

**A LETTER TO THE
MARQUESS OF NORMANBY
RELATIVE TO THE PRESENT
STATE OF JAMAICA**

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A Letter to The Marquess of Normanby Relative to the Present State of Jamaica by Howe Peter Browne Sligo

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HOWE PETER BROWNE SLIGO

**A LETTER TO THE
MARQUESS OF NORMANBY
RELATIVE TO THE PRESENT
STATE OF JAMAICA**

J. R. J.

A LETTER
TO THE
MARQUESS OF NORMANBY

RELATIVE TO THE PRESENT STATE OF

JAMAICA,

AND THE MEASURES WHICH ARE RENDERED NECESSARY
BY THE REFUSAL OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
TO TRANSACT BUSINESS.

BY

THE MARQUESS OF SLIGO.

LONDON:
JOHN ANDREWS, 187, NEW BOND STREET.

1839.

C. RICHARDS, FURNACE, 106, ST. MARTIN'S LANE, CHALING CROSS.



A LETTER,

&c. &c.

MY LORD,

The proprietors of Jamaica, resident in England, are in a great state of alarm at the position in which that colony is placed; and now that your lordship has undertaken the administration of affairs at the Colonial Office, they expect to find more firmness, vigour, and decision, than it has been their lot to experience there for some time past. From what I have seen of your lordship's government of Ireland, I feel assured that they will not be disappointed. To you, my lord, they look with confidence for measures which will relieve them from their present difficulties.

In some respects the evil is, I fear, beyond your lordship's power to redress, because a great part of their grievances, and those which weigh most heavily upon them, originate in the recent im-

portant change of the island from a slave to a free colony. These time alone can fully correct ; yet much may be done in the interval to mitigate the pressure of which they now complain. It may, perhaps, appear unnecessary to address your lordship at all on a subject of which you have so much personal knowledge ; and I should not have ventured on the task, had I not been aware that great changes have taken place in the colony, from the moral results of the apprenticeship, both during and since my administration of its government. I had, moreover, peculiar facilities for obtaining correct information. The weekly reports of sixty special justices traversing the country in all directions afforded me the means of acquiring a more perfect knowledge of the working of the slavery system than was ever within reach of any of my predecessors ; none had equal opportunities of being made acquainted with the evasions of the laws practised on all sides. I feel, moreover, that if I either extenuate or exaggerate, your lordship's knowledge will at once detect the error and render it harmless. I am, therefore, encouraged to persevere in my intentions ; and, I will, in the first place, endeavour to point out the present position of the agricultural and fiscal affairs of the colony, and in the next offer some suggestions for their amelioration.

Several letters from individuals in the colony have fallen under my inspection ; some say that

they obtain abundance of labour, others that they can procure none, or barely any. The reason for this difference of statements can easily be given. Those whose manner of conducting the work of the estates during the probationary period of the apprenticeship gave satisfaction to the negroes, obtain a grateful return from them in their willingness to work. Those, on the contrary, who were supposed to have recourse to unnecessary severities, or had neglected to consult the inclinations of the negroes, obtained no more labour than was absolutely required by the necessities of the few persons, whom local attachments had induced to remain residents on the estate. There are, besides, innumerable circumstances, useless to cite, which would be considered in all free countries as natural and legitimate causes for some parties procuring abundance of labour, and for others not being successful in getting any. It is enough to say, that the complaint of the impossibility of obtaining sufficient labour, is made by the majority of the planters; the universal, however, and loudly expressed feeling is, that at the rate of wages now given to those who are willing to work the cultivation of sugar cannot proceed.

There appears to be some truth in this observation, and I am sure that a great number of small estates which have been forced unnaturally into the cultivation of that species of produce, must be thrown up. Many large ones too, badly cir-

am not aware that the individual has been heard in his defence,—not even whether he has been informed of the accusation, so as either to avow or deny it, and as such a number of general accusations are made against those gentlemen without any specific instances being cited,—I cannot altogether admit that a single case has been made out against them. Next as to the missionaries. It cannot be denied that in numberless instances the missionaries were called in to assist the attorneys in bringing the negroes to terms. I am not sufficiently acquainted with facts to enumerate every estate on which they have effected arrangements otherwise most difficult, if not impossible; but I know that, on my own estate, the assistance of Mr Taylor was requested, and that Mr Knibb, whose name has been so extensively maligned as an inciter of rebellion, and determined enemy of the proprietors, has been the means of making arrangements to work at Oxford and Cambridge estates belonging to Mr Barrett, where the negroes previously had refused Mr Farquharson to come to any terms. In the parish of St. James's, particularly at the two Montpeliers, Mr Burchell has cooperated in effecting agreements. As these three gentlemen, Messrs. Burchell, Knibb, and Taylor, have been marked out for the most constant abuse by the Jamaica press, and declared to have been the causes of the refusal of the negroes to work, I have named instances wherein

they have been appealed to individually for assistance, and have never withheld it. I think these statements, if uncontradicted, must show that the accusations are unfounded; 1*s.* 8*d.* currency is the price which these gentlemen recommended the negroes to accept. Most of the resident proprietors and the agents of the absentees having offered it, and it having been accepted, I think that sum may be quoted as being the current rate of wages in the island. The first consideration is whether that be more than their labour is worth. As I have before stated, in Jamaica especially, the reward of labour must be regulated by the price of provisions, and of other commodities, which form the necessaries of the negro life. In Ireland the current rate of wages in the remote parts is sixpence a day, but eightpence may be quoted as the average price in that part of the country, west of the Shannon, with which I am more particularly acquainted. In Leinster it is higher; I should imagine about one shilling a day; in England it is higher again, and in London highest of all. It will be seen that these rates rise in proportion to the prices of provisions respectively, though I am far from saying that there are not other concomitant causes. In Jamaica the facility of raising ground provisions is very great, and their prices consequently low; the clothing of the negro, as previously stated, was not averaged at more than