

**SECOND LETTER TO THE FREEHOLDERS
OF THE COUNTY OF YORK, ON NEGRO
SLAVERY: BEING AN INQUIRY INTO
THE CLAIMS OF THE WEST INDIANS FOR
EQUITABLE COMPENSATION**

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Second Letter to the Freeholders of the County of York, on Negro Slavery: Being an Inquiry Into the claims of the west Indians for Equitable compensation by R. Wilmot Horton

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R. WILMOT HORTON

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TO
THE FREEHOLDERS
OF
THE COUNTY OF YORK,
ON NEGRO SLAVERY:
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AN INQUIRY INTO THE CLAIMS OF THE
WEST INDIANS
FOR
EQUITABLE COMPENSATION.

BY THE
RIGHT HON. R. WILMOT HORTON.

It is by no means intended to attribute the existence and continuance of this most opprobrious system to our Colonists exclusively. On the contrary, the guilt and shame arising from it belong in perhaps an equal degree to the People and Parliament of this country.

The Colonists say that they shall sustain a great actual loss by this proposed change of system. If so, they will of course have an opportunity of preferring and establishing their claim to Indemnity.—REPORT OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY, April 1823.

LONDON:
EDMUND LLOYD, HARLEY STREET.

1830.

E. W. W

[Handwritten signature]

LETTERS, &c.

LETTER II.

GENTLEMEN,

MY first Letter to you has, I trust, convinced you, that not only the House of Commons, which sanctioned unanimously the Resolutions of 1823, but the Abolitionists of 1823, intended that the West Indians should receive equitable compensation for positive injury accruing to their property, as the result of any measures growing out of those Resolutions. The parties who framed the Resolutions of 1823, adopted by Parliament, never intended that mere measures of melioration and improved system should be a subject for compensation. It is even unnecessary to argue that point with the West Indians themselves; because, in the solemn inquiry before the Privy Council in 1827, it was admitted by the eminent counsel who were engaged on the side of the West India interest, that, with the exception of the compulsory manumission clauses, which they considered as involving a loss of property without adequate

compensation, *they had no objections to offer*, or claims for indemnity to prefer.

I now approach the question, Why is compensation for the loss of labour of the Slave abstractedly just? I answer, simply, because this country has directly and indirectly fostered the existence of Slavery in the West Indies, and given an encouragement and guarantee to investments in that species of property, (however objectionable in itself,) by throwing over it, as over other property, the shield of the law. If, therefore, the State deprive the Planter of that labour, which he can alone obtain through the medium of coercion, that encouragement and guarantee demand from the State equitable compensation for his loss.

But it has been argued, that all such considerations are superseded by the fact, that Slavery is repugnant to Christianity; that we ought not, under any circumstances, to violate the precepts of Christianity; and that, therefore, we are bound to destroy Slavery at once, without consideration of consequences.

If equitable compensation were in itself *impossible*, the plea of the repugnance of Slavery to Christianity might, with parties maintaining that doctrine, justify its summary and uncompensated abolition. But as, on the contrary, compensation is clearly possible, such a plea is utterly without avail. A man may borrow a thousand pounds upon an annuity interest, and the lender may omit

to take any legal security. With what semblance of justice can the borrower say, "My mind is entirely made up, that lending money at so much per cent. is usury; and that usury is repugnant to Christianity; therefore I shall not pay you this annuity, as it is contrary to my conscience to do so?" The course which such a borrower ought to take is quite clear—to fulfil his engagement, and to borrow no more. The course which the Legislature ought to take, if it be convinced that Slavery is repugnant to Christianity, is, to give equitable compensation to the Proprietors of Slaves, and to enslave no longer.

But here the question arises—why is compensation *necessary*? It has often been asserted that it is altogether unnecessary, free-labour being far more profitable than slave-labour, and there being no reason to doubt that the Slaves, made free, would work, as English labourers do, for wages; and who, it is asked, would be insane enough to contend, that, in England, the employers of labour would be benefited if a state of Slavery were introduced in supersession of the present system? The Abolitionists generally, and the Anti-Slavery Society especially, have maintained these doctrines. In the year 1823, the Anti-Slavery Society published a pamphlet, containing the "Substance of the Debate in the House of Commons on the 15th of May, 1823," on which day the House

unanimously adopted Mr. Canning's resolutions. In an Appendix to this publication (A. A. p. 233,) is the following passage: "Would the West India Proprietors be worse off, or would the public interest suffer, if labourers in the West Indies worked, as labourers in England work, from a view, not to the benefit of their employers, but to the benefit of themselves? *A free black population would unquestionably act on the same principle, and with the same ends in view, as a free white population.*"

Again, in a publication entitled "A Brief View of the Nature and Effects of Negro Slavery, as it exists in the British Colonies," published in 1823, they say,— "In the present advanced state of knowledge, it can no longer be a question, *that the labour of Slaves is much less profitable than that of Freemen*, and that it can only be supported by a very heavy expense to the community at large."

Anglus also, to whose controversial writings reference has been made in my first letter, says,— "Does the Quarterly Reviewer FEAR that labourers could not be hired to assist in manufacturing sugar, if adequate wages were offered? He will find it hard, by the utmost exertion of his metaphysical skill, to convince *reasoning men* in this country, that, if the Negro will work industriously from moral motives, on

“ a Sunday or Saturday, he will not also be influenced by similar motives, to work industriously “ on the other five days in the week.”

The vital question, therefore, as far as compensation is involved, is this :—Who are right? *those* Abolitionists, who contend that sugar can be grown and manufactured in the West Indies by manumitted Slaves, that is, by free labourers, giving a fair profit to the planter,—or *those* West Indians who contend that manumitted Slaves cannot be induced by any temptation of wages which the Planter would be able to give, to execute that particular sort of continuous settled labour, which must be applied to the preparation of sugar, if a commodity fit for the market is ultimately to be produced?

I am without an argument to offer you, resting upon experience, in favor of the former opinion; and I shall show you, in a subsequent part of this letter, that my being without such an argument is not my fault, but exclusively the fault of the Abolitionists. As a specimen of the opinion of the West Indians, I propose here to cite the answers given by Major Moody, (whose experience and science entitle his opinions to the utmost attention,) when that gentleman was examined before the Privy Council, on the Appeal of the Berbice Planters against the Law of Compulsory Manumission. I do not place these answers before you, for the purpose of inviting your assent to the doctrines maintained in them, (because that assent

should be withholden till arguments in support of the contrary doctrines are before you,) but as affording you the best means of making you practically acquainted with the subject. Major Moody is asked :—

Your attention has been very much directed to the subject of free-labour?—Being employed by Government in a particular duty, in consequence of an unfortunate difference between my colleague and myself, it was directed to it more especially.

In more Colonies than one?—I have been in every Colony in the West Indies, except Jamaica. I have never been there. The observations made were only those of a person looking to the value of the Colonies to the parent state.

Do you think that the African, in his present state, would be likely to work in the field for wages?—Not such wages as the Colonist could afford to give him.

Do you think any system of Vagrant Laws would induce him to work on a sugar plantation?—It becomes very difficult to say what will be the effect of a thing which has not been tried in the English Colonies. It did not answer in those of France.

From your personal experience, do you think any system of Vagrant Laws would induce a free Negro to work on a sugar plantation?—It is very difficult to determine what is impossible; but if a system of Vagrant Laws produced that adequate degree of *necessity* which the free Negro in Berbice has not now, it might do it; but the formation of a most coercive police for that purpose would be required, and be almost equal to an army. I cannot say what the effect would be. It would depend on the effect