

**A FEW WORDS, ON THE
ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO
SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE
TRADE, BY RECENT MEASURES, AND
CHIEFLY BY THE SUGAR BILL OF 1846**

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A Few Words, on the Encouragement Given to Slavery and the Slave Trade, by recent measures, and chiefly by the sugar bill of 1846 by Stephen Cave

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BY STEPHEN CAVE, ESQ., M.A.

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“Rebus cunctis inest quidam velut orbis, ut quemadmodum
temporum vices, ita morum vertantur.”—TACITUS.

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

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THE writer of these few pages spent a portion of the years 1846-7-8 in the United States of America, and amongst the Tropical Possessions of Great Britain, and other nations. During this time he saw with pain the character of his country impaired in the eyes of foreigners; the affection of her Colonial subjects alienated; and the cause of humanity in general injured by her changeable policy. He has, in consequence, been induced to add his feeble protest to those which have already appeared; conscious, however, that in the present state of public opinion, this is little more than a declaration of adherence to a defeated, and unpopular party.

Cleve Hill,

February 21st, 1849.

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SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE.

ANOTHER Session of the Imperial Parliament has commenced, a Session momentous to the future destinies of Great Britain. The critical state of neighbouring countries no longer excites apprehension of disturbances in our own. We shall have leisure to deliberate calmly on ulterior measures. It remains to be shewn whether, by an amended policy, we shall endeavour to deserve the favour and protection of Heaven; or, by obstinate perseverance in an opposite course, continue to presume on its forbearance. Expediency has, of late years, too often taken the place of rectitude in the councils of the nation; and it is to one of the most flagrant instances of this mistaken policy that the writer of these few pages, wishes to direct attention: namely, the encouragement offered to Slavery, and the Slave Trade, by our whole commercial system, but more especially by the abolition of prohibitory duties on Slave-grown Sugar, commenced by Lord John Russell in 1846.

On the economy of the measure the writer wishes to say nothing. It is not his intention to enquire whether its promoters have reaped the advantage they anticipated from their surrender of principle; nor to examine the apparent violation of law and justice in the case of the British West Indians, that one contracting party should have the power of dissolving a contract without the consent of the other.

These points have been, and will be again, frequently

and fully discussed* by statesmen on both sides, whose arguments can be sifted by those only who have themselves deeply studied the question : but the morality of the proceeding is open to the comprehension of all. This requires no laborious investigation, no transcendent ability. The principles implanted in the human heart draw a clear line of demarcation here ; and yet, with some few bright exceptions, contending politicians have thrown into the back ground this important point—important indeed beyond measure ; for no one, conversant with the past history of mankind, will deny that national crimes, however great the present gain may appear, sooner or later call down national punishments. The assumption can scarcely be deemed hazardous, that in a country like Britain, professedly christian, the great majority of the people are impressed with this truth ; that few would openly and avowedly prefer expediency to duty, or aver that what is morally wrong, can be politically right. If this be the case, their acquiescence in these measures must proceed from one of three suppositions.

Either that slavery, in itself, is not criminal, or in opposition to divine law.

Or, that the slavery of the countries, from which our markets are supplied, is of such a nature as to take it out of the category of criminal slavery.

Or, thirdly, that our policy has not given encouragement to slavery, nor an impetus to the slave trade ; that both would be flourishing equally, had we pursued a contrary course.

Many persons, especially in the United States of

* See three letters to Lord John Russell, by Jacob Omnium, (Ridgway) and a recent pamphlet by Captain Sir H. V. Huntley, R. N., (Simpkin and Marshall).

America, assert that slavery is divinely sanctioned: citing, in support of their doctrine, the various peculiar precepts of the Jewish code. They go so far as to allege that emancipation is a presumptuous and vain endeavour to reverse God's decree; that a curse has gone forth against the children of Ham, to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for their more fortunate brethren; a curse, which it is our duty to enforce and carry out; and of which, the manifest tokens appear in the brutish physiognomy, and inferior capacity of the negroes, all over the world, as well as in the degraded, and enslaved condition of the African tribes in their own country. It is, however, plainly, a weak argument to cite, for our rule of life, any special ordinances of the Pentateuch, unless prepared to follow out all; to adopt again the multitudinous ceremonies, the penal code, the sanguinary warfare of the ancient Israelites. No doubt it seems to have been permitted to them, to retain their fellow-creatures in slavery, and even to treat them with rigour;* but we cannot be presumptuous in classing this among the ordinances abrogated by the advent of Him who was "to proclaim liberty to the captive;" and surely we, who are enjoined, not to exterminate, but to convert the heathen, cannot but think it inconsistent, that, while inviting them to shake off their spiritual bondage, we should be reducing them to bodily servitude.

If it be a presumptuous endeavour to raise from degradation any one of the "all nations" to whom the gospel is sent, how much more presumptuous for any one State to constitute itself the enforcer of that curse against one of the three great families of man; even supposing its interpretation of that curse literally correct.

* Leviticus xxv. 44—46.