

THE
SPEECHES
OF
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM PITT,
IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS.

QUANTO MAGIS ADMIRAREMINI SI AUDISSETIS IPSUM!
CICERO.

THE THIRD EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1817.

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM-WYNDHAM
LORD GRENVILLE,

FIRST LORD COMMISSIONER OF HIS MAJESTY'S TREASURY,
&c. &c. &c.

THESE VOLUMES

ARE,

WITH HIS LORDSHIP'S PERMISSION,

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS MOST OBEDIENT

AND OBLIGED HUMBLE SERVANT,

W. S. HATHAWAY.

LONDON, *November*, 1806.

P R E F A C E.

IN presenting to the public the following collection of Mr. Pitt's Speeches, the Editor would persuade himself that little apology is necessary, either for the motives which induced him to undertake the work, or for the plan upon which it has been conducted. Animated by an ardent zeal and a lively veneration for the memory of Mr. Pitt, and anxious that every vestige of that illustrious statesman's parliamentary career should be recorded as faithfully as possible, he has aimed at accomplishing this object by all the means that diligent and persevering research could afford him.

From the journals of Debrett and Woodfall, and from other public reports of admitted authenticity, the work has principally derived its materials. These, however, have not been the only

channels, through which intelligence has been received. Other sources of more difficult access, but at the same time of more authoritative information, have been consulted, and have contributed very valuable assistance: and it has been by collating these various authorities, by detecting the misrepresentations of some through the avowed fidelity of others, by discarding errors where they could be ascertained, and supplying defects where the means of amendment were within reach, that a compilation has been formed, not inadequate, it is hoped, to the expectations of the public. Some few of the speeches that appear in this collection underwent the revision of Mr. Pitt himself; some were communicated by respectable members of the House of Commons from private notes in their own possession; and of the remainder, the greater part has been sanctioned by the testimony of those, whose frequent observation of the style and character of the speaker enabled them to determine the degree of accuracy with which the speeches were reported.

Whilst the Editor presumes to offer this explanation, as to the merits of the collection in general, he is sensible that some exceptions must be admitted. Instances will occasionally occur, in which his efforts will be found unsuccessful; where either the speeches are presented in an imperfect form, or where the report of them has been entirely lost.

This is a defect, for which no remedy could be discovered — which the utmost caution has not been able to prevent, nor the most assiduous industry to supply.

In regulating the size of the work, the importance of the matter has been always the first object in view; nor has the privilege of rejection ever been resorted to, but in cases where the nature of the subject seemed to warrant the omission. Few readers, it is imagined, will make it ground of complaint, that, on questions of comparatively inferior interest, on local and incidental topics, which in many instances were discussed rather in the form of desultory conversation than of serious debate, the speeches have not been inserted: and to those, whose curiosity upon points connected with finance may experience a disappointment in the exclusion of any of the budget speeches, it may possibly afford some satisfaction to learn that the most celebrated of these have been retained — such as, though perhaps not superior to the others either in clearness of arrangement or precision of detail, exhibit matter more remarkable for novelty, and abound with a larger share of general information.

The prefatory and supplemental notes have been compressed and used as sparingly, as was found consistent with the necessary illustration of the subjects to which they refer.

With these introductory observations it was deemed expedient to prepare the reader, as to the nature and execution of the work before him. Of the exalted character, some portion of whose eloquence these pages have attempted to preserve, it is superfluous to speak. His talents, his patriotism, his virtues, are fresh in the memory of all; and his country will feel with long and deep regret its premature loss of them. “*Quidquid ex Agricola amavimus, quidquid mirati sumus, manet mansurumque est in animis hominum, in æternitate temporum, famâ rerum. Nam multos veterum velut inglorios et ignobiles oblivio obruet, Agricola posteritati narratus et traditus, superstes erit.*” (TACITUS IN AGRIC.)

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

	<i>Page</i>
FEB. 26. 1781. Mr. Burke's bill for regulating the civil list	1
List of Administration	1
May 31. ——— Bill for continuing the commission of pub- lic accounts	7
Dec. 6. 1782. Debate on the report of the address to His Majesty	16
List of Administration	16
Feb. 17. 1783. American peace	21
—— 21. ——— Ditto	24
Mar. 31. ——— Motion for a new administration	38
May 7. ——— Mr. Pitt's motion for a reform in parlia- ment	43
List of Administration	43
June 17. ——— Mr. Pitt's bill for reforming abuses in the public offices	52
Nov. 27. ——— Second reading of Mr. Fox's East India bill	60
List of Administration	65

	<i>Page</i>
Jan. 12. 1784. Debate on postponing the bringing up of a message from the King	66
— 14. — Mr. Pitt's motion for leave to bring in his East India bill	71
— 23. — Second reading of Mr. Pitt's East India bill	84
— 29. — Mr. Fox's motion for adjourning the committee on the state of the nation	91
Feb. 20. — Motion by Mr. Powys, that the House relies on His Majesty's readiness to comply with the wishes of His Commons	93
Mar. 1. — Mr. Fox's motion for an address to the King	101
June 8. — Further considerations of the Westminster election	108
July 6. — Mr. Pitt opens his new system for the government of India	118
Feb. 22. 1785. Debate on the resolutions of the Irish parliament	132
Mar. 9. — Motion by Mr. Fox for expunging from the journals the resolutions respecting the Westminster scrutiny	148
April 18. — Mr. Pitt's motion for a reform in the representation of the people	160
May 5. — Motion for a committee on the East India company statements	177
— 12. — Irish commercial regulations	183
Feb. 27. 1786. Mr. Pitt's motion relative to fortifying the dock-yards	198
Mar. 29. — Reduction of the national debt	217
Feb. 12. 1787. Commercial treaty with France	237
May 9. — Charges against Mr. Hastings	254
— 15. — Mr. Gray's motion for an enquiry into abuses in the Post Office	263

CONTENTS.

xi

		<i>Page</i>
Dec. 10. 1788.	Proceedings during the King's illness.....	266
— 12. —	Ditto.....	271
— 16. —	Ditto.....	277
Jan. 16. 1789.	Ditto	298
Mar. 2. 1790.	Mr. Fox's motion to repeal the test and corporation acts	313
Dec. 22. 1790.	Motion relative to the impeachment of Mr. Hastings	324
Feb. 17. 1792.	Consideration of the state of the public re- venue and expenditure	337
April 2. —	African slave-trade.....	363
Feb. 1. 1793.	His Majesty's message respecting an aug- mentation of the naval and military forces	397
— 12. —	Ditto, announcing war with France	413
May 7. —	Motion by Mr. Grey respecting a reform in parliament	437

RESOLVED,

That, from and after the 5th day of April 1792, the duties now payable on certain inhabited houses, containing less than seven windows or lights, charged by an act of the 6th year of the reign of His present Majesty, do cease and determine.

RESOLVED,

That, from and after the 5th day of April 1792, one halfpenny in the pound of the duty upon all candles (except wax and spermaceti candles) do cease and determine.

ORDERED,

That a bill, or bills, be brought in upon the said resolutions; and that the Earl of Mornington, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Edward James Eliot, the Lord Bayham, Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Attorney-General, Mr. Solicitor-General, Mr. Rose, and Mr. Charles Long, do prepare, and bring in, the same.

And in the committee of the supply on the same day, it was resolved to grant to His Majesty the sum of 400,000*l.* to be issued and paid to the governor and company of the Bank of England, to be by them placed to the account of the commissioners for the reduction of the national debt.

April 2. 1792.

THE House, after receiving a number of petitions *, praying for the Abolition of the Slave-trade, resolved itself into a committee of the whole House, to take the circumstances of the trade into consideration: — when Mr. Wilberforce moved the following resolution: “ 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. PITT, at a late hour, rose and addressed the committee as follows:

At this hour of the morning I am afraid, Sir, I am too much exhausted to enter so fully into the subject before the committee as I could wish; but if my bodily strength is in any degree equal to the task, I feel so strongly the magnitude of this question, that I am extremely earnest to deliver my sentiments, which I rise to do with the more satisfaction, because I now look

* The whole number of petitions presented to this day, was five hundred and eight.

forward to the issue of this business with considerable hopes of success.

The debate has this day taken a turn, which, though it has produced a variety of new suggestions, has, upon the whole, contracted this question into a much narrower point than it was ever brought into before.

I cannot say, that I quite agree with the right honourable gentleman over the way*; I am far from deploring all that has been said by my two honourable friends.† I rather rejoice that they have now brought this subject to a fair issue, that something, at least, is already gained, and that the question has taken altogether a new course this night. It is true, a difference of opinion has been stated, and has been urged with all the force of argument that could be given to it. But give me leave to say, that this difference has been urged upon principles very far removed from those which were maintained by the opponents of my honourable friend when he first brought forward his motion. There are very few of those who have spoken this night, who have not thought it their duty to declare their full and entire concurrence with my honourable friend in promoting the abolition of the slave-trade, as their ultimate object. However we may differ as to the time and manner of it, we are agreed in the abolition itself; and my honourable friends have expressed their agreement in this sentiment with that sensibility upon the subject, which humanity does most undoubtedly require. I do not, however, think they yet perceive what are the necessary consequences of their own concession, or follow up their own principles to their just conclusion.

The point now in dispute between us, is, a difference merely as to the period of time, at which the abolition of the slave-trade ought to take place. I therefore congratulate this House, the country, and the world, that this great point is gained; that we may now consider this trade as having received its condemnation; that its sentence is sealed; that this curse of mankind is seen by the House in its true light; and that the greatest stigma

* Mr. Fox.

† Mr. Dundas, and the Speaker.

on our national character which ever yet existed, is about to be removed! And, Sir, (which is still more important,) that mankind, I trust, in general, are now likely to be delivered from the greatest practical evil that ever has afflicted the human race — from the severest and most extensive calamity recorded in the history of the world!

In proceeding to give my reasons for concurring with my honourable friend in his motion, I shall necessarily advert to those topics which my honourable friends near me have touched upon; and which they stated to be their motives for preferring a gradual, and, in some degree, a distant abolition of the slave-trade, to the more immediate and direct measure now proposed to you. Beginning as I do, with declaring that in this respect I differ completely from my right honourable friends near me, I do not, however, mean to say, that I differ as to one observation which has been pressed rather strongly by them. If they can shew that their proposition of a gradual abolition is more likely than ours to secure the object which we have in view — that by proceeding gradually we shall arrive more speedily at our end, and attain it with more certainty, than by a direct vote immediately to abolish: — if they can shew to the satisfaction both of myself and the committee, that our proposition has more the appearance of a speedy abolition than the reality of it, undoubtedly they will in this case make a convert of me, and my honourable friend who moved the question; they will make a convert of every man among us, who looks to this, which I trust we all do, as a question not to be determined by theoretical principles or enthusiastic feelings, but considers the practicability of the measure — aiming simply to effect his object in the shortest time, and in the surest possible manner.

If, however, I shall be able to shew that our measure proceeds more directly to its object, and secures it with more certainty and within a less distant period; and that the slave-trade will on our plan be abolished sooner than on his; may I not then hope, that my right honourable friends will be as ready to adopt

our proposition, as we should in the other case be willing to accede to theirs?

One of my right honourable friends has stated, that an act passed here for the abolition of the slave-trade would not secure its abolition. Now, Sir, I should be glad to know, why an act of the British legislature, enforced by all those sanctions which we have undoubtedly the power and the right to apply, is not to be effectual : at least as to every material purpose? Will not the executive power have the same appointment of the officers and the courts of judicature, by which all the causes relating to this subject must be tried, that it has in other cases? Will there not be the same system of law by which we now maintain a monopoly of commerce? If the same law, Sir, be applied to the prohibition of the slave-trade, which is applied in the case of other contraband commerce, with all the same means of the country to back it, I am at a loss to know why the actual and total abolition is not likely to be effected in this way, as by any plan or project of my honourable friends, for bringing about a gradual termination of it. But my observation is extremely fortified by what fell from my honourable friend * who spoke last : he has told you, Sir, that if you will have patience with it for a few years, the slave-trade must drop of itself, from the increasing dearness of the commodity imported, and the increasing progress, on the other hand, of internal population. Is it true, then, that the importations are so expensive and disadvantageous already, that the internal population is even now becoming a cheaper resource? I ask then, if you leave to the importer no means of importation but by smuggling, and if, besides all the present disadvantages, you load him with all the charges and hazards of the smuggler, by taking care that the laws against smuggling are in this case watchfully and rigorously enforced, is there any danger of any considerable supply of fresh slaves being poured into the islands through this channel? And is there any real ground of fear, because a few slaves may have been smuggled in or out of the islands, that a bill will be useless and ineffectual on any such

* Mr. Jenkinson.

ground? The question under these circumstances will not bear a dispute.

Perhaps, however, my honourable friends may take up another ground, and say, "It is true your measure would shut out further importations more immediately; but we do not mean to shut them out immediately. We think it right, on grounds of general expediency, that they should not be immediately shut out." Let us therefore now come to this question of the expediency of making the abolition distant and gradual, rather than immediate.

The argument of expediency, in my opinion, like every other argument in this disquisition, will not justify the continuance of the slave-trade for one unnecessary hour. Supposing it to be in our power (which I have shewn it is) to enforce the prohibition from this present time, the expediency of doing it is to me so clear, that if I went on this principle alone, I should not feel a moment's hesitation. What is the argument of expediency stated on the other side? It is doubted whether the deaths and births in the islands are as yet so nearly equal as to ensure the keeping up of a sufficient stock of labourers: in answer to this, I took the liberty of mentioning, in a former year, what appeared to me to be the state of population at that time. My observations were taken from documents which we have reason to judge authentic, and which carried on the face of them the conclusions I then stated; they were the clear, simple, and obvious result of a careful examination which I made into this subject, and any gentleman who will take the same pains may arrive at the same degree of satisfaction.

These calculations, however, applied to a period of time that is now four or five years past. The births were then, in the general view of them, nearly equal to the deaths; and, as the state of population was shewn, by a considerable retrospect, to be regularly increasing, an excess of births must before this time have taken place.

Another observation has been made as to the disproportion of the sexes; this, however, is a disparity which existed in any

material degree only in former years ; it is a disparity of which the slave-trade has been itself the cause ; which will gradually diminish as the slave-trade diminishes, and must entirely cease, if the trade shall be abolished ; but which, nevertheless, is made the very plea for its continuance. I believe this disproportion of the sexes, taking the whole number in the islands, Creole as well as imported Africans, the latter of whom occasion all the disproportion, is not now by any means considerable.

But, Sir, I also shewed, that the great mortality which turned the balance so as to make the deaths appear more numerous than the births, arose too from the imported Africans, who die in extraordinary numbers in the seasoning. If, therefore, the importation of negroes should cease, every one of the causes of mortality which I have now stated, would cease also. Nor can I conceive any reason why the present number of labourers should not maintain itself in the West Indies, except it be from some artificial cause, some fault in the islands ; such as the impolicy of their governors, or the cruelty of the managers and officers whom they employ.

I will not reiterate all that I said at that time, or go through island by island. It is true, there is a difference in the ceded islands ; and I state them possibly to be, in some respects, an excepted case. But, if we are to enter into the subject of the mortality in clearing new lands, this, Sir, is undoubtedly another question ; the mortality here is tenfold ; and this is to be considered, not as the carrying on of a trade, but as the setting on foot of a slave-trade for the purpose of peopling the colony ; a measure which I think will not now be maintained. I therefore desire gentlemen to tell me fairly, whether the period they look to is not now arrived ? Whether, at this hour, the West Indies may not be declared to have actually attained a state in which they can maintain their population ? and upon the answer I must necessarily receive, I think I could safely rest the whole of the question.

One honourable gentleman has rather ingeniously observed that one or other of these two assertions of ours, must necessarily be

false : that either the population must be decreasing, which we deny ; or if the population is increasing, that the slaves must be perfectly well treated, (this being the cause of such population,) which we deny also. That the population is rather increasing than otherwise, and also that the general treatment is by no means so good as it ought to be, are both points which have been separately proved by different evidences ; nor are these two points so entirely incompatible. The ill treatment must be very great indeed, in order to diminish materially the population of any race of people. That it is not so extremely great as to do this, I will admit. I will even admit, if you please, that this charge may possibly have been sometimes exaggerated ; and I certainly think, that it applies less and less as we come nearer to the present times.

But, let us see how this contradiction of ours, as it is thought, really stands, and how the explanation of it will completely settle our minds on the point in question. Do the slaves diminish in numbers ? It can be nothing but ill treatment that causes the diminution. This ill treatment the abolition must and will restrain. In this case, therefore, we ought to vote for the abolition. On the other hand, Do you choose to say that the slaves clearly increase in numbers ? Then you want no importations, and, in this case also, you may safely vote for the abolition. Or, if you choose to say, as the third and only other case which can be put, and which perhaps is the nearest to the truth, that the population is nearly stationary, and the treatment neither so bad nor so good as it might be ; then surely, Sir, it will not be denied, that this of all others is, on each of the two grounds, the proper period for stopping further supplies : for your population, which you own is already stationary, will thus be made undoubtedly to increase from the births ; and the good treatment of your present slaves, which I am now supposing is but very moderate, will be necessarily improved also by the same measure of abolition. I say, therefore, that these propositions, contradictory as they may be represented, are in truth not at all inconsistent, but even come in aid of each other, and lead to a conclusion that is decisive. And let it be

always remembered, that in this branch of my argument I have only in view the well-being of the West Indies, and do not now ground any thing on the African part of the question.

But, Sir, I may carry these observations respecting the islands much further. It is within the power of the colonists, (and is it not then their indispensable duty?) to apply themselves to the correction of those various abuses by which population is restrained. The most important consequences may be expected to attend colonial regulations for this purpose. With the improvement of internal population, the condition of every negro will improve also; his liberty will advance, or at least he will be approaching to a state of liberty. Nor can you increase the happiness, or extend to the freedom of the negro, without adding in an equal degree to the safety of the islands, and of all their inhabitants. Thus, Sir, in the place of *slaves*, who naturally have an interest directly opposite to that of their masters, and are therefore viewed by them with an eye of constant suspicion, you will create a body of valuable *citizens and subjects*, forming a part of the same community, having a common interest with their superiors, in the security and prosperity of the whole.

And here let me add, that in proportion as you increase the happiness of these unfortunate beings, you will undoubtedly increase in effect the quantity of their labour also. Gentlemen talk of the diminution of the labour of the islands! I will venture to assert, that, even if in consequence of the abolition there were to be some decrease in the number of hands, the quantity of work done, supposing the condition of the slaves to improve, would by no means diminish in the same proportion; perhaps would be far from diminishing at all. For if you restore to this degraded race the true feelings of men; if you take them out from among the order of brutes, and place them on a level with the rest of the human species; they will then work with that energy which is natural to men, and their labour will be productive, in a thousand ways, above what it has yet been; as the labour of a man is always more productive than that of a mere brute.

It generally happens, that in every bad cause some information arises out of the evidence of its defenders themselves, which serves to expose in one part or other the weakness of their defence. It is the characteristic of such a cause, that if it be at all gone into, even by its own supporters, it is liable to be ruined by the contradictions in which those who maintain it are for ever involved.

The committee of the privy council of Great Britain sent over certain queries to the West-India islands, with a view of elucidating the present subject; and they particularly inquired, whether the negroes had any days or hours allotted to them, in which they might work for themselves. The assemblies, in their answers, with an air of great satisfaction state the labour of the slaves to be moderate, and the West-India system to be well calculated to promote the domestic happiness of the slaves: they add, “that proprietors are not compelled by law to allow their slaves any part of the six working days of the week for themselves, but that it is the general practice to allow them one afternoon in every week out of crop time, which, with such hours as they choose to work on Sundays, is time amply sufficient for their own purposes:” now, therefore, will the negroes, or I may rather say, do the negroes work for their own emolument? I beg the committee’s attention to this point: the assembly of Grenada proceeds to state — I have their own words for it — “that though the negroes are allowed the afternoons of only one day in every week, they will 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, Sir, I will desire you to burn all my calculations; to disbelieve, if you please, every word I have said on the present state of population; nay, I will admit, for the sake of argument, that the numbers are decreasing, and the productive labour at present insufficient for the cultivation of those countries: and I will then ask, whether the increase in the quantity of labour which is reasonably to be expected from the improved condition of the slaves, is not, by the admission of the islands themselves, by their

admission not merely of an argument but a fact, far more than sufficient to counterbalance any decrease which can be rationally apprehended from a defective state of their population. Why, Sir, a negro, if he works for himself, and not for a master, will do double work! This is their own account. If you will believe the planters, if you will believe the legislature of the islands, the productive labour of the colonies would, in case the negroes worked as free labourers instead of slaves, be literally doubled. Half the present labourers, on this supposition, would suffice for the whole cultivation of our islands on the present scale. I therefore confidently ask the House, whether, in considering the whole of this question, we may not fairly look forward to an improvement in the condition of these unhappy and degraded beings, not only as an event desirable on the ground of humanity and political prudence, but also as a means of increasing very considerably indeed, (even without any increasing population,) the productive industry of the islands?

When gentlemen are so nicely balancing the past and future means of cultivating the plantations, let me request them to put this argument into the scale; and the more they consider it, the more will they be satisfied, that both the solidity of the principle which I have stated, and the fact which I have just quoted in the very words of the colonial legislature, will bear me out in every inference I have drawn. I think they will perceive also, that it is the undeniable duty of this House, on the grounds of true policy, immediately to sanction and carry into effect that system which ensures these important advantages; in addition to all those other inestimable blessings which follow in their train.

If, therefore, the argument of expediency, as applying to the West-India islands, is the test by which this question is to be tried, I trust I have now established this proposition, namely, that whatever tends most speedily and effectually to meliorate the condition of the slaves, is undoubtedly on the ground of expediency, leaving justice out of the question, the main object to be pursued.

That the immediate abolition of the slave-trade will most emi-

nently have this effect, and that it is the only measure from which this effect can in any considerable degree be expected, are points to which I shall presently come; but before I enter upon them, let me notice one or two further circumstances.

We are told (and by respectable and well-informed persons) that the purchase of new negroes has been injurious instead of profitable to the planters themselves; so large a proportion of these unhappy wretches being found to perish in the seasoning. Writers well versed in this subject have even advised that, in order to remove the temptation which the slave-trade offers to expend large sums in this injudicious way, the door of importation should be shut. — This very plan which we now propose, the mischief of which is represented to be so great as to outweigh so many other momentous considerations, has actually been recommended by some of the best authorities, as a plan highly requisite to be adopted on the very principle of advantage to the island; nay, not merely on that principle of general and political advantage on which I have already touched, but for the advantage of the very individuals who would otherwise be most forward in purchasing slaves. On the part of the West-Indians it is urged, “The planters are in debt; they are already distressed; if you stop the slave-trade, they will be ruined.” Mr. Long, the celebrated historian of Jamaica, recommends the stopping of importations, as a receipt for enabling the plantations which are embarrassed to get out of debt. I will quote his words. Speaking of the usurious terms on which money is often borrowed for the purchase of fresh slaves, he advises “the laying of a duty equal to a prohibition on all negroes imported for the space of four or five years, except for re-exportation. - - Such a law,” he proceeds to say, “would be attended with the following good consequences. It would put an immediate stop to these extortions; it would enable the planter to retrieve his affairs by preventing him from running in debt, either by renting or purchasing negroes; it would render such recruits less necessary, by the redoubled care he would be obliged to take of his present stock, the preservation of their lives and health: and lastly, it

would raise the value of negroes in the island. — A North-American province, by this prohibition alone for a few years, from being deeply plunged in debt, has become independent, rich, and flourishing.”

On this authority of Mr. Long I rest the question, whether the prohibition of further importations is that rash, impolitic, and completely ruinous measure, which it is so confidently declared to be with respect to our West-Indian plantations.

I do not, however, mean, in thus treating this branch of the subject, absolutely to exclude the question of indemnification on the supposition of possible disadvantages affecting the West-Indies through the abolition of the slave-trade. But when gentlemen set up a claim of compensation merely on those general allegations, which are all that I have yet heard from them, I can only answer, let them produce their case in a distinct and specific form; and if upon any practicable or reasonable grounds it shall claim consideration, it will then be time enough for parliament to decide upon it.

I now come to another circumstance of great weight, connected with this part of the question. I mean the danger to which the islands are exposed from those negroes who are newly imported. This, Sir, like the observation which I lately made, is no mere speculation of ours; for here again I refer you to Mr. Long, the historian of Jamaica. He treats particularly of the dangers to be dreaded from the introduction of Coromantine negroes; an appellation under which are comprised several descriptions of negroes obtained on the Gold Coast, whose native country is not exactly known, and who are purchased in a variety of markets, having been brought from some distant inland. With a view of preventing insurrections, he advises, that “by a laying a duty equal to a prohibition, no more of these Coromantines should be bought;” and after noticing one insurrection which happened through their means, he tells you of another in the following year, in which thirty-three Coromantines, most of whom had been newly imported, suddenly rose, and in the space of an hour murdered and wounded no less than nineteen white persons.”

To the authority of Mr. Long, both in this and other parts of his work, I may add the recorded opinion of the committee of the house of assembly of Jamaica itself; who, in consequence of a rebellion among the slaves, were appointed to enquire into the best means of preventing future insurrections. The committee reported, "That the rebellion had originated (like most or all 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 negroes," which was intended to operate as a prohibition.

But the danger is not confined to the importation of Coromantines. Mr. Long, carefully investigating as he does the causes of such frequent insurrections, particularly at Jamaica, accounts for them from the greatness of its general importations. "In two years and a half," says he, "27,000 negroes have been imported. - - No wonder we have rebellions! Twenty-seven thousand in two years and a half!" Why, Sir, I believe that in some late years there have been as many imported into the same island within the same period! Surely, Sir, when gentlemen talk so vehemently of the safety of the islands, and charge us with being so indifferent to it; when they speak of the calamities of St. Domingo, and of similar dangers impending over their own heads at the present hour, it ill becomes *them* to be the persons who are crying out for further importations. It ill becomes *them* to charge upon *us* the crime of stirring up insurrections — upon *us* who are only adopting the very principles, which Mr. Long, which in part even the legislature of Jamaica itself, laid down in the time of danger, with an avowed view to the prevention of any such calamity.

The House, I am sure, will easily believe it is no small satisfaction to me, that among the many arguments for prohibiting the slave-trade which crowd upon my mind, the security of our West-India possessions against internal commotions, as well as foreign enemies, is among the most prominent and most forcible. And here let me apply to my two right honourable friends, and ask them, whether in this part of the argument they do not see

reason for *immediate* abolition! Why should you any longer import into those countries that which is the very seed of insurrection and rebellion? Why should you persist in introducing those latent principles of conflagration, which, if they should once burst forth, may annihilate in a single day the industry of an hundred years? Why will you subject yourselves, with open eyes, to the evident and imminent risk of a calamity, which may throw you back a whole century in your profits, in your cultivation, in your progress to the emancipation of your slaves? and, disappointing at once every one of those golden expectations, may retard not only the accomplishment of that happy system which I have attempted to describe, but may cut off even your opportunity of taking any one introductory step? Let us begin from this time! Let us not commit these important interests to any further hazard! Let us prosecute this great object from this very hour! Let us vote that the abolition of the slave-trade shall be immediate, and not left to I know not what future time or contingency! Will my right honourable friends answer for the safety of the islands during any imaginable intervening period? Or do they think that any little advantages of the kind which they state, can have any weight in that scale of expediency in which this great question ought undoubtedly to be tried?

Thus stated, and thus alone, Sir, can it be truly stated, to what does the whole of my right honourable friend's arguments, on the head of expediency, amount? It amounts but to this: — the colonies on the one hand would have to struggle with some few difficulties and disadvantages at the first, for the sake of obtaining on the other hand immediate security to their leading interests; of ensuring, Sir, even their own political existence; and for the sake also of immediately commencing that system of progressive improvement in the condition of the slaves, which is necessary to raise them from the state of brutes to that of rational beings, but which never can begin until the introduction of these new disaffected and dangerous Africans into the same gangs, shall have been stopped.

If any argument can in the slightest degree justify the seve-

rity that is now so generally practised in the treatment of the slaves, it must be the introduction of these Africans. It is the introduction of these Africans that renders all idea of emancipation for the present so chimerical; and the very mention of it so dreadful. It is the introduction of these Africans that keeps down the condition of all plantation-negroes. Whatever system of treatment is deemed necessary by the planters to be adopted towards these new Africans, extends itself to the other slaves also. Instead therefore of deferring the hour when you will finally put an end to importations, vainly purposing that the condition of your present slaves should previously be mended, you must, in the very first instance, stop your importations, if you hope to introduce any rational or practicable plan, either of gradual emancipation, or present general improvement.

Having now done with this question of expediency as affecting the islands, I come next to a proposition advanced by my right honourable friend *, which appeared to intimate, that on account of some patrimonial rights of the West-Indians, the prohibition of the slave-trade might be considered as an invasion on their legal inheritance.

Now, in answer to this proposition, I must make two or three remarks, which I think my right honourable friend will find some considerable difficulty in answering. — First, I observe that his argument, if it be worth any thing, applies just as much to gradual as immediate abolition. I have no doubt, that at whatever period he should be disposed to say the abolition should actually take place, this defence will equally be set up; for it certainly is just as good an argument against an abolition seven, or seventy years hence, as against an abolition at this moment. It supposes, we have no right whatever to stop the importations; and even though the disadvantage to our plantations, which some gentlemen suppose to attend the measure of immediate abolition, should be admitted gradually to lessen by the lapse of

* Mr. Dundas.

a few years, yet in point of principle the absence of all right of interference would remain the same. My right honourable friend, therefore, I am sure will not press an argument not less hostile to his proposition than to ours. But let us investigate the foundation of this objection, and I will commence what I have to say, by putting a question to my right honourable friend. It is chiefly on the presumed ground of our being bound by a parliamentary sanction heretofore given to the African slave-trade, that this argument against the abolition is rested. Does then my right honourable friend, or does any man in this House think, that the slave-trade has received any such parliamentary sanction, as must place it more out of the jurisdiction of the legislature for ever after, than the other branches of our national commerce? I ask, is there any one regulation of any part of our commerce, which, if this argument be valid, may not equally be objected to, on the ground of its affecting some man's patrimony, some man's property, or some man's expectations? Let it never be forgotten, that the argument I am canvassing would be just as strong, if the possession affected were small, and the possessors humble; for on every principle of justice, the property of any single individual, or small number of individuals, is as sacred, as that of the great body of West-Indians. Justice ought to extend her protection with rigid impartiality to the rich and to the poor, to the powerful and to the humble. If this be the case, in what a situation does my right honourable friend's argument place the legislature of Britain? What room is left for their interference in the regulation of any part of our commerce? It is scarcely possible to lay a duty on any one article, which may not, when first imposed, be said in some way to affect the property of individuals, and even of some entire classes of the community. If the laws respecting the slave-trade imply a contract for its perpetual continuance, I will venture to say, there does not pass a year without some act, equally pledging the faith of parliament to the perpetuating of some other branch of commerce. In short, I repeat my observation,

that no new tax can be imposed, much less can any prohibitory duty be ever laid on any branch of trade, that has before been regulated by parliament, if this principle be once admitted.

Before I refer to the acts of parliament by which the public faith is said to be pledged, let me remark also, that a contract for the continuance of the slave-trade must, on the principles which I shall presently insist on, have been void, even from the beginning; for if this trade is an outrage upon justice, and only another name for fraud, robbery, and murder, — will any man urge that the legislature could possibly by any pledge whatever incur the obligation of being an accessory, or I may even say a principal, in the commission of such enormities, by sanctioning their countenance? As well might an individual think himself bound by a promise to commit an assassination. I am confident, gentlemen must see, that our proceedings on such grounds would infringe all the principles of law, and subvert the very foundation of morality.

Let us now see, how far the acts themselves shew that there is this sort of parliamentary pledge to continue the African slave-trade. The act of 23d Geo. II. c. 31. is that by which we are supposed to be bound up by contract to sanction all those horrors now so incontrovertibly proved. How surprised then, Sir, must the House be to find, that by a clause of their very act, some of these outrages are expressly forbidden! It says, “No commander, or master of a ship, trading to Africa, shall by fraud, force, or violence, or by any indirect practice whatsoever, take on board or carry away from the coast of Africa, any negro, or native of the said country, or commit any violence on the natives, to the prejudice of the said trade, and that every person so offending shall for every such offence forfeit” — When it comes to the penalty, sorry am I to say, that we see too close a resemblance to the West-India law, which inflicts the payment of 80*l.* as the punishment for murdering a negro. The price of blood in Africa is 100*l.*; but even this penalty is enough to prove that the act at least does not sanction, much less does it engage to perpetuate enormities; and the

whole trade has now been demonstrated to be a mass, a system of enormities ; of enormities which incontrovertibly bid defiance not only to this clause but to every regulation which our ingenuity can devise, and our power carry into effect. Nothing can accomplish the object of this clause but an extinction of the trade itself.

But, Sir, let us see what was the motive for carrying on the trade at all? The preamble of the act states it, — “Whereas the trade to and from Africa is very advantageous to Great Britain, and necessary for the supplying the plantations and colonies thereunto belonging with a sufficient number of negroes at reasonable rates, and for that purpose the said trade should be carried on,” &c.—Here then we see what the parliament had in view when it passed this act ; and I have clearly shewn that not one of the occasions on which it grounded its proceedings now exists. I may then plead, I think, the very act itself as an argument for the abolition. If it is shewn, that instead of being “very advantageous” to Great Britain, this trade is the most destructive that can well be imagined to her interests ; that it is the ruin of our seamen ; that it stops the extension of our manufactures ; if it is proved in the second place that it is not now necessary for the “supplying our plantations with negroes ;” if it is further established that this traffick was from the very beginning contrary to the first principles of justice, and consequently that a pledge for its continuance, had one been attempted to have been given, must have been completely and absolutely void ;—where then in this act of parliament is the contract to be found, by which Britain is bound, as she is said to be, never to listen to her own true interests, and to the cries of the natives of Africa? Is it not clear that all argument, founded on the supposed pledged faith of parliament, makes against those who employ it? I refer you to the principles which obtain in other cases. Every trade-act shews undoubtedly that the legislature is used to pay a tender regard to all classes of the community. But if for the sake of moral duty, of national honour, or even of great political advantage, it is thought right, by authority of

parliament, to alter any long-established system, parliament is competent to do it. The legislature will undoubtedly be careful to subject individuals to as little inconvenience as possible; and if any peculiar hardship should arise, that can be distinctly stated, and fairly pleaded, there will ever, I am sure, be a liberal feeling towards them in the legislature of this country, which is the guardian of all who live under its protection. On the present occasion, the most powerful considerations call upon us to abolish the slave-trade; and if we refuse to attend to them on the alleged ground of pledged faith and contract, we shall depart as widely from the practice of parliament, as from the path of moral duty. If indeed there is any case of hardship, which comes within the proper cognizance of parliament, and calls for the exercise of its liberality,—well! But such a case must be reserved for calm consideration, as a matter distinct from the present question.

I beg pardon for dwelling so long on the argument of expediency, and on the manner in which it affects the West-Indies. I have been carried away by my own feelings on some of these points into a greater length than I intended, especially considering how fully the subject has been already argued. The result of all I have said, is, that there exists no impediment, no obstacle, no shadow of reasonable objection on the ground of pledged faith, or even on that of national expediency, to the abolition of this trade. On the contrary, all the arguments drawn from those sources pleaded for it; and they plead much more loudly, and much more strongly in every part of the question, for an immediate than for a gradual abolition.

But now, Sir, I come to Africa. That is the ground on which I rest, and here it is that I say my right honourable friends do not carry their principles to their full extent. Why ought the slave-trade to be abolished? Because it is incurable injustice. How much stronger then is the argument for immediate than gradual abolition? By allowing it to continue even for one hour, do not my right honourable friends weaken—do not they desert, their own argument of its injustice? If on the ground

of injustice it ought to be abolished at last, why ought it not now? Why is injustice to be suffered to remain for a single hour? From what I hear without doors, it is evident that there is a general conviction entertained of its being far from just: and from that very conviction of its injustice, some men have been led, I fear, to the supposition, that the slave-trade never could have been permitted to begin, but from some strong and irresistible necessity; a necessity, however, which, if it was fancied to exist at first, I have shewn cannot be thought by any man whatever to exist now. This plea of necessity, thus presumed, and presumed, as I suspect, from the circumstance of injustice itself, has caused a sort of acquiescence in the continuance of this evil. Men have been led to place it among the rank of those necessary evils, which are supposed to be the lot of human creatures, and to be permitted to fall upon some countries or individuals, rather than upon others, by that Being, whose ways are inscrutable to us, and whose dispensations, it is conceived, we ought not to look into. The origin of evil is indeed a subject beyond the reach of human understandings; and the permission of it by the Supreme Being, is a subject into which it belongs not to us to enquire. But where the evil in question is a moral evil which a man can scrutinise, and where that moral evil has its origin with ourselves, let us not imagine that we can clear our consciences by this general, not to say irreligious and impious way of laying aside the question. If we reflect at all on this subject, we must see that every necessary evil supposes that some other and greater evil would be incurred were it removed; I therefore desire to ask, what can be that greater evil, which can be stated to overbalance the one in question? — I know of no evil that ever has existed, nor can I imagine any evil to exist, worse than the tearing of seventy or eighty thousand persons annually from their native land, by a combination of the most civilized nations, inhabiting the most enlightened part of the globe, but more especially under the sanction of the laws of that nation which calls herself the most free and the most happy of them all. Even if

these miserable beings were proved guilty of every crime before you take them off, (of which however not a single proof is adduced,) ought we to take upon ourselves the office of executioners? And even if we condescend so far, still can we be justified in taking them, unless we have clear proof that they are criminals?

But if we go much farther, — if we ourselves tempt them to sell their fellow-creatures to us, we may rest assured, that they will take care to provide by every method, by kidnapping, by village-breaking, by unjust wars, by iniquitous condemnations, by rendering Africa a scene of bloodshed and misery, a supply of victims increasing in proportion to our demand. Can we then hesitate in deciding whether the wars in Africa are their wars or ours? It was our arms in the river Cameroon put into the hands of the trader, that furnished him with the means of pushing his trade; and I have no more doubt that they are British arms, put into the hands of Africans, which promote universal war and desolation, than I can doubt their having done so in that individual instance.

I have shewn how great is the enormity of this evil, even on the supposition that we take only convicts and prisoners of war. But take the subject in the other way; take it on the grounds stated by the right honourable gentlemen over the way; and how does it stand? Think of EIGHTY THOUSAND persons carried away out of their country by we know not what means! for crimes imputed! for light or inconsiderable faults! for debt perhaps! for the crime of witchcraft! or a thousand other weak and scandalous pretexts! besides all the fraud and kidnapping, the villanies and perfidy, by which the slave-trade is supplied. Reflect on these eighty thousand persons thus annually taken off! There is something in the horror of it, that surpasses all the bounds of imagination. Admitting that there exists in Africa something like to courts of justice; yet what an office of humiliation and meanness is it in us, to take upon ourselves to carry into execution the partial, the cruel, iniquitous sentences of such courts, as if we also were strangers

to all religion, and to the first principles of justice! But that country, it is said, has been in some degree civilised, and civilised by us. It is said they have gained some knowledge of the principles of justice. What, Sir, have they gained principles of justice from us? Their civilisation brought about by us!! Yes, we give them enough of our intercourse to convey to them the means, and to initiate them in the study of mutual destruction. We give 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 iniquity. We give them just enough of European improvements, to enable them the more effectually to turn Africa into a ravaged wilderness. Some evidences say, that the Africans are addicted to the practice of gambling; that they even sell their wives and children, and ultimately themselves. Are these then the legitimate sources of slavery? Shall we pretend that we can thus acquire an honest right to exact the labour of these people? Can we pretend that we have a right to carry away to distant regions, men of whom we know nothing by authentic enquiry, and of whom there is every reasonable presumption to think, that those who sell them to us, have no right to do so? But the evil does not stop here. I feel that there is not time for me to make all the remarks which the subject deserves, and I refrain from attempting to enumerate half the dreadful consequences of this system. Do you think nothing of the ruin and the miseries in which so many other individuals, still remaining in Africa, are involved in consequence of carrying off so many myriads of people? Do you think nothing of their families which are left behind? of the connections which are broken? of the friendships, attachments, and relationships that are burst asunder? Do you think nothing of the miseries in consequence, that are felt from generation to generation? of the privation of that happiness which might be communicated to them by the introduction of civilisation, and of mental and moral improvement? A happiness which you withhold from them so long as you permit the slave-trade to continue. What do you yet know of the internal

state of Africa? You have carried on a trade to that quarter of the globe from this civilised and enlightened country; but such a trade, that, instead of diffusing either knowledge or wealth, it has been the check to every laudable pursuit. Instead of any fair interchange of commodities; instead of conveying to them, from this highly favoured land, any means of improvement, you carry with you that noxious plant by which every thing is withered and blasted; under whose shade nothing that is useful or profitable to Africa will ever flourish or take root. Long as that continent has been known to navigators, the extreme line and boundaries of its coasts is all with which Europe is yet become acquainted; while other countries in the same parallel of latitude, through a happier system of intercourse, have reaped the blessings of a mutually beneficial commerce. But as to the whole interior of that continent you are, by your own principles of commerce, as yet entirely shut out: Africa is known to you only in its skirts. Yet even there you are able to infuse a poison that spreads its contagious effects from one end of it to the other, which penetrates to its very centre, corrupting every part to which it reaches. You there subvert the whole order of nature; you aggravate every natural barbarity, and furnish to every man living on that continent, motives for committing, under the name and pretext of commerce, acts of perpetual violence and perfidy against his neighbour.

Thus, Sir, has 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, and unmindful of our duty, what astonishing — I had almost said, what *irreparable* mischief, have we brought upon that continent? I would apply this thought to the present question. How shall we ever repair this mischief? How shall we hope to obtain, if it be possible, forgiveness from Heaven for those enormous evils we have committed; if we refuse to make use of those means which the mercy of Providence hath still reserved to us for wiping away the guilt and shame with which we are now covered? If we refuse even this degree of compensation, if,

knowing the miseries we have caused, we refuse even now to put a stop to them, how greatly aggravated will be the guilt of Great Britain! and what a blot will the history of these transactions for ever be in the history of this country! Shall we then DELAY to repair these injuries, and to begin rendering this justice to Africa? Shall we not count the days and hours that are suffered to intervene and to delay the accomplishment of such a work? Reflect, what an immense object is before you — what an object for a nation to have in view, and to have a prospect, under the favour of Providence, of being now permitted to attain! I think the House will agree with me in cherishing the ardent wish to enter without delay upon the measures necessary for these great ends: and I am sure that the immediate abolition of the slave-trade is the first, the principal, the most indispensable act of policy, of duty, and of justice, that the legislature of this country has to take, if it is indeed their wish to secure those important objects to which I have alluded, and which we are bound to pursue by the most solemn obligations.

There is, however, one argument set up as an universal answer to every thing that can be urged on our side; whether we address ourselves to gentlemen's understandings, or to their hearts and consciences. It is necessary I should remove this formidable objection; for though not often stated in distinct terms, I fear it is one which has a very wide influence. The slave-trade system, it is supposed, has taken so deep root in Africa, that it is absurd to think of its being eradicated; and the abolition of that share of trade carried on by Great Britain (and especially if her example is not followed by other powers) is likely to be of very little service. Give me leave to say, in answer to so dangerous an argument, that we ought to be extremely sure indeed of the assumption on which it rests, before we venture to rely on its validity; before we decide that an evil which we ourselves contribute to inflict is incurable, and on that very plea refuse to desist from bearing our part in the system which produces it. You are not sure, it is said, that other nations will give up the trade, if you should renounce it. I

answer, if this trade is as criminal as it is asserted to be, or if it has in it a thousandth part of the criminality, which I and others, after thorough investigation of the subject, charge upon it, God forbid that we should hesitate in determining to relinquish so iniquitous a traffic, even though it should be retained by other countries! God forbid, however, that we should fail to do our utmost towards inducing other countries to abandon a bloody commerce which they have probably been in great measure led by our example to pursue! God forbid, that we should be capable of wishing to arrogate to ourselves the glory of being singular in renouncing it!

I tremble at the thought of gentlemen's indulging themselves in this argument (an argument as pernicious as it is futile) which I am combating. "We are friends," say they, "to humanity. We are second to none of you in our zeal for the good of Africa, — but the French will not abolish, — the Dutch will not abolish. We wait, therefore, on prudential principles, till they join us, or set us an example."

How, Sir, is this enormous evil ever to be eradicated, if every nation is thus prudentially to wait till the concurrence of all the world shall have been obtained? — Let me remark too, that there is no nation in Europe that has, on the one hand, plunged so deeply into this guilt as Britain; or that is so likely, on the other, to be looked up to as an example, if she should have the manliness to be the first in decidedly renouncing it. But, Sir, does not this argument apply a thousand times more strongly in a contrary way? How much more justly may *other* nations point to us, and say, "Why should we abolish the slave-trade when Great Britain has not abolished? Britain, free as she is, just and honourable as she is, and deeply also involved as she is in this commerce above all nations, not only has not abolished, but has refused to abolish. — She has investigated it well; she has gained the completest insight into its nature and effects; she has collected volumes of evidence on every branch of the subject. Her senate has deliberated — has deliberated again and again — and what is the result? She has gravely and

solemnly determined to sanction the slave-trade. She sanctions it at least for a while — her legislature, therefore, it is plain, sees no guilt in it, and has thus furnished us with the strongest evidence that she can furnish, — of the justice unquestionably, — and of the policy also, in a certain measure and in certain cases at least, of permitting this traffic to continue.”

This, Sir, is the argument with which we furnish the other nations of Europe, if we again refuse to put an end to the slave-trade. Instead, therefore, of imagining, that by choosing to presume on their continuing it, we shall have exempted ourselves from guilt, and have transferred the whole criminality to them; let us rather reflect that on the very principle urged against us, we shall henceforth have to answer for their crimes, as well as our own. We have strong reasons to believe that it depends upon us, whether other countries will persist in this bloody trade or not. Already we have suffered one year to pass away, and now that the question is renewed, a proposition is made for gradual, with the view of preventing immediate abolition. I know the difficulty that exists in attempting to reform long-established abuses; and I know the danger arising from the argument in favour of delay, in the case of evils which nevertheless are thought too enormous to be borne, when considered as perpetual. But by proposing some other period than the present, by prescribing some condition, by waiting for some contingency, or by refusing to proceed till a thousand favourable circumstances unite together; perhaps until we obtain the general concurrence of Europe (a concurrence which I believe never yet took place at the commencement of any one improvement in policy or in morals); year after year escapes, and the most enormous evils go undressed. We see this abundantly exemplified, not only in public, but in private life. Similar observations have been applied to the case of personal reformation. If you go into the streets, it is a chance but the first person who crosses you is one, “*Vivendi recte qui prorogat horam.*” We may wait; we may delay to cross the stream before us, till it has run down; but we shall wait for ever, for the river will still flow on, without being exhausted.

We shall be no nearer the object which we profess to have in view, so long as the step which alone can bring us to it is not taken. Until the actual, the only remedy is applied, we ought neither to flatter ourselves that we have as yet thoroughly laid to heart the evil we affect to deplore; nor that there is as yet any reasonable assurance of its being brought to an actual termination.

It has also been occasionally urged, that there is something in the disposition and nature of the Africans themselves, which renders all prospect of civilisation on that continent extremely unpromising. "It has been known," says Mr. Frazer in his evidence, "that a boy has been put to death, who was refused to be purchased as a slave." This single story was deemed by that gentleman a sufficient proof of the barbarity of the Africans, and of the inutility of abolishing the slave-trade. My honourable friend, however, has told you, 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 his 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 still further repetition of the same expense, he determined to put him to death. Such was the explanation of the story given in the cross-examination. This, Sir, is the signal instance that has been dwelt upon of African barbarity.— This *African*, we admit, was *unenlightened*, and altogether barbarous: but let us now ask, what would a *civilised* and *enlightened West Indian*, or a body of West Indians, have done in any case of a parallel nature? I will quote you, Sir, a law passed in the West Indies, in the year 1722, which, in turning over the book, I happened just now to cast my eye upon; by which law, this very same crime of running away, is, by the legislature of the island, — by the grave and deliberate sentence of that enlightened legislature, punished with death; and this, not in the case only of the third offence, but even in the very first instance. It is enacted, "that if any negro, or other slave shall withdraw himself from his master, for the term of six months; or any slave

that was absent, shall not return within that time, it shall be adjudged felony, and every such person shall suffer death." There is also another West Indian law, by which every negro's hand is armed against his fellow-negroes, by his being authorised to kill a runaway slave, and even having a reward held out to him for doing so. Let the House now contrast the two cases. Let them ask themselves which of the two exhibits the greater barbarity? Let them reflect, with a little candour and liberality, whether on the ground of any of those facts, and loose insinuations as to the sacrifices to be met with in the evidence, they can possibly reconcile to themselves the excluding of Africa from all means of civilisation? Whether they can possibly vote for the continuance of the slave-trade upon the principle, that the Africans have shewn themselves to be a race of *incorrigible barbarians*?

I hope, therefore, we shall hear no more of the moral impossibility of civilising the Africans, nor have our understandings and consciences again insulted, by being called upon to sanction the slave-trade, until other nations shall have set the example of abolishing it. While we have been deliberating upon the subject, one nation, not ordinarily taking the lead in politics, nor by any means remarkable for the boldness of its councils, has determined on a gradual abolition; a determination, indeed, which, since it permits for a time the existence of the slave-trade, would be an unfortunate pattern for our imitation. France, it is said, will take up the trade, if we relinquish it. What! is it supposed that in the present situation of St. Domingo, of an island which used to take three-fourths of all the slaves required by the colonies of France, she, of all countries, will think of taking it up? What countries remain? The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Spaniards. Of those countries let me declare it is my opinion, that if they see us renounce the trade, after full deliberation, they will not be disposed, even on principles of policy, to rush further into it. But I say more: How are they to furnish the capital necessary for carrying it on? If there is any aggravation of our guilt, in this wretched

business, greater than another, it is that we have stooped to be the carriers of these miserable beings from Africa to the West Indies for all the other powers of Europe. And now, Sir, if we retire from the trade altogether, I ask, **WHERE** is that fund which is to be raised as once by other nations, equal to the purchase of 30 or 40,000 slaves? A fund, which if we rate them at 40*l.* or 50*l.* each, cannot make a capital of less than a million and a half, or two millions of money. From what branch of their commerce is it that these European nations will draw together a fund to feed this monster? — to keep alive this detestable commerce? And even if they should make the attempt, will not that immense chasm, which must instantly be created in the other parts of their trade, from which this vast capital must be withdrawn in order to supply the slave-trade, be filled up by yourselves? — Will not these branches of commerce which they must leave, and from which they must withdraw their industry and their capitals, in order to apply them to the slave-trade, be then taken up by British merchants? — Will you not even in this case find your capital flow into these deserted channels? — Will not your capital be turned from the slave-trade to that natural and innocent commerce from which they must withdraw their capitals, in proportion as they take up the traffic in the flesh and blood of their fellow-creatures?

The committee sees, I trust, how little ground of objection to our proposition there is in this part of our adversaries' argument.

Having now detained the House so long, all that I will further add, shall be on that important subject, the civilisation of Africa, which I have already shewn that I consider as the leading feature in this question. Grieved am I to think that there should be a single person in this country, much more that there should be a single member in the British parliament, who can look on the present dark, uncultivated, and uncivilised state of that continent, as a ground for continuing the slave-trade, — as a ground not only for refusing to attempt the improvement of Africa, but even for hindering and intercepting every ray of

light which might otherwise break in upon her, — as a ground for refusing to her the common chance and the common means, with which other nations have been blessed, of emerging from their native barbarism.

Here, as in every other branch of this extensive question, the argument of our adversaries pleads against them; for, surely, Sir, the present deplorable state of Africa, especially when we reflect that her chief calamities are to be ascribed to us, calls for our generous aid, rather than justifies any despair on our part of her recovery, and still less any further repetition of our injuries.

I will not much longer fatigue the attention of the House; but this point has impressed itself so deeply on my mind, that I must trouble the committee with a few additional observations. Are we justified, I ask, on any one ground of theory, or by any one instance to be found in the history of the world, from its very beginning to this day, in forming the supposition which I am now combating? Are we justified in supposing that the particular practice which we encourage in Africa, of men's selling each other for slaves, is any symptom of a barbarism that is incurable? Are we justified in supposing that even the practice of offering up human sacrifices proves a total incapacity for civilisation? I believe it will be found, and perhaps much more generally than is supposed, that both the trade in slaves, and the still more savage custom of offering human sacrifices, obtained in former periods, throughout many of those nations which now, by the blessings of Providence, and by a long progression of improvements, are advanced the farthest in civilization. I believe, Sir, that, if we will reflect an instant, we shall find that this observation comes directly home to our own selves; and that, on the same ground on which we are now disposed to proscribe Africa for ever from all possibility of improvement, we ourselves might, in like manner, have been proscribed and for ever shut out from all the blessings which we now enjoy.

There was a time, Sir, which it may be fit sometimes to revive in the remembrance of our countrymen, when even human sacrifices are said to have been offered in this island. But I would

peculiarly observe on this day, for it is a case precisely in point, that the very practice of the slave-trade once prevailed among us. 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." It does not distinctly appear, by what means they were procured; but there was unquestionably no small resemblance, in the particular point, between the case of our ancestors and that of the present wretched natives of Africa—for the historian tells you that "adultery, witchcraft, and debt were probably some of the chief sources of supplying the Roman market with British slaves—that prisoners taken in war were added to the number—and that there might be among them some unfortunate gamblers who, after having lost all their goods, at length staked themselves, their wives, and their children." Every one of these sources of slavery has been stated, and almost precisely in the same terms, to be at this hour a source of slavery in Africa. And these circumstances, Sir, with a solitary instance or two of human sacrifices, furnish the alleged proofs, that Africa labours under a natural incapacity for civilisation; that it is enthusiasm and fanaticism to think that she can ever enjoy the knowledge and the morals of Europe; that Providence never intended her to rise above a state of barbarism; that Providence has irrevocably doomed her to be only a nursery for slaves for us free and civilised Europeans. Allow of this principle, as applied to Africa, and I should be glad to know why it might not also have been applied to ancient and uncivilised Britain. Why might not some Roman senator, reasoning on the principles of some honourable gentlemen, and pointing to *British barbarians*, have predicted with equal boldness, "*There is a people that will never rise to civilisation—there is a people destined never to be free—a people 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.*"

Might not this have been said, according to the principles which we now hear stated, in all respects as fairly and as truly of Britain herself, at that period of her history, as it can now be said by us of the inhabitants of Africa?

We, Sir, have long since emerged from barbarism — we have almost forgotten that we were once barbarians — we are now raised to a situation which exhibits a striking contrast to every circumstance, by which a Roman might have characterised us, and by which we now characterise Africa. There is 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 continue to this hour a barbarous traffic in slaves; we continue it even yet in spite of all our great and undeniable pretensions to civilisation. 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 are at present. But in the lapse of a long series of years, by a progression slow, and for a time almost imperceptible, we have become rich in a variety of acquirements, favoured above measure in the gifts of Providence, unrivalled in commerce, pre-eminent in arts, foremost in the pursuits of philosophy and science, and established in all the blessings of civil society; we are in the possession of peace, of happiness, and of liberty; we are under the guidance of a mild and beneficent religion; and we are protected by impartial laws, and the purest administration of justice: we are living under a system of government which our own happy experience leads us to pronounce the best and wisest which has ever yet been framed; a system which has become the admiration of the world. From all these blessings, we must for ever have been shut out, had there been any truth in those principles which some gentlemen have not hesitated to lay down as applicable to the case of Africa. Had those principles been true, we ourselves had languished to this hour in that miserable state of ignorance, brutality, and degradation, in which history proves our ancestors to have been immersed. Had other nations adopted these principles in their conduct

towards us; had other nations applied to Great Britain the reasoning which some of the senators of this very island now apply to Africa, ages might have passed without our emerging from barbarism; and we, who are enjoying the blessings of British civilisation, of British laws, and British liberty, might at this hour have been little superior either in morals, in knowledge, or refinement, to the rude inhabitants of the coast of Guinea.

If then we feel that this perpetual confinement in the fetters of brutal ignorance, would have been the greatest calamity which could have befallen us; if we view with gratitude and exultation the contrast between the peculiar blessings we enjoy, and the wretchedness of the ancient inhabitants of Britain; if we shudder to think of the misery which would still have overwhelmed us, had Great Britain continued to the present times to be the mart for slaves to the more civilised nations of the world, through some cruel policy of theirs, God forbid that we should any longer subject Africa to the same dreadful scourge, and preclude the light of knowledge, which has reached every other quarter of the globe, from having access to her coasts!

I trust we shall no longer continue this commerce, to the destruction of every improvement on that wide continent; and shall not consider ourselves as conferring too great a boon, in restoring its inhabitants to the rank of human beings. I trust we shall not think ourselves too liberal, if, by abolishing the slave-trade, we give them the same common chance of civilisation with other parts of the world, and that we shall now allow to Africa the opportunity—the hope—the prospect of attaining to the same blessings which we ourselves, through the favourable dispensations of Divine Providence, have been permitted, at a much more early period, to enjoy. If we listen to the voice of reason and duty, and pursue this night the line of conduct which they prescribe, some of us may live to see a reverse of that picture, from which we now turn our eyes with shame and regret. We may live to behold the natives of Africa engaged in the calm occupations of industry, in the pursuits of a just and legitimate commerce. We may behold the beams of science and philo-

sophy breaking in upon their land, which, at some happy period in still later times, may blaze with full lustre; and joining their influence to that of pure religion, may illuminate and invigorate the most distant extremities of that immense continent. Then may we hope that even Africa, though last of all the quarters of the globe, shall enjoy at length, in the evening of her days, those blessings which have descended so plentifully upon us in a much earlier period of the world. Then also will Europe, participating in her improvement and prosperity, receive an ample recompense for the tardy kindness (if kindness it can be called) of no longer hindering that continent from extricating herself out of the darkness which, in other more fortunate regions, has been so much more speedily dispelled.

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

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

*His demum exactis —————
Devenere locos lætos, et amœna vireta
Fortunatorum nemorum, sedesque beatas:
Largior hic campos Æther, et limine vestit
Purpureo.*

It is in this view, Sir, — it is as an atonement for our long and cruel injustice towards Africa; that the measure proposed by my honourable friend most forcibly recommends itself to my mind. The great and happy change to be expected in the state of her inhabitants, is, of all the various and important benefits of the abolition, in my estimation, incomparably the most extensive and important.

I shall vote, Sir, against the adjournment; and I shall also oppose to the utmost every proposition, which in any way may tend either to prevent, or even to postpone for an hour, the total abolition of the slave-trade: a measure which, on all the various

grounds which I have stated, we are bound, by the most pressing and indispensable duty, to adopt.

The House divided on an amendment moved by Mr. Dundas, for inserting in the motion the word "gradually,"

Ayes..... 195

Noes..... 125

and the question thus amended was then put, and, after a second division, carried.

Ayes..... 250

Noes..... 85

February 1. 1793.

The order of the day being moved for taking into consideration His Majesty's message of the 28th of January, it was read by the Speaker, as follows :

" **GEORGE R.**

" His Majesty has given directions for laying before the House of Commons, copies of several papers which have been received from M. Chauvelin, late minister-plenipotentiary from the Most Christian King, by His Majesty's secretary of state for foreign affairs, and of the answers returned thereto; and likewise copy of an order made by His Majesty in council, and transmitted by His Majesty's commands to the said M. Chauvelin, in consequence of the accounts of the atrocious act recently perpetrated at Paris,

" In the present situation of affairs, His Majesty thinks it indispensably necessary to make a further augmentation of his forces by sea and land; and relies on the known affection and zeal of the House of Commons to enable His Majesty to take the most effectual measures in the present important conjuncture, for maintaining the security and rights of his own dominions; for supporting his allies; and for opposing views of aggrandisement and ambition on the part of France, which would be at all times dangerous to the general interests of Europe, but are peculiarly so, when connected with the propagation of principles which lead to the violation of the most sacred duties, and are utterly subversive of the peace and order of all civil society. **G. R.**"

Mr. Pitt then rose:

Sir — I shall now submit to the House some observations on