

**A REVIEW OF THE REPORT OF A
SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON THE
STATE OF THE WEST INDIA
COLONIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649225705

A Review of the Report of a Select Committee of the House of Commons, on the State of the
West india colonies by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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James Cropper, 1773-181

A REVIEW
OF THE
REPORT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE
OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
ON
THE STATE
OF
THE WEST INDIA COLONIES,

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED, 13TH APRIL, 1832;

OR, THE
INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY
AND THE
PROSPERITY OF THE WEST INDIA PLANTERS
MUTUALLY SECURED BY THE IMMEDIATE
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

LIVERPOOL:
PRINTED BY EGERTON SMITH AND CO. LORD-STREET.
Sold by J. and A. Aron, Cornhill, and HATCHARD and SON, Piccadilly, London.

1833.

REVIEW, &c.

THE real cause of the depression and distress of the West India planters may be so clearly inferred from the concluding remarks in the Report, of which the following pages are a review, that we may very properly commence with an extract from it. The Committee say:—

“In concluding their consideration of the causes of the depressed state of the West India Colonies, your Committee has not forgotten that that depressed state has existed in former times, and at periods anterior to the abolition of the slave trade. To one of these periods their attention has been specially called, by the reference of the report of the Committee of 1807, whence it appears that during the late war, and while still supplied with slaves from Africa, *the planters complained of inadequate returns, and of unequal competition in Foreign markets.* These results were then ascribed to the circumstances of the war, which has long ceased, and were necessarily independent of the causes now alleged. Your Committee are well aware that this similarity of complaint, and discrepancy of assigned reasons, has occasioned some distrust of the accuracy of those which are now put forward.

“But it appears to your Committee that the original cause of depression was, and is, the same at both periods, and the difference is in the circumstance of aggravation. That cause is in this, as in many other cases, over-production; but *in this case, as in no others of which your Committee are aware, entirely remediless on the part of the producer.*

“The West India Colonist not only feels, with any other proprietor of land, the difficulty of altering the application of his capital; he not only feels, in a greater degree than proprietors in general, the difficulty of changing the appropriation of his soil; *he is subject to a burden peculiar to himself, that of maintaining, be his profits what they may, the whole body of labourers, and of their families, existing upon his land.* He is

compelled, too, by a law, of which public considerations forbid the repeal, to maintain them in industrious employment, and is thus under the necessity of producing and re-producing the very article of which the superabundance depresses him."

Distrust of the accuracy of the reason assigned for the distress of the Colonies is, indeed, very natural, under the preceding circumstances. But it is strange that a committee of the House of Commons should be satisfied to leave this investigation (for which they were specially appointed) in a state of distrust, where they had such abundant means for arriving at certainty. We must, however, endeavour to supply this extraordinary deficiency on their part, and we trust that we shall be able to prove,

1st. That the slave-trading of the Brazilians gives them no advantage over the British Colonies; but, on the contrary, that the great loss which they sustain by it, is one chief means of enabling the British Colonies, in any degree, to compete with them.

2d. That the mortgage system entails such burdens, and is attended by such disadvantages, as are sufficient to ruin any business.

3d. That to maintain slavery, even without any profit, entails an enormous burden on this country, and that it cannot be much longer maintained without a prodigious increase of that burden.

4th. That there is, therefore, no possible remedy but the immediate extinction of slavery.

5th. That slavery may be abolished with immediate advantage to all parties.

The Committee attribute the distress to over-production. They say, "But in this case, *as in no others*, ENTIRELY REMEDILESS ON THE PART OF THE PLANTERS." To what other cause can this peculiarity so "entirely remediless on the part of the planters" be attributed, but to the slavery in which their labourers are held? And what is so likely to remedy this distress as its entire extinction?

The West Indians have been constant and zealous advocates for the abolition of the foreign slave trade, considering it the cause of their depression; and hence most of the witnesses adduce the continuance of it as a chief cause of their

distress. So unanimous are they on this subject, that even the witness from Barbadoes, J. Pollard Mayers,* attributes the distress in that Colony to a regular and cheap supply of labour, afforded by the slave trade to their Brazilian rivals. This is strange on the part of a witness from a colony where Creole slaves (allowed to be superior to newly imported Africans†) are to be had at little more than half price.‡ Indeed, with the exception of two of the Colonies, slaves may be purchased at a lower price in all of them than they sell for in the Brazils and Cuba.§

Although it seems so derogatory to the Divine goodness, so contrary to all his laws, that a system of such unparalleled wickedness, as the slave trade, should ever be advantageous, yet as statements so absurd have been listened to, and published by a British House of Commons, it is fit they should be examined and replied to.

Most of the witnesses say that the newly imported Africans, being chiefly men, form gangs more effective than a Creole population would make, though inured to labour, and more intelligent and athletic. ||

* See evidence, Appendix to Report, No. 1438.

† See No. 1376, 2459, 2467.

‡ Average prices paid for manumissions of slaves in the different Colonies from 1819 to 1825.—See *Anti-slavery Reporter*, vol. 2, No. 36, page 17.

	£	s.	d.
Bahamas.....	21	16	0
Barbadoes.....	28	0	0
Berbice.....	90	0	0
Demerara.....	86	0	0
Dominica.....	30	0	0
Grenada.....	30	16	0
Jamaica.....	45	12	0
Nevis.....	85	0	0
St. Kitt's.....	24	0	0
St. Vincent's.....	16	15	0
Tortola.....	17	10	0
	11	425	14
Average.....	£38	14	0

§ See ditto, No. 2567.....£50 to £55
2812.....£50
162 in Cuba, 220 to 250 dollars, that is—£48 to £56
Mandingoes 300 dollars, or.....£66

|| See Nos. 2459 and 2462.

This can easily be ascertained by the productions of our West India Colonies during the continuance of the slave trade, and at the present time. So far from any appearance of greater efficiency of the gangs during the slave trade, it appears, on the contrary, that, from 1791 to 1795, the produce of the West India Colonies was only $4\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. per slave, whilst at the present (under all the disadvantages of which they complain) the produce is nearly 6 cwt. per slave, proving this allegation to be very strikingly contrary to the fact, and setting that point completely at rest. It will probably be said, that since the first period we have added our most fertile colonies, Demerara, Berbice, and Trinidad. This is very true, but these colonies contain only about one sixth-part of the slave population, and the old colonies are become more exhausted by the long cultivation of the cane. But of this more hereafter; it is enough to show, that in that respect the present period has no advantage over 1791 to 1795.*

The cost of producing sugar in the British Colonies is stated to be 15s. 10d. per cwt.; the expense of bringing it to market 8s. 6d., lately affording only 6d. per cwt. for interest of capital, &c., but now a loss of 6d. per cwt.† Where is the proof that the Brazilians do actually raise sugar cheaper? I. B. Boothby states, No. 2105, that two estates, managed under trust, on which he is a creditor, have given nothing for the last two years beyond the expense of cultivation, though they are very fine estates.‡ G. T. Sealy says that the present

* The importation of sugar from the British West India Colonies—(See *Report of the State of the West India Colonies ordered to be printed 24th July, 1807.*) in 1791 to 1795 average 2,021,525. The slave population of the British Colonies in 1791, was, according to Brian Edwards:

Jamaica	250,000	Antigua	37,808
Barbadoes	62,115	Montserrat	10,000
Grenada	28,926	Nevis	8,420
St. Vincent	11,833	St. Kitt's	20,435
Dominica	14,967	Virgin Island	9,000
	808,861		85,663
			362,861
			448,524

making the produce of sugar, 4.5 cwts. per slave.—The average produce of the years 1827 to 1831 was 4,006,835, (the slave population being 678,527, See *Anti-slavery Reporter*, No. 100, page 259,) being 5.9 cwt. per slave.—The growth of coffee has also been doubled in that period; but this has been counterbalanced by a great reduction in the growth of cotton.

† See A. M'Donnell's evidence, Nos. 9 and 12.

‡ See No. 2213.

prices do not remunerate the planter.* The Brazilian and British planters are, therefore, in just the same situation, neither of them obtaining any profit.

It has already been proved that newly-imported Africans, instead of being more effective, and producing more sugar per slave, do actually produce less, as might naturally be expected from persons not inured to labour, and who are actually dying off at the rate of 6 or 8 or 10 per cent. per annum, † from the effect of that labour. It next remains to be proved that these labourers are obtained, not at a less, but at a much greater expense.

We will take one of the lowest estimates of decrease in the slave population of the Brazils and Cuba, say 6 per cent. per annum, which, as compared with the increase of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in the United States, makes together $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Now, if the average production of our most fertile Colonies, Demerara, Trinidad, Grenada, and St. Vincent's, is, as stated by James M'Queen, $11\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. per slave; and, according to the *Anti-slavery Reporter*, No. 100, page 263, rather more than 12 cwt. per slave, the average cost of a slave in the Brazils being at least £50; ‡ $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on that sum is 85s., or 7s. 1d. per cwt. on 12 cwt. of sugar: or, if compared with the British system, in which there is a loss of life of nearly 1 per cent, § there would be a difference in its favour of 5 per cent., which on £50 is 50s., or 4s. 2d. per cwt. on 12 cwt. of sugar.

Hence it appears, that not only are the newly-imported slaves less effective than Creoles, but this system of importation is dearer by 7s. 1d. per cwt. than the American, and 4s. 2d. per cwt. than that of the British Colonies. This, of itself, might be a full answer to the ridiculous statement of the cost of raising children; || but it is deserving of attention as showing the miserable delusions to which men are liable, when they will not open their eyes to obvious truths; when

* See No. 2542.

† See A. M'Donnell's evidence, No. 1262, and Evanson Alchome's estimate, page 273.

‡ See J. B. Boothby, evidence 2163, 2567; A. M'Donnell, 189; Joseph Marryat, 1236; G. T. Sealy, 2567 to 2569; Evanson Alchome, page 273.

§ See T. F. Buxton's statement, *Anti-slavery Reporter*, No. 97.

|| See John Innis's evidence, page 71 and 72, where the cost of raising a child to fourteen years is said to be £226 14s. 10d.

they are not willing to see that slavery is the cause of all their distresses, and that immediate extinction is the only remedy. In this statement it is assumed that a mother's labour, whilst occupied in the care of her child, is worth £25 per annum, though her employment at other times is that of producing sugar, which sell for a loss of 6d. per cwt. If a clear profit of 40s. per ewt., instead of 6d. loss, were made upon sugar, her labour might be worth £25 per annum. Provisions, clothing, and medical attendance, are charged in the second year at the rate of about £7 each;* clothing and herrings cost 32s. each per annum on the average, and could not be more than 16s. per annum for children; now if, besides herrings and clothing, one half day per week is sufficient to provide food for a slave and his family, and if we take the food according to this estimate to be worth £6 for a child, it must surely be worth £12 for a grown man, making £18 per annum, if he had no other than himself and one child to provide for; the value of his labour, for one twelfth part of his time, would be worth £18, or the whole £216 per annum, and yet the slaves who could make such an enormous sum by raising provisions, are stupidly kept to the cultivation of sugar, by which nothing is made. Labour in the West Indies is of as little value as it can be any where; if the planters, therefore, know no cheaper mode of raising children to the age of fourteen, than at the cost of £226 14s. 10d. each, James M^cQueen could enlighten them on the subject. From him we learn that the poor weavers in Scotland only get 3s. 6d. to 5s. per week, and, at this rate, the whole wages of a grown man for fourteen years will be only £182. What could such a man afford to spend on each of his children? Poor as their wages are, they maintain themselves at eight years of age, and will nearly have reimbursed their parents at fourteen.† The children in the Colo-

* Supplies to an estate of 345 slaves.—See *Anti-slavery Reporter*, No. 97 note, page 193. Clothing and medicines cost in England £238. The only food supplied was herrings, which cost £314, making together 552s. each.

† In some of the hand-loom weaving districts in Lancashire parish relief is not allowed where the earnings of the family are 1s. to 1s. 6d. each.

The father earns about	5	6	per week.
A child at eight to ten	1	2	"
Ditto, ten to twelve	2	10	"
Ditto, twelve to fourteen	3	10	"