

**REPORT OF THE ACTING  
COMMITTEE TO THE STANDING  
COMMITTEE OF WEST INDIA  
PLANTERS AND MERCHANTS**

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Report of the Acting Committee to the Standing Committee of West India Planters and Merchants by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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COMMITTEE OF WEST INDIA  
PLANTERS AND MERCHANTS**



[Printed for the West India Body.]

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**REPORT**  
OF  
**THE ACTING COMMITTEE**  
TO THE  
**STANDING COMMITTEE**  
OF  
**WEST INDIA PLANTERS AND**  
**MERCHANTS.**

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## REPORT.

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DURING the whole course of last year, it was found impracticable to bring the state of the West India Colonies under the just consideration of Parliament. The Petition which was adopted at the meeting of the Standing Committee, in the month of March, was therefore presented, after waiting a considerable time for a favorable juncture, without leading to any discussion in the House of Commons, by Sir John S. Pakington, and, subsequently, in the House of Lords, by the Earl of Harrowby. In the mean time, all parties concerned in maintaining the cultivation of estates, whose ability was not entirely exhausted, have continued the struggle, in the hope that, besides gradually obtaining more available labor, they may be placed on a fair footing as regards the foreign countries with which they are required to compete. They feel that all they have asked for this purpose is so reasonable, and so perfectly accordant with sound commercial policy, that their claims in this respect cannot be much longer rejected. For, unless the British people have become utterly indifferent to the continuance of the Slave Trade, they cannot persist in the design of the existing Sugar Duties Act, which is to admit the produce of the Slave-trading countries on the same terms as the produce of the free labor of their fellow-subjects, and thereby to give the greatest possible encouragement to the prosecution of the traffic in slaves, which they have hitherto professed to abhor.

That such is the effect of this inconsistent legislation is not merely the opinion of the West India Body, but the deliberate resolution of a Committee of the House of Commons specially appointed "To consider the best means which Great Britain can adopt for providing for the final extinction of the Slave Trade." After a particular investigation they reported "That the admission of Slave-grown sugar to consumption in this country has tended, by greatly increasing the demand for that description of produce, so to stimulate the African Slave Trade as to render an effectual check more difficult of attainment than at any former period."

This declaration refers to the admission of Slave-grown sugar, not on equal terms but, at a differential duty of seven shillings per cwt. And it is, in fact, a decisive condemnation of the Sugar Duties Act, as affording a direct stimulus to the Slave Trade. The Committee had been instructed to seek for the best means of extinguishing the traffic, and, at the threshold of their inquiry, they find this recent act of the British Parliament, which they pronounce to be a measure inconsistent with the important object they are desired to accomplish.

Spain and Brazil have, for many years, been bound by solemn treaties to suppress the Slave Trade, and it is notorious that a great part of the existing slave population of Cuba and Brazil have been illegally imported. Nevertheless, such is the extraordinary favor shown towards these countries that, although they continue to disregard their treaty-obligations, and prosecute the Slave Trade, and in fact cause the whole expenditure connected with the African Squadron, no notice whatever is taken of their violation of treaties; on the contrary, the produce of the Slave-labor which they have thus illegally obtained is received for



consumption by the people of the United Kingdom on terms which afford it, every year, additional encouragement.

The Committee, feeling that they had a right to remonstrate against the continuance of this unjust favor to the Slave-trading countries, appointed a deputation to wait on the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, previously to the meeting of Parliament, and they had, accordingly, an interview with Lord Palmerston on the 16th of January, when the subject was fully considered.

Before referring to the minute of what passed on that occasion, the Committee present the following memorandum on the means hitherto employed to suppress the Slave Trade.

#### MEMORANDUM.

THE means which have hitherto been employed by the <sup>Suppression</sup> British Government for the suppression of the Slave trade, <sup>of</sup> Slave-trade, may be classified as follows:—

- 1st. The laws prohibiting British subjects from engaging in the traffic.
- 2nd. The laws applicable to British subjects in foreign countries where Slavery prevails, prohibiting them from being concerned in the purchase, or sale of Slaves, except in certain specified cases.
- 3rd. The treaties with foreign powers.
- 4th. The treaties with African chiefs.
- 5th. The squadron on the coast of Africa, as well as general instructions to Her Majesty's ships.
- 6th. The differential duties on sugar the produce of Slave labor.

With the exception of the first of these measures, they have all proved ineffectual. It will, however, be found on

closely examining the proceedings which have been taken to carry out the purposes of these several arrangements, that they have been very defective, and that they have not at any time been all brought into active combination. This will be rendered obvious by considering what has been done under each head separately.

British  
Laws.

I. THE LAWS PROHIBITING BRITISH SUBJECTS FROM ENGAGING IN THE TRAFFIC, appear to be quite effectual, and therefore require no amendment.

II. THE LAWS PROHIBITING BRITISH SUBJECTS RESIDENT IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES FROM BEING CONCERNED IN THE PURCHASE OR SALE OF SLAVES. By the Act of 6 & 7 Vic. cap. 98, passed in August 1843; the 5th Geo. IV. cap. 113, intituled, "An act to amend and consolidate the laws relating to the abolition of the Slave trade," was made applicable to British subjects in foreign countries, and they were thereby placed under the same prohibitions and subjected to the same penalties, as if resident within the British dominions, with the following exceptions—namely—

1. That it should be lawful to *sell* or *transfer* Slaves in all cases in which the holding or taking of Slaves is not prohibited by an Act of Parliament.
2. All shareholders in Joint Stock Companies, possessing Slaves prior to 1843, in respect to such Slaves, and for the sale of Slaves, lawfully in the possession of any person at that period, or to which any person should become entitled, bona fide, prior to such sale by inheritance, marriage, or otherwise by operation of law.

This Act, though prohibiting all direct concern in the Slave Trade, is defective, inasmuch as it does not reach the indirect support, which, to a large amount, has been given to the traffic by British Merchants connected with

Cuba and Brazil, who now in fact hold mortgages upon Estates and Slaves acquired since 1849. These have, in some cases, been assigned by parties resident in Cuba and Brazil, in satisfaction of credits granted to them by their correspondents in this country, which credits they had employed to support Planters, in exchange for large emoluments, though unsuccessfully.

British  
Laws.

This Act, therefore, does not prevent British subjects from encouraging the Slave Trade, and it is very desirable to extend its provisions and render them much more stringent.

III. THE TREATIES WITH FOREIGN POWERS.—Of these Treaties. it is only necessary to advert to the treaties with Spain, Portugal, and Brazil, because there seems to be no doubt that all the other powers sincerely discountenance and successfully prevent the traffic in their dominions.

1. Spain, by a supplementary article to the Treaty of 1814, declared "concurrence in the fullest manner in the statements of His Britannic Majesty, with respect to the injustice and inhumanity of the traffic in Slaves," and agreed to prohibit the Spanish Foreign Slave Trade, as well as the use of the Spanish Flag by foreigners engaged in the traffic.

Spain.

By another Treaty, concluded on the 23rd September, 1817, Spain agreed to put down immediately the African Slave Trade of Spain, to the north of the Equator—and engaged "to abolish entirely all Slave Trade throughout the Spanish dominions after the 30th May, 1820."

On the 19th December, 1817, the King of Spain issued a decree, abolishing, thenceforward, the Spanish Slave Trade in all parts of Africa, north