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SHORT OBSERVATIONS ON

SLAVERY,

Introductory to some EXTRACTS from  
the writing of the ABBE RAYNAL,  
on that important Subject.

WHEN the General Congress first assembled, they prefaced the reason of their separation from Great Britain, with the following sentence, ' We hold these truths to be self evident, ' That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights ; that amongst these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' And in the declaration of the 6th of July 1775, Congress have in very forcible language declared their opinion ' that it was contrary to the intent of the Divine Author of our existence, that a part of the human kind should hold an absolute property and unbounded power over others, marked out by infinite goodness and wisdom, as the objects of a Legal Domination.-----That reverence for our  
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‘ great Creator, principles of humanity,  
‘ and the dictates of common sense, must  
‘ convince all those who reflect upon the  
‘ subject, that Government was instituted  
‘ to promote the welfare of mankind,  
‘ and ought to be administered for the  
‘ attainment of that end.’ As these re-  
flections apply to human nature in ge-  
neral, however diversified by colour and  
other distinctions, how far the situation of  
the Negroes still kept in Slavery, on this  
continent is consonant thereto, is a matter  
which calls for the most serious attention  
of all those who, indeed believe, in a ge-  
neral Providence, and that the good Au-  
thor of our being multiplies his blessings  
in proportion as we render ourselves wor-  
thy by the practice of Justice and Love.  
Hence it becomes a matter of the utmost  
weight to the Americans, in a peculiar  
manner, duly to consider how far they  
can justify a conduct so abhorrent from  
these sacred truths as that of dragging these  
oppressed Strangers from their native land,  
and all those tender connections, which  
we hold so dear; the violence exercised  
over them, to oblige them to do the servile  
offices of life, for those whose superiority  
has been obtained by an illegal force;  
under the sanction of unjust laws; laws fram-  
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ed to hold in bondage, a bondage often rigorous and cruel, a people over whom they have not the least shadow of right; a bondage without condition, without end, and without appeal. Under this prospect of the situation of these Black People, must not every sensible, feeling heart be filled with sympathy and fearful apprehensions. Well may the words of Scripture be applied to them, “ Behold the  
 “ tears of the oppressed and they had no  
 “ comforter;” and indeed, what refuge, what appeal can a slave have, when cruelly used by an inconsiderate master, or by a hard-hearted overseer. How inconsistent is this abhorrent practice, with every idea of Liberty, every principle of humanity. Nay is it not of publick notoriety that those masters or overseers, who by ill usage, or by an unrelenting scourge, have brought their Slaves to an untimely end, have scarce been called to any account, by those who ought not to bear the sword in vain: Scarce an instance can be mentioned even of any man’s being capitally arraigned for the wilful murder of a slave. Nay, dreadful to mention, do not the laws in some of the islands, and frequent advertisements in the Southern States, in effect encourage the murder of a Negroe, who has absented himself

himself for a certain time from his master's service, by giving a reward greater for the poor fugitive's head than for bringing him home alive.

When this unjust and cruel treatment of the Negroes is considered, and brought to the test of the above declarations, will it not appear wonderfully inconsistent and a matter of astonishment, to the whole world, that an alteration of conduct towards them, has not yet taken place, preparatory to a general abolition of Slavery on the continent; a step which every principle of honour, reason, and humanity call for, and which may well be effected in such a manner as will conduce to the happiness of the master as well as the slave. But such is the force of the habitual depravity, when supported by the practice of great numbers, especially in that which flatters our interest and soothes our passions, that the most striking instances of oppression and cruelty, such as would make a stranger, at the first glance, shudder, lose all their force upon minds accustomed, from their infancy, to see oppression reign uncontrouled; these can see the galling chains, the cruel stripes; the dying groan without pain; and without reflection or pity, can disregard the heart-rending

rending suffering, which many of these  
their afflicted fellow-men undergo,\* be-  
fore the remembrance of past enjoyments

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\* A striking instance of this kind appeared in the case of a **NEGROE**, residing near **PHILADELPHIA**. From his first arrival he appeared thoughtful and dejected, frequently dropping tears, when fondling his master's children; the cause of which was not known till he was able to be understood, when he gave the following account. That he had a wife and children in his own country, that some of these being sick, he went in the night time to fetch water at a spring, where he was, violently, seized and carried away, by persons who lay in wait to catch men; from whence he was transported to **AMERICA**; that the remembrance of his family and friends, whom he never expected to see any more, were the principal cause of his dejection and grief. Now can any whose mind is not rendered quite obdurate by the practice of oppression, or the love of gain, hear this relation without being affected with sympathy and sorrow; and doubtless the case of many of these afflicted people will be found to be attended with circumstances equally tragical and aggravating. And if we enquire of those **Negroes** who were brought from their native country, when children, we shall find many of them have been stolen away, when abroad from their parents on the roads, or watching their corn fields. Now **TENDER PARENTS**; and all who are real friends of **LIBERTY**; and you who are willing to read the book of **Conscience**, and those that are learned in the law, what can you say to these deplorable cases? When and how have these oppressed strangers forfeited their liberty; must not your heart assent to the declaration publickly made by a respectable member of the **Assembly of Virginia**? 'That there cannot be in nature, there is not in history, an instance in which every right of men is more flagrantly violated.' Does not justice loudly call for **LIBERTY** being restored to them? Is it not the duty of every dispenser of justice, who is not forgetful of his own humanity, to remember that they are men, and to declare them free. Where evils of such magnitude are neither inquired into nor redressed by  
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and their native vigour and love of liberty, can be broke down into tame submission to the absolute will of their lordly oppressors. No plea of difficulty ought to prevent our speedily doing that justice to these oppressed people, which the nature of their several cases will allow, such as declaring their offspring free at a suitable age; and instead of extorting their service by severity of discipline, make way for their freedom, by giving them such an interest in their own labour as may stir them up to the utmost exertion of their vigour and industry, and encourage them to employ those talents and ingenuity, which are now depressed by slavery, for the general good; thus from grudging dangerous Slaves they may become willing minded labourers, equally concerned with their masters in promoting the safety and happiness of their country. It will be when measures of this kind takes place in America, and when a final end is put to

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• those whose duty it is, ' to seek judgment, to relieve the  
 • oppressed, to judge for the fatherless, and plead for the  
 • widow,' Isa. i. 17. what can be expected but that the  
 groans and cries of these sufferers will reach HEAVEN,  
 and what shall ye do ' when GOD riseth up, and when  
 • he visiteth.' What will ye answer him? Did not he  
 that made them make us; and did not one fashion us in  
 the womb. Job, xxxi. 14.

a horrible Slave Trade in England, that both countries may expect to flourish, under the blessing of Him who delights in Justice and Mercy; and has promised to reward every country, as well as individual, according to their deeds.

To assist in eradicating the deep rooted prejudice which an education amongst Slaves has planted in many minds, let us attend to what the Abbe Raynal, that celebrated Philosopher and friend to Mankind, has said on the subject of Slavery.

‘ I will not, says he, disgrace myself by  
 ‘ adding one to the list of venal writers,  
 ‘ who have prostituted their pens in de-  
 ‘ fence of a trade so abhorrent from the  
 ‘ laws of universal justice. No principles  
 ‘ of policy can justify the breach of her  
 ‘ Sacred Laws. In so enlightened an age,  
 ‘ an age where so many errors are boldly  
 ‘ laid open, it would be shameful to con-  
 ‘ ceal any truth that is interesting to hu-  
 ‘ manity. We will first prove that no  
 ‘ reason of state can authorize Slavery.  
 ‘ In doing this we shall not hesitate to ar-  
 ‘ raign, before the Tribunal of Eternal  
 ‘ Light and Justice, all those governments  
 ‘ who tolerate the cruel practice, or are  
 ‘ not ashamed to make it the basis of their  
 ‘ power.

power. 'The great Montesquieu could not prevail upon himself to treat the question concerning Slavery, in a serious light. In reality it is degrading to reason to employ it. I will not say in defending, but even in refuting an abuse so repugnant to it; whoever justifies so odious a system deserves the utmost contempt, &c. &c.—— Will it be said that he who wants to make me a Slave does me no injury, that he only makes use of his rights? Where are those rights (may the Slave say) who has stamped upon them so sacred a character as to silence mine. He who supports the system of Slavery is the enemy of the whole human race. He divides it into two societies of Legal Assassins, the Oppressor and the Oppressed, &c. &c.—— But the right of Slavery, you say, extends only to the right of labour, and the privation of liberty, not life. What! does not the master who disposes of my strength, at his pleasure, dispose of my life, which depends on the voluntary and moderate exercise of my faculties: What is existence to him who has not the disposal of it? I cannot kill my Slave, but I can make him bleed under the whip of an executioner; I can over-

whelm



‘ overwhelm him with sorrow, drudgery, and  
 ‘ want: I can injure him every way, and  
 ‘ secretly undermine the principles and  
 ‘ springs of life: I can smother by slow  
 ‘ punishment, the wretched infant which  
 ‘ a Negroe Woman carries in her womb.  
 ‘ Thus the laws protects the Slave against a  
 ‘ violent death, to leave to my cruelty the  
 ‘ right of making him die by degrees.

‘ Let us proceed a step farther, the right  
 ‘ of Slavery is a right to perpetrate all  
 ‘ sorts of crimes; those crimes which in-  
 ‘ vade property; for Slaves are not suf-  
 ‘ fered to have any, even in their own  
 ‘ persons; those crimes which destroy per-  
 ‘ sonal safety, for the Slave may be sacri-  
 ‘ ficed to the caprice of his master; those  
 ‘ crimes which make modesty shudder;  
 ‘ my blood rises at those horrid images.  
 ‘ I hate, I fly the human species, made up  
 ‘ only of victims and executioners, and if  
 ‘ it is never to become better, may it an-  
 ‘ nihilate itself. A word more, since all  
 ‘ must be said, Cartouche, the famous  
 ‘ (French Highwayman) Cartouche seated  
 ‘ at the foot of a tree, in a deep forest,  
 ‘ calculating the profits and charges of  
 ‘ his robberies, the rewards and pay of  
 ‘ his associates, and adjusting with them  
 ‘ the idea of proportion and distributive  
 ‘ justice;

‘ justice ; this Cartouche is he not like a  
 ‘ merchant equipping a vessel for the Gui-  
 ‘ nea Trade, who reclined on his desk,  
 ‘ with his pen in his hand, settles the num-  
 ‘ ber of attacks which he can cause to be  
 ‘ made on the coast of Guinea, who de-  
 ‘ liberately examines how many firelocks  
 ‘ each Negroe will cost him, how many  
 ‘ iron fetters to confine him on board,  
 ‘ how many whips to make him work.  
 ‘ What think you of this parallel. The  
 ‘ highwayman attacks you and takes your  
 ‘ money; the trader carries off even your  
 ‘ person. The one invades the rights of  
 ‘ society, the other those of nature. This  
 ‘ certainly is the truth; and if there ex-  
 ‘ isted a religion which authorized, even  
 ‘ only by its silence, such horrors, if it  
 ‘ did not continually denounce vengeance  
 ‘ against the authors or the instruments of  
 ‘ this tyranny; if it made it criminal for  
 ‘ the Slave to break his bonds; if it suf-  
 ‘ fered in its bosom the iniquitous Judge  
 ‘ who condemns the fugitive to death; if  
 ‘ such a religion existed, the minister and  
 ‘ the altar ought to be crushed in one  
 ‘ common ruin.’

The same Author makes a farther note  
 (which is left out in the English Transla-  
 tion) upon the arguments frequently ad-  
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vanced by some, even teachers under different denominations, in vindication of the Slavery of the Negroes, as being the effects of the curses denounced against Cain or Canaan, whose descendants they suppose them to be; in 4 vol. p. 158, French Edit. ‘ Great God, says the Abbe, what  
 ‘ atrocious extravagancies are imputed to  
 ‘ thee, by beings who speak and act only  
 ‘ by a free gift of thy power; who ascribe  
 ‘ to thee words and actions agreeable to  
 ‘ the ridiculous caprice of their ignorant  
 ‘ presumption. Are they Devils who  
 ‘ blaspheme thee, or men who call them-  
 ‘ selves thy ministers.’ Philo. Hist. of the  
 Indies.

The writer of the foregoing introductory observations, i. e. A. Benezet, teacher of a school established by private subscription, in Philadelphia, for the instruction of the Black Children and others of that people, has, for many years, had opportunity of knowing the temper and genius of the Africans; particularly of those under his tuition, who have been many, of different ages; and he can with Truth and Sincerity declare, that he has found amongst them as great variety of Talents, equally capable of improvement, as amongst a like number of Whites; and he  
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is bold to assert, that the notion entertained by some, that the Blacks are inferior to the Whites in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice, founded on the Pride or Ignorance of their lordly Masters, who have kept their Slaves at such a distance, as to be unable to form a right judgment of them.

☞ In the HOUR OF REFLECTION, that awful hour which will come upon all, not hardened in obduracy or sunk in stupidity, when people are so far brought to themselves, as impartially to review the transactions of their past life, how much comfort will it afford to those, who laying aside all views of interest, have laboured by precept and example to depreciate and remove an evil of so deep a dye, an evil so big with dreadful consequences to their Country, to themselves, and yet more so to their unhappy offspring, thereby made a prey to that sloth and idleness, that pride, cruelty and lasciviousness, the natural produce of SLAVERY.

On the other hand, what ANGUISH OF SOUL, what Reflection from others, will at such a period be the portion of those who for selfish ends, in order to support a life of Pride and Luxury, will have stifled the Convictions of Conscience, in favour of a practice as pregnant with ruin of every kind, as it is inconsistent with every idea of Reason, Feeling and Humanity.