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978-1-108-06015-8 - The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Laws of God: Compared with the Unbounded Claims of the African Traders and British American Slaveholders  
Granville Sharp

Excerpt

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[ 1 ]

## T R A C T I.

T H E

## Just Limitation of Slavery.

**T**HE opinion of the lords Hardwick and Talbot, which I laboured to refute in my Tract against *Slavery in England* (1), (printed in 1769,) has since been effectually set aside by a clear determination, in the Court of King's-Bench (2), in favour of *James Somersett, a Negro*, against his former Master, C\*\*\*\*\* S\*\*\*\*\*, esq. in the year 1772.

B

But

(1) A Representation of the Injustice and dangerous Tendency of tolerating Slavery in *England*.

(2) See Appendix.

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## [ 2 ]

But it is not enough, that the Laws of England exclude *Slavery* merely *from this island*, whilst the grand Enemy of mankind triumphs in a toleration, *throughout our Colonies*, of the most monstrous *oppression* to which human nature can be subjected!

And yet this abominable wickedness has not wanted advocates, who, in a variety of late publications, have attempted to palliate the guilt, and have even ventured to appeal to Scripture for the support of their uncharitable pretensions: so that I am laid under a double obligation to answer them, because it is not the cause of *Liberty* alone for which I now contend, but for that which I have still much more at heart, the honour of the holy Scriptures, the principles of which are entirely opposite to the selfish and uncharitable

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## [ 3 ]

uncharitable pretensions of our American Slaveholders and African Traders.

A late anonymous writer, who calls himself "*An African Merchant*," remarks, that,—“By the Law of Moses, “the Israelites might purchase Slaves “from the Heathens, and even their “own people might become Slaves to “their brethren.” *A Treatise on the Trade from Great-Britain to Africa, &c. by an African Merchant.* P. 8 and 9.

Now, with respect to the first part of his observation, it is true, indeed, that the Israelites were expressly permitted to keep Bond-Servants, or Slaves, “of the “*Heathen*, (or, more properly, of the “*Nations* (הגוים) that were round about” them, and of “the children of the strangers that sojourned among” them. (Levit. xxv. 44 to 46.) But we must remember, that these *Heathen*, or “*Na-*

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## [ 4 ]

“ *tions that were round about them,*” were an abandoned race of people, already *Slaves* and *worshippers* of devils, and by them led to debase *human nature*, and to pollute themselves with the most unnatural and abominable vices : “ For in “ all these,” (said the Almighty,) “ the “ nations are defiled which I cast out “ before you : and the Land is defiled ; “ THEREFORE I do visit the iniquity “ thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants,” &c. Again: “ For all these abominations have “ the men of the land done which “ were before you, and the land is defiled,” &c. See Levit. xviii. And the “ *children of the strangers,*” abovementioned, were (probably) also of the same detestable nations of Palestine, the Amorites, Canaanites, &c. which were expressly doomed to destruction (3), and that

(3) “ Observe thou that which I command thee “ this day : behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite,  
“ rite,

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## [ 5 ]

that by the hand of the Israelites, *who were commanded to shew them no pity* (4).

But no doctrine must be drawn from these commands to *execute God's vengeance* upon the said wicked *strangers*, without considering, at the same time, *that very contrary treatment of strangers* which was *equally* enjoined in the Law: for the Israelites were positively commanded not to *vex or oppress a Stranger*. “*Thou shalt*

“rite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the  
“Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Take  
“heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the  
“inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be  
“for a snare in the midst of thee,” &c. Exod. xxxiv.  
11 and 12.

(4) “And thou shalt consume all the people which  
“the Lord thy God shall deliver thee: thine eye shall  
“have *no pity upon them*,” &c. Deut. vii. 16. “The  
“Lord thy God will put out those nations by little and  
“little,” &c. “The Lord thy God shall deliver  
“them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a migh-  
“ty destruction until they be destroyed. And he shall  
“deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt  
“destroy their name from under heaven: there shall  
“no man be able to stand before thee until thou have  
“destroyed them.” Deut. vii. 23 and 24.

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## [ 6 ]

“ *shalt love him as thyself,*” said Moses, by the express command of God. “ If a “ Stranger sojourn with thee in your “ land, ye *shall not vex*” (or *oppress*) “ him. But *the Stranger* that dwelleth “ with you shall be unto you as one born “ among you, and *thou shalt love him as* “ *thyself*: for ye were *Strangers* in the “ land of Egypt.” Levit. xix. 33. 34. And again: “ The Lord your God is “ God of gods and Lord of lords, a great “ God, a mighty and a terrible, which “ *regardeth not persons* nor taketh reward: “ he doth execute the judgement of the “ fatherless and widow, and *loveth the* “ *Stranger*, in giving him food and raiment. *Love ye, therefore, the Stranger*; for ye were *Strangers* in the land “ of Egypt.” Deut. x. 17 to 19. In all these passages, and many others, the Israelites were reminded of their *Bondage in Egypt*: for so the almighty *Deliverer* from *Slavery* warned his people to

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## [ 7 ]

to *limit* and moderate the *bondage*, which the Law permitted, by the remembrance of *their own former bondage* in a foreign land, and by a remembrance also of his great mercy in *delivering them* from that *bondage*: and he expressly referred them to *their own feelings*, as they themselves had experienced the intolerable yoke of Egyptian Tyranny! “Thou shalt not *oppress a Stranger*; for ye know the heart of a *stranger*, seeing ye were *strangers* in the land of Egypt.” Exod. xxiii. 9. And again: “Thou shalt remember that *thou wast a Bond-man* in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God *redeemed thee*.” Deut. xv. 15.

We must, therefore, necessarily conclude, when these very opposite commands are considered, that the *Heathen*, or *nations* that were “ROUND ABOUT,” or in the *environs* of the promised land, and also the *children of the strangers*, that dwelt

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## [ 8 ]

dwelt among them, mentioned at the same time, whom the Israelites were permitted to retain *in perpetual bondage*, were not intended to be included and ranked under that general denomination of *Strangers*, to whom so much real *affection, benevolence, and consideration*, are strictly commanded, in the texts to which I have just now referred. And, consequently, it must be allowed, that the particular nations, (the seven nations of Palestine, see Deut. vii. 1.) which were expressly devoted to destruction, were the only *Strangers* whom the Jews were permitted to hold in *absolute Slavery*; so that the wicked practice of *enslaving* the poor *African Negroes* would have been as *unlawful*, under the *Jewish Dispensation*, as it certainly is, now a-days, to Englishmen, and other subjects of Great-Britain, that profess *the Christian Religion*; in whose consideration, ALL STRANGERS, from every other



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## [ 9 ]

other part of the world, are, without doubt, entitled to be ranked, esteemed, and beloved, *as brethren*, which I have elsewhere particularly demonstrated; and which even the law of Moses expressly commanded : — “ But *the stranger*, that dwelleth with you, shall be unto you *as one born among you*, and THOU SHALT LOVE HIM AS THYSELF ; for *ye were strangers* in the land of Egypt : I am the Lord your God.” Levit. xix. 33 and 34.

This excellent system of benevolence to *strangers*, which the Israelites were so strictly enjoined to observe, cannot, I apprehend, be otherwise reconciled with the permission to the Israelites of retaining in perpetual bondage *the heathen that were round about them*, and the children of *the strangers* that sojourned among them : for, if this permission were to be extended to *strangers in general*, it would

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## [ 10 ]

subvert the exprefs command concerning *brotherly-love* due to *strangers*; because a man cannot be said *to love the stranger as himself* if he holds *the stranger* and his progeny in a perpetual *involuntary servitude*. The observation therefore of the African Merchant, that “THE ISRAELITES *might* “ *purchase Slaves from the heathens*,” will by no means justify the *enslaving* of *modern heathens*, by *Englishmen*, or by any other nation now subsisting. The Israelites, at that time, might not only purchase Slaves of those particular heathen nations, but they might also *drive out these heathen*; (I mean, these which were particularly named;) nay, even *kill* (5) and *extirpate* them, and *take possession of their cities, houses, and lands*. All these acts of violence *might* the Israelites do *without sin*, though the like would justly be esteemed  
*murder*

(5) “ But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, “ thou *shalt save alive nothing that breatheth*.” Deut. xx. 16.