

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery
Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell
Excerpt
[More information](#)

IMMEDIATE,
NOT
GRADUAL ABOLITION,
&c. &c. &c.

IT is now seventeen years since the *Slave Trade* was abolished by the Government of this country—but *Slavery* is still perpetuated in our West India colonies, and the horrors of the Slave Trade are aggravated rather than mitigated. By making it felony for British subjects to be concerned in that inhuman traffic, England has only transferred her share of it to other countries. She has, indeed, by negociation and remonstrance, endeavoured to persuade them to follow her example.—But has she succeeded?—How should she, whilst there is so little consistency in her conduct? Who will listen to her pathetic declamations on the injustice and cruelty of the Slave Trade—whilst she rivets the chains upon her own slaves,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

and subjects them to all the injustice and cruelty which she so eloquently deploras when her own interest is no longer at stake? Before we can have any rational hope of prevailing on our guilty neighbours to abandon this atrocious commerce,—to relinquish the gain of oppression,—the wealth obtained by rapine and violence,—by the deep groans, the bitter anguish of our unoffending fellow creatures ;—we must purge ourselves from these pollutions ;—we must break the iron yoke from off the neck of *our own slaves*,—and let the wretched captives in our own islands go free. Then, and not till then, we shall speak to the surrounding nations with the *all-commanding eloquence of sincerity and truth*,—and our persuasions will be backed by the *irresistible argument of consistent example*. But to invite others to be just and merciful whilst we grasp in our own hands the rod of oppression,—to solicit others to relinquish the wages of iniquity whilst we are putting them into our own pockets—what is it but cant and hypocrisy? Do such preachers of justice and mercy ever make converts? On the contrary,—do they not render themselves ridiculous and contemptible?

But let us, *individually*, bring this great question closely home to our own bosoms. We that hear, and read, and approve, and applaud the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

5

powerful appeals, the irrefragable arguments against the Slave Trade, and against slavery,—are we *ourselves* sincere, or hypocritical? Are *we* the true friends of justice, or do we only cant about it?—To which party do *we* really belong?—to the friends of emancipation, or of perpetual slavery? Every individual belongs to one party or the other; not speculatively, or professionally merely, but practically. The perpetuation of slavery in our West India colonies, is not an abstract question, to be settled between the Government and the Planters,—it is a question in which we are *all* implicated;—we are all guilty,—(with shame and compunction let us admit the opprobrious truth) of supporting and perpetuating slavery. The West Indian planter and the people of this country, stand in the same moral relation to each other, as the thief and the receiver of stolen goods. The planter refuses to set his wretched captive at liberty,—treats him as a beast of burden,—compels his reluctant unremunerated labour under the lash of the cart whip,—why?—because *WE* furnish the stimulant to all this injustice, rapacity, and cruelty,—by *PURCHASING ITS PRODUCE*. Heretofore, it may have been thoughtlessly and unconsciously,—but now this palliative is removed;—the veil of ignorance is rent aside;—the whole nation must now divide itself into the *active supporters*, and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

the *active opposers* of slavery ;—there is no longer any ground for a neutral party to stand upon.

The state of slavery, in our West Indian islands, is now become notorious ;—*the secret is out* ;—the justice and humanity, the *veracity* also, of slave owners,—is exactly ascertained ;—the credit due to their assertions, that their slaves are better fed, better clothed,—are more comfortable, more *happy* than our English peasantry, is now universally understood. The tricks and impostures practised by the colonial assemblies, to hoodwink the people,—to humbug the Government,—and to bamboozle the *saints* (as the friends of emancipation are scornfully termed)—have all been detected—and the cry of the nation has been raised, from one end to the other, against this complicated system of knavery and imposture,—of intolerable oppression, of relentless and savage barbarity.

But is all this knowledge to end in exclamations, in petitions, and remonstrances ?—Is there nothing to be *done*, as well as said ? Are there no tests to prove our sincerity,—no sacrifices to be offered in confirmation of our zeal ?—Yes, there is *one*,—(but it is in itself so small and insignificant that it seems almost burlesque to dignify it with the name of sacrifice)—it is ABSTI-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

7

NENCE FROM THE USE OF WEST INDIAN PRODUCTIONS, *sugar*, especially, in the cultivation of which slave labour is chiefly occupied. Small, however, and insignificant as the sacrifice may appear,—it would, at once, give the death blow to West Indian slavery. When there was no longer a market for the productions of *slave labour*, then, and *not till then*, will the slaves be emancipated.

Many had recourse to this expedient about thirty years ago, when the public attention was so generally roused to the enormities of the Slave Trade. But when the trade was abolished by the British legislature, it was too readily concluded that the abolition of slavery, in the British dominions, would have been an inevitable consequence, this species of abstinence was therefore unhappily discontinued.

“ But, (it will be objected) if there be no market for West Indian produce, the West Indian proprietors will be ruined, and the slaves, instead of being benefited, will perish by famine.” Not so,—the West Indian proprietors understand their own interest better. The market though shut to the productions of *slave labour*, would still be open to the productions of *free labour*,—and the planters are not such devoted worshippers of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

slavery as to make a voluntary sacrifice of their own interests upon her altar;—they will not doom the soil to perpetual barrenness rather than suffer it to be cultivated by free men. It has been abundantly proved that voluntary labour is more productive,—more advantageous to the employer than compulsory labour. The experiments of the venerable and philanthropic Joshua Steele have established the fact beyond all doubt:—But the planter shuts his eyes to such facts, though clear and evident as the sun at noon day.—None are so blind as those who *will* not see. The conviction then must be *forced* upon these infatuated men. It is often asserted, that slavery is too deeply rooted an evil to be eradicated by the exertions of any principle less potent and active than *self interest*—if so, the resolution to abstain from West Indian produce, would bring this potent and active principle into the fullest operation,—would *compel* the planter to set his slaves at liberty.

But were such a measure to be ultimately injurious to the interest of the planter—that consideration ought not to weigh a feather in the scale against emancipation. The slave has a *right* to his liberty, a right which it is a crime to withhold—let the consequences to the planters be what they may. If I have been deprived of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

9

my rightful inheritance, and the usurper, because he has long kept possession, asserts his *right* to the property of which he has defrauded me ;—are my just claims to it at all weakened by the boldness of his pretensions, or by the plea that restitution would impoverish and involve him in ruin? And to what inheritance, or birth-right, can any mortal have pretensions so just, (until forfeited by crime) as to liberty? What injustice and rapacity can be compared to that which defrauds a man of his best earthly inheritance,—tears him from his dearest connexions, and condemns him and his posterity to the degradation and misery of interminable slavery?

In the great question of emancipation, the interests of *two* parties are said to be involved,—the interest of the slave and that of the planter. But it cannot for a moment be imagined that these two interests have an equal right to be consulted, without confounding all moral distinctions, all difference between real and pretended, between substantial and assumed claims. With the interest of the planter, the question of emancipation has (properly speaking) nothing to do. The right of the slave, and the interest of the planter, are distinct questions ;—they belong to separate departments, to different provinces of consideration. If the liberty of the slave can be secured not only

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery

Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

without injury but with advantage to the planter, so much the better, certainly;—but still the liberation of the slave ought ever to be regarded as an independent object; and if it be deferred till the planter is sufficiently alive to his own interest to co-operate in the measure, we may for ever despair of its accomplishment. The cause of emancipation has been long and ably advocated.—Reason and eloquence, persuasion and argument have been powerfully exerted;—experiments have been fairly made,—facts broadly stated in proof of the impolicy as well as iniquity of slavery,—to little purpose;—even the *hope* of its extinction, with the concurrence of the planter,—or by any enactment of the colonial, or British legislature, is still seen in very remote perspective,—so remote, that the heart sickens at the cheerless prospect. All that zeal and talent could display in the way of argument, has been exerted in vain. All that an accumulated mass of indubitable evidence could effect in the way of conviction, has been brought forward to no effect.

It is high time then, to resort to other measures,—to ways and means more summary and effectual. Too much time has already been lost in declamation and argument,—in petitions and remonstrances against *British* slavery.—The cause of emancipation calls for something

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-02030-5 - Pamphlets on West Indian Slavery
 Elizabeth Heyrick and Alexander McDonnell
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

more decisive, more efficient than words. It calls upon the real friends of the poor degraded and oppressed African to bind themselves by a solemn engagement, —an irrevocable vow, to participate no longer in the crime of keeping him in bondage. It calls upon them to “wash their own hands in innocency;” — to abjure for ever the miserable hypocrisy of pretending to commiserate the slave, whilst, by purchasing the productions of his labour they *bribe* his master to keep him in slavery. The great Apostle of the gentiles declared, that he would “eat no flesh whilst the world stood, rather than make his Brother to offend.” Do you make a similar resolution respecting West Indian produce. — Let your resolution be made conscientiously, and kept inviolably; — let no plausible arguments which may be urged against it from without, — no solicitations of appetite from within, move you from your purpose, — and in the course of a few months, slavery in the British dominions will be annihilated.

“Yes, (it may be said) if *all* would unite in such a resolution, — but what can the abstinence of a few individuals, or a few families do, towards the accomplishment of so vast an object?” — It can do wonders. Great effects often result from small beginnings. — Your resolution will influence that of your friends and neighbours; — each of them will,

in like manner, influence their friends and neighbours;—the example will spread from house to house,—from city to city,—till, *among those who have any claim to humanity*, there will be but one heart, and one mind,—one resolution,—one uniform practice. Thus, *by means the most simple and easy, would West Indian slavery be most safely and speedily abolished.*

“ But, (it will be objected) it is not an *immediate*, but a *gradual* emancipation, which the most enlightened and judicious friends of humanity call for, as a measure best calculated, in their judgment, to promote the real interests of the *slave*, as well as his master; the former, not being in a condition to make a right use of his freedom, were it suddenly restored to him.” This, it must be admitted, appears not only the general, but almost universal sentiment of the abolitionists;—to oppose it therefore, may seem a most presumptuous, as well as hopeless attempt. But truth and justice are stubborn and inflexible;—they yield neither to numbers or authority.

The history of emancipation in St. Domingo, and of the conduct of the emancipated slaves for thirty years subsequent to that event (as detailed in Clarkson’s admirable pamphlet, on the necessity of improving the condition of our West Indian