

**FOUR ESSAYS ON
COLONIAL
SLAVERY**

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Four Essays on Colonial Slavery by John Jeremie

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JOHN JEREMIE

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COLONIAL
SLAVERY**

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ON

COLONIAL SLAVERY.

BY JOHN JEREMIE, Esq.

LATE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COURT OF ST. LUCIA.

LONDON:

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1831.

465.

THE Writer of this Tract, holding an official situation, feels bound to state, that he has committed his sentiments to the press, as other public officers have done, who differed from him ; that he has not had any communication with Government on the subject ; and that, therefore, his opinions are entirely personal and unofficial.

So situated, he has felt that he ought to notice such facts only as have come under public discussion in the course of his experience.

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ERRATA.

Page 51, last line, for *cleaning* read *clearing*.
66, line 20, before *the* read *and*.

FOUR ESSAYS, &c.

ESSAY I.

General Features of Slave Communities.

EVEN among the many important political questions to which at this moment public attention is drawn, that of West India Slavery has not diminished in interest. The large amount of property at stake, the warmth unfortunately displayed throughout the discussion, the positive manner in which parties who might be supposed equally well acquainted with the truth have contradicted each other on facts, have on the contrary contributed to increase that interest in a very high degree.

Whilst so many persons have already appeared in the field, the writer of this tract would not have come forward, had he not had some opportunity of forming a judgment, and had not his experience in some degree qualified him to express a decided opinion.

That opinion is also so clear, and his conviction so confirmed, that he deems it a duty to those with whom he differed at an earlier stage of his experience, and to the many who with him have made a sacrifice of their early prepossessions, not to withhold his present sentiments from the public.

There is also another paramount motive. He is on the point of returning to a slave community. They must be aware he has taken a deep interest in this subject; therefore, is it equally due to them and to himself, that he should make a distinct and

unreserved avowal of his opinions. This may prevent much misapprehension, and bring them at once to a right understanding.

In so doing, it is his intention to dwell on abstract questions, or to go back to the origin of slavery, as seldom as possible. It is as little his wish to enter into any lengthened detail of personal discussions, even though they might contribute much to the elucidation of the general subject. His chief purpose is to set forth his view of those points on which public anxiety seems to be chiefly raised, and these, he conceives to be, the present condition of the slaves, and the practicability of an amelioration of slavery and of a general emancipation.

In discussing these points, he will state such facts only as he knows may be supported by documentary evidence. Others of a similar nature, however he may be convinced of their truth, he will refrain from mentioning for many reasons, and particularly that as this is a topic on which angry feelings are already much excited, and whereon the fortunes of thousands, and the fate of hundreds of thousands depend, something more than assertion may be required; and he has no longer an opportunity of tendering oral testimony.

The island of St. Lucia, taken by the English in the year 1796, was ceded back to the French, after having been the scene of a servile war, at the peace of Amiens. It was retaken in 1803, by the British, and from thence, down to the period of the late peace, British merchants invested there a large amount of capital. After the peace, the island becoming definitively British, they made still further investments; but it was soon found that, unless the ancient French laws were considerably modified, they must refrain from carrying on business with the colony, as those laws did not afford a sufficient remedy to creditors. It was therefore thought advisable, by Lord Bathurst, that its institutions should be gradually brought to resemble those of our own colonies, espe-

cially in matters of trade; and to effect this purpose, the writer of this tract, who was then an advocate in the Royal Court of Guernsey, was offered, in 1823, a judicial situation in St. Lucia. This appointment he declined; but, further propositions having been made to him, he eventually accepted it in October, 1824, and arrived at St. Lucia, in February, 1825, in possession of the office of chief justice or first president of the Royal Court, which office he has continued to hold until he was recently appointed to another situation at the Mauritius.

At the time the tender of an appointment was first made to him, he was unacquainted with a single individual in the service of the colonial department, and his political opinions were rather opposed to the then government. On the question of slavery, he was thoroughly indifferent; indeed, it was so remote from his usual pursuits that he may fairly say he had never given it a thought. In the interval between the first proposal, and his accepting office, his professional avocations brought him to England, and on this occasion (probably owing to this proposal) his curiosity prompted him to attend an Anti-Slavery Meeting; he believes the second. The impression made on his mind at that meeting was rather unfavourable than otherwise to the abolitionists. He heard much declamation, much angry and eloquent declamation, but, accustomed from early life to sift evidence, it struck him that there was then a deficiency of facts and of evidence on which to ground that declamation. One gentleman only appeared who ever professed to have seen the West Indies, and this was at least some thirty years before, whilst he confined his arguments to matters in no way connected with his experience.* With this impression, the writer went to the

* On reading over these proceedings now, it is singular how altered they appear to my mind. With the experience I have since had of slavery, there is not a sentiment that I could not now adopt.

colonies. His duties were there, as is shown, likely to be but little connected with slavery; and the advice he received on the subject, from the only gentleman in office to whom he mentioned it, was to avoid those matters, especially as his actual duties were likely to prove sufficiently unpopular.

As his acquaintance with this gentleman has been more than once mentioned in the public prints, he thinks it right to state, at the outset, that, up to the time when he entered into the service of government, that acquaintance was purely professional, and formed after he had first been offered service. They had been both retained in appeals to council, especially in one important case, but one very little calculated to interest the affections: it was a question respecting the erection of a windmill in a certain parish. On his accepting office, he was of course directed to communicate with him as any other person so circumstanced, but from the time that, when in St. Lucia, he found he was likely to engage in controversy, all correspondence, all communication, direct or indirect, between them, ceased, and it was only resumed, on his retiring from his late office; for never had a single line, or a single communication, which had any reference, however slight, to discussions on slavery, passed between them. He was also, up to his recent return, entirely unacquainted with one single member of the Anti-Slavery Society. But whether fortunately or otherwise, certainly very unexpectedly, the last dispatch he received from government, before he left England, happened to be an official letter, from the under Secretary of State, transmitting the whole of the papers on this point up to that period, with directions to revise and report on the slave laws then preparing for St. Lucia; and thus he was at once involved in a discussion which he had wished to avoid, and called upon to attend with assiduity to the bearings of the question.

Hitherto nothing had been done at St. Lucia, either legally or practically. General Mainwaring had, it is true, advised the planters to make an experiment, in July 1823, immediately on