaring facts, others had maintained that the mortality in these vessels did

Page 108

not exceed that of other trades in the tropical climates. But the same documents, which proved that twenty-three per cent, were destroyed in this wasting traffic, proved that in West India ships only about one and a half per cent. were lost, including every casualty. —But the very men, under whose management this dreadful mortality had been constantly occurring, had coolly said, that much of it might be avoided by proper regulations. How criminal then were they, who, knowing this, had neither publicly proposed, nor in their practice adopted, a remedy!

The average loss of the slaves on board, which had been calculated by Mr. Wilberforce at twelve and a half per cent., had been denied. He believed this calculation, taking in all the circumstances connected with it, to be true; but that for years not less than one tenth had so perished, he would challenge those concerned in the traffic to disprove. Much evidence had been produced on the subject; but the voyages had been generally selected. There was only one, who had disclosed the whole account. This was Mr. Anderson of London, whose engagements in this trade had been very inconsiderable. His loss had only amounted to three per cent.; but, unfortunately for the Slave-traders of Liverpool, his vessel had not taken above three fourths of that number in proportion to the tonnage which they had stated to be necessary to the very existence of their trade.

An honourable member (Mr. Grosvenor) had attributed the protraction of this business to those who had introduced it. But from whom did the motion for further evidence (when that of the privy council was refused) originate, but from the enemies of the abolition? The same gentleman had said, it was impossible to abolish the trade; but where was the impossibility of forbidding the further importation of slaves into our own colonies? and beyond this the motion did not extend.

The latter argument had also been advanced by Sir William Yonge and others. But allowing it its full force, would there be no honour in the dereliction of such a commerce? Would it be nothing publicly to recognise great and just principles? Would our example be nothing?—Yes: every country would learn, from our experiment, that American colonies could be cultivated without the necessity of continual supplies equally expensive and disgraceful.

But we might do more than merely lay down principles or propose examples. We might, in fact, diminish the evil itself immediately by no inconsiderable part,—by the whole of our own supply: and here he could not at all agree with the honourable baronet, in what seemed to him a commercial paradox, that the taking away from an open trade by far the largest customer, and the lessening of the consumption of the article, would increase both the competition and the demand, and of course all those mischiefs, which it was their intention to avert.

That the civilization of the Africans was promoted, as had been asserted, by their intercourse with the Europeans, was void of foundation, as had appeared from the evidence. In manners and dishonesty they had indeed assimilated with those who frequented their coasts. But the greatest industry and the least corruption of morals were in the interior, where they were out of the way of this civilizing connection.

Page 109

To relieve Africa from famine, was another of the benign reasons which had been assigned for continuing the trade. That famines had occurred there, he did not doubt; but that they should annually occur, and with such arithmetical exactness as to suit the demands of the Slave-trade, was a circumstance most extraordinary; so wonderful indeed, that, could it once be proved, he should consider it as a far better argument in favour of the divine approbation of that trade, than any which had ever yet been produced.

As to the effect of the abolition on the West Indies, it would give weight to every humane regulation which had been made; by substituting a certain and obvious interest, in the place of one depending upon chances and calculation. An honourable member (Mr. Stanley) had spoken of the impossibility of cultivating the estates there without further importations of Negros; and yet, of all the authorities he had brought to prove his case, there was scarcely one which might not be pressed to serve more or less effectually against him. Almost every planter he had named had found his Negros increase under the good treatment he had professed to give them; and it was an axiom, throughout the whole evidence, that wherever they were well used importations were not necessary. It had been said indeed by some adverse witnesses, that in Jamaica all possible means had been used to keep up the stock by breeding; but how preposterous was this, when it was allowed that the morals of the slaves had been totally neglected, and that the planters preferred buying a larger proportion of males than females!

The misfortune was, that prejudice and not reason was the enemy to be subdued. The prejudices of the West Indians on these points were numerous and inveterate. Mr. Long himself had characterized them on this account, in terms which he should have felt diffident in using. But Mr. Long had shown his own prejudices also. For he justified the chaining of the Negros on board the slave-vessels, on account of “their bloody, cruel, and malicious dispositions.” But hear his commendation of some of the Aborigines of Jamaica, “who had miserably perished in caves, whither they had retired to escape the tyranny of the Spaniards. These,” says he, “left a glorious monument of their having disdained to survive the loss of their liberty and their country.” And yet this same historian could not perceive that this natural love of liberty might operate as strongly and as laudably in the African Negro, as in the Indian of Jamaica.

He was concerned to acknowledge that these prejudices were yet further strengthened by resentment against those who had taken an active part in the abolition of the Slave-trade. But it was never the object of these to throw a stigma on the whole body of the West Indians; but to prove the miserable effects of the trade. This it was their duty to do; and if, in doing this, disgraceful circumstances had come out, it was not their fault; and it must never be forgotten that they were true.

Page 110

That the slaves were exposed to great misery in the islands, was true as well from inference as from facts: for what might not be expected from the use of arbitrary power, where the three characters of party, judge, and executioner were united! The slaves too were more capable on account of their passions, than the beasts of the field, of exciting the passions of their tyrants. To what a length the ill treatment of them might be carried, might be learnt from the instance which General Tottenham mentioned to have seen in the year 1780 in the streets of Bridge Town, Barbadoes: "A youth about nineteen (to use his own words in the evidence), entirely naked, with an iron collar about his neck, having five long projecting spikes. His body both before and behind, was covered with wounds. His belly and thighs were almost cut to pieces, with running ulcers all over them; and a finger might have been laid in some of the weals. He could not sit down, because his hinder part was mortified; and it was impossible for him to lie down, on account of the prongs of his collar." He supplicated the General for relief. The latter asked, who had punished him so dreadfully? The youth answered, his master had done it. And because he could not work, this same master, in the same spirit of perversion, which extorts from scripture a justification of the Slave-trade, had fulfilled the apostolic maxim, that he should have nothing to eat. The use he meant to make of this instance was to show the unprotected state of the slaves. What must it be, where such an instance could pass not only unpunished, but almost unregarded! If, in the streets of London, but a dog were to be seen lacerated like this miserable man, how would the cruelty of the wretch be execrated, who had thus even abused a brute!

The judicial punishments also inflicted upon the Negro showed the low estimation, in which, in consequence of the strength of old customs and deep-rooted prejudices, they were held. Mr. Edwards, in his speech to the Assembly at Jamaica, stated the following case, as one which had happened in one of the rebellions there. Some slaves surrounded the dwelling-house of their mistress. She was in bed with a lovely infant. They deliberated upon the means of putting her to death in torment. But in the end one of them reserved her for his mistress; and they killed her infant with an axe before her face. "Now," says Mr. Edwards, (addressing himself to his audience,) "you will think that no torments were too great for such horrible excesses. Nevertheless I am of a different opinion. I think that death, unaccompanied with cruelty, should be the utmost exertion of human authority over our unhappy fellow-creatures." Torments, however, were always inflicted in these cases. The punishment was gibbeting alive, and exposing the delinquents to perish by the gradual effects of hunger, thirst, and a parching sun; in which situation they were known to suffer for nine days, with a fortitude

Page 111

scarcely credible, never uttering a single groan. But horrible as the excesses might have been, which occasioned these punishments, it muse be remembered, that they were committed by ignorant savages, who had been dragged from all they held most dear; whose patience had been exhausted by a cruel and loathsome confinement during their transportation; and whose resentment had been wound up to the highest pitch of fury by the lash of the driver.

But he would now mention another instance, by way of contrast, out of the evidence. A child on board a slave-ship, of about ten months old, took sulk and would not eat. The captain flogged it with a cat; swearing that he would make it eat, or kill it. From this and other ill-treatment the child's legs swelled. He then ordered some water to be made hot to abate the swelling. But even his tender mercies were cruel; for the cook, on putting his hand into the water, said it was too hot. Upon this the captain swore at him, and ordered the feet to be put in. This was done. The nails and skin came off. Oiled cloths were then put round them. The child was at length tied to a heavy log. Two or three days afterwards, the captain caught it up again; and repeated that he would make it eat, or kill it. He immediately flogged it again, and in a quarter of an hour it died. But, after the child was dead, whom should the barbarian select to throw it overboard, but the wretched mother? In vain she started from the office. He beat her, till he made her take up the child and carry it to the side of the vessel. She then dropped it into the sea, turning her head the other way that she might not see it. Now it would naturally be asked, Was not this captain also gibbered alive? Alas! although the execrable, barbarity of the European exceeded that of the Africans before mentioned, almost as much as his opportunities of instruction had been greater than theirs, no notice whatsoever was taken of this horrible action; and a thousand similar cruelties had been committed in this abominable trade with equal impunity: but he would say no more. He should vote for the abolition, not only as it would do away all the evils complained of in Africa and the Middle Passage; but as it would be the most effectual means of ameliorating the condition of those unhappy persons, who were still to continue slaves in the British colonies.

Mr. Courtenay rose. He said, he could not but consider the assertion of Sir William Yonge as a mistake, that the Slave-trade, if abandoned by us, would fall into the hands of France. It ought to be recollected, with what approbation the motion for abolishing it, made by the late Mirabeau, had been received; although the situation of the French colonies might then have presented obstacles to carrying the measure into immediate execution. He had no doubt, if parliament were to begin, so wise and enlightened a body as the National Assembly would follow the example. But even if France were not to relinquish the trade, how could we, if justice required its abolition, hesitate as to our part of it?

Page 112

The trade, it had been said, was conducted upon the principles of humanity. Yes: we rescued the Africans from what we were pleased to call their wretched situation in their own country, and then we took credit for our humanity; because, after having killed one half of them in the seasoning, we substituted what we were again pleased to call a better treatment than that which they would have experienced at home.

It had been stated that the principle of war among savages was a general massacre. This was not true. They frequently adopted the captives into their own families; and, so far from massacring the women and children, they often gave them the protection which the weakness of their age and sex demanded.

There could be no doubt, that the practice of kidnapping prevailed in Africa. As to witchcraft, it had been made a crime in the reign of James the First in this country, for the purpose of informations; and how much more likely were informations to take place in Africa, under the encouragement afforded by the Slave-trade! This trade, it had been said, was sanctioned by twenty-six acts of parliament. He did not doubt but fifty-six might be found, by which parliament had sanctioned witchcraft; of the existence of which we had now no belief whatever.

It had been said by Mr. Stanley, that the pulpit had been used as an instrument of attack on the Slave-trade. He was happy to learn it had been so well employed; and he hoped the Bishops would rise up in the House of Lords, with the virtuous indignation which became them, to abolish a traffic so contrary to humanity, justice, and religion.

He entreated every member to recollect, that on his vote that night depended the happiness of millions; and that it was then in his power to promote a measure, of which the benefits would be felt over one whole quarter of the globe; that the seeds of civilization might, by the present bill, be sown all over Africa; and the first principles of humanity be established in regions, where they had hitherto been excluded by the existence of this execrable trade.

Lord Carysfort rose, and said, that the great cause of the abolition had flourished by the manner in which it had been opposed. No one argument of solid weight has been adduced against it. It had been shown, but never disproved, that the colonial laws were inadequate to the protection of the slaves; that the punishments of the latter were most unmerciful; that they were deprived of the right of self-defence against any White man; and, in short, that the system was totally repugnant to the principles of the British constitution.

Colonel Phipps followed Lord Carysfort. He denied that this was a question in which the rights of humanity and the laws of nature were concerned. The Africans became slaves in consequence of the constitution of their own governments. These were founded in absolute despotism. Every subject was an actual slave. The inhabitants were slaves to the great men; and the great men were slaves to the Prince. Prisoners of war, too, were

by law subject to slavery. Such being the case, he saw no more cruelty in disposing of them to our merchants, than to those of any other nation. Criminals also in cases of adultery and witchcraft became slaves by the same laws.

Page 113

It had been said, that there were no regulations in the West Indies for the protection of slaves. There were several; though he was ready to admit, that more were necessary; and he would go in this respect as far as humanity might require. He had passed ten months in Jamaica, where he had never seen any such acts of cruelty as had been talked of. Those which he had seen were not exercised by the Whites, but by the Blacks. The dreadful stories, which had been told, ought no more to fix a general stigma upon the planters, than the story of Mrs. Brownrigg to stamp this polished metropolis with the general brand of murder. There was once a haberdasher's wife (Mrs. Nairne) who locked up her apprentice girl, and starved her to death; but did ever any body think of abolishing haberdashery on this account? He was persuaded the Negros in the West Indies were cheerful and happy. They were fond of ornaments; but it was not the characteristic of miserable persons to show a taste for finery. Such a taste, on the contrary, implied a cheerful and contented mind. He was sorry to differ from his friend Mr. Wilberforce, but he must oppose his motion.

Mr. Pitt rose, and said, that from the first hour of his having had the honour to sit in parliament down to the present, among all the questions, whether political or personal, in which it had been his fortune to take a share, there had never been one in which his heart was so deeply interested as in the present; both on account of the serious principles it involved, and the consequences connected with it.

The present was not a mere question of feeling. The argument, which ought in his opinion to determine the committee, was, that the Slave-trade was unjust. It was therefore such a trade as it was impossible for him to support, unless it could be first proved to him, that there were no laws of morality binding upon nations; and that it was not the duty of a legislature to restrain its subjects from invading the happiness of other countries, and from violating the fundamental principles of justice.

Several had stated the impracticability of the measure before them. They wished to see the trade abolished; but there was some necessity for continuing it, which they conceived to exist. Nay, almost every one, he believed, appeared to wish, that the further importation of slaves might cease; provided it could be made out, that the population of the West Indies could be maintained without it. He proposed therefore to consider the latter point; for, as the impracticability of keeping up the population there appeared to operate as the chief objection, he trusted that, by showing it to be ill founded, he should clear away all other obstacles whatever; so that, having no ground either of justice or necessity to stand upon, there could be no excuse left to the committee for resisting the present motion.

Page 114

He might reasonably, however, hope that they would not reckon any small or temporary disadvantage, which might arise from the abolition, to be a sufficient reason against it. It was surely not any slight degree of expediency, nor any small balance of profit, nor any light shades of probability on the one side, rather than on the other, which would determine them on this question. He asked pardon even for the supposition. The Slave-trade was an evil of such magnitude, that there must be a common wish in the committee at once to put an end to it, if there were no great and serious obstacles. It was a trade, by which multitudes of unoffending nations were deprived of the blessings of civilization, and had their peace and happiness invaded. It ought therefore to be no common expediency, it ought to be nothing less than the utter ruin of our islands, which it became those to plead, who took upon them to defend the continuance of it.

He could not help thinking that the West India gentlemen had manifested an over great degree of sensibility as to the point in question; and that their alarms had been unreasonably excited upon it. He had examined the subject carefully for himself; and he would now detail those reasons, which had induced him firmly to believe, not only that no permanent mischief would follow from the abolition; but not even any such temporary inconvenience, as could be stated to be a reason for preventing the House from agreeing to the motion before them; on the contrary, that the abolition itself would lay the foundation for the more solid improvement of all the various interests of those colonies.

In doing this he should apply his observations chiefly to Jamaica, which contained more than half the slaves in the British West Indies; and if he should succeed in proving that no material detriment could arise to the population there, this would afford so strong a presumption with respect to the other islands, that the House could no longer hesitate, whether they should, or should not, put a stop to this most horrid trade.

In the twenty years ending in 1788, the annual loss of slaves in Jamaica (that is, the excess of deaths above the births,) appeared to be one in the hundred. In a preceding period the loss was greater; and, in a period before that, greater still; there having been a continual gradation in the decrease through the whole time. It might fairly be concluded, therefore, that (the average loss of the last period being one per cent.) the loss in the former part of it would be somewhat more, and in the latter part somewhat less, than one per cent.; insomuch that it might be fairly questioned, whether, by this time, the births and deaths in Jamaica might not be stated as nearly equal. It was to be added, that a peculiar calamity, which swept away fifteen thousand slaves, had occasioned a part of the mortality in the last-mentioned period. The probable loss, therefore, now to be expected was very inconsiderable indeed.

Page 115

There was, however, one circumstance to be added, which the West India gentlemen, in stating this matter, had entirely overlooked; and which was so material, as clearly to reduce the probable diminution in the population of Jamaica down to nothing. In all the calculations he had referred to of the comparative number of births and deaths, all the Negros in the island were included. The newly imported, who died in the seasoning, made a part. But these swelled, most materially, the number of the deaths. Now as these extraordinary deaths would cease, as soon as the importations ceased, a deduction of them ought to be made from his present calculation.

But the number of those, who thus died in the seasoning, would make up of itself nearly the whole of that one per cent., which had been stated. He particularly pressed an attention to this circumstance; for the complaint of being likely to want hands in Jamaica, arose from the mistake of including the present unnatural deaths, caused by the seasoning, among the natural and perpetual causes of mortality. These deaths, being erroneously taken into the calculations, gave the planters an idea, that the numbers could not be kept up. These deaths, which were caused merely by the Slave-trade, furnished the very ground, therefore, on which the continuance of that trade had been thought necessary.

The evidence as to this point was clear; for it would be found in that dreadful catalogue of deaths, arising from the seasoning and the passage, which the House had been condemned to look into, that one half died. An annual mortality of two thousand slaves in Jamaica might be therefore charged to the importation; which, compared with the whole number on the island, hardly fell short of the whole one per cent. decrease.

Joining this with all the other considerations, he would then ask, Could the decrease of the slaves in Jamaica be such—could the colonies be so destitute of means—could the planters, when by their own accounts they were establishing daily new regulations for the benefit of the slaves—could they, under all these circumstances, be permitted to plead that total impossibility of keeping up their number, which they had rested on, as being indeed the only possible pretext for allowing fresh importations from Africa? He appealed therefore to the sober judgment of all, whether the situation of Jamaica was such, as to justify a hesitation in agreeing to the present motion.

It might be observed also, that, when the importations should stop, that disproportion between the sexes, which was one of the obstacles to population, would gradually diminish; and a natural order of things be established. Through the want of this natural order a thousand grievances were created, which it was impossible to define; and which it was in vain to think that, under such circumstances, we could cure. But the abolition of itself would work this desirable effect. The West Indians would then feel a near and urgent interest to enter into a thousand little details, which it was impossible for him to describe, but which would have the greatest influence on population. A foundation would thus be laid for the general welfare of the islands; a new system would rise up,

the reverse of the old; and eventually both their general wealth and happiness would increase.

Page 116

He had now proved far more than he was bound to do; for, if he could only show that the abolition would not be ruinous, it would be enough. He could give up, therefore, three arguments out of four, through the whole of what he had said, and yet have enough left for his position. As to the Creoles, they would undoubtedly increase. They differed in this entirely from the imported slaves, who were both a burthen and a curse to themselves and others. The measure now proposed would operate like a charm; and, besides stopping all the miseries in Africa and the passage, would produce even more benefit in the West Indies than legal regulations could effect.

He would now just touch upon the question of emancipation. A rash emancipation of the slaves would be mischievous. In that unhappy situation, to which our baneful conduct had brought ourselves and them, it would be no justice on either side to give them liberty. They were as yet incapable of it; but their situation might be gradually amended. They might be relieved from every thing harsh and severe; raised from their present degraded state; and put under the protection of the law. Till then, to talk of emancipation was insanity. But it was the system of fresh importations, which interfered with these principles of improvement; and it was only the abolition which could establish them. This suggestion had its foundation in human nature. Wherever the incentive of honour, credit, and fair profit appeared, energy would spring up; and when these labourers should have the natural springs of human action afforded them, they would then rise to the natural level of human industry.

From Jamaica he would now go to the other islands. In Barbadoes the slaves had rather increased. In St. Kitts the decrease for fourteen years had been but three fourths per cent.; but here many of the observations would apply, which he had used in the case of Jamaica. In Antigua many had died by a particular calamity. But for this, the decrease would have been trifling. In Nevis and Montserrat there was little or no disproportion of the sexes; so that it might well be hoped, that the numbers would be kept up in these islands. In Dominica some controversy had arisen about the calculation; but Governor Orde had stated an increase of births above the deaths. From Grenada and St. Vincents no accurate accounts had been delivered in answer to the queries sent them; but they were probably not in circumstances less favourable than in the other islands.

On a full review then, of the state of the Negro population in the West Indies, was there any serious ground of alarm from the abolition of the Slave-trade? Where was the impracticability, on which alone so many had rested their objections? Must we not blush at pretending, that it would distress our consciences to accede to this measure, as far as the question of the Negro population was concerned?

Page 117

Intolerable were the mischiefs of this trade, both in its origin and through every stage of its progress. To say that slaves could be furnished us by fair and commercial means was ridiculous. The trade sometimes ceased, as during the late war. The demand was more or less according to circumstances. But how was it possible, that to a demand so exceedingly fluctuating the supply should always exactly accommodate itself? Alas! we made human beings the subject of commerce; we talked of them as such; and yet we would not allow them the common principle of commerce, that the supply must accommodate itself to the consumption. It was not from wars, then, that the slaves were chiefly procured. They were obtained in proportion as they were wanted. If a demand for slaves arose, a supply was forced in one way or other; and it was in vain, overpowered as we then were with positive evidence, as well as the reasonableness of the supposition, to deny that by the Slave-trade we occasioned all the enormities which had been alleged against it.

Sir William Yonge had said, that, if we were not to take the Africans from their country, they would be destroyed. But he had not yet read, that all uncivilized nations destroyed their captives. We assumed therefore what was false. The very selling of them implied this: for, if they would sell their captives for profit, why should they not employ them so as to receive a profit also? Nay, many of them, while there was no demand from the slave-merchants, were often actually so employed. The trade, too, had been suspended during the war; and it was never said, or thought, that any such consequence had then followed.

The honourable baronet had also said in justification of the Slave-trade, that witchcraft commonly implied poison, and was therefore a punishable crime; but did he recollect that not only the individual accused, but that his whole family, were sold as slaves? The truth was, we stopped the natural progress of civilization in Africa. We cut her off from the opportunity of improvement. We kept her down in a state of darkness, bondage, ignorance and bloodshed. Was not this an awful consideration for this country? Look at the map of Africa, and see how little useful intercourse had been established on that vast continent! While other countries were assisting and enlightening each other, Africa alone had none of these benefits. We had obtained as yet only so much knowledge of her productions, as to show that there was a capacity for trade, which we checked. Indeed, if the mischiefs there were out of the question, the circumstance of the Middle Passage alone would, in his mind, be reason enough for the abolition. Such a scene as that of the slave-ships passing over with their wretched cargoes to the West Indies, if it could be spread before the eyes of the House, would be sufficient of itself to make them vote in favour of it; but when it could be added, that the interest even of the West Indies themselves rested on the accomplishment of this great event, he could not conceive an act of more imperious duty, than that, which was imposed upon the House, of agreeing to the present motion.

Page 118

Sir Archibald Edmonstone rose, and asked, whether the present motion went so far, as to pledge those who voted for it, to a total and immediate abolition.

Mr. Alderman Watson rose next. He defended the Slave-trade as highly beneficial to the country, being one material branch of its commerce. But he could not think of the African trade without connecting it with the West Indian. The one hung upon the other. A third important branch also depended upon it; which was the Newfoundland fishery: the latter could not go on, if it were not for the vast quantity of inferior fish bought up for the Negros in the West Indies; and which was quite unfit for any other market. If therefore we destroyed the African, we destroyed the other trades. Mr. Turgot, he said, had recommended in the National Assembly of France the gradual abolition of the Slave-trade. He would therefore recommend it to the House to adopt the same measure, and to soften the rigours of slavery by wholesome regulations; but an immediate abolition he could not countenance.

Mr. Fox at length rose. He observed that some expressions, which he had used on the preceding day, had been complained of as too harsh and severe. He had since considered them; but he could not prevail upon himself to retract them; because, if any gentleman, after reading the evidence on the table, and attending to the debate, could avow himself an abetter of this shameful traffic in human flesh, it could only be either from some hardness of heart, or some difficulty of understanding, which he really knew not how to account for.

Some had considered this question as a question of political, whereas it was a question of personal, freedom. Political freedom was undoubtedly a great blessing; but, when it came to be compared with personal, it sank to nothing. To confound the two, served therefore to render all arguments on either perplexing and unintelligible. Personal freedom was the first right of every human being. It was a right, of which he who deprived a fellow-creature was absolutely criminal in so depriving him, and which he who withheld was no less criminal in withholding. He could not therefore retract his words with respect to any, who (whatever respect he might otherwise have for them) should, by their vote of that night, deprive their fellow-creatures of so great a blessing. Nay, he would go further. He would say, that if the House, knowing what the trade was by the evidence, did not by their vote mark to all mankind their abhorrence of a practice so savage, so enormous, so repugnant to all laws human and divine, they would consign their character to eternal infamy.

Page 119

That the pretence of danger to our West Indian islands from the abolition of the Slave-trade was totally unfounded, Mr. Wilberforce had abundantly proved: but if there were they, who had not been satisfied with that proof, was it possible to resist the arguments of Mr. Pitt on the same subject? It had been shown, on a comparison of the births and deaths in Jamaica, that there was not now any decrease of the slaves. But if there had been, it would have made no difference to him in his vote; for, had the mortality been ever so great there, he should have ascribed it to the system of importing Negros, instead of that of encouraging their natural increase. Was it not evident, that the planters thought it more convenient to buy them fit for work, than to breed them? Why, then, was this horrid trade to be kept up?—To give the planters, truly, the liberty of misusing their slaves, so as to check population; for it was from ill-usage only that, in a climate so natural to them, their numbers could diminish. The very ground, therefore, on which the planters rested the necessity of fresh importations, namely, the destruction of lives in the West Indies, was itself the strongest argument that could be given, and furnished the most imperious call upon parliament for the abolition of the trade.

Against this trade innumerable were the charges. An honourable member, Mr. Smith, had done well to introduce those tragical stories, which had made such an impression upon the House. No one of these had been yet controverted. It had indeed been said, that the cruelty of the African captain to the child was too bad to be true; and we had been desired to look at the cross-examination of the witness, as if we should find traces of the falsehood of his testimony there. But his cross-examination was peculiarly honourable to his character; for after he had been pressed, in the closest manner, by some able members of the House, the only inconsistency they could fix upon him was, whether the fact had happened on the same day of the same month of the year 1764 or the year 1765.

But it was idle to talk of the incredibility of such instances. It was not denied, that absolute power was exercised by the slave-captains; and if this was granted, all the cruelties charged upon them would naturally follow. Never did he hear of charges so black and horrible as those contained in the evidence on the table. They unfolded such a scene of cruelty, that if the House, with all their present knowledge of the circumstances, should dare to vote for its continuance, they must have nerves, of which he had no conception. We might find instances indeed, in history, of men violating the feelings of nature on extraordinary occasions. Fathers had sacrificed their sons and daughters, and husbands their wives; but to imitate their characters we ought to have not only nerves as strong as the two Brutuses, but to take care that we had a cause as good; or that we had motives for such a dereliction of our feelings as patriotic as those, which historians had annexed to these when they handed them to the notice of the world.

Page 120

But what was our motive in the case before us?—to continue a trade which was a wholesale sacrifice of a whole order and race of our fellow-creatures; which carried them away by force from their native country, in order to subject them to the mere will and caprice, the tyranny and oppression, of other human beings, for their whole natural lives, them and their posterity for ever!! O most monstrous wickedness! O unparalleled barbarity! And, what was more aggravating, this most complicated scene of robbery and murder which mankind had ever witnessed, had been honoured by the name of—-trade.

That a number of human beings should be at all times ready to be furnished as fair articles of commerce, just as our occasions might require, was absurd. The argument of Mr. Pitt on this head was unanswerable. Our demand was fluctuating: it entirely ceased at some times: at others it was great and pressing. How was it possible, on every sudden call, to furnish a sufficient return in slaves, without resorting to those execrable means of obtaining them, which were stated in the evidence? These were of three sorts, and he would now examine them.

Captives in war, it was urged, were consigned either to death or slavery. This, however, he believed to be false in point of fact. But suppose it were true; Did it not become us, with whom it was a custom, founded in the wisest policy, to pay the captives a peculiar respect and civility, to inculcate the same principles in Africa? But we were so far from doing this, that we encouraged wars for the sake of taking, not men's goods and possessions, but men themselves; and it was not the war which was the cause of the Slave-trade, but the Slave-trade which was the cause of the war. If was the practice of the slave-merchants to try to intoxicate the African kings in order to turn them to their purpose. A particular instance occurred in the evidence of a prince, who, when sober, resisted their wishes; but in the moment of inebriety he gave the word for war, attacked the next village, and sold the inhabitants to the merchants.

The second mode was kidnapping. He referred the House to various instances of this in the evidence: but there was one in particular, from which we might immediately infer the frequency of the practice. A Black trader had kidnapped a girl and sold her; but he was presently afterwards kidnapped and sold himself; and, when he asked the captain who bought him, "What! do you buy me, who am a great trader?" the only answer was, "Yes, I will buy you, or her, or any body else, provided any one will sell you;" and accordingly both the trader and the girl were carried to the West Indies and sold for slaves.

Page 121

The third mode of obtaining slaves was by crimes committed or imputed. One of these was adultery. But was Africa the place, where Englishmen, above all others, were to go to find out and punish adulterers? Did it become us to cast the first stone? It was a most extraordinary pilgrimage for a most extraordinary purpose! And yet upon this plea we justified our right of carrying off its inhabitants. The offence alleged next was witchcraft. What a reproach it was to lend ourselves to this superstition!—Yes: we stood by; we heard the trial; we knew the crime to be impossible; and that the accused must be innocent: but we waited in patient silence for his condemnation; and then we lent our friendly aid to the police of the country, by buying the wretched convict, with all his family; whom, for the benefit of Africa, we carried away also into perpetual slavery.

With respect to the situation of the slaves in their transportation, he knew not how to give the House a more correct idea of the horrors of it, than by referring them to the printed section of the slave-ship; where the eye might see what the tongue must fall short in describing. On this dismal part of the subject he would not dwell. He would only observe, that the acts of barbarity, related of the slave-captains in these voyages, were so extravagant, that they had been attributed in some instances to insanity. But was not this the insanity of arbitrary power? Who ever read the facts recorded of Nero without suspecting he was mad? Who would not be apt to impute insanity to Caligula —or Domitian—or Caracalla—or Commodus—or Heliogabalus? Here were six Roman emperors, not connected in blood, nor by descent, who, each of them, possessing arbitrary power, had been so distinguished for cruelty, that nothing short of insanity could be imputed to them. Was not the insanity of the masters of slave-ships to be accounted for on the same principles?

Of the slaves in the West Indies it had been said, that they were taken from a worse state to a better. An honourable member, Mr. W. Smith, had quoted some instances out of the evidence to the contrary. He also would quote one or two others. A slave under hard usage had run away. To prevent a repetition of the offence his owner sent for his surgeon, and desired him to cut off the man's leg. The surgeon refused. The owner, to render it a matter of duty in the surgeon, broke it. "Now," says he, "you must cut it off; or the man will die." We might console ourselves, perhaps, that this happened in a French island; but he would select another instance, which had happened in one of our own. Mr. Ross heard the shrieks of a female issuing from an outhouse; and so piercing, that he determined to see what was going on. On looking in he perceived a young female tied up to a beam by her wrists; entirely naked; and in the act of involuntary writhing and swinging; while the author of her torture was standing below her with a lighted torch in his hand, which he applied to all the parts of her body as it approached him. What crime this miserable woman had perpetrated he knew not; but the human mind could not conceive a crime warranting such a punishment.

Page 122

He was glad to see that these tales affected the House. Would they then sanction enormities, the bare recital of which made them shudder? Let them remember that humanity did not consist in a squeamish ear. It did not consist in shrinking and starting at such tales as these; but in a disposition of the heart to remedy the evils they unfolded. Humanity belonged rather to the mind than to the nerves. But, if so, it should prompt men to charitable exertion. Such exertion was necessary in the present case. It was necessary for the credit of our jurisprudence at home, and our character abroad. For what would any man think of our justice, who should see another hanged for a crime, which would be innocence itself, if compared with those enormities, which were allowed in Africa and the West Indies under the sanction of the British parliament?

It had been said, however, in justification of the trade, that the Africans were less happy at home than in the Islands. But what right had we to be judges of their condition? They would tell us a very different tale, if they were asked. But it was ridiculous to say, that we bettered their condition, when we dragged them from every thing dear in life to the most abject state of slavery.

One argument had been used, which for a subject so grave was the most ridiculous he had ever heard. Mr. Alderman Watson had declared the Slave-trade to be necessary on account of its connection with our fisheries. But what was this but an acknowledgment of the manner, in which these miserable beings were treated? The trade was to be kept up, with all its enormities, in order that there might be persons to consume the refuse fish from Newfoundland, which was too bad for any body else to eat.

It had been said that England ought not to abolish the Slave-trade, unless other nations would also give it up. But what kind of morality was this? The trade was defensible upon no other principle than that of a highwayman. Great Britain could not keep it upon these terms. Mere gain was not a motive for a great country to rest on, as a justification of any measure. Honour was its superior; and justice was superior to honour.

With regard to the emancipation of those in slavery, he coincided with Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Pitt; and upon this principle, that it might be as dangerous to give freedom at once to a man used to slavery, as, in the case of a man who had never seen day-light, to expose him all at once to the full glare of a meridian sun.

With respect to the intellect and sensibility of the Africans, it was pride only, which suggested a difference between them and ourselves. There was a remarkable instance to the point in the evidence, and which he would quote. In one of the slave-ships was a person of consequence; a man, once high in a military station, and with a mind not insensible to the eminence of his rank. He had been taken captive and sold; and was then in the hold, confined promiscuously with

Page 123

the rest. Happening in the night to fall asleep, he dreamed that he was in his own country; high in honour and command; caressed by his family and friends; waited on by his domestics; and surrounded with all his former comforts in life. But awaking suddenly, and finding where he was, he was heard to burst into the loudest groans and lamentations on the miserable contrast of his present state; mixed with the meanest of his subjects; and subjected to the insolence of wretches a thousand times lower than himself in every kind of endowment. He appealed to the House, whether this was not as moving a picture of the miserable effects of the Slave-trade, as could be well imagined. There was one way, by which they might judge of it. Let them make the case their own. This was the Christian rule of judging; and, having mentioned Christianity, he was sorry to find that any should suppose, that it had given countenance to such a system of oppression. So far was this from being the case, that he thought it one of the most splendid triumphs of this religion, that it had caused slavery to be so generally abolished on its appearance in the world. It had done this by teaching us, among other beautiful precepts, that, in the sight of their Maker, all mankind were equal. Its influence appeared to have been more powerful in this respect than that of all the ancient systems of philosophy; though even in these, in point of theory, we might trace great liberality and consideration for human rights. Where could be found finer sentiments of liberty than in Demosthenes and Cicero? Where bolder assertions of the rights of mankind, than in Tacitus and Thucydides? But, alas! these were the holders of slaves! It was not so with those who had been converted to Christianity. He knew, however, that what he had been ascribing to Christianity had been imputed by others to the advances which philosophy had made. Each of the two parties took the merit to itself. The philosopher gave it to philosophy, and the divine to religion. He should not then dispute with either of them; but, as both coveted the praise, why should they not emulate each other by promoting this improvement in the condition of the human race?

He would now conclude by declaring, that the whole country, indeed the whole civilized world, must rejoice that such a bill as the present had been moved for, not merely as a matter of humanity, but as an act of justice; for he would put humanity out of the case. Could it be called humanity to forbear from committing murder? Exactly upon this ground did the present motion stand; being strictly a question of national justice. He thanked Mr. Wilberforce for having pledged himself so strongly to pursue his object till it was accomplished; and, as for himself, he declared, that, in whatever situation he might ever be, he would use his warmest efforts for the promotion of this righteous cause.

Page 124

Mr. Stanley (the member for Lancashire) rose, and declared that, when he came into the house, he intended to vote against the abolition; but that the impression made both on his feelings and on his understanding was such, that he could not persist in his resolution. He was now convinced that the entire abolition of the Slave-trade was called for equally by sound policy and justice. He thought it right and fair to avow manfully this change in his opinion. The abolition, he was sure, could not long fail of being carried. The arguments for it were irresistible.

The honourable Mr. Ryder said, that he came to the house, not exactly in the same circumstances as Mr. Stanley, but very undecided on the subject. He was, however, so strongly convinced by the arguments he had heard, that he was become equally earnest for the abolition.

Mr. Smith (member for Pontefract) said, that he should not trouble the House at so late an hour, further than to enter his protest, in the most solemn manner, against this trade, which he considered as most disgraceful to the country, and contrary to all the principles of justice and religion.

Mr. Sumner declared himself against the total, immediate, and unqualified abolition, which he thought would wound at least the prejudices of the West Indians, and might do mischief; but a gradual abolition should have his hearty support.

Major Scott declared there was no member in the house, who would give a more independent vote upon this question than himself. He had no concern either in the African or West Indian trades; but in the present state of the finances of the country, he thought it would be a dangerous experiment to risk any one branch of our foreign commerce. As far as regulation would go, he would join in the measure.

Mr. Burke said he would use but few words. He declared that he had for a long time had his mind drawn towards this great subject. He had even prepared a bill for the regulation of the trade, conceiving at that time that the immediate abolition of it was a thing hardly to be hoped for; but when he found that Mr. Wilberforce had seriously undertaken the work, and that his motion was for the abolition, which he approved much more than his own, he had burnt his papers; and made an offering of them in honour of his nobler proposition, much in the same manner as we read, that the curious books were offered up and burnt at the approach of the Gospel. He highly applauded the confessions of Mr. Stanley and Mr. Ryder. It would be a glorious tale for them to tell their constituents, that it was impossible for them, however prejudiced, if sent to hear discussion in that house, to avoid surrendering up their hearts and judgments at the shrine of reason.

Mr. Drake said, that he would oppose the abolition to the utmost. We had by a want of prudent conduct lost America. The house should be aware of being carried away by the meteors with which they had been dazzled. The leaders, it was true, were for the

abolition; but the minor orators, the dwarfs, the pigmies, he trusted, would that night carry the question against them. The property of the West Indians was at stake; and, though men might be generous with their own property, they should not be so with the property of others.

Page 125

Lord Sheffield reprobated the overbearing language, which had been used by some gentlemen towards others, who differed in opinion from them on a subject of so much difficulty as the present. He protested against a debate, in which he could trace nothing like reason; but, on the contrary, downright phrensy, raised perhaps by the most extraordinary eloquence. The abolition, as proposed, was impracticable. He denied the right of the legislature to pass a law for it. He warned the Chancellor of the Exchequer to beware of the day, on which the bill should pass, as the worst he had ever seen.

Mr. Milnes declared, that he adopted all those expressions against the Slave-trade, which had been thought so harsh; and that the opinion of the noble lord had been turned in consequence of having become one of the members for Bristol. He quoted a passage from Lord Sheffield's pamphlet; and insisted that the separation of families in the West Indies, there complained of by himself, ought to have compelled him to take the contrary side of the question.

Mr. Wilberforce made a short reply to some arguments in the course of the debate; after which, at half past three in the morning, the House divided. There appeared for Mr. Wilberforce's motion eighty-eight, and against it one hundred and sixty-three; so that it was lost by a majority of seventy-five votes.

By this unfavourable division the great contest, in which we had been so long engaged, was decided. We were obliged to give way to superior numbers. Our fall, however, grievous as it was, was rendered more tolerable by the circumstance of having been prepared to expect it. It was rendered more tolerable also by other considerations; for we had the pleasure of knowing, that we had several of the most distinguished characters in the kingdom, and almost all the splendid talents of the House of Commons[A], in our favour. We knew too, that the question had not been carried against us either by evidence or by argument; but that we were the victims of the accidents and circumstances of the times. And as these considerations comforted us, when we looked forward to future operations on this great question, so we found great consolation as to the past, in believing, that, unless human constitutions were stronger then they really were, we could not have done more than we had done towards the furtherance of the cause.

[Footnote A: It is a pity that no perfect list was ever made of this or of any other division in the House of Commons on this subject. I can give, however, the names of the following members, as having voted for Mr. Wilberforce's motion at this time.

Mr. Pitt,	Hon. R. Fitzpatrick,
Mr. Fox,	Sir William Dolben,
Mr. Burke,	Sir Henry Houghton,
Mr. Grey,	Sir Edward Lyttleton,
Mr. Windham,	Sir William Scott,

Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Samuel Thornton,
Mr. Whitbread, Mr. Henry Thornton,
Mr. Courtenay, Mr. Robert Thornton,

Page 126

Mr. Francis, Mr. Duncombe,
Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Martin,
Mr. Ryder, Mr. Milnes,
Mr. William Smith, Mr. Steele,
Mr. John Smyth, Mr. Coke,
Mr. Robert Smith, Mr. Elliott,
Mr. Powys, Mr. Montagu,
Lord Apsley, Mr. Bastard,
Lord Bayham, Mr. Stanley,
Lord Arden, Mr. Plumer,
Lord Carysfort, Mr. Beaufoy,
Lord Muncaster, Mr. I.H. Browne,
Lord Barnard, Mr. G.N. Edwards,
Lord North, Mr. W.M. Pitt,
Lord Euston, Mr. Bankes.
General Burgoyne]

The committee for the abolition held a meeting soon after this our defeat. It was the most impressive I ever attended. The looks of all bespoke the feelings of their hearts. Little was said previously to the opening of the business; and, after it was opened, it was conducted with a kind of solemn dignity, which became the occasion. The committee, in the course of its deliberations, came to the following resolutions:

That the thanks of this committee be respectfully given to the illustrious minority of the House of Commons, who lately stood forth the assertors of British justice and humanity, and the enemies of a traffic in the blood of man.

That our acknowledgements are particularly due to William Wilberforce, esquire, for his unwearied exertions to remove this opprobrium of our national character; and to the right honourable William Pitt, and the right honourable Charles James Fox, for their virtuous and dignified cooperation in the same cause.

That the solemn declarations of these gentlemen, and of Matthew Montagu and William Smith, esquires, that they will not relinquish, but with life, their struggle for the abolition of the Slave-trade, are not only highly honourable to themselves as Britons, as Statesmen, and as Christians, but must eventually, as the light of evidence shall be more and more diffused, be seconded by the good wishes of every man not immediately interested in the continuance of that detestable commerce.

And, lastly, that anticipating the opposition they should have to sustain from persons trained to a familiarity with the rapine and desolation necessarily attendant on the Slave-

trade, and sensible also of the prejudices which implicitly arise from long-established usages, this committee consider the late decision in the House of Commons as a delay, rather than a defeat. In addressing a free and enlightened nation on a subject, in which its justice, its humanity, and its wisdom are involved, they cannot despair of final success; and they do hereby, under an increasing conviction of the excellence of their cause, and inconformity to the distinguished examples before them, renew their firm protestation, that they will never desist from appealing to their countrymen, till the commercial intercourse with Africa shall cease to be polluted with the blood of its inhabitants.

These resolutions were published, and they were followed by a suitable report.

Page 127

The committee, in order to strengthen themselves for the prosecution of their great work, elected Sir William Dolben, baronet, Henry Thornton, Lewis Alexander Grant, and Matthew Montagu, esquires, who were members of parliament, and Truman Harford, Josiah Wedgwood, jun. esquire, and John Clarkson, esquire, of the royal navy, as members of their own body; and they elected the Reverend Archdeacon Plymloy (now Corbett) an honorary and corresponding member, in consequence of the great services which he had rendered their cause in the shires of Hereford and Salop, and the adjacent counties of Wales.

The several committees, established in the country, on receiving the resolutions and report as before mentioned, testified their sympathy in letters of condolence to that of London on the late melancholy occasion; and expressed their determination to support it as long as any vestiges of this barbarous traffic should remain.

At length the session ended; and though, in the course of it, the afflicting loss of the general question had occurred, there was yet an attempt made by the abolitionists in parliament, which met with a better fate. The Sierra Leone company received the sanction of the legislature. The object of this institution was to colonize a small portion of the coast of Africa. They, who were to settle there, were to have no concern in the Slave-trade, but to discourage it as much as possible. They were to endeavour to establish a new species of commerce, and to promote cultivation in its neighbourhood by free labour. The persons more generally fixed upon for colonists, were such Negros, with their wives and families, as chose to abandon their habitations in Nova Scotia. These had followed the British arms in America; and had been settled there, as a reward for their services, by the British government. My brother, just mentioned to have been chosen a member of the committee, and who had essentially served the great cause of the abolition on many occasions, undertook a visit to Nova Scotia, to see if those in question were willing to undergo the change; and in that case to provide transports, and conduct them to Sierra Leone. This object he accomplished. He embarked more than eleven hundred persons in fifteen vessels, of all which he took the command. On landing them he became the first Governor of the new Colony. Having laid the foundation of it, he returned to England; when a successor was appointed. From that time many unexpected circumstances, but particularly devastations by the French in the beginning of the war, took place, which, contributed to ruin the trading company, which was attached to it. It is pleasing, however, to reflect, that though the object of the institution, as far as mercantile profit was concerned, thus failed, the other objects belonging to it were promoted. Schools, places of worship, agriculture, and the habits of civilized life, were established. Sierra Leone, therefore, now presents itself as the medium of civilization

Page 128

for Africa. And, in this latter point of view, it is worth all the treasure which has been lost in supporting it: for the Slave-trade, which was the great obstacle to this civilization, being now happily abolished, there is a metropolis, consisting of some hundreds of persons, from which may issue the seeds of reformation to this injured continent; and which, when sown, may be expected to grow into fruit without interruption. New schools may be transplanted from thence into the interior. Teachers, and travellers on discovery, may be sent from thence in various directions; who may return to it occasionally as to their homes. The natives too, able now to travel in safety, may resort to it from various parts. They may see the improvements which are going on from time to time. They may send their children to it for education. And thus it may become the medium[A] of a great intercourse between England and Africa, to the benefit of each other.

[Footnote A: To promote this desirable end an association took place last year, called The African Institution, under the patronage of the Duke of Gloucester, as president, and of the friends to the African cause, particularly of such as were in parliament, and as belonged to the committee for the abolition of the Slave-trade.]

CHAPTER IV.

Continuation from July 1791 to July 1792—Author travels round the kingdom again—-Object of his journey—People begin to leave off the use of sugar—to form committees—and to send petitions to Parliament—Motion made in the House of Commons for the immediate abolition of the trade—Debates upon it—Abolition resolved upon, but not to commence till 1796—Resolution taken to the Lords—Latter determine upon hearing evidence—Evidence at length introduced—Further hearing of it postponed to the next session.

The defeat which we had just sustained, was a matter of great triumph to our opponents. When they considered the majority in the House of Commons in their favour, they viewed the resolutions of the committee, which have been detailed, as the last spiteful effort of a vanquished and dying animal, and they supposed that they had consigned the question to eternal sleep. The committee, however, were too deeply attached to the cause, vanquished as they were, to desert it; and they knew also too well the barometer of public feeling, and the occasion of its fluctuations, to despair. In the year 1787 the members of the House of Commons, as well as the people, were enthusiastic in behalf of the abolition of the trade. In the year 1788 the fair enthusiasm of the former began to fade. In 1789 it died. In 1790 prejudice started up as a noxious weed in its place. In 1791 this prejudice arrived at its growth. But to what were these changes owing?—To delay; during which the mind, having been gradually led to the question as a commercial, had been gradually taken from it as a moral object. But it

was possible to restore the mind to its proper place. Add to which, that the nation had never deserted the cause during this whole period.

Page 129

It is much to the honour of the English people, that they should have continued to feel for the existence of an evil which was so far removed from their sight. But at this moment their feelings began to be insupportable. Many of them resolved, as soon as parliament had rejected the bill, to abstain from the use of West Indian produce. In this state of things a pamphlet, written by William Bell Crafton, of Tewksbury, and called “A Sketch of the Evidence, with a Recommendation on the Subject to the Serious Attention of People in general,” made its appearance; and another followed it, written by William Fox, of London, “On the Propriety of abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum.” These pamphlets took the same ground. They inculcated abstinence from these articles as a moral duty; they inculcated it as a peaceable and constitutional measure; and they laid before the reader a truth, which was sufficiently obvious, that if each would abstain, the people would have a complete remedy for this enormous evil in their own power.

While these things were going on, it devolved upon me to arrange all the evidence on the part of the abolition under proper heads, and to abridge it into one volume. It was intended that a copy of this should be sent into different towns of the kingdom, that all might know, if possible, the horrors (as far as the evidence contained them) of this execrable trade; and as it was possible that these copies might lie in the places where they were sent, without a due attention to their contents, I resolved, with the approbation of the committee, to take a journey, and for no other purpose than personally to recommend that they might be read.

The books, having been printed, were dispatched before me. Of this tour I shall give the reader no other account than that of the progress of the remedy, which the people were then taking into their own hands. And first I may observe, that there was no town, through which I passed, in which there was not some one individual who had left off the use of sugar. In the smaller towns there were from ten to fifty by estimation, and in the larger from two to five hundred, who had made this sacrifice to virtue. These were of all ranks and parties. Rich and poor, churchmen and dissenters, had adopted the measure. Even grocers had left off trading in the article, in some places. In gentlemen’s families, where the master had set the example, the servants had often voluntarily followed it; and even children, who were capable of understanding the history of the sufferings of the Africans, excluded, with the most virtuous resolution, the sweets, to which they had been accustomed, from their lips. By the best computation I was able to make from notes taken down in my journey, no fewer than three hundred thousand persons had abandoned the use of sugar.

Page 130

Having travelled over Wales, and two thirds of England, I found it would be impossible to visit Scotland on the same errand. I had already, by moving upwards and downwards in parallel lines, and by intersecting these in the same manner, passed over six thousand miles. By the best calculation I could make, I had yet two thousand to perform. By means of almost incessant journeyings night and day, I had suffered much in my health. My strength was failing daily. I wrote therefore to the committee on this subject; and they communicated immediately with Dr. Dickson, who, on being applied to, visited Scotland in my stead. He consulted first with the committee at Edinburgh relative to the circulation of the Abridgement of the Evidence. He then pursued his journey, and, in conjunction with the unwearied efforts of Mr. Campbel Haliburton, rendered essential service to the cause for this part of the kingdom.

On my return to London I found that the committee had taken into their own body T.F. Forster, B.M. Forster, and James West, esquires, as members; and that they had elected Hercules Ross, esquire, an honorary and corresponding member, in consequence of the handsome manner in which he had come forward as an evidence, and of the peculiar benefit which had resulted from his testimony to the cause.

The effects of the two journeys by Dr. Dickson and myself were soon visible. The people could not bear the facts, which had been disclosed to them by the Abridgement of the Evidence. They were not satisfied, many of them, with the mere abstinence from sugar; but began to form committees to correspond with that of London. The first of these appeared at Newcastle upon Tyne, so early as the month of October. It consisted of the Reverend William Turner as chairman, and of Robert Ormston, William Batson, Henry Taylor, Ralph Bainbridge, George Brown, Hadwen Bragg, David Sutton, Anthony Clapham, George Richardson, and Edward Prowit. It received a valuable addition afterwards by the admission of many others. The second was established at Nottingham. The Reverend Jeremiah Bigsby became the president, and the Rev. G. Walker and J. Smith, and Mess. Dennison, Evans, Watson, Hart, Storer, Bott, Hawkesley, Pennington, Wright, Frith, Hall, and Wakefield, the committee. The third was formed at Glasgow, under the patronage of David Dale, Scott Moncrieff, Robert Graham, Professor Millar, and others. Other committees started up in their turn. At length public meetings began to take place, and after this petitions to be sent to parliament; and these so generally, that there was not a day for three months, Sundays excepted, in which five or six were not resolved upon in some places or other in the kingdom.

Page 131

Of the enthusiasm of the nation at this time none can form an opinion but they who witnessed it. There never was perhaps a season when so much virtuous feeling pervaded all ranks. Great pains were taken by interested persons in many places to prevent public meetings. But no efforts could avail. The current ran with such strength and rapidity, that it was impossible to stem it. In the city of London a remarkable instance occurred. The livery had been long waiting for the common council to begin a petition. But the lord mayor and several of the aldermen stifled it. The former, indignant at this conduct, insisted upon a common hall. A day was appointed; and, though the notice given of it was short, the assemblage was greater than had ever been remembered on any former occasion. Scarcely a liveryman was absent, unless sick, or previously engaged. The petition, when introduced, was opposed by those who had prevented it in the common council. But their voices were drowned amidst groans and hissings. It was shortly after carried; and it had not been signed more than half an hour, before it was within the walls of the House of Commons. The reason of this extraordinary dispatch was, that it had been kept back by intrigue so late, that the very hour, in which it was delivered to the House, was that in which Mr. Wilberforce was to make his new motion.

And as no petitions were ever more respectable than those presented on this occasion, as far as they breathed the voice of the people, and as far as they were founded on a knowledge of the object which they solicited, so none were ever more numerous, as far as we have any record of such transactions. Not fewer than three hundred and ten were presented from England; one hundred and eighty-seven from Scotland; and twenty from Wales. Two other petitions also for the abolition came from England, but they were too late for delivery. On the other side of the question, one was presented from the town of Reading for regulation, in opposition to that for abolition from the same place. There were also four against abolition. The first of these was from certain persons at Derby in opposition to the other from that town. The second was from Stephen Fuller, esquire, as agent for Jamaica. The third from J. Dawson, esquire, a slave-merchant at Liverpool. And the fourth from the merchants, planters, mortgagees, annuitants, and others concerned in the West Indian colonies. Taking in all these statements, the account stood thus. For regulation there was one; against all abolition there were four; and for the total abolition of the trade five hundred and nineteen.

On the second of April Mr. Wilberforce moved the order of the day; which having been agreed to, Sir William Dolben was put into the chair.

Page 132

He then began by soliciting the candid attention of the West Indians to what he was going to deliver to the House. However others might have censured them indiscriminately, he had always himself made a distinction between them and their system. It was the latter only, which he reprobated. If aristocracy had been thought a worse form of government than monarchy, because the people had many tyrants instead of one, how objectionable must be that form of it, which existed in our colonies! Arbitrary power could be bought there by any one, who could buy a slave. The fierceness of it was doubtless restrained by an elevation of mind in many, as arising from a consciousness of superior rank and consequence: but, alas! it was too often exercised there by the base and vulgar. The more liberal too of the planters were not resident upon their estates. Hence a promiscuous censure of them would be unjust, though their system would undoubtedly be odious.

As for the cure of this monstrous evil, he had shown, last year, that internal regulations would not produce it. These could have no effect, while the evidence of slaves was inadmissible. What would be the situation of the bulk of the people of this country, if only gentlemen of five hundred a-year were admitted as evidences in our courts of law? Neither was the cure of it in the emancipation of the slaves. He did not deny that he wished them this latter blessing. But, alas, in their present degraded state, they were unfit for it! Liberty was the child of reason and order. It was indeed a plant of celestial growth, but the soil must be prepared for its reception. He, who would see it flourish and bring forth its proper fruit, must not think it sufficient to let it shoot in unrestrained licentiousness. But if this inestimable blessing was ever to be imparted to them, the cause must be removed, which obstructed its introduction. In short, no effectual remedy could be found but in the abolition of the Slave-trade.

He then took a copious view of the advantages, which would arise both to the master and to the slave, if this traffic were done away; and having recapitulated and answered the different objections to such a measure, he went to that part of the subject, in which he described himself to be most interested.

He had shown, he said, last year, that Africa was exposed to all the horrors of war; and that most of these wars had their origin in the Slave-trade. It was then said, in reply, that the natural barbarity of the natives was alone sufficient to render their country a scene of carnage. This was triumphantly instanced in the king of Dahomey. But his honourable friend Lord Muncaster, then in the House, had proved in his interesting publication, which had appeared since, called Historical Sketches of the Slave-trade and of its Effects in Africa, addressed to the People of Great Britain, that the very cruelties of this king, on which so much stress had been laid, were committed by him in a war, which had been undertaken expressly to punish an adjacent people for having stolen some of his subjects and sold them for slaves.

Page 133

He had shown also last year, that kings were induced to seize and sell their subjects, and individuals each other, in consequence of the existence of the Slave-trade.

He had shown also, that the administration of justice was perverted, so as to become a fertile source of supply to this inhuman traffic; that every crime was punished by slavery; that false accusations were made, to procure convicts; and that even the judges had a profit on the convictions.

He had shown again, that many acts of violence were perpetrated by the Europeans themselves. But he would now relate others, which had happened since. The captain of an English vessel, lying in the river Cameroons, sent his boat with three sailors and a slave to get water. A Black trader seized the latter, and took him away. He alleged in his defence, that the captain owed him goods to a greater amount than the value of the slave; and that he would not pay him.

This being told on board, the captain, and a part of his crew, who were compelled to blacken their naked bodies that they might appear like the natives, went on shore at midnight, armed with muskets and cutlasses. They fired on the trader's dwelling, and killed three of his children on the spot. The trader, being badly wounded, died while they were dragging him to the boat; and his wife, being wounded also, died in half an hour after she was on board the ship. Resistance having been made to these violent proceedings, some of the sailors were wounded, and one was killed. Some weeks after this affray, a chieftain of the name of Quarmo went on board the same vessel to borrow some cutlasses and muskets. He was going, he said, into the country to make war; and the captain should have half of his booty. So well understood were the practices of the trade, that his request was granted. Quarmo, however, and his associates, finding things favourable to their design, suddenly seized the captain, threw him overboard, hauled him into their canoe, and dragged him to the shore; where another party of the natives, lying in ambush, seized such of the crew as were absent from the ship. But how did these savages behave, when they had these different persons in their power? Did they not instantly retaliate by murdering them all? No—they only obliged the captain to give an order on the vessel to pay his debts. This fact came out only two months ago in a trial in the court of common pleas—not in a trial for piracy and murder—but in the trial of a civil suit, instituted by some of the poor sailors, to whom the owners refused their wages, because the natives, on account of the villanous conduct of their captain, had kept them from their vessel by detaining them as prisoners on shore. This instance, he said, proved the dreadful nature of the Slave-trade, its cruelty, its perfidy, and its effect on the Africans as well as on the Europeans, who carried it on. The cool manner, in which the transaction was conducted on both sides, showed that these practices were not novel. It showed also the manner of doing business in the trade. It must be remembered too, that these transactions were carrying on at the very time when the inquiry concerning this trade was going forward in Parliament, and whilst the witnesses of his opponents were strenuously denying not only the actual, but the possible, existence of any such depredations.

Page 134

But another instance happened only in August last. Six British ships, the Thomas, Captain Phillips; the Wasp, Captain Hutchinson; the Recovery, Captain Kimber, of Bristol; and the Martha, Captain Houston; the Betsey, Captain Doyle; and the Amachree, (he believed,) Captain Lee, of Liverpool; were anchored off the town of Calabar. This place was the scene of a dreadful massacre about twenty years before. The captains of these vessels, thinking that the natives asked too much for their slaves, held a consultation, how they should proceed; and agreed to fire upon the town unless their own terms were complied with. On a certain evening they notified their determination to the traders; and told them, that, if they continued obstinate, they would put it into execution the next morning. In this they kept their word. They brought sixty-six guns to bear upon the town; and fired on it for three hours. Not a shot was returned. A canoe then went off to offer terms of accommodation. The parties however not agreeing, the firing recommenced; more damage was done; and the natives were forced into submission. There were no certain accounts of their loss. Report said that fifty were killed; but some were seen lying badly wounded, and others in the agonies of death, by those who went afterwards on shore.

He would now say a few words relative to the Middle Passage, principally to show, that regulation could not effect a cure of the evil there. Mr. Isaac Wilson had stated in his evidence, that the ship, in which he sailed, only three years ago, was of three hundred and seventy tons; and that she carried six hundred and two slaves. Of these she lost one hundred and fifty-five. There were three or four other vessels in company with her, and which belonged to the same owners. One of these carried four hundred and fifty, and buried two hundred; another carried four hundred and sixty-six, and buried seventy-three; another five hundred and forty-six, and buried one hundred and fifty-eight; and from the four together, after the landing of their cargoes, two hundred and twenty died. He fell in with another vessel, which had lost three hundred and sixty-two; but the number, which had been bought, was not specified. Now if to these actual deaths, during and immediately after the voyage, we were to add the subsequent loss in the seasoning, and to consider that this would be greater than ordinary in cargoes which were landed in such a sickly state, we should find a mortality, which, if it were only general for a few months, would entirely depopulate the globe.

But he would advert to what Mr. Wilson said, when examined, as a surgeon, as to the causes of these losses, and particularly on board his own ship, where he had the means of ascertaining them. The substance of his reply was this—That most of the slaves laboured under a fixed melancholy, which now and then broke out into lamentations and plaintive songs, expressive of the loss of their relations,

Page 135

friends, and country. So powerfully did this sorrow operate, that many of them attempted in various ways to destroy themselves, and three actually effected it. Others obstinately refused to take sustenance; and when the whip and other violent means were used to compel them to eat, they looked up in the face of the officer, who unwillingly executed this painful task, and said with a smile, in their own language, “Presently we shall be no more.” This, their unhappy state of mind, produced a general languor and debility, which were increased in many instances by an unconquerable aversion to food, arising partly from sickness, and partly, to use the language of the slave-captains, from sulkiness. These causes naturally produced the flux. The contagion spread; several were carried off daily; and the disorder, aided by so many powerful auxiliaries, resisted the power of medicine. And it was worth while to remark, that these grievous sufferings were not owing either to want of care on the part of the owners, or to any negligence or harshness of the captain; for Mr. Wilson declared, that his ship was as well fitted out, and the crew and slaves as well treated, as any body could reasonably expect.

He would now go to another ship. That, in which Mr. Claxton sailed as a surgeon, afforded a repetition of all the horrid circumstances which had been described. Suicide was attempted, and effected; and the same barbarous expedients were adopted to compel the slaves to continue an existence, which they considered as too painful to be endured. The mortality also was as great. And yet here again the captain was in no wise to blame. But this vessel had sailed since the regulating act. Nay, even in the last year the deaths on shipboard would be found to have been between ten and eleven per cent. on the whole number exported. In truth, the House could not reach the cause of this mortality by all their regulations. Until they could cure a broken heart—until they could legislate for the affections, and bind by their statutes the passions and feelings of the mind, their labour would be in vain.

Such were the evils of the Passage. But evils were conspicuous every where, in this trade. Never was there indeed a system so replete with wickedness and cruelty. To whatever part of it we turned our eyes, whether to Africa, the Middle Passage, or the West Indies, we could find no comfort, no satisfaction, no relief. It was the gracious ordinance of Providence, both in the natural and moral world, that good should often arise out of evil. Hurricanes cleared the air; and the propagation of truth was promoted by persecution. Pride, vanity, and profusion contributed often, in their remoter consequences, to the happiness of mankind. In common, what was in itself evil and vicious was permitted to carry along with it some circumstances of palliation. The Arab was hospitable; the robber brave. We did not necessarily find cruelty associated with fraud, or meanness with injustice.

Page 136

But here the case was far otherwise. It was the prerogative of this detested traffic to separate from evil its concomitant good, and to reconcile discordant mischiefs. It robbed war of its generosity; it deprived peace of its security: we saw in it the vices of polished society, without its knowledge or its comforts; and the evils of barbarism without its simplicity. No age, no sex, no rank, no condition was exempt from the fatal influence of this wide-wasting calamity. Thus it attained to the fullest measure of pure, unmixed, unsophisticated wickedness; and, scorning all competition and comparison, it stood without a rival in the secure, undisputed, possession of its detestable preeminence.

But, after all this, wonderful to relate, this execrable traffic had been defended on the ground of benevolence! It had been said, that the slaves were captives and convicts, who, if we were not to carry them away, would be sacrificed, and many of them at the funerals of people of rank, according to the savage custom of Africa. He had shown, however, that our supplies of slaves were obtained from other quarters than these. But he would wave this consideration for the present. Had it not been acknowledged by his opponents, that the custom of ransoming slaves prevailed in Africa? With respect to human sacrifices, he did not deny, that there might have been some instances of these; but they had not been proved to be more frequent than amongst other barbarous nations; and, where they existed, being acts of religion, they would not be dispensed with for the sake of commercial gain. In fact, they had nothing to do with the Slave-trade; only perhaps, if it were abolished, they might, by means of the civilization which would follow, be done away.

But, exclusively of these sacrifices, it had been asserted, that it was kindness to the inhabitants to take them away from their own country. But what said the historians of Africa, long before the question of the abolition was started? “Axim,” says Bosman, “is cultivated, and abounds with numerous large and beautiful villages: its inhabitants are industriously employed in trade, fishing, or agriculture.”—“The inhabitants of Adom always expose large quantities of corn to sale, besides what they want for their own use.”—“The people of Acron husband their grounds and time so well, that every year produces a plentiful harvest.” Speaking of the Fetu country, he says, “Frequently, when walking through it, I have seen it abound with fine well built and populous towns, agreeably enriched with vast quantities of corn and cattle, palm-wine and oil. The inhabitants all apply themselves without distinction to agriculture; some sow corn; others press oil, and draw wine from the palm-trees.”

Smith, who was sent out by the royal African company in 1726, assures us, “that the discerning natives account it their greatest unhappiness, that they were ever visited by the Europeans. They say that we Christians introduced the traffic of slaves; and that before our coming they lived in peace. But, say they, it is observable, wherever Christianity comes, there come swords and guns and powder and ball with it.”

Page 137

“The Europeans,” says Bruce, “are far from desiring to act as peace-makers among them. It would be too contrary to their interests; for the only object of their wars is to carry off slaves; and, as these form the principal part of their traffic, they would be apprehensive of drying up the source of it, were they to encourage the people to live well together.”

“The neighbourhood of the Damel and Tin keep them perpetually at war, the benefit of which accrues to the Company, who buy all the prisoners made on either side; and the more there are to sell, the greater is their profit; for the only end of their armaments is to make captives, to sell them to the White traders.”

Artus, of Dantzic, says that in his time, “those liable to pay fines were banished till the fine was paid; when they returned to their houses and possessions.”

Bosman affirms “that formerly all crimes in Africa were compensated by fine or restitution, and, where restitution was impracticable, by corporal punishment.”

Moore says, “Since this trade has been used, all punishments have been changed into slavery. There being an advantage in such condemnation, they strain the crimes very hard, in order to get the benefit of selling the criminal. Not only murder, theft, and adultery, are punished by selling the criminal for a slave, but every trifling crime is punished in the same manner.”

Loyer affirms that “the King of Sain, on the least pretence, sells his subjects for European goods. He is so tyrannically severe, that he makes a whole village responsible for the fault of one inhabitant; and on the least offence sells them all for slaves.”

Such, he said, were the testimonies, not of persons whom he had summoned; not of friends of the abolition: but of men who were themselves, many of them, engaged in the Slave-trade. Other testimonies might be added; but these were sufficient to refute the assertions of his opponents, and to show the kind services we had done to Africa by the introduction of this trade.

He would just touch upon the argument, so often repeated, that other nations would carry on the Slave-trade, if we abandoned it. But how did we know this? Had not Denmark given a noble example to the contrary? She had consented to abolish the trade in ten years; and had she not done this, even though we, after an investigation for nearly five years, had ourselves hung back? But what might not be expected, if we were to take up the cause in earnest; if we were to proclaim to all nations the injustice of the trade, and to solicit their concurrence in the abolition of it! He hoped the representatives of the nation would not be less just than the people. The latter had stepped forward, and expressed their sense more generally by petitions, than in any instance in which they had ever before interfered. To see this great cause thus

triumphing over distinctions and prejudices was a noble spectacle. Whatever might be said

Page 138

of our political divisions, such a sight had taught us, that there were subjects still beyond the reach of party; that there was a point of elevation, where we ascended above the jarring of the discordant elements, which ruffled and agitated the vale below. In our ordinary atmosphere clouds and vapours obscured the air, and we were the sport of a thousand conflicting winds and adverse currents; but here we moved in a higher region, where all was pure and clear, and free from perturbation and discomposure.

"As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm;
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Here then, on this august eminence, he hoped we should build the Temple of Benevolence; that we should lay its foundation deep in Truth and Justice; and that we should inscribe upon its gates, "Peace and Goodwill to Men." Here we should offer the first-fruits of our benevolence, and endeavour to compensate, if possible, for the injuries we had brought upon our fellow-men.

He would only now observe, that his conviction of the indispensable necessity of immediately abolishing this trade remained as strong as ever. Let those who talked of allowing three or four years to the continuance of it, reflect on the disgraceful scenes which had passed last year. As for himself, he would wash his hands of the blood which would be spilled in this horrid interval. He could not, however, but believe, that the hour was come, when we should put a final period to the existence of this cruel traffic. Should he unhappily be mistaken, he would never desert the cause; but to the last moment of his life he would exert his utmost powers in its support. He would now move, "That it is the opinion of this committee, that the trade carried on by British subjects for the purpose of obtaining slaves on the coast of Africa, ought to be abolished."

Mr. Baillie was in hopes that the friends of the abolition would have been contented with the innocent blood which had been already shed. The great island of St. Domingo had been torn to pieces by insurrections. The most dreadful barbarities had been perpetrated there. In the year 1789 the imports into it exceeded five millions sterling. The exports from it in the same year amounted to six millions; and the trade employed three hundred thousand tons of shipping, and thirty thousand seamen. This fine island, thus advantageously situated, had been lost in consequence of the agitation of the question or the Slave-trade. Surely so much mischief ought to have satisfied those who supported it; but they required the total destruction of all the West Indian colonies, belonging to Great Britain, to complete the ruin.

Page 139

The honourable gentleman, who had just spoken, had dwelt, upon the enormities of the Slave-trade. He was far from denying, that many acts of inhumanity might accompany it; but as human nature was much the same every where, it would be unreasonable to expect among African traders, or the inhabitants of our islands, a degree of perfection in morals, which was not to be found in Great Britain itself. Would any man estimate the character of the English nation by what was to be read in the records of the Old Bailey? He himself, however, had lived sixteen years in the West Indies, and he could bear testimony to the general good usage of the slaves.

Before the agitation of this impolitic question the slaves were contented with their situation. There was a mutual confidence between them and their masters: and this continued to be the case till the new doctrines were broached. But now depots of arms were necessary on every estate; and the scene was totally reversed. Nor was their religious then inferior to their civil state. When the English took possession of Grenada, where his property lay, they found them baptized and instructed in the principles of the Roman Catholic faith. The priests of that persuasion had indeed been indefatigable in their vocation; so that imported Africans generally obtained within twelve months a tolerable idea of their religious duties. He had seen the slaves there go through the public mass in a manner, and with a fervency, which would have done credit to more civilized societies. But the case was now altered; for, except where the Moravians had been, there was no trace in our islands of an attention to their religious interests.

It had been said, that their punishments were severe. There might be instances of cruelty; but these were not general. Many of them were undoubtedly ill disposed; though not more, according to their number, on a plantation, than in a regiment, or in a ship's crew. Had we never heard of seamen being flogged from ship to ship, or of soldiers dying in the very act of punishment? Had we not also heard, even in this country of boasted liberty, of seamen being seized, and carried away, when returning from distant voyages, after an absence of many years; and this without even being allowed to see their wives and families? As to distressed objects, he maintained, that there was more wretchedness and poverty in St. Giles's, than in all the West Indian islands belonging to Great Britain.

He would now speak of the African and West Indian trades. The imports and exports of these amounted to upwards of ten millions annually; and they gave employment to three hundred thousand tons of shipping, and to about twenty-five thousand seamen. These trades had been sanctioned by our ancestors in parliament. The acts for this purpose might be classed under three heads. First, they were such as declared the colonies and the trade thereof advantageous to Great Britain,

Page 140

and therefore entitled to her protection. Secondly, such as authorised, protected, and encouraged the trade to Africa, as advantageous in itself, and necessary to the welfare and existence of the sugar colonies: and, Thirdly, such as promoted and secured loans of money to the proprietors of the said colonies, either from British subjects or from foreigners. These acts[A], he apprehended, ought to satisfy every person of the legality and usefulness of these trades. They were enacted in reigns distinguished for the production of great and enlightened characters. We heard then of no wild and destructive doctrines like the present. These were reserved for this age of novelty and innovation. But he must remind the House, that the inhabitants of our islands had as good a right to the protection of their property, as the inhabitants of Great Britain. Nor could it be diminished in any shape without full compensation. The proprietors of lands in the ceded islands, which were purchased of government under specific conditions of settlement, ought to be indemnified. They also (of whom he was one) who had purchased the territory granted by the crown to General Monkton in the Island of St. Vincent, ought to be indemnified also. The sale of this had gone on briskly, till it was known, that a plan was in agitation for the abolition of the Slave-trade. Since that period the original purchasers had done little or nothing, and they had many hundred acres on hand, which would be of no value, if the present question was carried. In fact, they had a right to compensation. The planters generally spent their estates in this country. They generally educated their children in it. They had never been found seditious or rebellious; and they demanded of the Parliament of Great Britain that protection, which, upon the principles of good faith, it was in duty bound to afford them in common with the rest of his majesty's loyal subjects.

[Footnote A: Here he quoted them specifically.]

Mr. Vaughan stated that, being a West Indian by birth and connected with the islands, he could speak from his own knowledge. In the early part of his life he was strongly in favour of the abolition of the Slave-trade. He had been educated by Dr. Priestley and the father of Mrs. Barbauld; who were both of them friends to that question. Their sentiments he had imbibed: but, although bred at the feet of Gamaliel, he resolved to judge for himself, and he left England for Jamaica.

He found the situation of the slaves much better than he had imagined. Setting aside liberty, they were as well off as the poor in Europe. They had little want of clothes or fuel: they had a house and garden found them; were never imprisoned for debts; nor deterred from marrying through fear of being unable to support a family; their orphans and widows were taken care of, as they themselves were when old and disabled; they had medical attendance without expense; they had private property, which no

Page 141

master ever took front them; and they were resigned to their situation, and looked for nothing beyond it. Perhaps persons might have been prejudiced by living in the towns, to which slaves were often sent for punishment; and where there were many small proprietors; or by seeing no Negro otherwise than as belonging to the labouring poor; but they appeared to him to want nothing but liberty; and it was only occasionally that they were abused.

There were two prejudices with respect to the colonies, which he would notice. The first was, that cruel usage occasioned the inequality of births and deaths among the slaves. But did cruelty cause the excess of deaths above births in the city of London? No—this excess had other causes. So it had among the slaves. Of these more males were imported than females: they were dissolute too in their morals; they had also diseases peculiar to themselves. But in those islands where they nearly kept up their numbers, there was this difficulty, that the equality was preserved by the increase on one estate compensating for the decrease on another. These estates, however, would not interchange their numbers; whereas, where freedom prevailed, the free labourers circulated from one employer to another, and appeared wherever they were wanted.

The second was, that all chastisement of the slaves was cruelty. But this was not true. Their owners generally withdrew them from public justice; so that they, who would have been publicly executed elsewhere, were often kept alive by their masters, and were found punished again and again for repeating their faults. Distributive justice occasioned many punishments; as one slave was to be protected against every other slave: and, when one pilfered from another, then the master interfered. These punishments were to be distinguished from such as arose from enforcing labour, or from the cruelty of their owners. Indeed he had gone over the islands, and he had seen but little ill usage. He had seen none on the estate where he resided. The whip, the stocks, and confinement, were all the modes of punishment he had observed in other places. Some slaves belonging to his father were peculiarly well off. They saved money, and spent it in their own way.

But, notwithstanding all he had said, he allowed that there was room for improvement; and particularly for instilling into the slaves the principles of religion. Where this should be realized, there would be less punishment, more work, more marriages, more issue, and more attachment to masters. Other improvements would be the establishment of medical societies; the introduction of task-work; and grants of premiums and honorary distinctions both to fathers and mothers, according to the number of children which they should rear. Besides this, Negro evidence should be allowed in the courts of law, it being left to the discretion of the court or jury to take or reject it, according to the nature of the case. Cruel masters also

Page 142

should be kept in order in various ways. They should be liable to have their slaves taken from them, and put in trust. Every instrument of punishment should be banished, except the whip. The number of lashes should be limited; and the punishment should not be repeated till after intervals. These and other improvements should be immediately adopted by the planters. The character of the exemplary among them was hurt by being confounded with that of lower and baser men. He concluded by stating, that the owners of slaves were entitled to compensation, if, by means of the abolition, they should not be able to find labourers for the cultivation of their lands[A].

[Footnote A: Mr. Vaughan declared in a future stage of the debate, that he wished to see a prudent termination both of the Slave-trade and of slavery; and that, though he was the eldest son of his father, he never would, on any consideration, become the owner of a slave.]

Mr. Henry Thornton conceived, that the two last speakers had not spoken to the point. The first had described the happy state of the slaves in the West Indies. The latter had made similar representations; but yet had allowed, that much improvement might be made in their condition. But this had nothing to do with the question then before them. The manner of procuring slaves in Africa was the great evil to be remedied. Africa was to be stripped of its inhabitants to supply a population for the West Indies. There was a Dutch proverb, which said, “My son, get money, honestly if you can—but get money:” or, in other words, “Get slaves, honestly if you can—but get slaves.” This was the real grievance; and the two honourable gentlemen, by confining their observations to the West Indies, had entirely overlooked it.

Though this evil had been fully proved, he could not avoid stating to the House some new facts, which had come to his knowledge as a director of the Sierra Leone Company, and which would still further establish it. The consideration, that they had taken place since the discussion of the last year on this subject, obliged him to relate them.

Mr. Falconbridge, agent to the Company, sitting one evening in Sierra Leone, heard a shout, and immediately afterwards the report of a gun. Fearing an attack, he armed forty of the settlers, and rushed with them to the place from whence the noise came. He found a poor wretch, who had been crossing from a neighbouring village, in the possession of a party of kidnappers, who were tying his hands. Mr. Falconbridge, however, dared not rescue him, lest, in the defenceless state of his own town, retaliation might be made upon him.

At another time a young woman, living half a mile off, was sold, without any criminal charge, to one of the slave-ships. She was well acquainted with the agent’s wife, and

had been with her only the day before. Her cries were heard; but it was impossible to relieve her.

At another time a young lad, one of the free settlers who went from England, was caught by a neighbouring chief, as he was straggling alone from home, and sold for a slave. The pretext was, that some one in the town of Sierra Leone had committed an offence. Hence the first person belonging to it, who could be seized, was to be punished. Happily the free settlers saw him in his chains; and they recovered him, before he was conveyed to the ship.

Page 143

To mark still more forcibly the scenes of misery, to which the Slave-trade gave birth, he would mention a case stated to him in a letter by King Naimbanna. It had happened to this respectable person, in no less than three instances, to have some branches of his family kidnapped, and carried off to the West Indies. At one time three young men, Corpro, Banna, and Marbrour, were decoyed on board a Danish slave-ship, under pretence of buying something, and were taken away. At another time another relation piloted a vessel down the river. He begged to be put on shore, when he came opposite to his own town; but he was pressed to pilot her to the river's mouth. The captain then pleaded the impracticability of putting him on shore; carried him to Jamaica; and sold him for a slave. Fortunately, however, by means of a letter, which was conveyed there, the man, by the assistance of the governor, was sent back to Sierra Leone. At another time another relation was also kidnapped. But he had not the good fortune, like the former, to return.

He would mention one other instance. A son had sold his own father, for whom he obtained a considerable price: for, as the father was rich in domestic slaves, it was not doubted that he would offer largely for his ransom. The old man accordingly gave twenty-two of these in exchange for himself. The rest, however, being from that time filled with apprehensions of being on some ground or other sold to the slave-ships, fled to the mountains of Sierra Leone, where they now dragged on a miserable existence. The son himself was sold, in his turn, soon after. In short, the whole of that unhappy peninsula, as he learnt from eye-witnesses, had been desolated by the trade in slaves. Towns were seen standing without inhabitants all over the coast; in several of which the agent of the Company had been. There was nothing but distrust among the inhabitants. Every one, if he stirred from home, felt himself obliged to be armed.

Such was the nature of the Slave-trade. It had unfortunately obtained the name of a trade; and many had been deceived by the appellation. But it was war, and not trade. It was a mass of crimes, and not commerce. It was that which prevented the introduction of a trade in Africa; for it was only by clearing and cultivating the lands, that the climate could be made healthy for settlements; but this wicked traffic, by dispersing the inhabitants, and causing the lands to remain uncultivated, made the coast unhealthy to Europeans. He had found, in attempting to establish a colony there, that it was an obstacle, which opposed itself to him in innumerable ways; it created more embarrassments than all the natural impediments of the country; and it was more hard to contend with, than any difficulties of climate, soil, or natural disposition of the people.

Page 144

We would say a few words relative to the numerous petitions, which were then on the table of the House. They had shown, in an extraordinary manner, the opinion of the people. He did not wish to turn this into a constitutional question; but he would observe, that it was of the utmost consequence to the maintenance of the constitution of this country, that the reputation of Parliament should be maintained. But nothing could prejudice its character so much, as a vote, which should lead the people to believe, that the legislative body was the more corrupt part of it, and that it was slow to adopt moral principles.

It had been often insinuated that Parliament, by interfering in this trade, departed from its proper functions. No idea could be more absurd: for, was it not its duty to correct abuses? and what abuses were greater than robbery and murder? He was indeed anxious for the abolition. He desired it, as a commercial man, on account of the commercial character of the country. He desired it for the reputation of Parliament, on which so materially depended the preservation of our happy constitution: but most of all he prayed for it for the sake of those eternal principles of justice, which it was the duty of nations, as well as of individuals, to support.

Colonel Tarleton repeated his arguments of the last year. In addition to these he inveighed bitterly against the abolitionists, as a junto of sectaries, sophists, enthusiasts, and fanatics. He condemned the abolition as useless, unless other nations would take it up. He brought to the recollection of the House the barbarous scenes which had taken place in St. Domingo, all of which, he said, had originated in the discussion of this question. He described the alarms, in which the inhabitants of our own islands were kept, lest similar scenes should occur from the same cause. He ridiculed the petitions on the table. Itinerant clergymen, mendicant physicians, and others, had extorted signatures from the sick, the indigent, and the traveller. School-boys were invited to sign them, under the promise of a holiday. He had letters to produce, which would prove all these things, though he was not authorized to give up the names of those who had written them.

Mr. Montagu said, that, in the last session, he had simply entered his protest against the trade; but now he could be no longer silent; and as there were many, who had conceived regulation to be more desirable than abolition, he would confine himself to that subject.

Regulation, as it related to the manner of procuring slaves, was utterly impossible: for how could we know the case of each individual, whom we forced away into bondage? Could we establish tribunals all along the coast, and in every ship, to find it out? What judges could we get for such an office? But, if this could not be done upon the coast, how could we ascertain the justness of the captivity of by far the greatest number, who were brought from immense distances inland?

Page 145

He would not dwell upon the proof of the inefficiency of regulations, as to the Middle Passage. His honourable friend Mr. Wilberforce had shown, that, however the mortality might have been lessened in some ships by the regulations of Sir William Dolben, yet, wherever a contagious disorder broke out, the greatest part of the cargo was swept away. But what regulations by the British Parliament could prevent these contagions, or remove them suddenly, when they appeared?

Neither would regulations be effectual, as they related to the protection of the slaves in the West Indies. It might perhaps be enacted, as Mr. Vaughan had suggested, that their punishments should be moderate; and that the number of lashes should be limited. But the colonial legislatures had already done as much, as the magic of words alone could do, upon this subject: yet the evidence upon the table clearly proved, that the only protection of slaves was in the clemency of their masters. Any barbarity might be exercised with impunity, provided no White person were to see it, though it happened in the sight of a thousand slaves. Besides, by splitting the offence, and inflicting the punishment at intervals, the law could be evaded, although the fact was within the reach of the evidence of a White man. Of this evasion, Captain Cook, of the eighty-ninth regiment, had given a shocking instance: and Chief Justice Ottley had candidly confessed, that “he could devise no method of bringing a master, so offending, to justice, while the evidence of the slave continued inadmissible.” But perhaps councils of protection, and guardians of the slaves, might be appointed. This again was an expedient, which sounded well; but which would be nugatory and absurd. What person would risk the comfort of his life by the exercise of so invidious an interference? But supposing that one or two individuals could be found, who would sacrifice all their time, and the friendship of their associates, for the good of the slaves; what could they effect? Could they be in all places at once? But even if acts of barbarity should be related to them, how were they to come at the proof of them?

It appeared then that no regulations could be effectual until the slaves were admitted to give their evidence: but to admit them to this privilege in their present state would be to endanger the safety and property of their masters. Mr. Vaughan had, however, recommended this measure with limitations, but it would produce nothing but discontent; for how were the slaves to be persuaded, that it was fit they should be admitted to speak the truth, and then be disbelieved and disregarded? What a fermentation would such a conduct naturally excite in men dismissed with injuries unredressed, though abundantly proved, in their apprehension, by their testimony! In fact, no regulations would do. There was no cure for these evils, but in the abolition of the Slave-trade. He called upon the planters to concur with his honourable friend

Page 146

Mr. Wilberforce in this great measure. He wished them to consider the progress, which the opinion of the injustice of this trade was making in the nation at large, as manifested by the petitions; which had almost obstructed the proceedings of the House by their perpetual introduction. It was impossible for them to stifle this great question. As for himself, he would renew his profession of last year, that he would never cease, but with life, to promote so glorious an end.

Mr. Whitbread said, that even if he could conceive, that the trade was, as some had asserted it to be, founded on principles of humanity; that the Africans were rescued from death in their own country; that, upon being carried to the West Indies, they were put under kind masters; that their labour there was easy; that at evening they returned cheerful to their homes; that in sickness they were attended with care; and that their old age was rendered comfortable; even then he would vote for the abolition of the Slave-trade; inasmuch as he was convinced, that that, which was fundamentally wrong, no practice could justify.

No eloquence could persuade him, that the Africans were torn from their country and their dearest connections, merely that they might lead a happier life; or that they could be placed under the uncontrolled dominion of others without suffering. Arbitrary power would spoil the hearts of the best. Hence would arise tyranny on the one side, and a sense of injury on the other. Hence the passions would be let loose, and a state of perpetual enmity would follow.

He needed only to go to the accounts of those who defended the system of slavery, to show that it was cruel. He was forcibly struck last year by an expression of an honourable member, an advocate for the trade, who, when he came to speak of the slaves, on selling off the stock of a plantation, said, that they fetched less than the common price, because they were damaged.—Damaged!—What! were they goods and chattels? What an idea was this to hold out of our fellow-creatures. We might imagine how slaves were treated, if they could be spoken of in such a manner. Perhaps these unhappy people had lingered out the best part of their lives in the service of their master. Able then to do but little, they were sold for little! and the remaining substance of their sinews was to be pressed out by another, yet more hardened than the former, and who had made a calculation of their vitals accordingly.

As another proof, he would mention a passage in a pamphlet, in which the author, describing the happy situation of the slaves, observed, that a good Negro never wanted a character. A bad one could always be detected by his weals and scars. What was this but to say, that there were instruments in use, which left indelible marks behind them; and who would say, that these were used justly?

An honourable gentleman, Mr. Vaughan, had said, that setting aside slavery, the slaves were better off than the poor in this country. But what was it that we wished to abolish? Was it not the Slave-trade, which would destroy in time the cruel distinction he had mentioned? The same honourable gentleman had also expressed his admiration of their resignation; but might it not be that resignation, which was the consequence of despair?

Page 147

Colonel Tarleton had insinuated, that the petitions on the table had been obtained in an objectionable manner. He had the honour to present one from his constituents; which he would venture to say had originated with themselves; and that there did not exist more respectable names in the kingdom, than those of the persons who had signed it. He had also asserted, that there was a strong similitude in their tenour and substance, as if they had been manufactured by the same persons. This was by no means to be wondered at. There was surely but one plain tale to tell; and it was not surprising, that it had been clothed in nearly the same expressions. There was but one boon to ask, and that was—the abolition of this wicked trade.

It had been said by another, (Mr. Baillie) that the horrible insurrections in St. Domingo arose from the discussion of the question of the Slave-trade. He denied the assertion; and maintained that they were the effect of the trade itself. There was a point of endurance, beyond which human nature could not go; at which the mind of man rose by its native elasticity with a spring and violence proportioned to the degree to which it had been depressed. The calamities in St. Domingo proceeded from the Slave-trade alone; and, if it were continued, similar evils were to be apprehended in our own islands. The cruelties, which the slaves had perpetrated in that unfortunate colony, they had learnt from their masters. Had not an African eyes? Had he not ears? Had he not organs, senses, and passions? If you pricked him, would he not feel the puncture and bleed? If you poisoned him, would he not die? and, if you wronged him, would he not revenge? But he had said sufficient; for he feared he could not better the instruction.

Mr. Milbank would only just observe, that the policy of the measure of the abolition was as great, as its justice was undeniable. Where slavery existed, every thing was out of its natural place. All improvement was at an end. There must also, from the nature of the human heart, be oppression. He warned the planters against the danger of fresh importations, and invited their concurrence in the measure.

Mr. Dundas (now Lord Melville) declared, that he had always been a warm friend to the abolition of the Slave-trade, though he differed with Mr. Wilberforce as to the mode of effecting it.

The abolitionists, and those on the opposite side of the question, had, both of them, gone into extremes. The former were for the immediate and abrupt annihilation of the trade. The latter considered it as essentially necessary to the existence of the West Indian islands, and therefore laid it down, that it was to be continued for ever. Such was the vast distance between the parties. He would now address himself to each.

Page 148

He would say first, that he agreed with his honourable friend Mr. Wilberforce in very material points. He believed the trade was not founded in policy; that the continuation of it was not essential to the preservation of our trade with the West Indian islands; and that the slaves were not only to be maintained, but increased there, by natural population. He agreed, too, as to the propriety of the abolition. But when his honourable friend talked of direct and abrupt abolition, he would submit it to him, whether he did not run counter to the prejudices of those who were most deeply interested in the question; and whether, if he could obtain his object without wounding these, it would not be better to do it? Did he not also forget the sacred attention, which Parliament had ever shown to the private interests and patrimonial rights of individuals?

Whatever idea men might then have of the African trade, certain it was that they, who had connected themselves with it, had done it under the sanction of Parliament. It might also be well worth while to consider (though the conduct of other nations ought not to deter us from doing our duty) whether British subjects in the West Indies might not be supplied with slaves under neutral flags. Now he believed it was possible to avoid these objections, and at the same time to act in harmony with the prejudices which had been mentioned. This might be done by regulations, by which we should effect the end much more speedily than by the way proposed. By regulations, he meant such as would increase the breed of the slaves in the West Indies; such as would ensure a moral education to their children; and such as would even in time extinguish hereditary slavery. The extinction, however, of this was not to be effected by allowing the son of an African slave to obtain his freedom on the death of his parent. Such a son should be considered as born free. He should then be educated at the expense of the person importing his parents; and, when arrived at such a degree of strength as might qualify him to labour, he should work for a term of years for the payment of the expense of his education and maintenance. It was impossible to emancipate the existing slaves at once; nor would such an emancipation be of any immediate benefit to themselves: but this observation would not apply to their descendants, if trained and educated in the manner he had proposed.

He would now address himself to those who adopted the opposite extreme: and he thought he should not assume too much, when he said, that if both slavery and the Slave-trade could be abolished with safety to their property, it deeply concerned their interests to do it. Such a measure, also, would only be consistent with the principles of the British Constitution. It was surely strange that we, who were ourselves free, should carry on a Slave-trade with Africa; and that we should never think of introducing cultivation into the West Indies by free labourers.

Page 149

That such a measure would tend to their interest he had no doubt. Did not all of them agree with Mr. Long, that the great danger in the West Indies arose from the importation of the African slaves there? Mr. Long had asserted, that all the insurrections there arose from these. If this statement were true, how directly it bore upon the present question! But we were told also, by the same author, that the Slave-trade gave rise to robbery, murder, and all kinds of depredations on the coast of Africa. Had this been answered? No: except indeed it had been said, that the slaves were such as had been condemned for crimes. Well then: the imported Africans consisted of all the convicts, rogues, thieves, and vagabonds in Africa. But would the West Indians choose to depend on fresh supplies of these for the cultivation of their lands, and the security of their islands, when it was also found that every insurrection had arisen from them? it was plain the safety of the islands was concerned in this question. There would be danger so long as the trade lasted. The Planters were, by these importations, creating the engines of their own destruction. Surely they would act more to their own interest, if they would concur in extinguishing the trade, than by standing up for its continuance.

He would now ask them, what right they had to suppose that Africa would for ever remain in a state of barbarism. If once an enlightened prince were to rise up there, his first act would be to annihilate the Slave-trade. If the light of heaven were ever to descend upon that continent, it would directly occasion its downfall. It was their interest then to contrive a mode of supplying labour, without trusting to precarious importations from that quarter. They might rest assured that the trade could not continue. He did not allude to the voice of the people in the petitions then lying on the table of the House; but he knew certainly, that an idea not only of the injustice but of the impolicy of this trade had been long entertained by men of the most enlightened understandings in this country. Was it then a prudent thing for them to rest on this commerce for the further improvement of their property?

There was a species of slavery, prevailing only a few years ago, in the collieries in certain boroughs of Scotland. Emancipation there was thought a duty by Parliament: But what an opposition there was to the measure! Nothing but ruin would be the consequence of it! After several years struggle the bill was carried. Within a year after, the ruin so much talked of vanished in smoke, and there was an end of the business. It had also been contended that Sir William Dolben's bill would be the ruin of Liverpool: and yet one of its representatives had allowed, that this bill had been of benefit to the owners of the slave-vessels there. Was he then asking too much of the West Indians, to request a candid consideration of the real ground of their alarms? He would conclude by stating, that he meant to propose a middle way of proceeding. If there was a number of members in the House, who thought with him, that this trade ought to be ultimately abolished, but yet by moderate measures, which should neither invade the property nor the prejudices of individuals; he wished them to unite, and they might then reduce the question to its proper limits.

Page 150

Mr. Addington (the speaker) professed himself to be one of those moderate persons called upon by Mr. Dundas. He wished to see some middle measure suggested. The fear of doing injury to the property of others, had hitherto prevented him from giving an opinion against a system, the continuance of which he could not countenance.

He utterly abhorred the Slave-trade. A noble and learned lord, who had now retired from the bench, said on a certain occasion, that he pitied the loyalty of that man, who imagined that any epithet could aggravate the crime of treason. So he himself knew of no language which could aggravate the crime of the Slave-trade. It was sufficient for every purpose of crimination, to assert, that man thereby was bought and sold, or that he was made subject to the despotism of man. But though he thus acknowledged the justice due to a whole continent on the one side, he confessed there were opposing claims of justice on the other. The case of the West Indians deserved a tender consideration also.

He doubted, if we were to relinquish the Slave-trade alone, whether it might not be carried on still more barbarously than at present; and whether, if we were to stop it altogether, the islands could keep up their present stocks. It had been asserted that they could. But he thought that the stopping of the importations could not be depended upon for this purpose, so much as a plan for providing them with more females.

With the mode suggested by his right honourable friend, Mr. Dundas, he was pleased, though he did not wholly agree to it. He could not grant liberty to the children born in the islands. He thought also, that the trade ought to be permitted for ten or twelve years longer, under such arrangements as should introduce a kind of management among the slaves there, favourable to their interests, and of course to their future happiness. One species of regulation which he should propose, would be greater encouragement to the importation of females than of males, by means of a bounty on the former till their numbers should be found equal. Rewards also might be given to those slaves who should raise a certain number of children; and to those who should devise means of lightening negro-labour. If the plan of his honourable friend should comprehend these regulations, he would heartily concur in it. He wished to see the Slave-trade abolished. Indeed it did not deserve the name of a trade. It was not a trade, and ought not to be allowed. He was satisfied, that in a few years it would cease to be the reproach of this nation and the torment of Africa. But under regulations like these, it would cease without any material injury to the interests of others.

Mr. Fox said, that after what had fallen from the two last speakers he could remain no longer silent. Something so mischievous had come out, and something so like a foundation had been laid for preserving, not only for years to come, but for ever, this detestable traffic, that he should feel himself wanting in his duty, if he were not to deprecate all such deceptions and delusions upon the country.

Page 151

The honourable gentlemen had called themselves moderate men: but upon this subject he neither felt, nor desired to feel, any thing like a sentiment of moderation. Their speeches had reminded him of a passage in Middleton's Life of Cicero. The translation of it was defective, though it would equally suit his purpose. He says, "To enter into a man's house, and kill him, his wife, and family, in the night, is certainly a most heinous crime, and deserving of death; but to break open his house, to murder him, his wife, and all his children, in the night, may be still very right, provided it be done with moderation." Now, was there any thing more absurd in this passage, than to say, that the Slave-trade might be carried on with moderation; for, if you could not rob or murder a single man with moderation, with what moderation could you pillage and wound a whole nation? In fact, the question of the abolition was simply a question of justice. It was only, whether we should authorize by law, respecting Africa, the commission of crimes, for which, in this country, we should forfeit our lives; notwithstanding which, it was to be treated, in the opinion of these honourable gentlemen, with moderation.

Mr. Addington had proposed to cure the disproportion of the sexes in the islands, by a bounty on the importation of females; or, in other words, by offering a premium to any crew of ruffians, who would tear them from their native country. He would let loose a banditti against the most weak and defenceless of the sex. He would occasion these to kill fathers, husbands, and brothers, to get possession of their relatives, the females, who, after this carnage, were to be reserved for—slavery. He should like to see the man, who would pen such a moderate clause for a British Parliament.

Mr. Dundas had proposed to abolish the Slave-trade, by bettering the state of the slaves in the islands, and particularly that of their offspring. His plan, with respect to the latter, was not a little curious. They were to become free, when born; and then they were to be educated at the expense of those to whom their fathers belonged. But it was clear, that they could not be educated for nothing. In order, therefore, to repay this expense, they were to be slaves for ten or fifteen years. In short, they were to have an education, which was to qualify them to become freemen; and, after they had been so educated, they were to become slaves. But as this free education might possibly unfit them for submitting to slavery; so, after they had been made to bow under the yoke for ten or fifteen years, they might then, perhaps, be equally unfit to become free; and therefore, might be retained as slaves for a few years longer, if not for their whole lives. He never heard of a scheme so moderate, and yet so absurd and visionary.

The same honourable gentleman had observed, that the conduct of other nations should not hinder us from doing our duty; but yet neutrals would furnish our islands with slaves. What was the inference from this moderate assertion, but that we might as well supply them ourselves? He hoped, if we were yet to be supplied, it would never be by Englishmen. We ought no longer to be concerned in such a crime.

Page 152

An adversary, Mr. Baillie, had said, that it would not be fair to take the character of this country from the records of the Old Bailey. He did not at all wonder, when the subject of the Slave-trade was mentioned, that the Old Bailey naturally occurred to his recollection. The facts which had been described in the evidence, were associated in all our minds with the ideas of criminal justice. But Mr. Baillie had forgot the essential difference between the two cases. When we learnt from these records, that crimes were committed in this country, we learnt also, that they were punished with transportation and death. But the crimes committed in the Slave-trade were passed over with impunity. Nay, the perpetrators were even sent out again to commit others.

As to the mode of obtaining slaves, it had been suggested as the least disreputable, that they became so in consequence of condemnation as criminals. But he would judge of the probability of this mode by the reasonableness of it. No less than eighty thousand Africans were exported annually by the different nations of Europe from their own country. Was it possible to believe, that this number could have been legally convicted of crimes, for which they had justly forfeited their liberty? The supposition was ridiculous. The truth was, that every enormity was practised to obtain the persons of these unhappy people. He referred those present to the case in the evidence of the African trader, who had kidnapped and sold a girl, and who was afterwards kidnapped and sold himself. He desired them to reason upon the conversation which had taken place between the trader and the captain of the ship on this occasion. He desired them also to reason upon the instance mentioned this evening, which had happened in the river Cameroons, and they would infer all the rapine, all the desolation, and all the bloodshed, which had been placed to the account of this execrable trade.

An attempt had been made to impress the House with the horrible scenes which had taken place in St. Domingo, as an argument against the abolition of the Slave-trade; but could any more weighty argument be produced in its favour? What were the causes of the insurrections there? They were two. The first was the indecision of the National Assembly, who wished to compromise between that which was right and that which was wrong on this subject. And the second was the oppression of the People of Colour, and of the Slaves. In the first of the causes we saw something like the moderation of Mr. Dundas and Mr. Addington. One day this Assembly talked of liberty, and favoured the Blacks. Another day they suspended their measures, and favoured the Whites. They wished to steer a middle course; but decision had been mercy. Decision even against the Planters would have been a thousand times better than indecision and half measures. In the mean time, the People of Colour took the great work of justice into their own hands. Unable,

Page 153

however, to complete this of themselves, they called in the aid of the Slaves. Here began the second cause; for the Slaves, feeling their own power, began to retaliate on the Whites. And here it may be observed, that, in all revolutions, the clemency or cruelty of the victors will always be in proportion to their former privileges, or their oppression. That the Slaves then should have been guilty of great excesses was not to be wondered at; for where did they learn their cruelty? They learnt it from those who had tyrannized over them. The oppression, which they themselves had suffered, was fresh in their memories, and this had driven them to exercise their vengeance so furiously. If we wished to prevent similar scenes in our own islands, we must reject all moderate measures, and at once abolish the Slave-trade. By doing this, we should procure a better treatment for the Slaves there; and when this happy change of system should have taken place, we might depend on them for the defence of the islands as much as on the Whites themselves.

Upon the whole, he would give his opinion of this traffic in a few words. He believed it to be impolitic—he knew it to be inhuman—he was certain it was unjust—he though it so inhuman and unjust, that, if the colonies could not be cultivated without it, they ought not to be cultivated at all. It would be much better for us to be without them, than not abolish the Slave-trade. He hoped therefore that members would this night act the part which would do them honour. He declared, that, whether he should vote in a large minority or a small one, he would never give up the cause. Whether in the House of Parliament or out of it, in whatever situation he might ever be, as long as he had a voice to speak, this question should never be at rest. Believing the trade to be of the nature of crimes and pollutions, which stained the honour of the country, he would never relax his efforts. It was his duty to prevent man from preying upon man; and if he and his friends should die before they had attained their glorious object, he hoped there would never be wanting men alive to their duty, who would continue to labour till the evil should be wholly done away. If the situation of the Africans was as happy as servitude could make them, he could not consent to the enormous crime of selling man to man; nor permit a practice to continue, which put an entire bar to the civilization of one quarter of the globe. He was sure that the nation would not much longer allow the continuance of enormities which shocked human nature. The West Indians had no right to demand that crimes should be permitted by this country for their advantage; and, if they were wise, they would lend their cordial assistance to such measures, as would bring about, in the shortest possible time, the abolition of this execrable trade.

Mr. Dundas rose again, but it was only to move an amendment, namely, that the word “gradually” should be inserted before the words “to be abolished” in Mr. Wilberforce’s motion.

Page 154

Mr. Jenkinson (now Lord Hawkesbury) said, that the opinions of those who were averse to the abolition had been unfairly stated. They had been described as founded on policy, in opposition to humanity. If it could be made out that humanity would be aided by the abolition, he would be the last person to oppose it. The question was not, he apprehended, whether the trade was founded in injustice and oppression. He admitted it was: nor was it, whether it was in itself abstractedly an evil: he admitted this also: but whether, under all the circumstances of the case, any considerable advantage would arise to a number of our fellow-creatures from the abolition of the trade in the manner in which it had been proposed.

He was ready to admit, that the Africans at home were made miserable by the Slave-trade, and that, if it were universally abolished, great benefit would arise to them. No one, however, would assert, that these miseries arose from the trade as carried on by Great Britain only. Other countries occasioned as much of the evil as we did; and if the abolition of it by us should prove only the transferring of it to those countries, very little benefit would result from the measure.

What then was the probability of our example being followed by foreign powers? Five years had now elapsed since the question was first started, and what had any of them done? The Portuguese continued the trade. The Spaniards still gave a bounty to encourage it. He believed there were agents from Holland in this country, who were then negotiating with persons concerned in it in order to secure its continuance. The abolition also had been proposed in the National Assembly of France, and had been rejected there. From these circumstances he had a right to infer, that if we gave up the trade, we should only transfer it to those countries: but this transfer would be entirely against the Africans. The mortality on board English ships, previously to the regulating bill, was four and an eighth per cent. Since that time it had been reduced to little more than three per cent.[A] In French ships it was near ten, and in Dutch ships from five to seven, per cent. In Portuguese it was less than either in French or Dutch, but more than in English ships since the regulating bill. Thus the deaths of the Africans would be more than doubled, if we were to abolish the trade.

[Footnote A: Mr. Wilberforce stated it on the same evening to be between ten and eleven per cent. for the last year. The number then exported from Africa to our islands was rather more than 22,000, of whom more than 2,300 died.]

Perhaps it might be replied, that, the importations being stopped in our own islands, fewer Africans would experience this misery, because fewer would be taken from their own country on this account. But he had a right to infer, that as the planters purchased slaves at present, they would still think it their interest to have them. The question then was, whether they could get them by smuggling. Now it appeared by the evidence, that many hundred slaves had been stolen from time to time from Jamaica, and carried into Cuba. But if persons could smuggle slaves out of our colonies, they could smuggle

slaves into them; but particularly when the planters might think it to their interest to assist them.

Page 155

With respect to the slaves there, instances had been related of their oppression, which shocked the feelings of all who heard them: But was it fair to infer from these their general ill usage? Suppose a person were to make a collection of the different abuses, which had happened for a series of years under our own happy constitution, and use these as an argument of its worthlessness; should we not say to him, that in the most perfect system which the human intellect could form, some defects would exist; and that it was unfair to draw inferences from such partial facts? In the same manner he would argue relative to the alleged treatment of the slaves. Evidence had been produced upon this point on both sides. He should not be afraid to oppose the authorities of Lord Rodney, and others, against any, however respectable, in favour of the abolition. But this was not necessary. There was another species of facts, which would answer the same end. Previously to the year 1730 the decrease of the slaves in our islands was very considerable. From 1730 to 1755 the deaths were reduced to only two and a half per cent. above the births: from 1755 to 1768 to only one and three fourths; and from 1768 to 1788 to only one per cent. This then, on the first view of the subject, would show, that whatever might have been the situation of slaves formerly, it had been gradually improved. But if, in addition to this, we considered the peculiar disadvantages under which they laboured; the small proportion of females to males; and the hurricanes, and famines, which had swept away thousands, we should find it physically impossible, that they could have increased as related, if they had been treated as cruelly as the friends of the abolition had described.

This species of facts would enable him also to draw still more important conclusions; namely, that as the slaves in the West Indies had gradually increased, they would continue to increase; that very few years would pass, not only before the births were equal to the deaths, but before they were more numerous than the deaths; and that if this was likely to happen in the present state of things, how much more would it happen, if by certain regulations the increase of the slaves should be encouraged?

The only question then was, whether it was more advantageous to breed or to import. He thought he should prove the former; and if so, then this increase was inevitable, and the importations would necessarily cease.

In the first place, the gradual increase of the slaves of late years clearly proved, that such increase had been encouraged. But their price had been doubled in the last twenty years. The planter therefore must feel it his interest to desist from purchasing, if possible. But again, the greatest mortality was among the newly imported slaves. The diseases they contracted on the passage, and their deaths in the seasoning, all made for the same doctrine. Add to this, that slaves bred in the islands were more expert at colonial labour, more reconciled to their situation, and better disposed towards their masters, than those who were brought from Africa.

Page 156

But it had been said, that the births and deaths in the islands were now equal; and, that therefore no further supply was wanted. He denied the propriety of this inference. The slaves were subject to peculiar diseases. They were exposed also to hurricanes and consequent famines. That the day, however, would come, when the stock there would be sufficient, no person who attended to the former part of his argument could doubt. That they had gradually increased, were gradually, increasing, and would, by certain regulations, increase more and more, must be equally obvious. But these were all considerations for continuing the traffic a little longer.

He then desired the House to reflect upon the state of St. Domingo. Had not its calamities been imputed by its own deputies to the advocates for the abolition? Were ever any scenes of horror equal to those which had passed there? And should we, when principles of the same sort were lurking in our own islands, expose our fellow-subjects to the same miseries, who, if guilty of promoting this trade, had, at least, been encouraged in it by ourselves?

That the Slave-trade was an evil, he admitted. That the state of slavery itself was likewise an evil, he admitted; and if the question was, not whether we should abolish, but whether we should establish these, he would be the first to oppose himself to their existence; but there were many evils, which we should have thought it our duty to prevent, yet which, when they had once arisen, it was more dangerous to oppose than to submit to. The duty of a statesman was, to consider abstractedly what was right or wrong, but to weigh the consequences which were likely to result from the abolition of an evil, against those, which were likely to result from its continuance. Agreeing then most perfectly with the abolitionists in their end, he differed from them only in the means of accomplishing it. He was desirous of doing that gradually, which he conceived they were doing rashly. He had therefore drawn up two propositions. The first was, That an address be presented to His Majesty, that he would recommend to the colonial assemblies to grant premiums to such planters, and overseers, as should distinguish themselves by promoting the annual increase of the slaves by birth; and likewise freedom to every female slave, who had reared five children to the age of seven years. The second was, That a bounty of five pounds per head be given to the master of every slave-ship, who should import in any cargo a greater number of females than males, not exceeding the age of twenty-five years. To bring forward these propositions, he would now move that the chairman leave the chair.

Mr. Este wished the debate to be adjourned. He allowed there ware many enormities in the trade, which called for regulation. There were two propositions before the House: the one for the immediate, and the other for the gradual, abolition of the trade. He thought that members should be allowed time to compare their respective merits. At present his own opinion was, that gradual abolition would answer the end proposed in the least exceptionable manner.

Page 157

Mr. Pitt rejoiced that the debate had taken a turn, which contracted the question into such narrow limits. The matter then in dispute was merely as to the time at which the abolition should take place. He therefore congratulated the House, the country, and the world, that this great point had been gained; that we might now consider this trade as having received its condemnation; that this curse of mankind was seen in its true light; and that the greatest stigma on our national character, which ever yet existed, was about to be removed! Mankind, he trusted, were now likely to be delivered from the greatest practical evil that ever afflicted the human race—from the most severe and extensive calamity recorded in the history of the world.

His honourable friend (Mr. Jenkinson) had insinuated, that any act for the abolition would be evaded. But if we were to enforce this act with all the powers of the country, how could it fail to be effectual? But his honourable friend had himself satisfied him upon this point. He had acknowledged, that the trade would drop of itself, on account of the increasing dearness of the commodity imported. He would ask then, if we were to leave to the importer no means of importation but by smuggling; and if, besides all the present disadvantages, we were to load him with all the charges and hazards of the smuggler, would there be any danger of any considerable supply of fresh slaves being poured into the islands through this channel? The question under these circumstances, he pronounced, would not bear a dispute.

His honourable friend had also maintained, that it would be inexpedient to stop the importations immediately, because the deaths and births in the islands were as yet not equal. But he (Mr. Pitt) had proved last year, from the most authentic documents, that an increase of the births above the deaths had already taken place. This then was the time for beginning the abolition. But he would now observe, that five years had elapsed since these documents were framed; and therefore the presumption was, that the Black population was increasing at an extraordinary rate. He had not, to be sure, in his consideration of the subject, entered into the dreadful mortality arising from the clearing of new lands. Importations for this purpose were to be considered, not as carrying on the trade, but as setting on foot a Slave-trade, a measure which he believed no one present would then support. He therefore asked his honourable friend, whether the period he had looked to was now arrived? whether the West Indies, at this hour, were not in a state, in which they could maintain their population?

Page 158

It had been argued, that one or other of these two assertions was false; that either the population of the slaves must be decreasing, (which the abolitionists denied,) or, if it was increasing, the slaves must have been well treated. That their population was rather increasing than otherwise, and also that their general treatment was by no means so good as it ought to have been, were both points which had been proved by different witnesses. Neither were they incompatible with each other. But he would see whether the explanation of this seeming contradiction would not refute the argument of expediency, as advanced by his honourable friend. Did the slaves decrease in numbers?—Yes. Then ill usage must have been the cause of it; but if so, the abolition was immediately necessary to restrain it. Did they, on the other hand, increase?—Yes. But if so, no further importations were wanted: Was their population (to take a middle course) nearly stationary, and their treatment neither so good nor so bad as it might be? —Yes. But if so, this was the proper period for stopping further supplies; for both the population and the treatment would be improved by such a measure.

But he would show again the futility of the argument of his honourable friend. He himself had admitted, that it was in the power of the colonists to correct the various abuses, by which the Negro population was restrained. But they could not do this without improving the condition of their slaves; without making them approximate towards the rank of citizens; without giving them some little interest in their labour, which would occasion them to work with the energy of men. But now the Assembly of Grenada had themselves stated, “that though the Negros were allowed the afternoons of only one day in every week, they would do as much work in that afternoon, when employed for their own benefit, as in the whole day, when employed in their masters’ service.” Now after this confession, the House might burn all his calculations relative to the Negro population; for, if it had not yet quite reached the desirable state which he had pointed out, this confession had proved, that further supplies were not wanted. A Negro, if he worked for himself, could do double work. By an improvement then in the mode of labour, the work in the islands could be doubled. But if so, what would become of the argument of his honourable friend? for then only half the number of the present labourers were necessary.

He would now try this argument of expediency by other considerations. The best informed writers on the subject had told us, that the purchase of new Negros was injurious to the planters. But if this statement was just, would not the abolition be beneficial to them? That it would, was the opinion of Mr. Long, their own historian. “If the Slave-trade,” says he, “was prohibited for four or five years, it would enable them, to retrieve their affairs by preventing them from running into debt, either by renting or purchasing Negros.” To this acknowledgment he would add a fact from the evidence, which was, that a North American province, by such a prohibition alone for a few years, from being deeply plunged in debt, had become independent, rich, and flourishing.

Page 159

The next consideration was the danger, to which the islands were exposed from the newly imported slaves. Mr. Long, with a view of preventing insurrections, had advised, that a duty, equal to a prohibition, might be laid on the importation of Coromantine slaves. After noticing one insurrection, which happened through their means, he speaks of another in the following year, in which thirty-three Coromantines, “most of whom had been newly imported, murdered and wounded no less than nineteen Whites in the space of an hour.” To the authority of Mr. Long he would add the recorded opinion of a Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, which was appointed to inquire into the best means of preventing future insurrections. The Committee reported, that “the rebellion had originated, like most others, with the Coromantines,” and they proposed that a bill should be brought in for laying a higher duty on the importation of these particular Negros, which should operate as a prohibition. But the danger was not confined to the introduction of Coromantines. Mr. Long accounts for the frequent insurrections in Jamaica from the greatness of its general importations. “In two years and a half,” says he, “twenty-seven thousand Negros have been imported—No wonder that we have rebellions!” Surely then, when his honourable friend spoke of the calamities of St. Domingo, and of similar dangers impending over our own islands, it ill became him to be the person to cry out for further importations! It ill became him to charges upon the abolitionists the crime of stirring up insurrections, who only recommended what the Legislature of Jamaica itself had laid down in a time of danger with an avowed view to prevent them. It was indeed a great satisfaction to himself, that among the many arguments for prohibiting the Slave-trade, the security of our West Indian possessions against internal commotions, as well as foreign enemies, was among the most prominent and forcible. And here he would ask his honourable friend, whether in this part of the argument he did not see reason for immediate abolition. Why should we any longer persist in introducing those latent principles of conflagration, which, if they should once burst forth, might annihilate the industry of a hundred years? which might throw the planters back a whole century in their profits, in their cultivation, and in their progress towards the emancipation of their slaves? It was our duty to vote, that the abolition of the Slave-trade should be immediate, and not to leave it to he knew not what future time or contingency.

Having now done with the argument of expediency, he would consider the proposition of his right honourable friend Mr. Dundas; that, on account of some patrimonial rights of the West Indians, the prohibition of the Slave-trade would be an invasion of their legal inheritance. He would first observe, that, if this argument was worth any thing, it applied just as much to gradual as to immediate abolition. He had no doubt, that,

Page 160

at whatever period we should say the trade should cease, it would be equally set up; for it would certainly be just as good an argument against the measure in seventy years hence, as it was against it now. It implied also, that Parliament had no right to stop the importations: but had this detestable traffic received such a sanction, as placed it more out of the jurisdiction of the legislature for ever after, than any other branch of our trade? In what a situation did the proposition of his honourable friend place the legislature of Great Britain! It was scarcely possible to lay a duty on any one article, which might not in some way affect the property of individuals. But if the laws respecting the Slave-trade implied a contract for its perpetual continuance, the House could never regulate any other of the branches of our national commerce.

But any contract for the promotion of this trade must, in his opinion, have been void from the beginning: for if it was an outrage upon justice, and only another name for fraud, robbery, and murder, What pledge could devolve upon the legislature to incur the obligation of becoming principals in the commission of such enormities by sanctioning their continuance?

But he would appeal to the acts themselves. That of 23 George II. c. 31, was the one upon which the greatest stress was laid. How would the House be surprised to hear, that the very outrages committed in the prosecution of this trade had been forbidden by that act! "No master of a ship trading to Africa," says the act, "shall by fraud, force, or violence, or by any indirect practice whatever, take on board or carry away from that coast any Negro, or native of that country, or commit any violence on the natives, to the prejudice of the said trade; and every person so offending, shall for every such offence forfeit one hundred pounds." But the whole trade had been demonstrated to be a system of fraud, force, and violence; and therefore the contract was daily violated, under which the Parliament allowed it to continue.

But why had the trade ever been permitted at all? The preamble of the act would show: "Whereas the trade to and from Africa is very advantageous to Great Britain, and necessary for supplying the Plantations and Colonies thereunto belonging with a sufficient number of Negros at reasonable rates, and for that purpose the said trade should be carried on"—Here then we might see what the Parliament had in view, when it passed this act. But no one of the occasions, on which it grounded its proceedings, now existed. He would plead, then, the act itself as an argument for the abolition. If it had been proved that, instead of being very advantageous to Great Britain, it was the most destructive to her interests—that it was the ruin of her seamen—that it stopped the extension of her manufactures;—if it had been proved, in the second place, that it was not now necessary for the supply of our Plantations

Page 161

with Negros;—if it had been further established, that it was from the beginning contrary to the first principles of justice, and consequently that a pledge for its continuance, had one been attempted to be given, must have been absolutely void—where in this act of parliament was the contract to be found, by which Britain was bound, as she was said to be, never to listen to her own true interests and to the cries of the natives of Africa? Was it not clear, that all argument, founded on the supposed pledge of Parliament, made against those who employed it?

But if we were not bound by existing laws to the support of this trade, we were doubly criminal in pursuing it: for why ought it to be abolished at all? Because it was incurable injustice. Africa was the ground, on which he chiefly rested; and there it was, that his two honourable friends, one of whom had proposed gradual abolition, and the other regulation, did not carry their principles to their full extent. Both had confessed the trade to be a moral evil. How much stronger then was the argument for immediate than for gradual abolition! If on the ground of a moral evil it was to be abolished at last, why ought it not now? Why was injustice to be suffered to remain for a single hour? He knew of no evil, which ever had existed, nor could he imagine any to exist, worse than the tearing of eighty thousand persons annually from their native land, by a combination of the most civilized nations, in the most enlightened quarter of the globe; but more especially by that nation, which called herself the most free and the most happy of them all.

He would now notice the objection, that other nations would not give up the Slave-trade, if we were to renounce it. But if the trade were stained but by a thousandth part of the criminality, which he and others, after a thorough investigation of the subject, charged upon it, the House ought immediately to vote its abolition. This miserable argument, if persevered in, would be an eternal bar to the annihilation of the evil. How was it ever to be eradicated, if every nation was thus prudentially to wait till the concurrence of all the world should be obtained? But it applied a thousand times more strongly in a contrary way. How much more justly would other nations say, “Great Britain, free as she is, just and honourable as she is, not only has not abolished, but has refused to abolish, the Slave-trade. She has investigated it well. Her senate has deliberated upon it. It is plain, then, that she sees no guilt in it.” With this argument we should furnish the other nations of Europe, if we were again to refuse to put an end to this cruel traffic: and we should have from henceforth not only to answer for our own, but for their crimes also. Already we had suffered one year to pass away; and now, when the question was renewed, not only had this wretched argument been revived, but a proposition had been made for the gradual abolition

Page 162

of the trade. He knew indeed the difficulty of reforming long established abuses: but in the present case, by proposing some other period than the present, by prescribing some condition, by waiting for some contingency, perhaps till we obtained the general concurrence of Europe, (a concurrence which he believed never yet took place at the commencement of any one improvement in policy or morals,) he feared that this most enormous evil would never be redressed. Was it not folly to wait for the stream to run down before we crossed the bed of its channel? Alas! we might wait for ever. The river would still flow on. We should be no nearer the object, which we had in view, so long as the step, which could alone bring us to it, was not taken.

He would now proceed to the civilization of Africa; and as his eye had just glanced upon a West Indian law in the evidence upon the table, he would begin with an argument, which the sight of it had suggested to him. This argument had been ably answered in the course of the evening; but he would view it in yet another light. It had been said, that the savage disposition of the Africans rendered the prospect of their civilization almost hopeless. This argument was indeed of long standing; but, last year, it had been supported upon a new ground. Captain Frazer had stated in his evidence, that a boy had been put to death at Cabenda, because there were those who refused to purchase him as a slave. This single story was deemed by him, and had been considered by others, as a sufficient proof of the barbarity of the Africans, and of the inutility of abolishing the Slave-trade. But they, who had used this fact, had suppressed several circumstances relating to it. It appeared, on questioning Captain Frazer afterward, that this boy had previously run away from his master three several times; that the master had to pay his value, according to the custom of the country, every time he was brought back; and that partly from anger at the boy for running away so frequently, and partly to prevent a repetition of the same expense, he determined to destroy him. Such was the explanation of the signal instance, which was to fix barbarity on all Africa, as it came out in the cross-examination of Captain Frazer. That this African master was unenlightened and barbarous, he freely admitted: but what would an enlightened and civilized West Indian have done in a similar case? He would quote the law, passed in the West Indies in 1722, which he had just cast his eye upon in the book of evidence, by which law this very same crime of running away was by the legislature of an island, by the grave and deliberate sentence of an enlightened legislature, punished with death; and this, not in the case only of the third offence, but even in the very first instance. It was enacted, “That, if any Negro or other slave should withdraw himself from his master for the term of six months; or any slave, who was absent, should not return within that time, every such person

Page 163

should suffer death." There was also another West Indian law, by which every Negro was armed against his fellow-negro, for he was authorized to kill every runaway slave; and he had even a reward held out to him for so doing. Let the House now contrast the two cases. Let them ask themselves which of the two exhibited the greater barbarity; and whether they could possibly vote for the continuance of the Slave-trade, upon the principle, that the Africans had shown themselves to be a race of incorrigible barbarians?

Something like an opposite argument, but with a like view, had been maintained by others on this subject. It had been said, in justification of the trade, that the Africans had derived some little civilization from their intercourse with us. Yes: we had given them just enough of the forms of justice to enable them to add the pretext of legal trials to their other modes of perpetrating the most atrocious crimes. We had given them just enough of European improvements, to enable them the more effectually to turn Africa into a ravaged wilderness. Alas! alas! we had carried on a trade with them from this civilized and enlightened country, which, instead of diffusing knowledge, had been a check to every laudable pursuit. We had carried a poison into their country, which spread its contagious effects from one end of it to the other, and which penetrated to its very centre, corrupting every part to which it reached. We had there subverted the whole order of nature; we had aggravated every natural barbarity, and furnished to every man motives for committing, under the name of trade, acts of perpetual hostility and perfidy against his neighbour. Thus had the perversion of British commerce carried misery instead of happiness to one whole quarter of the globe. False to the very principles of trade, misguided in our policy, unmindful of our duty, what almost irreparable mischief had we done to that continent! How should we hope to obtain forgiveness from Heaven, if we refused to use those means, which the mercy of Providence had still reserved to us for wiping away the guilt and shame, with which we were now covered? If we refused even this degree of compensation, how aggravated would be our guilt! Should we delay, then, to repair these incalculable injuries? We ought to count the days, nay the very hours, which intervened to delay the accomplishment of such a work.

On this great subject, the civilization of Africa, which, he confessed, was near his heart, he would yet add a few observations. And first he would say, that the present deplorable state of that country, especially when we reflected that her chief calamities were to be ascribed to us, called for our generous aid, rather than justified any despair, on our part, of her recovery, and still less a repetition of our injuries. On what ground of theory or history did we act, when we supposed that she was never to be reclaimed? There was a time, which it might

Page 164

be now fit to call to remembrance, when human sacrifices, and even, this very practice of the Slave-trade, existed in our own island. Slaves, as we may read in Henry's History of Great Britain, were formerly an established article of our exports. "Great numbers," he says, "were exported, like cattle, from the British coast, and were to be seen exposed for sale in the Roman market."—"Adultery, witchcraft, and debt," says the same historian, "were probably some of the chief sources of supplying the Roman market with British slaves—prisoners taken in war were added to the number—there might be also among them some unfortunate gamesters, who, after having lost all their goods, at length, staked themselves, their wives, and their children." Now every one of these sources of slavery had been stated to be at this hour a source of slavery in Africa. If these practices, therefore, were to be admitted as proofs of the natural incapacity of its inhabitants, why might they not have been applied to ancient Britain? Why might not then some Roman senator, pointing to British barbarians, have predicted with equal boldness, that these were a people, who were destined never to be free; who were without the understanding necessary for the attainment of useful arts; depressed by the hand of Nature below the level of the human species; and created to form a supply of slaves for the rest of the world? But happily, since that time, notwithstanding what would then have been the justness of these predictions, we had emerged from barbarism. We were now raised to a situation, which exhibited a striking contrast to every circumstance, by which a Roman might have characterized us, and by which we now characterized Africa. There was indeed one thing wanting to complete the contrast, and to clear us altogether from the imputation of acting even to this hour as barbarians; for we continued to this hour a barbarous traffic in slaves. We continued it even yet, in spite of all our great pretensions. We were once as obscure among the nations of the earth, as savage in our manners, as debased in our morals, as degraded in our understandings, as these unhappy Africans. But in the lapse of a long series of years, by a progression slow, and for a time almost imperceptible, we had become rich in a variety of acquirements. We were favoured above measure in the gifts of Providence, we were unrivalled in commerce, preeminent in arts, foremost in the pursuits of philosophy and science, and established in all the blessings of civil society: we were in the possession of peace, of liberty, and of happiness: we were under the guidance of a mild and a beneficent religion; and we were protected by impartial laws, and the purest administration of justice: we were living under a system of government, which our own happy experience led us to pronounce the best and wisest, and which had become the admiration of the world. From all these blessings we must for ever have been excluded, had there been any truth in those principles, which some had not hesitated to lay down as applicable to the case of Africa; and we should have been at this moment little superior, either in morals, knowledge, or refinement, to the rude inhabitants of that continent.

Page 165

If then we felt that this perpetual confinement in the fetters of brutal ignorance would have been the greatest calamity which could have befallen us; if we viewed with gratitude the contrast between our present and our former situation; if we shuddered to think of the misery, which would still have overwhelmed us, had our country continued to the present times, through some cruel policy, to be the mart for slaves to the more civilized nations of the world;—God forbid, that we should any longer subject Africa to the same dreadful scourge, and exclude the sight of knowledge from her coasts, which had reached every other quarter of the globe!

He trusted we should no longer continue this commerce; and that we should no longer consider ourselves as conferring too great a boon on the natives of Africa in restoring them to the rank of human beings. He trusted we should not think ourselves too liberal, if, by abolishing the Slave-trade, we gave them the same common chance of civilization with other parts of the world. If we listened to the voice of reason and duty this night, some of us might live to see a reverse of that picture, from which we now turned our eyes with shame. We might live to behold the natives engaged in the calm occupations of industry, and in the pursuit of a just commerce. We might behold the beams of science and philosophy breaking in upon their land, which at some happy period in still later times might blaze with full lustre; and joining their influence to that of pure religion, might illuminate and invigorate the most distant extremities of that immense continent. Then might we hope, that even Africa (though last of all the quarters of the globe) should enjoy at length, in the evening of her days, those blessings, which had descended so plentifully upon us in a much earlier period of the world. Then also would Europe, participating in her improvement and prosperity, receive an ample recompense for the tardy kindness (if kindness it could be called) of no longer hindering her from extricating herself out of the darkness, which, in other more fortunate regions, had been so much more speedily dispelled.

—Nos primus equis Oriens afflavit anhelis;
Illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper.

Then might be applied to Africa those words, originally used indeed with a different view:

Hic demum exactis —— ——
Devenere locos laetos, et amoena vireta
Fortunatorum nemorum, sedesque beatas;
Largior hic campos aether et lumine vestit
Purpurco:

It was in this view—it was as an atonement for our long and cruel injustice towards Africa, that the measure proposed by his honourable friend Mr. Wilberforce most forcibly recommended itself to his mind. The great and happy change to be expected in the state of her inhabitants was, of all the various benefits of the abolition, in his estimation

the most extensive and important. He should vote against the adjournment; and he should also oppose every proposition, which tended either to prevent, or even to postpone for an hour, the total abolition of the Slave-trade.

Page 166

Mr. Pitt having concluded his speech (at about six in the morning), Sir William Dolben, the chairman, proposed the following questions. The first was on the motion of Mr. Jenkinson, “that the chairman do now leave the chair.” This was lost by a majority of two hundred and thirty-four to eighty-seven. The second was on the motion of Mr. Dundas, “that the abolition should be gradual;” when the votes for gradual exceeded those for immediate by one hundred and ninety-three to one hundred and twenty-five. He then put the amended question, that “it was the opinion of the committee, that the trade ought to be gradually abolished.” The committee having divided again, the votes for a gradual abolition were two hundred and thirty, and those against any abolition were eighty-five.

After this debate, the committee for the abolition of the Slave-trade held a meeting. They voted their thanks to Mr. Wilberforce for his motion, and to Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, and those other members of the House, who had supported it. They resolved also, that the House of Commons, having determined that the Slave-trade ought to be gradually abolished, had by that decision manifested their opinion, that it was cruel and unjust. They resolved also, that a gradual abolition of it was not an adequate remedy for its injustice and cruelty; neither could it be deemed a compliance with the general wishes of the people, as expressed in their numerous and urgent petitions to Parliament. And they resolved lastly, that the interval, in which the Slave-trade should be permitted to continue, afforded a prospect of redoubled cruelties and ravages on the coast of Africa; and that it imposed therefore an additional obligation on every friend to the cause to use all constitutional means to obtain its immediate abolition.

At a subsequent meeting they voted their thanks to the right honourable Lord Muncaster, for the able support he had given to the great object of their institution by his Historical Sketches of the Slave-trade, and of its Effects in Africa, addressed to the People of Great Britain; and they elected the Reverend Richard Gifford and the Reverend Thomas Gisborne honorary and corresponding members; the first on account of his excellent sermon before mentioned and other services, and the latter on account of his truly Christian and seasonable pamphlet, entitled Remarks on the late Decision of the House of Commons respecting the Abolition of the Slave-trade.

On the twenty-third of April, the House of Commons resolved itself into a committee of the whole House, to consider the subject again; and Mr. Beaufoy was put into the chair.

Page 167

Mr. Dundas, upon whom the task of introducing a bill for the gradual abolition of the Slave-trade now devolved, rose to offer the outlines of a plan for that purpose. He intended, he said, immediately to abolish that part of the trade, by which we supplied foreigners with slaves. The other part of it was to be continued seven years from the first of January next. He grounded the necessity of its continuance till this time upon the documents of the Negro-population in the different islands. In many of these, slaves were imported, but they were re-exported nearly in equal numbers. Now all these he considered to be in a state to go on without future supplies from Africa. Jamaica and the ceded islands retained almost all the slaves imported into them. This he considered as a proof that these had not attained the same desirable state; and it was therefore necessary, that the trade should be continued longer on this account.

It was his intention, however, to provide proper punishments, while it lasted, for abuses both in Africa and the Middle Passage. He would take care, as far as he could, that none but young slaves should be brought from the Coast of Africa. He would encourage establishments there for a new species of traffic. Foreign nations should be invited to concur in the abolition. He should propose a praedial rather than a personal service for the West Indies, and institutions, by which the slaves there should be instructed in religious duties. He concluded by reading several resolutions, which he would leave to the future consideration of the House.

Mr. Pitt then rose. He deprecated the resolutions altogether. He denied also the inferences, which Mr. Dundas had drawn from the West-Indian documents relative to the Negro-population. He had looked over his own calculations from the same documents again and again, and he would submit them, with all their data, if it should be necessary, to the House.

Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Fox held the same language. They contended also, that Mr. Dundas had now proved, a thousand times more strongly than ever, the necessity of immediate abolition. All the resolutions he had read were operative against his own reasoning. The latter observed, that the Slave-traders were in future only to be allowed to steal innocent children from their disconsolate parents.

After a few observations by Lord Sheffield, Mr. Drake, Colonel Tarleton, and Mr. Rolle, the House adjourned.

On the twenty-fifth of April it resumed the consideration of the subject. Mr. Dundas then went over his former resolutions, and concluded by moving, “that it should not be lawful to import any African Negros into any British colonies, in ships owned or navigated by British subjects, at any time after the first of January 1800.”

Page 168

Lord Mornington (now Marquis Wellesley) rose to propose an amendment. He congratulated his countrymen, that the Slave-trade had received its death-wound. This traffic was founded in injustice; and between right and wrong there could be no compromise. Africa was not to be sacrificed to the apparent good of the West-Indies. He would not repeat those enormities out of the evidence, which had made such a deep impression upon the House. It had been resolved, that the trade should be abolished. The question then was, how long they were to persevere in the crime of its continuance. One had said, that they might be unjust for ten years longer; another, only till the beginning of the next century. But this diversity of opinion had proceeded from an erroneous statement of Mr. Dundas against the clear and irrefragable calculations of Mr. Pitt. The former had argued, that, because Jamaica and the ceded islands had retained almost all the slaves which had been imported into them, they were therefore not yet in a situation to support their population without further supplies from Africa. But the truth was, that the slaves, so retained, were kept, not to maintain the population there, but to clear new land. Now the House had determined, that the trade was not to be continued for this purpose. The population, therefore, in the islands was sufficient to continue the ordinary cultivation of them.

He deprecated the idea, that the Slave-trade had been so sanctioned by the acts of former parliaments, that the present could make no alteration in it. Had not the House altered the import of foreign sugar into our islands? a measure, which at the time affected the property of many. Had they not prohibited the exports of provisions from America to the same quarter? Again, as to compacts, had the Africans ever been parties to these? It was rather curious also, when King James the Second gave a charter to the slave-traders, that he should have given them a right to all the south of Africa, and authority over every person born therein! But, by doing this, it was clear, that he gave them a right which he never possessed himself. After many other observations, he concluded by moving, “that the year 1793 be substituted in the place of the year 1800.”

In the course of the debate, which followed, Mr. Burdon stated his conviction of the necessity of immediate abolition; but he would support the amendment, as the shortest of the terms proposed.

Mr. Robert Thornton would support it also, as the only choice left him. He dared not accede to a motion, by which we were to continue for seven years to imbrue our hands in innocent blood.

Mr. Ryder would not support the trade for one moment, if he could avoid it. He could not hold a balance with gold in one scale, and blood in the other.

Mr. William Smith exposed the wickedness of restricting the trade to certain ages. The original motion, he said, would only operate as a transfer of cruelty from the aged and

the guilty to the young and the innocent. He entreated the House to consider, whether, if it related to their own children, any one of them would vote for it.

Page 169

Mr. Windham had hitherto felt a reluctance to speaking, not from the abstruseness, but from the simplicity, of the subject; but he could not longer be silent, when he observed those arguments of policy creeping again out of their lurking-places, which had fled before eloquence and truth. The House had clearly given up the policy of the question. They had been determined by the justice of it. Why were they then to be troubled again with arguments of this nature? These, if admitted, would go to the subversion of all public as well as private morality. Nations were as much bound as individuals to a system of morals, though a breach in the former could not be so easily punished. In private life morality took pretty good care of itself. It was a kind of retail article, in which the returns were speedy. If a man broke open his neighbour's house, he would feel the consequences. There was an ally of virtue, who rendered it the interest of individuals to be moral, and he was called the executioner. But as such punishment did not always await us in our national concerns, we should substitute honour as the guardian of our national conduct. He hoped the West-Indians would consider the character of the mother-country, and the obligations to national as well as individual justice. He hoped also they would consider the sufferings, which they occasioned both in Africa, in the passage, and in the West-Indies. In the passage indeed no one was capable of describing them. The section of the slave-ship, however, made up the deficiency of language, and did away all necessity of argument, on this subject. Disease there had to struggle with the new affliction of chains and punishment. At one view were the irksomeness of a gaol, and the miseries of an hospital; so that the holds of these vessels put him in mind of the regions of the damned. The trade, he said, ought immediately to be abolished. On a comparison of the probable consequences of the abolition of it, he saw on one side only doubtful contingencies, but on the other shame and disgrace.

Sir James Johnstone contended for the immediate abolition of the trade. He had introduced the plough into his own plantation in the West Indies, and he found the land produced more sugar than when cultivated in the ordinary way by slaves. Even for the sake of the planters, he hoped the abolition would not be long delayed.

Mr. Dundas replied: after which a division took place. The number of votes in favour of the original motion were one hundred and fifty-eight, and for the amendment one hundred and nine.

On the 27th of April the House resumed the subject. Mr. Dundas moved, as before, that the Slave-trade should cease in the year 1800; upon which Lord Mornington moved, that the year 1795 should be substituted for the latter period.

In the course of the debate, which followed, Mr. Hubbard said, that he had voted against the abolition, when the year 1793 was proposed; but he thought that, if it were not to take place till 1795, sufficient time would be allowed the planters. He would support this amendment; and he congratulated the House on the prospect of the final triumph of truth, humanity, and justice.

Page 170

Mr. Addington preferred the year 1796 to the year 1795.

Mr. Alderman Watson considered the abolition in 1796 to be as destructive as if it were immediate.

A division having taken place, the number of votes in favour of the original motion were one hundred and sixty-one, and in favour of Lord Mornington's amendment for the year 1795, one hundred and twenty-one. Sir Edward Knatchbull, however, seeing that there was a disposition in the House to bring the matter to a conclusion, and that a middle line would be preferred, moved that the year 1796 should be substituted for the year 1800. Upon this the House divided again; when there appeared for the original motion only one hundred and thirty-two, but for the amendment one hundred and fifty-one.

The gradual abolition having been now finally agreed upon for the year 1796, a committee was named, which carried the resolution to the Lords.

On the eighth of May, the Lords were summoned to consider it. Lord Stormont, after having spoken for some time, moved, that they should hear evidence upon it. Lord Grenville opposed the motion on account of the delay, which would arise from an examination of the witnesses by the House at large: but he moved that such witnesses should be examined by a committee of the House. Upon this a debate ensued, and afterwards a division; when the original motion was carried by sixty-three against thirty-six.

On the 15th of May the Lords met again. Evidence was then ordered to be summoned in behalf of those interested in the continuance of the trade. At length it was introduced; but on the fifth of June, when only seven persons had been examined, a motion was made and carried, that the farther examinations should be postponed to the next session.

CHAPTER V.

Continuation from July 1792 to July 1793—Author travels round the kingdom again—-Motion to renew the resolution of the last year in the Commons—Motion lost—New Motion in the Commons to abolish the foreign Slave-trade—Motion lost—Proceedings of the Lords.

The resolution adopted by the Commons, that the trade should cease in 1796, was a matter of great joy to many; and several, in consequence of it, returned to the use of sugar. The committee, however, for the abolition did not view it in the same favourable light. They considered it as a political manoeuvre to frustrate the accomplishment of the object. But the circumstance, which gave them the most concern, was the resolution of the Lords to hear evidence. It was impossible now to say, when the trade would cease.

The witnesses in behalf of the merchants and planters had obtained possession of the ground; and they might keep it, if they chose, even till the year 1800, to throw light upon a measure which was to be adopted in 1796. The committee found too, that they had again the laborious task before them of finding out new persons to give testimony in behalf

Page 171

of their cause; for some of their former witnesses were dead, and others were out of the kingdom; and unless they replaced these, there would be no probability of making out that strong case in the Lords, which they had established in the Commons. It devolved therefore upon me once more to travel for this purpose: but as I was then in too weak a state to bear as much fatigue as formerly, Dr. Dickson relieved me, by taking one part of the tour, namely, that to Scotland, upon himself.

These journeys we performed with considerable success; during which the committee elected Mr. Joseph Townsend of Baltimore, in Maryland, an honorary and corresponding member.

Parliament having met, Mr. Wilberforce, in February 1793, moved, that the House resolve itself into a committee of the whole House on Thursday next, to consider of the circumstances of the Slave-trade. This motion was opposed by Sir William Yonge, who moved, that this day six months should be substituted for Thursday next. A debate ensued: of this, however, as well as of several which followed, I shall give no account; as it would be tedious to the reader to hear a repetition of the same arguments. Suffice it to say, that the motion was lost by a majority of sixty-one to fifty-three.

This sudden refusal of the House of Commons to renew their own vote of the former year gave great uneasiness to the friends of the cause. Mr. Wilberforce, however, resolved, that the session should not pass without an attempt to promote it in another form; and accordingly, on the fourteenth of May, he moved for leave to bring in a bill to abolish that part of the Slave-trade, by which the British merchants supplied foreigners with slaves. This motion was opposed like the former; but was carried by a majority of seven. The bill was then brought in; and it passed its first and second reading with little opposition; but on the fifth of June, notwithstanding the eloquence of Mr. Pitt and of Mr. Fox, and the very able speeches of Mr. Francis, Mr. Courtenay, and others, it was lost by a majority of thirty-one to twenty-nine.

In the interval between these motions the question experienced in the Lords considerable opposition. The Duke of Clarence moved that the House should not proceed in the consideration of the Slave-trade till after the Easter recess. The Earl of Abingdon was still more hostile afterwards. He deprecated the new philosophy. It was as full of mischief as the Box of Pandora. The doctrine of the abolition of the Slave-trade was a species of it; and he concluded by moving, that all further consideration of the subject be postponed. To the epithet, then bestowed upon the abolition of it by this nobleman, the Duke of Clarence added those of fanatics and hypocrites! among whom he included Mr. Wilberforce by name. All the other Lords, however, who were present, manifested such a dislike to the sentiments of the Earl of Abingdon, that he withdrew this motion.

Page 172

After this the hearing of evidence on the resolution of the House of Commons was resumed; and seven persons were examined before the close of the session.

CHAPTER VI.

Continuation from July 1793 to July 1794—Author travels round the kingdom again—-Motion to abolish the foreign Slave-trade renewed in the Commons—and carried—but lost in the Lords—further proceedings there—Author, on account of his declining health, obliged to retire from the cause.

The committee for the abolition could not view the proceedings of both Houses of Parliament on this subject during the year 1793, without being alarmed for the fate of their question. The only two sources of hope, which they could discover, were in the disposition then manifested by the peers as to the conduct of the Earl of Abingdon, and in their determination to proceed in the hearing of evidence. The latter circumstance indeed was the more favourable, as the resolution, upon which the witnesses were to be examined, had not been renewed by the Commons. These considerations, however, afforded no solid ground for the mind to rest upon. They only broke in upon it, like faint gleams of sunshine, for a moment, and then were gone. In this situation the committee could only console themselves by the reflection, that they had done their duty. In looking, however, to their future services, one thing, and only one, seemed practicable; and this was necessary; namely, to complete the new body of evidence, which they had endeavoured to form in the preceding year. The determination to do this rendered another journey on my part indispensable; and I undertook it, broken down us my constitution then was, beginning it in September 1793, and completing it in February 1794.

Mr. Wilberforce, in this interval, had digested his plan of operations; and accordingly, early in the session of 1794, he asked leave to renew his former bill, to abolish that part of the trade, by means of which British merchants supplied foreigners with slaves. This request was opposed by Sir William Yonge; but it was granted, on a division of the House, by a majority of sixty-three to forty votes.

When the bill was brought in, it was opposed by the same member; upon which the House divided; and there appeared for Sir William Yonge’s amendment thirty-eight votes, but against it fifty-six.

On a motion for the recommitment of the bill, Lord Sheffield divided the House, against whose motion there was a majority of forty-two. And, on the third reading of it, it was opposed again; but it was at length carried.

The speakers against the bill were; Sir William Yonge, Lord Sheffield, Colonel Tarleton, Alderman Newnham, and Mr. Payne, Este, Lechmere, Cawthorne, Jenkinson, and

Dent. Those who spoke in favour of it were; Mr. Pitt, Fox, William Smith, Whitbread, Francis, Burdon, Vaughan, Barham, and Serjeants Watson and Adair.

Page 173

While the foreign Slave-bill was thus passing its stages in the Commons, Dr. Horsley, bishop of Rochester, who saw no end to the examinations, while the witnesses were to be examined at the bar of the House of Lords, moved, that they should be taken in future before a committee above-stairs. Dr. Porteus, bishop of London, and the Lords Guildford, Stanhope, and Grenville, supported this motion. But the Lord Chancellor Thurlow, aided by the Duke of Clarence, and by the Lords Mansfield, Hay, Abingdon, and others, negatived it by a majority of twenty-eight.

At length the bill itself was ushered into the House of Lords. On reading it a second time, it was opposed by the Duke of Clarence, Lord Abingdon, and others. Lord Grenville and the Bishop of Rochester declined supporting it. They alleged, as a reason, that they conceived the introduction of it to have been improper pending the inquiry on the general subject of the Slave-trade. This declaration brought up the Lords Stanhope and Lauderdale, who charged them with inconsistency as professed friends of the cause. At length the bill was lost. During these discussions the examination of the witnesses was resumed by the Lords; but only two of them were heard in this session[A].

[Footnote A: After this the examinations wholly dropped in the House of Lords.]

After this decision the question was in a desperate state; for if the Commons would not renew their own resolution, and the Lords would not abolish the foreign part of the Slave-trade, What hope was there, of success? It was obvious too, that in the former House, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Dundas voted against each other. In the latter, the Lord Chancellor Thurlow opposed every motion in favour of the cause. The committee therefore were reduced to this;—either they must exert themselves without hope, or they must wait till some change should take place in their favour. As far as I myself was concerned, all exertion was then over. The nervous system was almost shattered to pieces. Both my memory and my hearing failed me. Sudden dizziness seized my head. A confused singing in the ears followed me, wherever I went. On going to bed the very stairs seemed to dance up and down under me, so that, misplacing my foot, I sometimes fell. Talking too, if it continued but half an hour, exhausted me, so that profuse perspirations followed; and the same effect was produced even by an active exertion of the mind for the like time. These disorders had been brought on by degrees in consequence of the severe labours necessarily attached to the promotion of the cause. For seven years I had a correspondence to maintain with four hundred persons with my own hand. I had some book or other annually to write in behalf of the cause. In this time I had travelled more than thirty-five thousand miles in search of evidence, and a great part of these journeys in the night. All this time my mind had been on the stretch. It had been bent too to

BOOKRAGS

Page 174

this one subject; for I had not even leisure to attend to my own concerns. The various instances of barbarity, which had come successively to my knowledge within this period, had vexed, harassed, and afflicted it. The wound, which these had produced, was rendered still deeper by those cruel disappointments before related, which arose from the reiterated refusal of persons to give their testimony, after I had travelled hundreds of miles in quest of them. But the severest stroke was that inflicted by the persecution, begun and pursued by persons interested in the continuance of the trade, of such witnesses as had been examined against them; and whom, on account of their dependent situation in life, it was most easy to oppress. As I had been the means of bringing these forward on these occasions, they naturally came to me, when thus persecuted, as the author of their miseries and their ruin. From their supplications and wants it would have been ungenerous and ungrateful to have fled[A]. These different circumstances, by acting together, had at length brought me into the situation just mentioned; and I was therefore obliged, though very reluctantly, to be borne out of the field, where I had placed the great honour and glory of my life.

[Footnote A: The late Mr. Whitbread, to whom one day in deep affliction on this account I related accidentally a circumstance of this kind, generously undertook, in order to make my mind easy upon the subject, to make good all injuries, which should in future arise to individuals from such persecution; and he repaired these, at different times, at a considerable expense. I feel it a duty to divulge this circumstance, out of respect to the memory of one of the best of men, and of one, whom, if the history of his life were written, it would appear to have been an extraordinary honour to the country to have produced.]

CHAPTER VII.

Continuation from July 1794 to July 1799—Various motions within this period.

I purpose, though it may seem abrupt after the division which has hitherto been made of the contents of this volume, to throw the events of the next five years into one chapter.

Mr. Wilberforce and the members of the committee, whose constitutions had not suffered like my own, were still left; and they determined to persevere in the promotion of their great object; as long as their health and their faculties permitted them. The former, accordingly, in the month of February 1795, moved in the House of Commons for leave to bring in a bill for the abolition of the Slave-trade. This motion was then necessary, if, according to the resolution of that House, the Slave-trade was to cease in 1796. It was opposed, however, by Sir William Yonge, and unfortunately lost by a majority of seventy-eight to fifty-seven.

In the year 1796 Mr. Wilberforce renewed his efforts in the Commons. He asked leave to bring in a bill for the abolition of the Slave-trade, but in a limited time. The motion was opposed as before; but on a division, there were for it ninety-three, and against it only sixty-seven.

Page 175

The bill having been brought in, was opposed in its second reading; but it was carried through it by a majority of sixty-four to thirty-one.

In a future stage it was opposed again; but it triumphed by a majority of seventy-six to thirty-one. Mr. Eliott was then put into the chair. Several clauses were adopted; and the first of March 1797 was fixed for the abolition of the trade: but in the next stage of it, after a long speech from Mr. Dundas, it was lost by a majority of seventy-four against seventy.

Mr. Francis, who had made a brilliant speech in the last debate, considering that nothing effectual had been yet done on this great question, and wishing that a practical beginning might be made, brought forward soon afterwards, a motion relative to the improvement of the condition of the slaves in the West Indies. This, after a short debate, was negatived without a division. Mr. William Smith also moved an address to His Majesty, that he would be pleased to give directions to lay before the House copies of the several acts relative to regulations in behalf of the slaves, passed by the different colonial assemblies since the year 1788. This motion was adopted by the House. Thus passed away the session of 1796.

In the year 1797, while Mr. Wilberforce was deliberating upon the best measure for the advancement of the cause, Mr. C. Ellis came forward with a new motion. He began by declaring, that he agreed with the abolitionists as to their object; but he differed with them as to the mode of attaining it. The Slave-trade he condemned as a cruel and pernicious system; but, as it had become an inveterate evil, he feared it could not be done away all at once, without injury to the interests of numerous individuals, and even to the Negros themselves. He concluded by moving an address to His Majesty, humbly requesting, that he would give directions to the governors of the West Indian islands, to recommend it to the colonial assemblies to adopt such measures as might appear to them best calculated to ameliorate the condition of the Negros, and thereby to remove gradually the Slave-trade; and likewise to assure His Majesty of the readiness of this House to concur in any measure to accelerate this desirable object. This motion was seconded by Mr. Barham. It was opposed, however, by Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Pitt, and others; but was at length carried by a majority of ninety-nine to sixty-three.

In the year 1798 Mr. Wilberforce asked leave to renew his former bill, to abolish the Slave-trade within a limited time. He was supported by Mr. Canning, Mr. Hobhouse, Sir Robert Buxton, Mr. Bouverie, and others. Mr. Sewell, Bryan Edwards, Henniker, and C. Ellis, took the opposite side of the question. Mr. Ellis, however, observed, that he had no objection to restricting the Slave-trade to plantations already begun in the colonies; and Mr. Barham professed himself a friend to the abolition, if it could be accomplished in a reasonable way. On a division, there appeared to be for Mr. Wilberforce’s motion eighty-three, but against it eighty-seven.

Page 176

In the year 1799 Mr. Wilberforce, undismayed by these different disappointments, renewed his motion. Colonel M. Wood, Mr. Petrie, and others, among whom were Mr. Windham and Mr. Dundas, opposed it. Mr. Pitt, Fox, W. Smith, Sir William Dolben, Sir R. Milbank, Mr. Hobhouse, and Mr. Canning, supported it. Sir R. Milbank contended, that modifications of a system fundamentally wrong ought not to be tolerated by the legislature of a free nation. Mr. Hobhouse said, that nothing could be so nefarious as this traffic in blood. It was unjust in its principle. It was cruel in its practice. It admitted of no regulation whatever. The abolition of it was called for equally by morality and sound policy. Mr. Canning exposed the folly of Mr. Dundas, who had said, that as Parliament had in the year 1787 left the abolition to the colonial assemblies, it ought not to be taken out of their hands. This great event, he observed, could only be accomplished in two ways; either by these assemblies, or by the Parliament of England. Now the members of the assembly of Jamaica had professed, that they would never abolish the trade. Was it not therefore idle to rely upon them for the accomplishment of it? He then took a very comprehensive view of the arguments, which had been offered in the course of the debate, and was severe upon the planters in the House, who, he said, had brought into familiar use certain expressions, with no other view than to throw a veil over their odious system. Among these was—their right to import labourers. But never was the word “labourers” so prostituted, as when it was used for slaves. Never was the word “right” so prostituted, not even when The Rights of Man were talked of, as when the right to trade in man’s blood was asserted by the members of an enlightened assembly. Never was the right of importing these labourers worse defended than when the antiquity of the Slave-trade, and its foundation on antient acts of parliament, were brought forward in its support. We had been cautioned not to lay our unhallowed hands on the antient institution of the Slave-trade; nor to subvert a fabric, raised by the wisdom of our ancestors, and consecrated by a lapse of ages. But on what principles did we usually respect the institutions of antiquity? We respected them when we saw some shadow of departed worth and usefulness; or some memorial of what had been creditable to mankind. But was this the case with the Slave-trade? Had it begun in principles of justice or national honour, which the changes of the world alone had impaired? had it to plead former services and glories in behalf of its present disgrace? In looking at it we saw nothing but crimes and sufferings from the beginning —nothing but what wounded and convulsed our feelings—nothing but what excited indignation and horror. It had not even to plead what could often be said in favour of the most unjustifiable wars. Though conquest had sometimes originated in ambition, and in the worst

Page 177

of motives, yet the conquerors and the conquered were sometimes blended afterwards into one people; so that a system of common interest arose out of former differences. But where was the analogy of the cases? Was it only at the outset that we could trace violence and injustice on the part of the Slave-trade? Were the oppressors and the oppressed so reconciled, that enmities ultimately ceased?—No. Was it reasonable then to urge a prescriptive right, not to the fruits of an antient and forgotten evil, but to a series of new violences; to a chain of fresh enormities; to cruelties continually repeated; and of which every instance inflicted a fresh calamity, and constituted a separate and substantial crime?

The debate being over, the House divided; when it appeared that there were for Mr. Wilberforce's motion seventy-four, but against it eighty-two.

The motion for the general abolition of the Slave-trade having been thus lost again in the Commons, a new motion was made there soon after, by Mr. Henry Thornton, on the same subject. The prosecution of this traffic on certain parts of the coast of Africa had become so injurious to the new settlement at Sierra Leone, that not only its commercial prospects were impeded, but its safety endangered. Mr. Thornton therefore brought in a bill to confine the Slave-trade within certain limits. But even this bill, though it had for its object only to free a portion of the coast from the ravages of this traffic, was opposed by Mr. Gascoyne, Dent, and others. Petitions also were presented against it. At length, after two divisions, on the first of which there were thirty-two votes to twenty-seven, and on the second thirty-eight to twenty-two, it passed through all its stages.

When it was introduced into the Lords the petitions were renewed against it. Delay also was interposed to its progress by the examination of witnesses. It was not till the fifth of July that the matter was brought to issue. The opponents of the bill at that time were, the Duke of Clarence, Lord Westmoreland, Lord Thurlow, and the Lords Douglas and Hay, the two latter being Earls of Morton and Kinnoul in Scotland. The supporters of it were Lord Grenville, who introduced it; Lord Loughborough; Holland; and Dr. Horsley, bishop of Rochester. The latter was peculiarly eloquent. He began his speech by arraigning the injustice and impolicy of the trade: injustice, he said, which no considerations of policy could extenuate; impolicy, equal in degree to its injustice.

He well knew that the advocates for the Slave-trade had endeavoured to represent the project for abolition as a branch of jacobinism; but they, who supported it, proceeded upon no visionary motives of equality or of the imprescriptible rights of man. They strenuously upheld the gradations of civil society: but they did indeed affirm that these gradations were, both ways, both as they ascended and as they descended, limited. There was an existence of power, to which no good king would aspire; and there was an extreme condition of subjection, to which man could not be degraded without injustice;

and this they would maintain was the condition of the African, who was torn away into slavery.

Page 178

He then explained the limits of that portion of Africa, which the bill intended to set apart as sacred to peace and liberty. He showed that this was but one-third of the coast; and therefore that two-thirds were yet left for the diabolical speculations of the slave-merchants. He expressed his surprise that such witnesses as those against the bill should have been introduced at all. He affirmed that their oaths were falsified by their own log-books; and that from their own accounts the very healthiest of their vessels were little better than pestilential gaols. Mr. Robert Hume, one of these witnesses, had made a certain voyage. He had made it in thirty-three days. He had shipped two hundred and sixty-five slaves, and he had lost twenty-three of them. If he had gone on losing his slaves, all of whom were under twenty-five years of age, at this rate, it was obvious, that he would have lost two hundred and fifty-three of them, if his passage had lasted for a year. Now in London only seventeen would have died, of that age, out of one thousand within the latter period.

After having exposed the other voyages of Mr. Hume in a similar manner, he entered into a commendation of the views of the Sierra Leone company; and then defended the character of the Africans in their own country, as exhibited in the Travels of Mr. Mungo Park. He made a judicious discrimination with respect to slavery, as it existed among them. He showed that this slavery was analogous to that of the heroic and patriarchal ages; and contrasted it with the West Indian in an able manner.

He adverted, lastly, to what had fallen from the learned counsel, who had supported the petitions of the slave-merchants. One of them had put this question to their lordships, “if the Slave-trade were as wicked as it had been represented, why was there no prohibition of it in the holy scriptures?” He then entered into a full defence of the scriptures on this ground, which he concluded by declaring that, as St. Paul had coupled men-stealers with murderers, he had condemned the Slave-trade in one of its most productive modes, and generally in all its modes:—and here it was worthy of remark, that the word used by the apostle on this occasion, and which had been translated men-stealers, should have been rendered slave-traders. This was obvious from the Scholiast of Aristophanes, whom he quoted. It was clear therefore that the Slave-trade, if murder was forbidden, had been literally forbidden also.

The learned counsel too had admonished their lordships, to beware how they adopted the visionary projects of fanatics. He did not know in what direction this shaft was shot; and he cared not. It did not concern him. With the highest reverence for the religion of the land, with the firmest conviction of its truth, and with the deepest sense of the importance of its doctrines, he was proudly conscious, that the general shape and fashion of his life bore nothing of the stamp of fanaticism. But he begged leave,

Page 179

in his turn, to address a word of serious exhortation to their lordships. He exhorted them to beware, how they were persuaded to bury, under the opprobrious name of fanaticism, the regard which they owed to the great duties of mercy and justice, for the neglect of which (if they should neglect them) they would be answerable at that tribunal, where no prevarication of witnesses could misinform the judge; and where no subtlety of an advocate, miscalling the names of things, putting evil for good and good for evil, could mislead his judgement.

At length the debate ended: when the bill was lost by a majority of sixty-eight to sixty-one, including personal votes and proxies.

I cannot conclude this chapter without offering a few remarks. And, first, I may observe, as the substance of the debates has not been given for the period which it contains, that Mr. Wilberforce, upon whom too much praise cannot be bestowed for his perseverance from year to year, amidst the disheartening circumstances which attended his efforts, brought every new argument to bear, which either the discovery of new light or the events of the times produced. I may observe also, in justice to the memories of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox, that there was no debate within this period, in which they did not take a part; and in which they did not irradiate others from the profusion of their own light: and, thirdly, that in consequence of the efforts of the three, conjoined with those of others, the great cause of the abolition was secretly gaining ground. Many members who were not connected with the trade, but who had yet hitherto supported it, were on the point of conversion. Though the question had oscillated backwards and forwards, so that an ordinary spectator could have discovered no gleam of hope at these times, nothing is more certain, than that the powerful eloquence then displayed had smoothed the resistance to it; had shortened its vibrations; and had prepared it for a state of rest.

With respect to the West Indians themselves, some of them began to see through the mists of prejudice, which had covered them. In the year 1794, when the bill for the abolition of the foreign Slave-trade was introduced, Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Barham supported it. They called upon the planters in the House to give way to humanity, where their own interests could not be affected by their submission. This indeed may be said to have been no mighty thing; but it was a frank confession of the injustice of the Slave-trade, and the beginning of the change which followed, both with respect to themselves and others.

With respect to the old friends of the cause, it is with regret I mention, that it lost the support of Mr. Windham within this period; and this regret is increased by the consideration, that he went off on the avowed plea of expediency against moral rectitude; a doctrine, which, at least upon this subject, he had reprobated for ten years. It was, however, some consolation, as far as talents were concerned, (for there can be

none for the loss of virtuous feeling,) that Mr. Canning, a new member, should have so ably supplied his place.

Page 180

Of the gradual abolitionists, whom we have always considered as the most dangerous enemies of the cause, Mr. Jenkinson (now Lord Hawkesbury), Mr. Addington (now Lord Sidmouth), and Mr. Dundas (now Lord Melville), continued their opposition during all this time. Of the first two I shall say nothing at present; but I cannot pass over the conduct of the latter. He was the first person, as we have seen, to propose the gradual abolition of the Slave-trade; and he fixed the time for its cessation on the first of January 1800. His sincerity on this occasion was doubted by Mr. Fox at the very outset; for he immediately rose and said, that "something so mischievous had come out, something so like a foundation had been laid for preserving, not only for years to come, but for any thing he knew for ever, this detestable traffic, that he felt it his duty immediately to deprecate all such delusions upon the country." Mr. Pitt, who spoke soon afterwards, in reply to an argument advanced by Mr. Dundas, maintained, that "at whatever period the House should say that the Slave-trade should actually cease, this defence would equally be set up; for it would be just as good an argument in seventy years hence, as it was against the abolition then." And these remarks Mr. Dundas verified in a singular manner within this period: for in the year 1796, when his own bill, as amended in the Commons, was to take place, he was one of the most strenuous opposers of it; and in the year 1799, when in point of consistency it devolved upon him to propose it to the House, in order that the trade might cease on the first of January 1800, (which was the time of his own original choice, or a time unfettered by parliamentary amendment,) he was the chief instrument of throwing out Mr. Wilberforce's bill, which promised even a longer period to its continuance: so that it is obvious, that there was no time, within his own limits, when the abolition would have suited him, notwithstanding his profession, "that he had always been a warm advocate for the measure."

CHAPTER VIII.

Continuation from July 1799 to July 1805—Various motions within this period.

The question had now been brought forward in almost every possible way, and yet had been eventually lost. The total and immediate abolition had been attempted; and then the gradual. The gradual again had been tried for the year 1793, then for 1795, and then for 1796, at which period it was decreed, but never allowed to be executed. An abolition of a part of the trade, as it related to the supply of foreigners with slaves, was the next measure proposed; and when this failed, the abolition of another part of it, as it related to the making of a certain portion of the coast of Africa sacred to liberty, was attempted; but this failed also. Mr. Wilberforce therefore thought it prudent, not to press the abolition as a mere annual measure, but to allow members time to digest the eloquence,

Page 181

which had been bestowed upon it for the last five years, and to wait till some new circumstances should favour its introduction. Accordingly he allowed the years 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803 to pass over without any further parliamentary notice than the moving for certain papers; during which he took an opportunity of assuring the House, that he had not grown cool in the cause, but that he would agitate it in a future session.

In the year 1804, which was fixed upon for renewed exertion, the committee for the abolition of the Slave-trade elected James Stephen, Zachary Macaulay, Henry Brougham, esquires, and William Phillips, into their own body. Four other members also, Robert Grant and John Thornton, esquires, and William Manser and William Allen, were afterwards added to the list. Among the reasons for fixing upon this year one may be assigned, namely, that the Irish members, in consequence of the Union which had taken place between the two countries, had then all taken their seats in the House of Commons; and that most of them were friendly to the cause.

This being the situation of things, Mr. Wilberforce, on the thirtieth of March, asked leave to renew his bill for the abolition of the Slave-trade within a limited time. Mr. Fuller opposed the motion. A debate ensued. Colonel Tarleton, Mr. Devaynes, Mr. Addington, and Mr. Manning spoke against it. The latter, however, notwithstanding his connection with the West Indies, said he would support it, if an indemnification were offered to the planters, in case any actual loss should accompany the measure.

Sir William Geary questioned the propriety of immediate abolition.

Sir Robert Buxton, Mr. Pitt, Fox, and Durham, spoke in favour of the motion.

Mr. William Smith rose, when the latter had seated himself, and complimented him on this change of sentiment, so honourable to him, inasmuch as he had espoused the cause of humanity against his supposed interest as a planter. Mr. Leigh said, that he would not tolerate such a traffic for a moment. All the feelings of nature revolted at it. Lord de Blaquiere observed, “it was the first time the question had been proposed to Irishmen as legislators. He believed it would be supported by most of them. As to the people of Ireland, he could pledge himself, that they were hostile to this barbarous traffic.” An amendment having been proposed by Mr. Manning, a division took place upon it, when leave was given to bring in the bill, by a majority of one hundred and twenty-four to forty-nine.

On the seventh of June, when the second reading of the bill was moved, it was opposed by Sir W. Yonge, Dr. Laurence, Mr. C. Brook, Mr. Dent, and others. Among these Lord Castlereagh professed himself a friend to the abolition of the trade, but he differed as to the mode. Sir J. Wrottesley approved of the principle of the bill, but would oppose it in some of its details. Mr. Windham allowed the justice,

Page 182

but differed as to the expediency, of the measure. Mr. Deverell professed himself to have been a friend to it; but he had then changed his mind. Sir Laurence Parsons wished to see a plan for the gradual extinction of the trade. Lord Temple affirmed, that the bill would seal the death-warrant of every White inhabitant of the islands. The second reading was supported by Sir Ralph Milbank, Mr. Pitt, Fox, William Smith, Whitbread, Francis, Barham, and by Mr. Grenfell, and Sir John Newport. Mr. Grenfell observed, that he could not give a silent vote, where the character of the country was concerned. When the question of the abolition first came before the public, he was a warm friend to it; and from that day to this he had cherished the same feelings. He assured Mr. Wilberforce of his constant support. Sir John Newport stated that the Irish nation took a virtuous interest in this noble cause. He ridiculed the idea, that the trade and manufactures of the country would suffer by the measure in contemplation; but, even if they should suffer, he would oppose it. “Fiat justitia, ruat coelum.” Upon a division, there appeared for the second reading one hundred, and against it forty-two.

On the twelfth of June, when a motion was made to go into a committee upon the bill, it was opposed by Mr. Fuller, C. Brook, C. Ellis, Dent, Deverell, and Manning: and it was supported by Sir Robert Buxton, Mr. Barham, and the honourable J.S. Cocks. The latter condemned the imprudence of the planters. Instead of profiting by the discussions, which had taken place, and making wise provisions against the great event of the abolition, which would sooner or later take place, they had only thought of new stratagems to defeat it. He declared his abhorrence of the trade, which he considered to be a national disgrace. The House divided: when there were seventy-nine for the motion, and against it twenty.

On the twenty-seventh of June the bill was opposed in its last stage by Sir W. Young, Mr. Dickenson, G. Rose, Addington, and Dent: and supported by Mr. Pitt, W. Smith, Francis, and Barham; when it was carried by a majority of sixty-nine to thirty-six. It was then taken up to the Lords; but on a motion of Lord Hawkesbury, then a member of that House, the discussion of it was postponed to the next year.

The session being ended, the committee for the abolition of the Slave-trade increased its number, by the election of the right honourable Lord Teignmouth, Dr. Dickson, and Wilson Birkbeck, as members.

In the year 1805, Mr. Wilberforce renewed his motion of the former year. Colonel Tarleton, Sir William Yonge, Mr. Fuller, and Mr. Gascoyne opposed it. Leave, however, was given him to introduce his bill.

Page 183

On the second reading of it a serious opposition took place; and an amendment was moved for postponing it till that day six months. The amendment was opposed by Mr. Fox and Mr. Huddlestone. The latter could not help lifting his voice against this monstrous traffic in the sinews and blood of man, the toleration of which had so long been the disgrace of the British legislature. He did not charge the enormous guilt resulting from it upon the nation at large; for the nation had washed its hands of it by the numerous petitions it had sent against it; and it had since been a matter of astonishment to all Christendom, how the constitutional guardians of British freedom should have sanctioned elsewhere the greatest system of cruelty and oppression in the world.

He said that a curse attended this trade even in the mode of defending it. By a certain fatality, none but the vilest arguments were brought forward, which corrupted the very persons, who used them. Every one of these were built on the narrow ground of interest; of pecuniary profit; of sordid gain; in opposition to every higher consideration; to every motive that had reference to humanity, justice, and religion; or to that great principle, which comprehended them all. Place only before the most determined advocate of this odious traffic the exact image of himself in the garb and harness of a slave, dragged and whipped about like a beast: place this image also before him, and paint it as that of one without a ray of hope to cheer him; and you would extort from him the reluctant confession, that he would not endure for an hour the misery, to which he condemned his fellow-man for life. How dared he then to use this selfish plea of interest against the voice of the generous sympathies of his nature? But even upon this narrow ground the advocates for the traffic had been defeated. If the unhallowed argument of expediency was worth any thing when opposed to moral rectitude, or if it were to supersede the precepts of Christianity, where was a man to stop, or what line was he to draw? For any thing he knew, it might be physically true, that human blood was the best manure for the land; but who ought to shed it on that account? True expediency, however, was, where it ever would be found, on the side of that system, which was most merciful and just. He asked how it happened, that sugar could be imported cheaper from the East Indies, than from the West, notwithstanding the vast difference of the length of the voyages, but on account of the impolicy of slavery, or that it was made in the former case by the industry of free men, and in the latter by the languid drudgery of slaves.

Page 184

As he had had occasion to advert to the Eastern part of the world, he would make an observation upon an argument, which had been collected from that quarter. The condition of the Negros in the West Indies had been lately compared with that of the Hindoos. But he would observe that the Hindoo, miserable as his hovel was, had sources of pride and happiness, to which not only the West Indian slave, but even his master, was a stranger. He was to be sure a peasant; and his industry was subservient to the gratifications of an European lord. But he was, in his own belief, vastly superior to him. He viewed him as one of the lowest cast. He would not on any consideration eat from the same plate. He would not suffer his son to marry the daughter of his master, even if she could bring him all the West Indies as her portion. He would observe too, that the Hindoo-peasant drank his water from his native well; that, if his meal were scanty, he received it from the hand of her, who was most dear to him; that, when he laboured, he laboured for her and his offspring. His daily task being finished, he reposed with his family. No retrospect of the happiness of former days, compared with existing misery, disturbed his slumber; nor horrid dreams occasioned him to wake in agony at the dawn of day. No barbarous sounds of cracking whips reminded him, that with the form and image of a man his destiny was that of the beast of the field. Let the advocates for the bloody traffic state what they had to set off on their side of the question against the comforts and independence of the man, with whom they compared the slave.

The amendment was supported by Sir William Yonge, Sir William Pulteney, Colonel Tarleton, Mr. Gascoyne, C. Brook, and Hiley Addington. On dividing the House upon it, there appeared for it seventy-seven, but against it only seventy.

This loss of the question, after it had been carried in the last year by so great a majority, being quite unexpected, was a matter of severe disappointment; and might have discouraged the friends of the cause in this infancy of their renewed efforts, if they had not discovered the reason of its failure. After due consideration it appeared, that no fewer than nine members, who had never been absent once in sixteen years when it was agitated, gave way to engagements on the day of the motion, from a belief that it was safe. It appeared also, that out of the great number of Irish members, who supported it in the former year, only nine were in the House, when it was lost. It appeared also that, previously to this event, a canvass, more importunate than had been heard of on any former occasion, had been made among the latter by those interested in the continuance of the trade. Many of these, unacquainted with the detail of the subject, like the English members, admitted the dismal representations, which were then made to them. The desire of doing good on the one hand, and the fear of doing injury on the other, perplexed them; and in this dubious state they absented themselves at the time mentioned.

Page 185

The causes of the failure having been found accidental, and capable of a remedy, it was resolved, that an attempt should be made immediately in the House in a new form. Accordingly Lord Henry Petty signified his intention of bringing in a bill for the abolition of the foreign part of the Slave-trade; but the impeachment of Lord Melville, and other weighty matters coming on, the notice was not acted upon in that session.

CHAPTER IX.

Continuation from July 1805 to July 1806—Author returns to his duty in the committee —travels again round the Kingdom—Death of Mr. Pitt—his character, an it related to the question—Motion for the abolition of the foreign Slave-trade—resolution to take measures for the total abolition of it—Address to the King to negotiate with foreign powers for their concurrence in it—Motion to prevent any new vessel going into the trade—these carried through both houses of parliament.

It was now almost certain, to the inexpressible joy of the committee, that the cause, with proper vigilance, could be carried in the next session in the House of Commons. It became them therefore to prepare to support it. In adverting to measures for this purpose, it occurred to them, that the House of Lords, if the question should be then carried to them from the Commons, might insist upon hearing evidence on the general subject. But, alas, even the body of witnesses, which had been last collected, was broken by death or dispersion! It was therefore to be formed again. In this situation it devolved upon me, as I had now returned to the committee after an absence of nine years, to take another journey for this purpose.

This journey I performed with extraordinary success. In the course of it I had also much satisfaction on another account. I found the old friends of the cause still faithful to it. It was remarkable, however, that the youth of the rising generation knew but little about the question. For the last eight or nine years the committee had not circulated any books; and the debates in the Commons during that time had not furnished them with the means of an adequate knowledge concerning it. When, however, I conversed with these, as I travelled along, I discovered a profound attention to what I said; an earnest desire to know more of the subject; and a generous warmth in favour of the injured Africans, which I foresaw could soon be turned into enthusiasm. Hence I perceived that the cause furnished us with endless sources of rallying; and that the ardour, which we had seen with so much admiration in former years, could be easily renewed.

I had scarcely finished my journey, when Mr. Pitt died. This event took place in January 1806. I shall stop therefore to make a few observations upon his character, as it related to this cause. This I feel myself bound in justice to do, because his sincerity towards it has been generally questioned.

Page 186

The way, in which Mr. Pitt became acquainted with this question, has already been explained. A few doubts having been removed, when it was first started, he professed himself a friend to the abolition. The first proof, which he gave of his friendship to it is known but to few; but it is, nevertheless, true, that so early as in 1788, he occasioned a communication to be made to the French government, in which he recommended an union of the two countries for the promotion of the great measure. This proposition seemed to be then new and strange to the court of France; and the answer was not favourable.

From this time his efforts were reduced within the boundaries of his own power.

As far, however, as he had scope, he exerted them. If we look at him in his parliamentary capacity, it must be acknowledged by all, that he took an active, strenuous, and consistent part, and this year after year, by which he realized his professions. In my own private communications with him, which were frequent, he never failed to give proofs of a similar disposition. I had always free access to him. I had no previous note or letter to write for admission. Whatever papers I wanted, he ordered. He exhibited also in his conversation with me on these occasions marks of a more than ordinary interest in the welfare of the cause. Among the subjects, which were then started, there was one, which was always near his heart. This was the civilization of Africa. He looked upon this great work as a debt due to that continent for the many injuries we had inflicted upon it: and had the abolition succeeded sooner, as in the infancy of his exertions he had hoped, I know he had a plan, suited no doubt to the capaciousness of his own mind, for such establishments in Africa, as he conceived would promote in due time this important end.

I believe it will be said, notwithstanding what I have advanced, that if Mr. Pitt had exerted himself as the minister of the country in behalf of the abolition, he could have carried it. This brings the matter to an issue; for unquestionably the charge of insincerity, as it related to this great question, arose from the mistaken notion, that, as his measures in parliament were supported by great majorities, he could do as he pleased there. But, they who hold this opinion, must be informed, that there were great difficulties, against which he had to struggle on this subject. The Lord Chancellor Thurlow ran counter to his wishes almost at the very outset. Lord Liverpool and Mr. Dundas did the same. Thus, to go no further, three of the most powerful members of the cabinet were in direct opposition to him. The abolition then, amidst this difference of opinion, could never become a cabinet measure; but if so, then all his parliamentary efforts in this case wanted their usual authority, and he could only exert his influence as a private man[A].

[Footnote A: This he did with great effect on one or two occasions. On the motion of Mr. Cawthorne in 1791, the cause hung as it were by a thread; and would have failed that day, to my knowledge, but for his seasonable exertions.]

Page 187

But a difficulty, still more insuperable, presented itself, in an occurrence which took place in the year 1791, but which is much too delicate to be mentioned. The explanation of it, however, would convince the reader, that all the efforts of Mr. Pitt from that day were rendered useless, I mean as to bringing the question, as a minister of state, to a favourable issue.

But though Mr. Pitt did not carry this great question, he was yet one of the greatest supporters of it. He fostered it in its infancy. If, in his public situation, he had then set his face against it, where would have been our hope? He upheld it also in its childhood; and though in this state of its existence it did not gain from his protection all the strength which it was expected it would have acquired, he yet kept it from falling, till his successors, in whose administration a greater number of favourable circumstances concurred to give it vigour, brought it to triumphant maturity.

Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox, having been called to the head of the executive government on the death of Mr. Pitt, the cause was ushered into parliament under new auspices. In a former year His Majesty had issued a proclamation, by which British merchants were forbidden (with certain defined exceptions) to import slaves into the colonies, which had been conquered by the British arms in the course of the war. This circumstance afforded an opportunity of trying the question in the House of Commons with the greatest hope of success. Accordingly Sir A. Pigott, the attorney-general, as an officer of the crown; brought in a bill on the thirty-first of March 1806, the first object of which was, to give effect to the proclamation now mentioned. The second was, to prohibit British subjects from being engaged in importing slaves into the colonies of any foreign power, whether hostile or neutral. And the third was, to prohibit British subjects and British capital from being employed in carrying on a Slave-trade in foreign ships; and also to prevent the outfit of foreign ships from British ports.

Sir A. Pigott, on the introduction of this bill, made an appropriate speech. The bill was supported by Mr. Fox, Sir William Yonge, Mr. Brook, and Mr. Bagwell; but opposed by Generals Tarleton and Gascoyne, Mr. Rose, Sir Robert Peele, and Sir Charles Price. On the third reading a division being called for, there appeared for it thirty-five, and against it only thirteen.

On the seventh of May it was introduced into the Lords. The supporters of it there were, the Duke of Gloucester, Lord Grenville, the Bishops of London and St. Asaph, the Earl of Buckinghamshire, and the Lords Holland, Lauderdale, Auckland, Sidmouth, and Ellenborough. The opposers were, the Dukes of Clarence and Sussex, the Marquis of Sligo, the Earl of Westmoreland, and the Lords Eldon and Sheffield. At length a division took place, when there appeared to be in favour of it forty-three, and against it eighteen.

Page 188

During the discussions, to which this bill gave birth, Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox declared in substance, in their respective Houses of Parliament, that they felt the question of the Slave-trade to be one, which involved the dearest interests of humanity, and the most urgent claims of policy, justice, and religion; and that, should they succeed in effecting its abolition, they would regard that success as entailing more true glory on their administration, and more honour and advantage on their country, than any other measure, in which they could be engaged. The bill having passed (the first, which dismembered this cruel trade,) it was thought proper to follow it up in a prudent manner; and, as there was not then time in the advanced period of the session to bring in another for the total extinction of it, to move a resolution, by which both Houses should record those principles, on which the propriety of the latter measure was founded. It was judged also expedient that Mr. Fox, as the prime minister in the House of Commons, should introduce it there.

On the tenth of June Mr. Fox rose. He began by saying that the motion, with which he should conclude, would tend in its consequences to effect the total abolition of the Slave-trade; and he confessed that, since he had sat in that House (a period of between thirty and forty years), if he had done nothing else, but had only been instrumental in carrying through this measure, he should think his life well spent; and should retire quite satisfied, that he had not lived in vain.

In adverting to the principle of the trade, he noticed some strong expressions of Mr. Burke concerning it. “To deal in human flesh and blood,” said that great man, “or to deal, not in the labour of men, but in men themselves, was to devour the root, instead of enjoying the fruit of human diligence.”

Mr. Fox then took a view of the opinions of different members of the House on this great question; and showed that, though many had opposed the abolition, all but two or three, among whom were the members for Liverpool, had confessed, that the trade ought to be done away. He then went over the different resolutions of the House on the subject, and concluded from thence, that they were bound to support his motion.

He combated the argument, that the abolition would ruin the West-Indian Islands. In doing this he paid a handsome compliment to the memory of Mr. Pitt, whose speech upon this particular point was, he said, the most powerful and convincing of any he had ever heard. Indeed they, who had not heard it, could have no notion of it. It was a speech, of which he would say with the Roman author, reciting the words of the Athenian orator, “Quid esset, si ipsum audivissetis!” It was a speech no less remarkable for splendid eloquence, than for solid sense and convincing reason; supported by calculations founded on facts, and conclusions drawn from premises, as correctly as if they had been mathematical propositions; all

Page 189

tending to prove that, instead of the West Indian plantations suffering an injury, they would derive a material benefit by the abolition of the Slave-trade. He then called upon the friends of this great man to show their respect for his memory by their votes; and he concluded with moving, “that this House, considering the African Slave-trade to be contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and policy, will, with all practicable expedition, take effectual measures for the abolition of the said trade, in such a manner, and at such a period, as may be deemed advisable.”

Sir Ralph Milbank rose, and seconded the motion.

General Tarleton rose next. He deprecated the abolition, on account of the effect which it would have on the trade and revenue of the country.

Mr. Francis said the merchants of Liverpool were at liberty to ask for compensation; but he, for one, would never grant it for the loss of a trade, which had been declared to be contrary to humanity and justice. As an uniform friend to this great cause, he wished Mr. Fox had not introduced a resolution, but a real bill for the abolition of the Slave-trade. He believed that both Houses were then disposed to do it away. He wished the golden opportunity might not be lost.

Lord Castlereagh thought it a proposition, on which no one could entertain a doubt, that the Slave-trade was a great evil in itself; and that it was the duty and policy of Parliament to extirpate it; but he did not think the means offered were adequate to the end proposed. The abolition, as a political question, was a difficult one. The year 1796 had been once fixed upon by the House, as the period when the trade was to cease; but, when the time arrived, the resolution was not executed. This was a proof, either that the House did not wish for the event, or that they judged it impracticable. It would be impossible, he said, to get other nations to concur in the measure; and, even if they were to concur, it could not be effected. We might restrain the subjects of the parent-state from following the trade; but we could not those in our colonies. A hundred frauds would be committed by those, which we could not detect. He did not mean by this, that the evil was to go on for ever. Had a wise plan been proposed at first, it might have been half-cured by this time. The present resolution would do no good. It was vague, indefinite, and unintelligible. Such resolutions were only the Slave-merchants’ harvests. They would go for more slaves than usual in the interim. He should have advised a system of duties on fresh importations of slaves, progressively increasing to a certain extent; and that the amount of these duties should be given to the planters, as a bounty to encourage the Negro-population upon their estates. Nothing could be done, unless we went hand in hand with the latter. But he should deliver himself more fully on this subject, when any thing specific should be brought forward in the shape of a bill.

Page 190

Sir S. Romilly, the solicitor-general, differed from Lord Castlereagh; for he thought the resolution of Mr. Fox was very simple and intelligible. If there was a proposition vague and indefinite, it was that, advanced by the noble lord, of a system of duties on fresh importations, rising progressively, and this under the patronage and cooperation of the planters. Who could measure the space between the present time and the abolition of the trade, if that measure were to depend upon the approbation of the colonies?

The cruelty and injustice of the Slave-trade had been established by evidence beyond a doubt. It had been shown to be carried on by rapine, robbery, and murder; by fomenting and encouraging wars; by false accusations; and imaginary crimes. The unhappy victims were torn away not only in the time of war, but of profound peace. They were then carried across the Atlantic, in a manner too horrible to describe; and afterwards subjected to eternal slavery. In support of the continuance of such a traffic, he knew of nothing but assertions already disproved, and arguments already refuted. Since the year 1796, when it was to cease by a resolution of Parliament, no less than three hundred and sixty thousand Africans had been torn away from their native land. What an accumulation was this to our former guilt!

General Gascoyne made two extraordinary assertions: First, that the trade was defensible on Scriptural ground.—"Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen, that are round about thee; of them shall you have bondmen and bondmaids. And thou shalt take them as an heritance for thy children after thee to inherit them for a possession; they shall be thy bondmen for ever." Secondly, that the trade had been so advantageous to this country, that it would have been advisable even to institute a new one, if the old had not existed.

Mr. Wilberforce replied to General Gascoyne. He then took a view of the speech of Lord Castlereagh, which he answered point by point. In the course of his observations he showed, that the system of duties progressively increasing, as proposed by the noble lord, would be one of the most effectual modes of perpetuating the Slave-trade. He exposed also the false foundation of the hope of any reliance on the cooperation of the colonists. The House, he said, had on the motion of Mr. Ellis in the year 1797, prayed His Majesty to consult with the colonial legislatures to take such measures, as might conduce to the gradual abolition of the African Slave-trade. This address was transmitted to them by Lord Melville. It was received in some of the islands with a declaration, "that they possibly might, in some instances, endeavour to improve the condition of their slaves; but they should do this, not with any view to the abolition of the Slave-trade; for they considered that trade as their birth-right, which could not be taken from them; and that we should deceive ourselves by supposing,

Page 191

that they would agree to such a measure." He desired to add to this the declaration of General Prevost in his public letter from Dominica. Did he not say, when asked what steps had been taken there in consequence of the resolution of the House in 1797, "that the act of the legislature, entitled an act for the encouragement, protection, and better government of slaves, appeared to him 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 the slaves."

Sir William Yonge censured the harsh language of Sir Samuel Romilly, who had applied the terms rapine, robbery, and murder to those, who were connected with the Slave-trade. He considered the resolution of Mr. Fox as a prelude to a bill for the abolition of that traffic, and this bill as a prelude to emancipation, which would not only be dangerous in itself, but would change the state of property in the islands.

Lord Henry Petty, after having commented on the speeches of Sir S. Romilly and Lord Castlereagh, proceeded to state his own opinion on the trade; which was, that it was contrary to justice, humanity, and sound policy, all of which he considered to be inseparable. On its commencement in Africa the wickedness began. It produced there fraud and violence, robbery and murder. It gave birth to false accusations, and a mockery of justice. It was the parent of every crime, which could at once degrade and afflict the human race. After spreading vice and misery all over this continent, it doomed its unhappy victims to hardships and cruelties which were worse than death. The first of these was conspicuous in their transportation. It was found there, that cruelty begat cruelty; that the system, wicked in its beginning, was equally so in its progress; and that it perpetuated its miseries wherever it was carried on. Nor was it baneful only to the objects, but to the promoters of it. The loss of British seamen in this traffic was enormous. One fifth of all, who were employed in it, perished; that is, they became the victims of a system, which was founded on fraud, robbery, and murder; and which procured to the British nation nothing but the execration of mankind. Nor had we yet done with the evils, which attended it; for it brought in its train the worst of all moral effects, not only as it respected the poor slaves, when transported to the colonies, but as it respected those, who had concerns with them there. The arbitrary power, which it conferred, afforded men of bad dispositions full scope for the exercise of their passions; and it rendered men, constitutionally of good dispositions, callous to the misery of others. Thus it depraved the nature of all, who were connected with it. These considerations had made him a friend to the abolition from the time he was capable of reasoning upon it. They were considerations also, which determined the House in the year 1782 to adopt a measure of the same kind as the present. Had any thing happened to change the opinion of members since? On the contrary, they had now the clearest evidence, that all the arguments then used against the abolition were fallacious; being founded not upon truth, but on assertions devoid of all truth, and derived from ignorance or prejudice.

Page 192

Having made these remarks, he proved by a number of facts the folly of the argument, that the Africans laboured under such a total degradation of mental and moral faculties, that they were made for slavery.

He then entered into the great subject of population. He showed that in all countries, where there were no unnatural hardships, mankind would support themselves. He applied this reasoning to the Negro-population in the West Indies; which he maintained could not only be kept up, but increased, without any further importations from Africa.

He then noticed the observations of Sir W. Yonge on the words of Sir S. Romilly; and desired him to reserve his indignation for those, who were guilty of acts of rapine, robbery, and murder, instead of venting it on those, who only did their duty in describing them. Never were accounts more shocking than those lately sent to government from the West Indies. Lord Seaforth, and the Attorney-general, could not refrain, in explaining them, from the use of the words murder and torture. And did it become members of that House (in order to accommodate the nerves of the friends of the Slave-trade) to soften down their expressions, when they were speaking on that subject; and to desist from calling that murder and torture, for which a governor, and the attorney-general, of one of the islands could find no better name?

After making observations relative to the cooperation of foreign powers in this great work, he hoped that the House would not suffer itself to be drawn, either by opposition or by ridicule, to the right or to the left; but that it would, advance straight forward to the accomplishment of the most magnanimous act of justice, that was ever achieved by any legislature in the world.

Mr. Rose declared, that on the very first promulgation of this question, he had proposed to the friends of it the very plan of his noble friend Lord Castlereagh; namely, a system of progressive duties, and of bounties for the promotion of the Negro-population. This he said to show that he was friendly to the principle of the measure. He would now observe, that he did not wholly like the present resolution. It was too indefinite. He wished also, that something had been said on the subject of compensation. He was fearful also, lest the abolition should lead to the dangerous change of emancipation. The Negros, he said, could not be in a better state, or more faithful to their masters, than they were. In three attacks made by the enemy on Dominica, where he had a large property, arms had been put into their hands; and every one of them had exerted himself faithfully. With respect to the cruel acts in Barbadoes, an account of which had been sent to government by Lord Seaforth and the Attorney-general of Barbadoes, he had read them; and never had he read any thing on this subject with more horror. He would agree to the strongest measures for the prevention of such acts in future. He would even give up the colony, which should refuse to make the wilful murder of a slave felony. But as to the other, or common, evils complained of, he thought the remedy should be gradual; and such also as the planters would concur in. He would nevertheless not oppose the present resolution.

Page 193

Mr. Barham considered compensation but reasonable, where losses were to accrue from the measure, when it should be put in execution; but he believed that the amount of it would be much less than was apprehended. He considered emancipation, though so many fears had been expressed about it, as forming no objection to the abolition, though he had estates in the West Indies himself. Such a measure, if it could be accomplished successfully, would be an honour to the country, and a blessing to the planters; but preparation must be made for it by rendering the slaves fit for freedom, and by creating in them an inclination to free labour. Such a change could only be the work of time.

Sir John Newport said that the expressions of Sir S. Romilly, which had given such offence, had been used by others; and would be used with propriety, while the trade lasted. Some slave-dealers of Liverpool had lately attempted to prejudice certain merchants of Ireland in their favour. But none of their representations answered; and it was remarkable, that the reply made to them was in these words. “We will have no share in a traffic, consisting in rapine, blood, and murder.” He then took a survey of a system of duties progressively increasing, and showed, that it would be utterly inefficient; and that there was no real remedy for the different evils complained of, but in the immediate prohibition of the trade.

Mr. Canning renewed his professions of friendship to the cause. He did not like the present resolution; yet he would vote for it. He should have been better pleased with a bill, which would strike at once at the root of this detestable commerce.

Mr. Manning wished the question to be deferred to the next session. He hoped, compensation would then be brought forward as connected with it. Nothing, however, effectual could be done without the concurrence of the planters.

Mr. William Smith noticed, in a striking manner, the different inconsistencies in the arguments of those, who contended for the continuance of the trade.

Mr. Windham deprecated not only the Slave-trade, but slavery also. They were essentially connected with each other. They were both evils, and ought both of them to be done away. Indeed, if emancipation would follow the abolition, he should like the latter measure the better. Rapine, robbery, and murder were the true characteristics of this traffic. The same epithets had not indeed been applied to slavery, because this was a condition, in which some part of the human race had been at every period of the history of the world. It was, however, a state, which ought not to be allowed to exist. But, notwithstanding all these confessions, he should weigh well the consequences of the abolition before he gave it his support. It would be on a balance between the evils themselves and the consequences of removing them, that he should decide for himself on this question.

Mr. Fox took a view of all the arguments, which had been advanced by the opponents of the abolition; and having given an appropriate answer to each, the House divided, when there appeared for the resolution one hundred and fourteen, and against it but fifteen.

Page 194

Immediately after this division Mr. Wilberforce moved an address to His Majesty, “praying that he would be graciously pleased, to direct a negotiation to be entered into, by which foreign powers should be invited to cooperate with His Majesty in measures to be adopted for the abolition of the African Slave-trade.”

This address was carried without a division. It was also moved and carried, that “these resolutions be communicated to the Lords; and that their concurrence should be desired therein.”

On the twenty-fourth of June the Lords met to consider of the resolution and address. The Earl of Westmoreland proposed, that both counsel and evidence should be heard against them; but his proposition was overruled.

Lord Grenville then read the resolution of the Commons. This resolution, he said, stated first, that the Slave-trade was contrary to humanity, justice, and sound policy. That it was contrary to humanity was obvious; for humanity might be said to be sympathy for the distress of others, or a desire to accomplish benevolent ends by good means. But did not the Slave-trade convey ideas the very reverse of this definition? It deprived men of all those Comforts, in which it pleased the Creator to make the happiness of his creatures to consist,—of the blessings of society,—of the charities of the dear relationships of husband, wife, father, son, and kindred,—of the due discharge of the relative duties of these,—and of that freedom, which in its pure and natural sense was one of the greatest gifts of God to man.

It was impossible to read the evidence, as it related to this trade, without acknowledging the inhumanity of it, and our own disgrace. By what means was it kept up in Africa? By wars instigated, not by the passions of the natives, but by our avarice. He knew it would be said in reply to this, that the slaves, who were purchased by us, would be put to death, if we were not to buy them. But what should we say, if it should turn out, that we were the causes of those very cruelties, which we affected to prevent? But, if it were not so, ought the first nation in the world to condescend to be the executioner of savages?

Another way of keeping up the Slave-trade was by the practice of man-stealing. The evidence was particularly clear upon this head. This practice included violence, and often bloodshed. The inhumanity of it therefore could not be doubted.

The unhappy victims, being thus procured, were conveyed, he said, across the Atlantic in a manner which justified the charge of inhumanity again. Indeed the suffering here was so great, that neither the mind could conceive nor the tongue describe it. He had said on a former occasion, that in their transportation there was a greater portion of misery condensed within a smaller space, than had ever existed in the known world. He would repeat his words; for he did not know, how he could express himself better on the subject. And, after all these horrors, what was their destiny? It was such, as

justified the charge in the resolution again: for, after having survived the sickness arising from the passage, they were doomed to interminable slavery.

Page 195

We had been, he said, so much accustomed to words, descriptive of the cruelty of this traffic, that we had almost forgotten their meaning. He wished that some person, educated as an Englishman, with suitable powers of eloquence, but now for the first time informed of all the horrors of it, were to address their lordships upon it, and he was sure, that they would instantly determine that it should cease. But the continuance of it had rendered cruelty familiar to us; and the recital of its horrors had been so frequent, that we could now hear them stated without being affected as we ought to be. He intreated their lordships, however, to endeavour to conceive the hard case of the unhappy victims of it; and as he had led them to the last stage of their miserable existence, which was in the colonies, to contemplate it there. They were there under the arbitrary will of a cruel task-master from morning till night. When they went to rest, would not their dreams be frightful? When they awoke, would they not awake,

> ——"only to discover sights of woe,
> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all; but torture without end
> Still urges?"——

They knew no change, except in the humour of their masters, to whom their whole destiny was entrusted. We might perhaps flatter ourselves with saying, that they were subject to the will of Englishmen. But Englishmen were not better than others, when in possession of arbitrary power. The very fairest exercise of it was a never-failing corrupter of the heart. But suppose it were allowed, that self-interest might operate some little against cruelty; yet where was the interest of the overseer or the driver? But he knew it would be said, that the evils complained of in the colonies had been mitigated. There might be instances of this; but they could never be cured, while slavery existed. Slavery took away more than half of the human character. Hence the practice, where it existed, of rejecting the testimony of the slave: but, if his testimony was rejected, where could be his redress against his oppressor?

Having shown the inhumanity, he would proceed to the second point in the resolution, or the injustice, of the trade. We had two ideas of justice, first, as it belonged to society by virtue of a social compact; and, secondly, as it belonged to men, not as citizens of a community, but as beings of one common nature. In a state of nature, man had a right to the fruit of his own labour absolutely to himself; and one of the main purposes, for which he entered into society, was, that he might be better protected in the possession of his rights. In both cases therefore it was manifestly unjust, that a man should be made to labour during the whole of his life, and yet have no benefit from his labour. Hence the Slave-trade and the Colonial slavery were a violation of the very principle,

Page 196

upon which all law for the protection of property was founded. Whatever benefit was derived from that trade to an individual, it was derived from dishonour and dishonesty. He forced from the unhappy victim of it that, which the latter did not wish to give him; and he gave to the same victim that, which he in vain attempted to show was an equivalent to the thing he took, it being a thing for which there was no equivalent; and which, if he had not obtained by force, he would not have possessed at all. Nor could there be any answer to this reasoning, unless it could be proved, that it had pleased God to give to the inhabitants of Britain a property in the liberty and life of the natives of Africa. But he would go further on this subject. The injustice complained of was not confined to the bare circumstance of robbing them of the right to their own labour. It was conspicuous throughout the system. They, who bought them, became guilty of all the crimes which had been committed in procuring them; and, when they possessed them, of all the crimes which belonged to their inhuman treatment. The injustice in the latter case amounted frequently to murder. For what was it but murder to pursue a practice, which produced untimely death to thousands of innocent and helpless beings? It was a duty, which their lordships owed to their Creator, if they hoped for mercy, to do away this monstrous oppression.

With respect to the impolicy of the trade (the third point in the resolution), he would say at once, that whatever was inhuman and unjust must be impolitic. He had, however, no objection to argue the point upon its own particular merits; and, first, he would observe, that a great man, Mr. Pitt, now no more, had exerted his vast powers on many subjects to the admiration of his hearers; but on none more successfully than on the subject of the abolition of the Slave-trade. He proved, after making an allowance for the price paid for the slaves in the West Indies, for the loss of them in the seasoning, and for the expense of maintaining them afterwards, and comparing these particulars with the amount in value of their labour there, that the evils endured by the victims of the traffic were no gain to the master, in whose service they took place. Indeed Mr. Long had laid it down in his History of Jamaica, that the best way to secure the planters from ruin would be to do that, which the resolution recommended. It was notorious, that when any planter was in distress, and sought to relieve himself by increasing the labour on his estate by means of the purchase of new slaves, the measure invariably tended to his destruction. What then was the importation of fresh Africans but a system, tending to the general ruin of the islands?

Page 197

But it had often been said, that without fresh importations the population of the slaves could not be supported in the islands. This, however, was a mistake. It had arisen from reckoning the deaths of the imported Africans, of whom so many were lost in the seasoning, among the deaths of the Creole-slaves. He did not mean to say, that under the existing degree of misery the population would greatly increase; but he would maintain, that, if the deaths and the births were calculated upon those, who were either born, or who had been a long time in the islands, so as to be considered as natives, it would be found that the population had not only been kept up, but that it had been increased.

If it was true, that the labour of a free man was cheaper than that of a slave; and also that the labour of a long imported slave was cheaper than that of a fresh imported one; and again, that the chances of mortality were much more numerous among the newly imported slaves in the West Indies, than among those of old standing there (propositions, which he took to be established), we should see new arguments for the impolicy of the trade.

It might be stated also, that the importation of vast bodies of men, who had been robbed of their rights, and grievously irritated on that account, into our colonies (where their miserable condition opened new sources of anger and revenge), was the importation only of the seeds of insurrection into them. And here he could not but view with astonishment the reasoning of the West Indian planters, who held up the example of St. Domingo as a warning against the abolition of the Slave-trade; because the continuance of it was one of the great causes of the insurrections and subsequent miseries in that devoted island. Let us but encourage importations in the same rapid progression of increase every year, which took place in St. Domingo, and we should witness the same effect in our own islands.

To expose the impolicy of the trade further, he would observe, that it was an allowed axiom, that as the condition of man was improved, he became more useful. The history of our own country, in very early times, exhibited instances of internal slavery, and this to a considerable extent. But we should find that precisely in proportion as that slavery was ameliorated, the power and prosperity of the country flourished. This was exactly applicable to the case in question. There could be no general amelioration of slavery in the West Indies, while the Slave-trade lasted: but, if we were to abolish it, we should make it the interest of every owner of slaves to do that, which would improve their condition; and which indeed would lead ultimately to the annihilation of slavery itself. This great event, however, could not be accomplished at once. It could only be effected in a course of time.

Page 198

It would be endless, he said, to go into all the cases, which would manifest the impolicy of this odious traffic. Inhuman as it was, unjust as it was, he believed it to be equally impolitic; and if their lordships should be of this opinion also, he hoped they would agree to that part of the resolution, in which these truths were expressed. With respect to the other part of it, or that they would proceed to abolish the trade, he observed, that neither the time nor the manner of doing it were specified. Hence if any of them should differ as to these particulars, they might yet vote for the resolution; as they were not pledged to any thing definite in these respects; provided they thought that the trade should be abolished at some time or other; and he did not believe, that there was any one of them, who would sanction its continuance for ever.

Lord Hawkesbury said, that he did not mean to discuss the question on the ground of justice and humanity, as contradistinguished from sound policy. If it could fairly be made out, that the African Slave-trade was contrary to justice and humanity, it ought to be abolished. It did not, however, follow, because a great evil subsisted, that therefore it should be removed; for it might be comparatively a less evil, than that which would accompany the attempt to remove it. The noble lord, who had just spoken, had exemplified this: for though slavery was a great evil in itself, he was of opinion, that it could not be done away but in a course of time.

A state of slavery, he said, had existed in Africa from the earliest time; and, unless other nations would concur with England in the measure of the abolition, we could not change it for the better.

Slavery had existed also throughout all Europe. It had now happily in a great measure been done away. But how? Not by acts of parliament; for these might have retarded the event; but by the progress of civilization, which removed the evil in a gradual and rational manner.

He then went over the same ground of argument, as when a member of the Commons in 1792. He said that the inhumanity of the abolition was visible in this, that not one slave less would be taken from Africa; and that such, as were taken from it, would suffer more than they did now, in the hands of foreigners. He maintained also, as before, that the example of St. Domingo afforded one of the strongest arguments against the abolition of the trade. And he concluded by objecting to the resolution, inasmuch as it could do no good; for the substance of it would be to be discussed again in a future session.

The Bishop of London (Dr. Porteus) began by noticing the concession of the last speaker, namely, that, if the trade was contrary to humanity and justice, it ought to be abolished. He expected, he said, that the noble lord would have proved, that it was not contrary to these great principles, before he had supported its continuance; but not a word had he said to show, that the basis of the resolution in these respects was false. It

followed then, he thought, that as the noble lord had not disproved the premises, he was bound to abide by the conclusion.

Page 199

The ways, he said, in which the Africans were reduced to slavery in their own country, were by wars, many of which were excited for the purpose; by the breaking up of villages; by kidnapping; and by convictions for a violation of their own laws. Of the latter class many were accused falsely, and of crimes which did not exist. He then read a number of extracts from the evidence examined before the privy council, and from the histories of those, who, having lived in Africa, had thrown light upon this subject, before the question was agitated. All these, he said, (and similar instances could be multiplied,) proved the truth of the resolution, that the African Slave-trade was contrary to the principles of humanity, justice, and sound policy.

It was moreover, he said, contrary to the principles of the religion we professed. It was not superfluous to say this, when it had been so frequently asserted, that it was sanctioned both by the Jewish and the Christian dispensations. With respect to the Jews he would observe, that there was no such thing as perpetual slavery among them. Their slaves were of two kinds, those of their own nation, and those from the country round about them. The former were to be set free on the seventh year; and the rest, of whatever nation, on the fiftieth, or on the year of Jubilee. With respect to the Christian dispensation, it was a libel to say, that it countenanced such a traffic. It opposed it both in its spirit and in its principle. Nay, it opposed it positively; for it classed men-stealers, or slave-traders, among the murderers of fathers and mothers and the most profane criminals upon earth.

The antiquity of slavery in Africa, which the noble lord had glanced at, afforded, he said, no argument for its continuance. Such a mode of defence would prevent for ever the removal of any evil. It would justify the practice of the Chinese, who exposed their infants in the streets to perish. It would also justify piracy; for that practice existed long before we knew any thing of the African Slave-trade.

He then combated the argument, that we did a kindness to the Africans by taking them from their homes; and concluded, by stating to their lordships, that, if they refused to sanction the resolution, they would establish these principles, “that though individuals might not rob and murder, yet that nations might—that though individuals incurred the penalties of death by such practices, yet that bodies of men might commit them with impunity for the purposes of lucre,—and that for such purposes they were not only to be permitted, but encouraged.”

The Lord Chancellor (Erskine) confessed, that he was not satisfied with his own conduct on this subject. He acknowledged with deep contrition, that, during the time he was a member of the other House, he had not once attended, when this great question was discussed.

Page 200

In the West Indies he could say personally, that the slaves were well treated, where he had an opportunity of seeing them. But no judgement was to be formed there with respect to the evils complained of. They must be appreciated as they existed in the trade. Of these he had also been an eye-witness. It was on this account that he felt contrition for not having attended the House on this subject; for there were some cruelties in this traffic which the human imagination could not aggravate. He had witnessed such scenes over the whole coast of Africa: and he could say, that, if their lordships could only have a sudden glimpse of them, they would be struck with horror; and would be astonished, that they could ever have been permitted to exist. What then would they say to their continuance year after year, and from age to age?

From information, which he could not dispute, he was warranted in saying, that on this continent husbands were fraudulently and forcibly severed from their wives, and parents from their children; and that all the ties of blood and affection were torn up by the roots. He had himself seen the unhappy natives put together in heaps in the hold of a ship, where, with every possible attention to them, their situation must have been intolerable. He had also heard proved, in courts of justice, facts still more dreadful than those which he had seen. One of these he would just mention. The slaves on board a certain ship rose in a mass to liberate themselves; and having advanced far in the pursuit of their object, it became necessary to repel them by force. Some of them yielded; some of them were killed in the scuffle; but many of them actually jumped into the sea and were drowned; thus preferring death to the misery of their situation; while others hung to the ship, repenting of their rashness, and bewailing with frightful noises their horrid fate. Thus the whole vessel exhibited but one hideous scene of wretchedness. They, who were subdued, and secured in chains, were seized with the flux, which carried many of them off. These things were proved in a trial before a British jury, which had to consider, whether this was a loss, which fell within the policy of insurance, the slaves being regarded as if they had been only a cargo of dead matter. He could mention other instances, but they were much too shocking to be described. Surely their lordships could never consider such a traffic to be consistent with humanity or justice. It was impossible.

That the trade had long subsisted there was no doubt; but this was no argument for its continuance. Many evils of much longer standing had been done away; and it was always our duty to attempt to remove them. Should we not exult in the consideration, that we, the inhabitants of a small island, at the extremity of the globe, almost at its north pole, were become the morning-star to enlighten the nations of the earth, and to conduct them out of the shades of darkness into the realms of light; thus exhibiting to an astonished and an admiring world the blessings of a free constitution? Let us then not allow such a glorious opportunity to escape us.

Page 201

It had been urged that we should suffer by the abolition of the Slave-trade. He believed we should not suffer. He believed that our duty and our interest were inseparable: and he had no difficulty in saying, in the face of the world, that his own opinion was, that the interests of a nation would be best preserved by its adherence to the principles of humanity, justice, and religion.

The Earl of Westmoreland said, that the African Slave-trade might be contrary to humanity and justice, and yet it might be politic; at least, it might be inconsistent with humanity, and yet be not inconsistent with justice: this was the case, when we executed a criminal, or engaged in war.

It was, however, not contrary to justice; for justice in this case must be measured by the law of nations. But the purchase of slaves was not contrary to this law. The Slave-trade was a trade with the consent of the inhabitants of two nations, and procured by no terror, nor by any act of violence whatever. Slavery had existed from the first ages of the world, not only in Africa, but throughout the habitable globe; among the Persians, Greeks, and Romans; and he could compare, with great advantage to his argument, the wretched condition of the slaves in these ancient states with that of those in our colonies. Slavery too had been allowed in a nation, which was under the especial direction of Providence. The Jews were allowed to hold the heathen in bondage. He admitted, that what the learned prelate had said relative to the emancipation of the latter in the year of jubilee was correct; but he denied that his quotation relative to the stealers of men referred to the Christian religion. It was a mere allusion to that, which was done contrary to the law of nations, which was the only measure of justice between states.

With respect to the inhumanity of the trade, he would observe, that if their lordships, sitting there as legislators, were to set their faces against every thing which appeared to be inhuman, much of the security on which their lives and property depended, might be shaken, if not totally destroyed. The question was, not whether there was not some evil attending the Slave-trade, but whether by the measure now before them they should increase or diminish the quantum of human misery in the world. He believed, for one, considering the internal state of Africa, and the impossibility of procuring the concurrence of foreign nations in the measure, that they would not be able to do any good by the adoption of it.

As to the impolicy of the trade, the policy of it, on the other hand, was so great, that he trembled at the consequences of its abolition. The property connected with this question amounted to a hundred millions. The annual produce of the islands was eighteen millions, and it yielded a revenue of four millions annually. How was this immense property and income to be preserved? Some had said it would be preserved, because the Black population in the islands could be kept up without further supplies. But the planters denied this assertion; and they were the best judges of the subject.

Page 202

He condemned the resolution as a libel upon the wisdom of the law of the land, and upon the conduct of their ancestors. He condemned it also, because, if followed up, it would lead to the abolition of the trade, and the abolition of the trade to the emancipation of the slaves in our colonies.

The Bishop of St. Asaph (Dr. Horsley) said, that, allowing the slaves in the West Indies even to be pampered with delicacies, or to be put to rest on a bed of roses, they could not be happy, for—a slave would be still a slave. The question, however, was not concerning the alteration of their condition, but whether we should abolish the practice, by which they were put in that condition? Whether it was humane, just, and politic in us so to place them? This question was easily answered; for he found it difficult to form any one notion of humanity, which did not include a desire of promoting the happiness of others; and he knew of no other justice than that, which was founded on the principle of doing to others, as we should wish they should do to us. And these principles of humanity and justice were so clear, that he found it difficult to make them clearer. Perhaps no difficulty was greater than that of arguing a self-evident proposition, and such he took to be the character of the proposition, that the Slave-trade was inhuman and unjust.

It had been said, that slavery had existed from the beginning of the world. He would allow it. But had such a trade as the Slave-trade ever existed before? Would the noble Earl, who had talked of the slavery of ancient Rome and Greece, assert, that in the course of his whole reading, however profound it might have been, he had found any thing resembling such a traffic? Where did it appear in history, that ships were regularly fitted out to fetch away tens of thousands of persons annually, against their will, from their native land; that these were subject to personal indignities and arbitrary punishments during their transportation; and that a certain proportion of them, owing to suffocation and other cruel causes, uniformly perished? He averred, that nothing like the African Slave-trade was ever practised in any nation upon earth.

If the trade then was repugnant, as he maintained it was, to justice and humanity, he did not see how, without aiding and abetting injustice and inhumanity, any man could sanction it: and he thought that the noble baron (Hawkesbury) was peculiarly bound to support the resolution; for he had admitted that if it could be shown, that the trade was contrary to these principles, the question would be at an end. Now this contrariety had been made apparent, and his lordship had not even attempted to refute it.

He would say but little on the subject of revealed religion, as it related to this question, because the reverend prelate, near him, had spoken so fully upon it. He might observe, however, that at the end of the sixth year, when the Hebrew slave was emancipated, he was to be furnished liberally from the flock, the floor, and the wine-press of his master.

Page 203

Lord Holland lamented the unfaithfulness of the noble baron (Hawkesbury) to his own principles, and the inflexible opposition of the noble earl (Westmoreland), from both which circumstances he despaired for ever of any assistance from them to this glorious cause. The latter wished to hear evidence on the subject, for the purpose, doubtless, of delay. He was sure, that the noble earl did not care what the evidence would say on either side; for his mind was made up, that the trade ought not to be abolished.

The noble earl had made a difference between humanity, justice, and sound policy. God forbid, that we should ever admit such distinctions in this country! But he had gone further, and said, that a thing might be inhuman, and yet not unjust; and he put the case of the execution of a criminal in support of it. Did he not by this position confound all notions of right and wrong in human institutions? When a criminal was justly executed, was not the execution justice to him who suffered, and humanity to the body of the people at large?

The noble earl had said also, that we should do no good by the abolition, because other nations would not concur in it. He did not know what other nations would do; but this he knew, that we ourselves ought not to be unjust because they should refuse to be honest. It was, however, self-obvious, that, if we admitted no more slaves into our colonies, the evil would be considerably diminished.

Another of his arguments did not appear to be more solid; for surely the Slave-trade ought not to be continued, merely because the effect of the abolition might ultimately be that of the emancipation of the slaves; an event, which would be highly desirable in its due time.

The noble lord had also said, that the planters were against the abolition, and that without their consent it could never be accomplished. He differed from him in both these points: for, first, he was a considerable planter himself, and yet he was a friend to the measure: secondly, by cutting off all further supplies, the planters would be obliged to pay more attention to the treatment of their slaves, and this treatment would render the trade unnecessary.

The noble earl had asserted also, that the population in the West Indies could not be kept up without further importations; and this was the opinion of the planters, who were the best judges of the subject. As a planter he differed from his lordship again. If indeed all the waste lands were to be brought into cultivation, the present population would be insufficient. But the government had already determined, that the trade should not be continued for such a purpose. We were no longer to continue pirates, or executioners for every petty tyrant in Africa, in order that every holder of a bit of land in our islands might cultivate the whole of his allotment; a work, which might require centuries. Making this exception, he would maintain,

Page 204

that no further importations were necessary. Few or no slaves had been imported into Antigua for many years; and he believed, that even some had been exported from it. As to Jamaica, although in one year fifteen thousand died in consequence of a hurricane and famine, the excess of deaths over the births during the twenty years preceding 1788 was only one per cent. Deducting, however, the mortality of the newly imported slaves, and making the calculation upon the Negros born in the island or upon those who had been long there, he believed the births and the deaths would be found equal. He had a right therefore to argue that the Negros, with better treatment (which the abolition would secure), would not only maintain but increase their population, without any aid from Africa. He would add, that the newly imported Africans brought with them not only disorders, which ravaged the plantations, but danger from the probability of insurrections. He wished most heartily for the total abolition of the trade. He was convinced, that it was both inhuman, unjust, and impolitic. This had always been his opinion as an individual since he was capable of forming one. It was his opinion then as a legislator. It was his opinion as a colonial proprietor; and it was his opinion as an Englishman, wishing for the prosperity of the British empire.

The Earl of Suffolk contended, that the population of the slaves in the islands could be kept up by good treatment, so as to be sufficient for their cultivation. He entered into a detail of calculations from the year 1772 downwards in support of this statement. He believed all the miseries of St. Domingo arose from the vast importation of Africans. He had such a deep sense of the inhumanity and injustice of the Slave-trade, that, if ever he wished any action of his life to be recorded, it would be that of the vote he should then give in support of the resolution.

Lord Sidmouth said, that he agreed to the substance of the resolution, but yet he could not support it. Could he be convinced that the trade would be injurious to the cause of humanity and justice, the question with him would be decided; for policy could not be opposed to humanity and justice. He had been of opinion for the last twenty years, that the interests of the country and those of numerous individuals were so deeply blended with this traffic, that we should be very cautious how we proceeded. With respect to the cultivation of new lands, he would not allow a single Negro to be imported for such a purpose; but he must have a regard to the old plantations. When he found a sufficient increase in the Black population to continue the cultivation already established there, then, but not till then, he would agree to an abolition of the trade.

Page 205

Earl Stanhope said he would not detain their lordships long. He could not, however, help expressing his astonishment at what had fallen from the last speaker; for he had evidently confessed that the Slave-trade was inhuman and unjust, and then he had insinuated, that it was neither inhuman nor unjust to continue it. A more paradoxical or whimsical opinion, he believed, was never entertained, or more whimsically expressed in that house. The noble viscount had talked of the interests of the planters: but this was but a part of the subject; for surely the people of Africa were not to be forgotten. He did not understand the practice of complimenting the planters with the lives of men, women, and helpless children by thousands for the sake of their pecuniary advantage; and they, who adopted it, whatever they might think of the consistency of their own conduct, offered an insult to the sacred names of humanity and justice.

The noble earl (Westmoreland) had asked what would be the practical effect of the abolition of the Slave-trade. He would inform him. It would do away the infamous practices, which took place in Africa; it would put an end to the horrors of the passage; it would save many thousands of our fellow-creatures from the miseries of eternal slavery; it would oblige the planters to treat those better, who were already in that unnatural state; it would increase the population of our islands; it would give a death-blow to the diabolical calculations, whether it was cheaper to work the Negros to death and recruit the gangs by fresh importations, or to work them moderately and to treat them kindly. He knew of no event, which would be attended with so many blessings.

There was but one other matter, which he would notice. The noble baron (Hawkesbury) had asserted, that all the horrors of St. Domingo were the consequence of the speculative opinions, which were current in a neighbouring kingdom on the subject of liberty. They had, he said, no such origin. They were owing to two causes; first, to the vast number of Negros recently imported into that island; and, secondly, to a scandalous breach of faith by the French legislature. This legislature held out the idea not only of the abolition of the Slave-trade, but also of all slavery; but it broke its word. It held forth the rights of man to the whole human race, and then, in practice, it most infamously abandoned every article in these rights; so that it became the scorn of all the enlightened and virtuous part of mankind. These were the great causes of the miseries of St. Domingo, and not the speculative opinions of France.

Earl Grosvenor could not but express the joy he felt at the hope, after all his disappointments, that this wicked trade would be done away. He hoped that His Majesty's ministers were in earnest, and that they would, early in the next session, take this great question up with a determination to go through with it; so that another year should not pass, before we extended the justice and humanity of the country to the helpless and unhappy inhabitants of Africa.

Page 206

Earl Fitzwilliam said he was fearful, lest the calamities of St. Domingo should be brought home to our own islands. We ought not, he thought, too hastily to adopt the resolution on that account. He should therefore support the previous question.

Lord Ellenborough said, he was sorry to differ from his noble friend (Lord Sidmouth), and yet he could not help saying that if after twenty years, during which this question had been discussed by both Houses of Parliament, their Lordships' judgments were not ripe for its determination, he could not look with any confidence to a time, when they would be ready to decide it.

The question then before them was short and plain. It was, whether the African Slave-trade was inhuman, unjust, and impolitic. If the premises were true, we could not too speedily bring it to a conclusion.

The subject had been frequently brought before him in a way, which had enabled him to become acquainted with it; and he was the more anxious on that account to deliver his sentiments upon it as a peer of Parliament, without reference to any thing he had been called upon to do in the discharge of his professional duty. When he looked at the mode in which this traffic commenced, by the spoliation of the rights of a whole quarter of the globe; by the misery of whole nations of helpless Africans; by tearing them from their homes, their families, and their friends; when he saw the unhappy victims carried away by force; thrust into a dungeon in the hold of a ship, in which the interval of their passage from their native to a foreign land was filled up with misery, under every degree of debasement, and in chains; and when he saw them afterwards consigned to an eternal slavery; he could not but contemplate the whole system with horror. It was inhuman in its beginning, inhuman in its progress, and inhuman to the very end.

Nor was it more inhuman than it was unjust. The noble earl, (Westmoreland) in adverting to this part of the question, had considered it as a question of justice between two nations. But it was a moral question. Although the natives of Africa might be taken by persons authorized by their own laws to take and dispose of them, and the practice therefore might be said to be legal as it respected them, yet no man could doubt, whatever ordinances they might have to sanction it, that it was radically, essentially, and in principle, unjust; and therefore there could be no excuse for us in continuing it. On the general principle of natural justice, which was paramount to all ordinances of men, it was quite impossible to defend this traffic; and he agreed with the noble baron (Hawkesbury) that, having decided that it was inhuman and unjust, we should not inquire whether it was impolitic. Indeed, the inquiry itself would be impious; for it was the common ordinance of God, that that, which was inhuman and unjust, should never be for the good of man. Its impolicy therefore was included in its injustice and its inhumanity.

Page 207

And he had no doubt, when the importations were stopped, that the planters would introduce a change of system among their slaves, which would increase their population, so as to render any further supplies from Africa unnecessary. It had been proved indeed, that the Negro-population in some of the islands was already in this desirable state. Many other happy effects would follow. As to the losses which would arise from the abolition of the Slave-trade, they, who were interested in the continuance of it, had greatly over-rated, them. When pleading formerly in his professional capacity for the merchants of Liverpool at their lordships' bar, he had often delivered statements, which he had received from them; and which he afterward discovered to be grossly incorrect. He could say from his own knowledge, that the assertion of the noble earl (Westmoreland), that property to the amount of a hundred millions would be endangered, was wild and fanciful. He would not however deny, that some loss might accompany the abolition; but there could be no difficulty in providing for it. Such a consideration ought not to be allowed to impede their progress in getting rid of an horrible injustice.

But it had been said, that we should do but little in the cause of humanity by abolishing the Slave-trade; because other nations would continue it. He did not believe they would. He knew that America was about to give it up. He believed the states of Europe would give it up. But, supposing that they were all to continue it, would not our honour be the greater? Would not our virtue be the more signal? for then,

——"faithful we
Among the faithless found"——

to which he would add, that undoubtedly we should diminish the evil, as far as the number of miserable beings was concerned, which was accustomed to be transported to our own colonies.

Earl Spencer agreed with the noble viscount (Sidmouth) that the amelioration of the condition of the slaves was an object, which might be effected in the West Indies; but he was certain, that the most effectual way of improving it would be by the total and immediate abolition of the Slave-trade; and for that reason he would support the resolution. Had the resolution held out emancipation to them, it would not have had his assent; for it would have ill become the character of this country, if it had been once promised, to have withheld it from them. It was to such deception that the horrors of St. Domingo were to be attributed. He would not enter into the discussion of the general subject at present. He was convinced that the trade was what the resolution stated it to be, inhuman, unjust, and impolitic. He wished therefore, most earnestly indeed, for its abolition. As to the mode of effecting it, it should be such, as would be attended with the least inconvenience to all parties. At the same time he would not allow small inconveniences to stand in the way of the great claims of humanity, justice, and religion.

Page 208

The question was then put on the resolution, and carried by a majority of forty-one to twenty. The same address also to His Majesty, which had been agreed upon by the Commons, was directly afterward moved. This also was carried, but without the necessity of a division.

The resolution and the motion having passed both Houses, one other parliamentary measure was yet necessary to complete the proceedings of this session. It was now almost universally believed, in consequence of what had already taken place there, that the Slave-trade had received its death-wound; and that it would not long survive it. It was supposed therefore, that the slave-merchants would, in the interim, fit out not only all the vessels they had, but even buy others, to make what might be called their last harvest. Hence extraordinary scenes of rapine, and murder, would be occasioned in Africa. To prevent these a new bill was necessary. This was accordingly introduced into the Commons. It enacted, but with one exception, that from and after the first of August 1806, no vessel should clear out for the Slave-trade, unless it should have been previously employed by the same owner or owners in the said trade, or should be proved to have been contracted for previously to the tenth of June 1806, for the purpose of being employed in that trade. It may now be sufficient to say that this bill also passed both houses of parliament; soon after which the session ended.

CHAPTER X.

Continuation from July 18O6 to March 18O7—Death of Mr. Fox—Bill for the total abolition of the Slave-trade carried in the House of Lords—sent from thence to the Commons—amended and passed there—carried back, and passed with its amendments by the Lords—receives the royal assent—Reflections on this great event.

It was impossible for the committee to look back to the proceedings of the last session, as they related to the great question under their care, without feeling a profusion of joy, as well as of gratitude to those, by whose virtuous endeavours they had taken place. But, alas, how few of our earthly pleasures come to us without alloy! a melancholy event succeeded. We had the painful intelligence, in the month of October 1806, that one of the oldest and warmest friends of the cause was then numbered with the dead.

Of the character of Mr. Fox, as it related to this cause, I am bound to take notice. And, first, I may observe, that he professed an attachment to it almost as soon as it was ushered into the world. Early in the year 1788, when he was waited upon by a deputation of the committee, his language was, as has appeared in the first volume, “that he would support their object to its fullest extent, being convinced that there was no remedy for the evil but in the total abolition of the trade.”

Page 209

His subsequent conduct evinced the sincerity of his promises. He was constant in his attendance in Parliament whenever the question was brought forward; and he never failed to exert his powerful eloquence in its favour. The countenance, indeed, which he gave it, was of the greatest importance to its welfare; for most of his parliamentary friends, who followed his general political sentiments, patronized it also. By the aid of these, joined to that of the private friends of Mr. Pitt, and of other members, who espoused it without reference to party, it was always so upheld, that after the year 1791 no one of the defeats, which it sustained, was disgraceful. The majority on the side of those interested in the continuance of the trade was always so trifling, that the abolitionists were preserved a formidable body, and their cause respectable.

I never heard whether Mr. Fox, when he came into power, made any stipulations with His Majesty on the subject of the Slave-trade: but this I know, that he determined upon the abolition of it, if it were practicable, as the highest glory of his administration, and as the greatest earthly blessing which it was in the power of the Government to bestow; and that he took considerable pains to convince some of his colleagues in the cabinet of the propriety of the measure.

When the resolution, which produced the debates in parliament, as detailed in the last chapter, was under contemplation, it was thought expedient that Mr. Fox, as the minister of state in the House of Commons, should introduce it himself. When applied to for this purpose he cheerfully undertook the office, thus acting in consistency with his public declaration in the year 1791, “that in whatever situation he might ever be, he would use his warmest efforts for the promotion of this righteous cause.”

Before the next measure, or the bill to prevent the sailing of any new vessel in the trade after the first of August, was publicly disclosed, it was suggested to him, that the session was nearly over; that he might possibly weary both Houses by another motion on the subject; and that, if he were to lose it, or to experience a diminution of his majorities in either, he might injure the cause; which was then in the road to triumph. To this objection he replied, “that he believed both Houses were disposed to get rid of the trade; that his own life was precarious; that if he omitted to serve the injured Africans on this occasion, he might have no other opportunity of doing it; and that he dared not, under these circumstances, neglect so great a duty.”

Page 210

This prediction relative to himself became unfortunately verified; for his constitution, after this, began to decline, till at length his mortal destiny, in the eyes of his medical attendants, was sealed. But even then, when removed by pain and sickness from the discussion of political subjects, he never forgot this cause. In his own sufferings he was not unmindful of those of the injured Africans. “Two things,” said he, on his death-bed, “I wish earnestly to see accomplished—peace with Europe,—and the abolition of the Slave-trade.” But knowing well, that we could much better protect ourselves against our own external enemies, than this helpless people against their oppressors, he added, “but of the two I wish the latter.” These sentiments he occasionally repeated, so that the subject was frequently in his thoughts in his last illness. Nay, “the very hope of the abolition (to use the expression of Lord Howick in the House of Commons) quivered on his lips in the last hour of it.” Nor is it improbable, if earthly scenes ever rise to view at that awful crisis, and are perceptible, that it might have occupied his mind in the last moment of his existence. Then indeed would joy ineffable, from a conviction of having prepared the way for rescuing millions of human beings from misery, have attended the spirit on its departure from the body; and then also would this spirit, most of all purified when in the contemplation of peace, good-will, and charity upon earth, be in the fittest state, on gliding from its earthly cavern, to commix with the endless ocean of benevolence and love.

At length the session of 1807 commenced. It was judged advisable by Lord Grenville, that the expected motion on this subject should, contrary to the practice hitherto adopted, be agitated first in the Lords. Accordingly, on the second of January he presented a bill, called an act for the abolition of the Slave-trade; but he then proposed only to print it, and to let it lie on the table, that it might be maturely considered, before it should be discussed.

On the fourth no less than four counsel were heard against the bill.

On the fifth the debate commenced. But of this I shall give no detailed account; nor, indeed, of any of those, which followed it. The truth is, that the subject has been exhausted. They, who spoke in favour of the abolition, said very little that was new concerning it. They, who spoke against it, brought forward, as usual, nothing but negative assertions and fanciful conjectures. To give therefore, what was said by both parties at these times, would be but useless repetition[A]. To give, on the other hand, that which was said on one side only would appear partial. Hence I shall offer to the reader little more than a narrative of facts upon these occasions.

[Footnote A: The different debates in both Houses on this occasion would occupy the half of another volume. This is another circumstance, which reconciles me to the omission. But that, which reconciles me the most is, that they will be soon published. In these debates justice has been done to every individual concerned in them.]

Page 211

Lord Grenville opened the debate by a very luminous speech. He was supported by the Duke of Glocester, the Bishop of Durham (Dr. Barrington), the Earls Moira, Selkirk, and Roslyn, and the Lords Holland, King, and Hood. The opponents of the bill were the Duke of Clarence, the Earls Westmoreland and St. Vincent, and the Lords Sidmouth, Eldon, and Hawkesbury.

The question being called for at four o'clock in the morning, it appeared that the personal votes and proxies in favour of Lord Grenville's motion amounted to one hundred, and those against it to thirty-six. Thus passed the first bill in England, which decreed, that the African Slave-trade should cease. And here I cannot omit paying to his Highness the Duke of Glocester the tribute of respect, which is due to him, for having opposed the example of his royal relations on this subject in behalf of an helpless and oppressed people. The sentiments too, which he delivered on this occasion, ought not to be forgotten. "This trade," said he, "is contrary to the principles of the British constitution. It is, besides, a cruel and criminal traffic in the blood of my fellow-creatures. It is a foul stain on the national character. It is an offence to the Almighty. On every ground therefore on which a decision can be made; on the ground of policy, of liberty, of humanity, of justice, but, above all, on the ground of religion, I shall vote for its immediate extinction."

On the tenth of February the bill was carried to the House of Commons. On the twentieth, counsel were heard against it; after which, by agreement, the second reading of it took place. On the twenty-third the question being put for the commitment of it, Lord Viscount Howick (now Earl Grey) began an eloquent speech. After he had proceeded in it some way, he begged leave to enter his protest against certain principles of relative justice, which had been laid down. "The merchants and planters," said he, "have an undoubted right, in common with other subjects of the realm, to demand justice at our hands. But that, which they denominate justice, does not correspond with the legitimate character of that virtue; for they call upon us to violate the rights of others, and to transgress our own moral duties. That, which they distinguish as justice, involves in itself the greatest injury to others. It is not in fact justice, which they demand, but—favour—and favour to themselves at the expense of the most grievous oppression of their fellow-creatures."

He then argued the question upon the ground of policy. He showed by a number of official documents, how little this trade had contributed to the wealth of the nation, being but a fifty-fourth part of its export trade; and he contended that as four-sevenths of it had been cut off by His Majesty's proclamation, and the passing of the foreign Slave-bill in a former year, no detriment of any consequence would arise from the present measure.

He entered into an account of the loss of seamen, and of the causes of the mortality, in this trade.

Page 212

He went largely into the subject of the Negro-population in the islands from official documents, giving an account of it up to the latest date. He pointed out the former causes of its diminution, and stated how the remedies for these would follow.

He showed how, even if the quantity of colonial produce should be diminished for a time, this disadvantage would, in a variety of instances, be more than counterbalanced by advantages, which would not only be great in themselves, but permanent.

He then entered into a refutation of the various objections which had been made to the abolition, in an eloquent and perspicuous manner; and concluded by appealing to the great authorities of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox in behalf of the proposed measure. "These precious ornaments, he said, of their age and country had examined the subject with all the force of their capacious minds. On this question they had dismissed all animosity—-all difference of opinion—and had proceeded in union;—and he believed, that the best tribute of respect we could show, or the most splendid monument we could raise, to their memories, Would be by the adoption of the glorious measure of the abolition of the Slave-trade."

Lord Howick was supported by Mr. Roscoe, who was then one of the members for Liverpool; by Mr. Lushington, Mr. Fawkes, Lord Mahon, Lord Milton, Sir John Doyle, Sir Samuel Romilly, Mr. Wilberforce, and Earl Percy, the latter of whom wished that a clause might be put into the bill, by which all the children of slaves, born after January 1810, should be made free. General Gascoyne and Mr. Hibbert opposed the bill. Mr. Manning hoped that compensation would be made to the planters in case of loss. Mr. Bathurst and Mr. Hiley Addington preferred a plan for gradual abolition to the present mode. These having spoken, it appeared on a division that there were for the question two hundred and eighty-three, and against it only sixteen.

Of this majority I cannot but remark, that it was probably the largest that was ever announced on any occasion, where the House was called upon to divide. I must observe also, that there was such an enthusiasm among the members at this time, that there appeared to be the same kind and degree of feeling, as manifested itself within the same walls in the year 1788, when the question was first started. This enthusiasm too, which was of a moral nature, was so powerful, that it seemed even to extend to a conversion of the heart: for several of the old opponents of this righteous cause went away, unable to vote against it; while others of them staid in their places, and voted in its favour.

On the twenty-seventh of February Lord Howick moved, that the House resolve itself into a committee on the bill for the abolition of the Slave-trade. Sir C. Pole, Mr. Hughan, Brown, Bathurst, Windham, and Fuller opposed the motion; and Sir R. Milbank, and Mr. Wynne, Barham, Courtenay, Montague, Jacob, Whitbread, and Herbert (of Kerry), supported it. At length the committee was allowed to sit *pro forma*, and Mr. Hobhouse

was put into the chair. The bill then went through it, and, the House being resumed, the report was received and read.

Page 213

On the sixth of March, when the committee sat again, Sir C. Pole moved, that the year 1812 be substituted for the year 1807, as the time when the trade should be abolished. This amendment produced a long debate, which was carried on by Sir C. Pole, Mr. Fuller, Hiley Addington, Rose, Gascoyne, and Bathurst on one side; and by Mr. Ward, Sir P. Francis, General Vyse, Sir T. Turton, Mr. Whitbread, Lord Henry Petty, Mr. Canning, Stanhope, Perceval, and Wilberforce on the other. At length, on a division, there appeared to be one hundred and twenty-five against the amendment, and for it only seventeen. The chairman then read the bill, and it was agreed that he should report it with the amendments on Monday. The bill enacted, that no vessel should clear out for slaves from any port within the British dominions after the first of May 1807, and that no slave should be landed in the colonies after the first of March 1808.

On the sixteenth of March, on the motion of Lord Henry Petty, the question was put, that the bill be read a third time. Mr. Hibbert, Captain Herbert, Mr. T.W. Plomer, Mr. Windham, and Lord Castlereagh spoke against the motion. Sir P. Francis, Mr. Lyttleton, Mr. H. Thornton, and Mr. Barham, Sheridan, and Wilberforce supported it. After this the bill was passed without a division[A].

[Footnote A: S. Lushington, esq. M.P. for Yarmouth, gave his voluntary attendance and assistance to the Committee, during all these motions, and J. Bowdler, esquire, was elected a member of it.]

On Wednesday, the eighteenth, Lord Howick, accompanied by Mr. Wilberforce and others, carried the bill to the Lords. Lord Grenville, on receiving it, moved that it should be printed, and that, if this process could be finished by Monday, it should be taken into consideration on that day. The reason of this extraordinary haste was, that His Majesty, displeased with the introduction of the Roman-catholic officers' bill into the Commons, had signified his intention to the members of the existing administration, that they were to be displaced.

The uneasiness, which, a few days before, had sprung up among the friends of the abolition, on the report that this event was probable, began now to show itself throughout the kingdom. Letters were written from various parts, manifesting the greatest fear and anxiety on account of the state of the bill, and desiring answers of consolation. Nor was this state of the mind otherwise than what might have been expected upon such an occasion; for the bill was yet to be printed—Being an amended one, it was to be argued again in the Lords—It was then to receive the royal assent—All these operations implied time; and it was reported that the new ministry[A] was formed; among whom were several, who had shown a hostile disposition to the cause.

[Footnote A: The only circumstance, which afforded comfort at this time, was that the honourable Spencer Perceval and Mr. Canning were included in it, who were warm patrons of this great measure.]

Page 214

On Monday, the twenty-third, the House of Lords met. Such extraordinary diligence had been used in printing the bill, that it was then ready. Lord Grenville immediately brought it forward. The Earl of Westmoreland and the Marquis of Sligo opposed it. The Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Llandaff (Dr. Watson) supported it. The latter said, that this great act of justice would be recorded in heaven. The amendments were severally adopted without a division. But here an omission of three words was discovered, namely, “country, territory, or place,” which, if not rectified, might defeat the purposes of the bill. An amendment was immediately proposed and carried. Thus the bill received the last sanction of the Peers. Lord Grenville then congratulated the House on the completion, on its part, of the most glorious measure, that had ever been adopted by any legislative body in the world.

The amendment, now mentioned, occasioned the bill to be sent back to the Commons. On the twenty-fourth, on the motion of Lord Howick, it was immediately taken into consideration there, and agreed to; and it was carried back to the Lords, as approved of, on the same day.

But though the bill had now passed both houses, there was an awful fear throughout the kingdom, lest it should not receive the royal assent before the ministry was dissolved. This event took place the next day; for on Wednesday the twenty-fifth, at half past eleven in the morning; His Majesty’s message was delivered to the different members of it, that they were then to wait upon him to deliver up the seals of their offices. It then appeared that a commission for the royal assent to this bill among others had been obtained. This commission was instantly opened by the Lord Chancellor (Erskine), who was accompanied by the Lords Holland and Auckland; and as the clock struck twelve, just when the sun was in its meridian splendour to witness this august Act, this establishment of a Magna Charta for Africa in Britain, and to sanction it by its most vivid and glorious beams, it was completed. The ceremony being over, the seals of the respective offices were delivered up; so that the execution of this commission was the last act of the administration of Lord Grenville; an administration, which, on account of its virtuous exertions in behalf of the oppressed African race, will pass to posterity, living through successive generations, in the love and gratitude of the most virtuous of mankind.

Thus ended one of the most glorious contests, after a continuance for twenty years, of any ever carried on in any age or country. A contest, not of brutal violence, but of reason. A contest between those, who felt deeply for the happiness and the honour of their fellow-creatures, and those, who, through vicious custom and the impulse of avarice, had trampled under-foot the sacred rights of their nature, and had even attempted to efface all title to the divine image from their minds.

Page 215

Of the immense advantages of this contest I know not how to speak. Indeed, the very agitation of the question, which it involved, has been highly important. Never was the heart of man so expanded. Never were its generous sympathies so generally and so perseveringly excited. These sympathies, thus called into existence, have been useful in the preservation of a national virtue. For any thing we know, they may have contributed greatly to form a counteracting balance against the malignant spirit, generated by our almost incessant wars during this period, so as to have preserved us from barbarism.

It has been useful also in the discrimination of moral character. In private life it has enabled us to distinguish the virtuous from the more vicious part of the community[A]. It has shown the general philanthropist. It has unmasked the vicious in spite of his pretension to virtue. It has afforded us the same knowledge in public life. It has separated the moral statesman from the wicked politician. It has shown us who, in the legislative and executive offices of our country are fit to save, and who to destroy, a nation.

[Footnote A: I have had occasion to know many thousand persons in the course of my travels on this subject; and I can truly say, that the part, which these took on this great question, was always a true criterion of their moral character. Some indeed opposed the abolition, who seemed to be so respectable, that it was difficult to account for their conduct; but it invariably turned out in a course of time, either that they had been influenced by interested motives, or that they were not men of steady moral principle. In the year 1792, when the national enthusiasm was so great, the good were as distinguishable from the bad, according to their disposition to this great cause, as if the divine Being had marked them; or, as a friend of mine the other day observed, as we may suppose the sheep to be from the goats on the day of judgment.]

It has furnished us also with important lessons. It has proved what a creature man is! how devoted he is to his own interest! to what a length of atrocity he can go, unless fortified by religious principle! But as if this part of the prospect would be too afflicting, it has proved to us, on the other hand, what a glorious instrument he may become in the hands of his Maker; and that a little virtue, when properly leavened, is made capable of counteracting the effects of a mass of vice!

With respect to the end obtained by this contest, or the great measure of the abolition of the Slave-trade as it has now passed, I know not how to appreciate its importance. To our own country, indeed, it is invaluable. We have lived, in consequence of it, to see the day, when it has been recorded as a principle in our legislation, that commerce itself shall have its moral boundaries. We have lived to see the day, when we are likely to be delivered from the contagion of the most barbarous opinions.

Page 216

They, who supported this wicked traffic, virtually denied, that man was a moral being. They substituted the law of force for the law of reason. But the great Act now under our consideration, has banished the impious doctrine, and restored the rational creature to his moral rights. Nor is it a matter of less pleasing consideration, that, at this awful crisis, when the constitutions of kingdoms are on the point of dissolution, the stain of the blood of Africa is no longer upon us, or that we have been freed (alas, if it be not too late!) from a load of guilt, which has long hung like a mill-stone about our necks, ready to sink us to perdition.

In tracing the measure still further, or as it will affect other lands, we become only the more sensible of its importance: for can we pass over to Africa; can we pass over to the numerous islands, the receptacles of miserable beings from thence; and can we call to mind the scenes of misery, which have been passing in each of these regions of the earth, without acknowledging, that one of the greatest sources of suffering to the human race has, as far as our own power extends, been done away? Can we pass over to these regions again, and contemplate the multitude of crimes, which the agency necessary for keeping up the barbarous system produced, without acknowledging, that a source of the most monstrous and extensive wickedness has been removed also? But here, indeed, it becomes us peculiarly to rejoice; for though nature shrinks from pain, and compassion is engendered in us when we see it become the portion of others, yet what is physical suffering compared with moral guilt? The misery of the oppressed is, in the first place, not contagious like the crime of the oppressor. Nor is the mischief, which it generates, either so frightful or so pernicious. The body, though under affliction, may retain its shape; and, if it even perish, what is the loss of it but of worthless dust? But when the moral springs of the mind are poisoned, we lose the most excellent part of the constitution of our nature, and the divine image is no longer perceptible in us. Nor are the two evils of similar duration. By a decree of Providence, for which we cannot be too thankful, we are made mortal. Hence the torments of the oppressor are but temporary; whereas the immortal part of us, when once corrupted, may carry its pollutions with it into another world.

But independently of the quantity of physical suffering and the innumerable avenues to vice in more than a quarter of the globe, which this great measure will cut off, there are yet blessings, which we have reason to consider as likely to flow from it. Among these we cannot overlook the great probability, that Africa, now freed from the vicious and barbarous effects of this traffic, may be in a better state to comprehend and receive the sublime truths of the Christian religion. Nor can we overlook the probability, that, a new system of treatment necessarily springing up in our islands,

Page 217

the same bright sun of consolation may visit her children there. But here a new hope rises to our view. Who knows but that emancipation, like a beautiful plant, may, in its due season, rise out of the ashes of the abolition of the Slave-trade, and that, when its own intrinsic value shall be known, the seed of it may be planted in other lands? And looking at the subject in this point of view, we cannot but be struck with the wonderful concurrence of events as previously necessary for this purpose, namely, that two nations, England and America, the mother and the child, should, in the same month of the same year, have abolished this impious traffic; nations, which at this moment have more than a million of subjects within their jurisdiction to partake of the blessing; and one of which, on account of her local situation and increasing power, is likely in time to give, if not law, at least a tone to the manners and customs of the great continent, on which she is situated.

Reader! Thou art now acquainted with the history of this contest! Rejoice in the manner of its termination! And, if thou feelest grateful for the event, retire within thy closet, and pour out thy thanksgivings to the Almighty for this his unspeakable act of mercy to thy oppressed fellow-creatures.

THE END.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

VOL. I.

CHAP. 1. INTRODUCTION—Estimate of the evil of the Slave-trade—and of the blessing of the Abolition of it—Usefulness of the contemplation of this subject

CHAP. 2. Those, who favoured the cause of the Africans previously to 1787, were so many necessary forerunners in it—Cardinal Ximenes—and others

CHAP. 3. Forerunners continued to 1787—divided now into four classes—First consists of persons in England of various descriptions, Godwyn, Baxter, and others

CHAP. 4. Second, of the Quakers in England, George Fox, and his religious descendants

CHAP. 5. Third, of the Quakers in America—Union of these with individuals of other religious denominations in the same cause

CHAP. 6. Facility of junction between the members of these three different classes

CHAP. 7. Fourth consists of Dr. Peckard—then of the Author—Author wishes to embark in the cause—falls in with several of the members of these classes

CHAP. 8. Fourth class continued—Langton—Baker—and others—Author now embarks in the cause as a business of his life

CHAP. 9. Fourth class continued—Sheldon—Mackworth—and others—Author seeks for further information on the subject—and visits Members of Parliament

CHAP. 10. Fourth class continued—Author enlarges his knowledge—Meeting at Mr. Wilberforce's—Remarkable junction of all the four classes, and a Committee formed out of them, in May 1787, for the Abolition of the Slave-trade

Page 218

CHAP. 11. History of the preceding classes, and of their junction, shown by means of a map

CHAP. 12. Author endeavours to do away the charge of ostentation in consequence of becoming so conspicuous in this work

CHAP. 13. Proceedings of the Committee—Emancipation declared to be no part of its object—Wrongs of Africa by Mr. Roscoe

CHAP. 14. Author visits Bristol to collect information—Ill usage of seamen in the Slave-trade—Articles of African produce—Massacre at Calebar

CHAP. 15. Mode of procuring and paying seamen in that trade—their mortality in it—-Construction and admeasurement of Slave-ships—Difficulty of procuring evidence—-Cases of Gardiner and Arnold

CHAP. 16. Author meets with Alexander Falconbridge—visits ill-treated and disabled seamen—takes a mate out of one of the Slave-vessels—and puts another in prison for murder

CHAP. 17. Visits Liverpool—Specimens of African produce—Dock-duties—Iron-instruments used in the traffic—His introduction to Mr. Norris

CHAP. 18. Manner of procuring and paying seamen at Liverpool in the Slave-trade—-their treatment and mortality—Murder of Peter Green—Dangerous situation of the Author in consequence of his inquiries

CHAP. 19. Author proceeds to Manchester—delivers a discourse there on the subject of the Slave-trade—revisits Bristol—New and difficult situation—suddenly crosses the Severn at night—returns to London

CHAP. 20. Labours of the Committee during the Author’s journey—Mr. Sharp elected chairman—Seal engraved—Letters from different correspondents to the Committee

CHAP. 21. Further labours of the Committee to February 1788—List of new Correspondents

CHAP. 22. Progress of the cause to the middle of May—Petitions to Parliament—-Author’s interviews with Mr. Pitt and Mr. Grenville—Privy council inquire into the subject—examine Liverpool-delegates—Proceedings of the Committee for the abolition—-Motion and debate in the House of Commons—Discussion of the general question postponed to the next session

CHAP. 23. Progress to the middle of July—Bill to diminish the horrors of the Middle Passage—Evidence examined against it—Debates—Bill passed through both Houses —Proceedings of the Committee, and effects of them.

VOL. II.

CHAP. 1. Continuation from June 1758 to July 1739—Author travels in search of fresh evidence—Privy council resume their examinations—prepare their report—Proceedings of the Committee for the abolition—and of the Planters and others—Privy council report laid on the table of the House of Commons—Debate upon it—Twelve propositions—-Opponents refuse to argue from the report—Examine new evidence of their own in the House of Commons—Renewal of the Middle Passage-Bill—Death and character of Ramsay

Page 219

CHAP. 2. Continuation from July 1789 to July 1790—Author travels to Paris to promote the abolition in France—His proceedings there—returns to England—Examination of opponents' evidence resumed in the Commons—Author travels in quest of new evidence on the side of the abolition—This, after great opposition, introduced—Renewal of the Middle Passage-Bill—Section of the Slave-ship—Cowper's Negro's Complaint—-Wedgwood's Cameos.

CHAP. 3. Continuation from July 1790 to July 1791—Author travels again—-Examinations on the side of the abolition resumed in the Commons—List of those examined—Cruel circumstances of the times—Motion for the abolition of the trade—-Debates—Motion lost—Resolutions of the Committee—Sierra Leone Company established

CHAP. 4. Continuation from July 1791 to July 1792—Author travels again—People begin to leave off sugar—Petition Parliament—Motion renewed in the Commons—-Debates—Abolition resolved upon, but not to commence till 1796—The Lords determine upon hearing evidence on the resolution—This evidence introduced—Further hearing of it postponed to the next session

CHAP. 5. Continuation from July 1792 to July 1793—Author travels again—Motion to renew the Resolution of the last year in the Commons—Motion lost—New motion to abolish the foreign Slave-trade—Motion lost—Proceedings of the Lords

CHAP. 6. Continuation from July 1793 to July 1794—Author travels again—Motion to abolish the foreign Slave-trade renewed and carried—but lost in the Lords—Further proceedings there—Author, on account of declining health, obliged to retire from the cause

CHAP. 7. Continuation from July 1794 to July 1799—Various motions within this period

CHAP. 8. Continuation from July 1799 to July 18O5—Various motions within this period

CHAP. 9. Continuation from July 1805 to July 1806—Author, restored, joins the Committee again—Death of Mr. Pitt—Foreign Slave-trade abolished—Resolution to take measures for the total abolition of the trade—Address to the King to negotiate with foreign powers for their concurrence in it—Motion to prevent new vessels going into the trade—all these carried through both Houses of Parliament

CHAP. 10. Continuation from July 1806 to July 1807—Death of Mr. Fox—Bill for the total abolition carried in the Lords—Sent from thence to the Commons—amended, and passed there, and sent back to the Lords—receives the royal assent—Reflections on this great event