

**PROPOSALS FOR THE FORMATION OF A WEST
INDIA FREE LABOUR COMPANY, FOR
EFFECTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, AND
AFFORDING EQUITABLE PROTECTION TO THE
HOLDERS OF COLONIAL PROPERTY, WITHOUT
IMPOSING A BURTHEN UPON THE NATION**

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Proposals for the Formation of a West India Free Labour Company, for Effecting the Abolition of Slavery, and Affording Equitable Protection to the Holders of Colonial Property, without imposing a burthen upon the nation by George D. Clark

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GEORGINA LOWELL PUTNAM

OF BOSTON

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By GEORGE D. CLARK.

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INTRODUCTION.

LIKE many others not immediately connected with the colonies, I have for some years watched with intense interest the progress of the slavery abolition question, and being intimately connected with persons interested in West India property, although I have no stake in it myself, I have, from oft repeated discussions, and access to authentic details, become familiarised with the subject.

The vast importance of the question in a national point of view, whether considered with reference to the trade of the British empire, or the fate of the colonies, the immense value of the property at stake, and, above all, the interest excited by the contemplation of 800,000* of our fellow creatures about to be elevated from a state of slavery to the rights of freemen, are considerations, which I trust, constitute an apology for publishing individual views on this momentous subject.

I am, in the largest sense of the word, an abolitionist. I wish perfect unrestricted freedom to be given to the negro for the exercise of his civil rights. But I also wish the rights of property to

* This includes the slave population of the Mauritius.

be respected, and beyond every thing, I am anxious that, whilst the measure of abolition is prompt and efficacious, it may be calculated to secure the present and future welfare of the negroes.

The question in all its bearings is one of extreme difficulty to treat; there are strong prejudices on one side, and mistaken abstract notions of philanthropy on the other to contend against—there are rival pretensions and clashing interests to conciliate—there is the crippled financial state of the country to consider—and, worst of all, there is a spirit of bitterness and animosity that reigns in every discussion of the question, whether it be in parliament or in the public meetings of the abolitionists and the West India Body.

Reviewing all these circumstances, I was forcibly struck with the conviction, that one pervading cause was the origin of this want of union, namely, the denial by the abolitionists of the planter's right to compensation. I therefore sought to devise a plan by which colonial interests might be protected in a way to silence the scruples of the most rigid abolitionist, to meet the state of the public finances, and satisfy the just expectations of the holders of West India property.

The present publication is the result of my humble labours. I offer the scheme not as a panacea for all the difficulties that beset the question, but as the outline of a measure, that in more practised and abler hands will promote the public good.

In order that the reader, before he peruse the following pages, may comprehend the views on which the plan is based, I will succinctly state the principles by which I have been guided.

1. The immediate and complete abolition of slavery.

2. The payment of money wages for the labour of the negro, to be paid to himself, and to be at his own free disposal.

3. A system of combination among the planters and their cordial co-operation with Government, both conceived in a spirit of justice to the emancipated negroes, in order to secure a fair distribution of their labour; as well as to train them to habits of voluntary industry and the knowledge of the use of money.

4. Equitable protection and compensation to planters and others, holders of West India property.

5. Compensation to come out of the produce of the colonies, and not out of the wages of the negroes' labour.

6. The guarantee of the British Parliament for such compensation, secured upon the whole of the West India property, assigned to Government for the purpose.

NOTE.

The following pages were prepared for publication before the government plan was brought forward. After a careful review of all its provisions, there appears nothing in them to meet the view I have taken of the question. Adequate protection is not conceded to the West Indians, and their co-operation is not secured, whereas the satisfactory settlement of these two points ought to precede the proposal of any plan for effecting the abolition of slavery. If the British Parliament do not pledge itself to grant ample compensation to the holders of West India property, it is vain to look for the co-operation of the colonial legislatures.

Not intending to go into a detailed examination of the ministerial scheme, I will merely suggest a few enquiries. Is the grant of fifteen millions intended to be a final measure of compensation? Will fifteen millions satisfy the mortgagees? and if not what is to become of the planters? or is one of these great interests to be sacrificed to protect the other? As to the proposed measure of gradual emancipation by a system of apprenticeship, it might be carried into effect by a general association of the planters, but in no other way.

By converting the loan of fifteen millions into a gift, and relieving the negroes from the obligation of paying the price of their emancipation, that important condition of the government scheme by which the colonists themselves are to fix the value of each negro, becomes a dead letter, unless it be intended to make it compulsory on the planters to employ their apprentices at a fixed rate of wages for their one day and a half's free time. But this would be a monstrous injustice, for the labourer would in that case be free to work or not, as he might think proper, but the master would be compelled to employ him: thus making the master, in fact, the slave of his apprentice.

The proposal for raising the fifteen millions by an additional duty of 3s. per cwt. on sugar, is nothing but an expedient for burdening the national resources with the interest of that sum, which (about £700,000) *must be paid annually* whatever may be the effect produced by the increased duty. If an advance of price take place, it will tend to diminish the consumption and so reduce the gross receipts of duty. If no advance take place then will the duty operate as an additional tax on the planter of 3s. per cwt., to be deducted from the produce of his estate. It would be much more to the advantage of the West India interest to lower the duty on Sugar.

5th June, 1833.