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No 5

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

CONTINUANCE

OF THE

SLAVE TRADE,

AND OF

The USE of SLAVES

IN THE

BRITISH COLONIES.

L O N D O N :

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CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
CONTINUANCE of SLAVERY.

THE subject of Slavery having engaged a considerable degree of public attention, and it appearing to be a general opinion, that any national determination that can be expected to take place, will be in favour of the *continuance* of Slavery in the Colonies of this kingdom, if not of the trade to the coast of Africa for the purpose of procuring a future supply of Slaves, it becomes a matter of serious inquiry, as to what will be the situation, in which the whole community of this country will place itself, by such a determination.

That all the nations into which the world is divided, are under the government of infinite Wisdom and Justice, and that there are fixed laws established by the ALMIGHTY, as the rules by which mankind shall conduct themselves in their public measures as nations, is as evident as any thing can be made by all the conclusions

sions of reason, and the express declarations of revelation; and to these laws it is, that we are bound to resort, both as men possessed of reason and as a nation acknowledging the authority of revelation; and it must be by comparing this part of our national conduct with these settled rules, that we are to form our judgments of the reality of our situation, as a people under that universal government; the laws and administrations of which we allow, and which cannot be done away by being disbelieved or disobeyed; any more than that the laws and government of a country, are destroyed by any number of the subjects choosing to act as if there were none.

Whatever may be the situation of the people of Africa among themselves, their being sent away from their native country and kindred attachments into foreign Slavery, is as much the object of their aversion as it would be of ours to receive the same treatment at their hands; and any laws we can make for regulating the trade and treatment of Slaves, cannot be expected to produce any other change in their minds, than would be made in our own by any regulations which, under a reverse of circumstances, might be made as to the manner in which we should be treated on our being delivered into their hands; and their aversion to foreign Slavery, continuing to be the same after any new regulations of ours may be made, they will of course continue to use, as they have done, their utmost efforts to prevent themselves from being taken and sent down to their sea coast and delivered into our hands. So that the effects which have followed our trade from its commencement, can only be expected to be produced for
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the future. The inducements offered on our part as the price of Slaves, leading those of the natives to whom those offers are made, to use their endeavours to procure us a supply of Slaves, by all the means in their power; the various attempts of violence and design, by one party against another, will continue without any change, and call for the same resistance, which has ever been made, against an evil which they so universally dread; and these attempts on one hand, and the efforts made to resist and overcome them on the other, will occasion the continuance of those fatal contests, which keep the flames of civil war continually burning among them, with all the fears and complicated miseries which inseparably attend upon civil wars in any country; and of which we may form the truest judgment, by considering what would be the consequences among ourselves, were we at this moment engaged in the same manner, in procuring the people of neighbouring towns and adjoining counties, for the purpose of selling them into foreign Slavery; and that ships were continually coming upon every part of our coasts, and by the influence of the inducements they offered as the price of the men, women, and children of this country, the whole inhabitants were always kept in a state of hostility among themselves; and that from one end of the kingdom to the other, there was no place of safety, nor a person in it enabled to say for a day, that in the next he should not be the prisoner of an opposite party, and be sent from market to market, and passed from one trader to another, till he was finally sold to the common purchasers, to be taken to a distant part of the world into a state of Slavery for life.

The continuance of our Slave trade, continuing to meet with this certain, and deep-rooted aversion in the minds of the people we procure for our Slaves, all the evils which are produced among the inhabitants in the country of Africa, will with equal certainty be followed, with all the sufferings which attend the conveyance of the Slaves, who are thus procured, to our colonies. Not one of them, but being delivered to us as much against their inclinations, as it would be against our own, to be transported in the same manner and for the same purpose, by any other people that had obtained the same power over us, their sufferings on board of ship must include the united miseries of the mind, from their being forced from their relations and friends, with those which arise from their being exposed to any treatment that may be offered to them without distinction of age or sex, and the unavoidable wretchedness of a situation like that of being shut up in close confinement, the witnesses of each others sorrows and sufferings. And to these evils to the country and people we procure, is to be added the injuries inseparable to a state of Slavery. From the day they are exposed to sale in our colonies, purchased and driven they know not where, to be the property of they know not whom, they are as much at the discretion of their owners, as in this country our cattle are, as to the treatment they shall receive at our hands or from those to whom they are entrusted. And though we are under all the inducements of self-interest to treat them well, yet notwithstanding this, how they are treated in numberless instances, may be known by the manner in which such vast number of horses are destroyed and wrought to death, by neglect and severity;

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and thinking, as we ought, no other of human nature in the colonies than at home, we cannot be at a loss to conceive what must be the treatment Slaves will in general receive, left as they are to feel all the effects of avarice unrestrained in limiting the extent of their labours, and of anger in punishing them at pleasure, without fear or controul; besides all the sufferings which human beings cannot fail to feel at being bought and sold, hired out and sent away, without any regard to the relations in which they stand to those they are made to leave behind them.

To continue the Slave Trade at all, and to tolerate Slavery under any regulations, and to prevent those injuries to the country and people of Africa, seems no more to be done than to separate the consequence from the cause by which it is produced. If the inhabitants of that vast continent *could know* of any regulations, by which we might intend to provide for the better treatment of Slaves, it would not take away their aversion to being sent into foreign Slavery on any terms, that being an aversion inseparable to human nature; and our regulations producing no change in their minds, they will continue to defend themselves to the last extremity; and were we as a nation, to resolve on a perpetual war with the whole continent of Africa, the worst effects which could be expected from it, would not be equal to those which are produced by the influence of our Trade. And however we may regulate this Trade, from the moment any part of those people become our Slaves, they are in our hands as prisoners without crimes, receiving punishment without any ap-

peal to justice, suffering without hope of relief, and left to the lawless power of every individual whose property they are.

How far a conduct like this in the people of one country to those of another, offends against the laws which it is reasonable to believe mankind are under, appears from the first reflection that the several countries in the World are equally calculated for the happiness of the inhabitants; and of course for one part of mankind to break in upon the country of another, occasion continual wars for the purpose of taking as many of them as can be obtained for Slaves, and then keeping them as such to the end of their lives, would appear to include every crime, which the people of one country can be guilty of against those of another, and offend as highly as it is possible to offend against every principle and all the reasons of natural justice; and as far as human measures can do it, directly oppose all the purposes of infinite goodness in the provision made for the happiness of mankind; and that for a nation so to offend, must be to expose itself to the penalties necessarily annexed, as the natural consequences of a conduct opposed to the will of the CREATOR, and to the peace of the World, and without which penalties there would be no provision made, nor be any such thing as universal justice among mankind; and if those punishments were any thing short of a full return of sufferings to those which they themselves inflicted, justice would be defective and the guilty be left finally to gain by their crimes; and if such a return of sufferings was not to be inflicted upon the people who offended and would continue to do so,

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it would be such a defect of justice in the government of the World, as would place the supreme disposer of all events in the view of mankind, as being equally regardless of the crimes of the guilty as of the sufferings of the oppressed; and this would be the same as to conclude that the ALMIGHTY neither regarded justice nor mercy among mankind. But as much reason as there is to be assured of the contrary, all that reason have we to conclude that justice will be done to the guilty, that mercy will be shewn to the oppressed; and nations only existing in the present state of things, in that state they must receive an equal and certain return of their joint measures as communities in the treatment of others; and continuing their injuries, they have all the certainty of receiving the returns of them, which can arise from a consideration of the justice and goodness of GOD.

But to turn from the conclusions of reason, to the clear light of revelation, the certainty and nature of the Divine Government is made as plainly to appear, as words can convey a sense of things to the human mind: —
*“The dominion of the MOST HIGH is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation; he doeth according to his will, among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand. —There is one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy.—The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Law-giver, the Lord is our King.”**

What the universal law is, by which nations, as well as individuals, are obliged to govern their conduct to each other, sufficiently appears from its being commanded

* Daniel 4. Isaiah 33. James 4.

manded, that—“ *All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them.*”*

The penalty annexed to the breach of this law, is, that they who offend against it, shall themselves be treated as they have treated others.—“ *He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity : As they have caused to be slain, so shall they be slain. For the Lord God of recompense shall surely requite* ”†

The examples under the administration of these laws, by the providence of the ALMIGHTY, appears in many instances; in the case of one of the empires of the East it is said—“ *They have used oppression and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy, yea they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.—Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them, I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. And as a reason for this judgment it is said—“ They, the people who were ill-treated, were oppressed together, and all that took them captives held them fast, they refused to let them go.”‡*

By this it appears, that the nation who had made an unjust and cruel use of its power, had been applied to in behalf of the people they oppressed, and that it was not till after they had *refused to let them go*, that they were made to receive the recompence of their conduct, under the irresistible administration of universal justice; the notion of which power is given us by its being said—

“ *Their*

* Matth. 7. † Revelation 13. Jer. 51. ‡ Jer. 51.

*“ Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of Hosts is his name, he shall thoroughly plead their cause.”**

And to prevent the mistake of pleading the divine attribute of *mercy*, against the expectation of justice, the ALMIGHTY hath said—*“ Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head—I will render to all the inhabitants all their evil.†* And to shew that the *goodness* of GOD, calls upon us to look for the execution of his justice, when appeals are made in vain for the relief of the oppressed, it is said—*“ He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper; he shall redeem them from deceit and violence, and precious shall be their blood in his sight.”*

But degraded as the people of Africa are, in the distant dominions of this kingdom, to an equality with meer animals, it is possible that we may exclude them, in our view, from the most distant expectation of the divine compassion being shewn in their favour, in any such real sense as these words convey—*He shall redeem them from deceit and violence*—and that the ALMIGHTY doth not look down upon the *blood* of all that are slain in the wars to procure them, and that perish under the sufferings they receive by our means and at our hands, as HE would upon ourselves. But to exclude them from the fullest share in the compassion of our common CREATOR, would be to forget that we are all partakers of the same common nature; that we all stand in the same relation to himself, that his goodwill is as much expressed in their persons, climate and country as our own; and that at
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* Jer. 50. † Ezek. 9.

thus to exclude them in our esteem from an equal share in all the designs of his mercy, would be to think with the most mistaken Jews, who would not admit that the rest of mankind were, with themselves, intended to receive all the offered goodness of GOD, through the Messiah and Saviour of the World, contrary to all the evidence of the universality of his mercy and goodwill, upon the face of the creation, and in the entire scope and numberless express declarations of scripture—That GOD is no respecter of persons; that his mercy is over all his works; that he despiseth none; that he is loving to every man; and that in judging he regardeth not the rich, nor prefers them and their cause to the persons and interests of the poor,—declarations which are proved by all the facts which are recorded in the scriptures, of his divine notice of the poorest; among whom he appeared himself as our Redeemer, in a state of the lowest humiliation, and to encourage our common humanity, to look for refuge in his favour, choosing for his servants and friends the poor and despised, making them the witnesses of all that power, wisdom and goodness of GOD, which are displayed in the history of his life in the New Testament, received and established in this and every other Christian country, contradicting every thought of such a supposition, as that the people of Africa are not as much the objects of his divine compassion, as the inhabitants of this or any other country in the world would be, who were suffering under the same calamities as we are now so much the occasion of inflicting upon them; it not being the merits of mankind but their miseries which call for the interposition of infinite goodness; and as a part of mankind suffering at the hands of others,

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all that hath ever been promised and done for any people under the same circumstances, we have the same cause to expect to be done for them, infinite goodness and human misery being the same now they ever were. None were ever more despised or oppressed than the people of the Jews were in Egypt, and though that oppression was allowed to continue long and to be extreme in the degree of it, yet they were made an example to mankind, how much GOD regards the sorrows and sufferings of the afflicted. And to shew how equal the divine administrations are, many instances are given us, in the case of the Jewish nation, when they were the oppressors; and among these that may be named, of their being visited with a famine, which continued till they did justice to the people they had treated with cruelty.*

And this last instance is the more necessary to be considered in our own case, as it seems calculated to prevent a mistake, that distinguished mercies in any nation, imply a future impunity for its crimes; a supposition which appears to be as natural, in the season of general prosperity in a country, as self confidence and a fearless disregard of offending, is but the too frequent attendant upon the prosperity of individuals. But distinguished as different nations have been by the divine favour, when that favour was turned into a forgetfulness of GOD, and a disregard of the rights of others; their history first presents to our view, the public calls upon them to reform their abuses; but not doing it, slow but irresistible sufferings seconded the messages of mercy; and when human pride chose rather to bid defiance to infinite justice,

* I Sam. 21.

justice, than to make an acknowledgment of public offences by real reformation, we then see them sinking under the returns of their own conduct to others, and frequently inflicted upon the greatest and most prosperous nations, by means of the corruptions which were the consequences of their crimes; and the accounts of their glory, their guilt and their ruin, appear to tell us as certainly as history and matter of fact can tell us, that the highest human powers, and the policy of states, when engaged in a determined continuance of crimes, afford no security against the returns of justice. And as they to whom much is given, of them the more is required, when nations have at once been as eminent for the advantages they enjoyed as for the crimes they committed, it has neither been the mercies they possessed, nor the numbers among them who feared to offend, which saved them from total ruin; their wrongs being evident, there punishment has been made equally public, to prevent mankind from being misled by their example.

To excuse our conduct as a nation to the country and people of Africa, because they make Slaves of each other, is to make the crimes of heathens examples to be imitated by a nation possessed of the clearest knowledge of revelation. And to suppose ourselves authorised in making Slaves of the Africans, because Slavery has been common among mankind from very early ages of the world, will perhaps be found on better consideration to be the same mistake in the conduct of a nation, as it would be in private life for individuals to look upon the punishments inflicted by public justice, to be the example of the treatment which the subjects should
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shew to one another, and whoever had the power was warranted by what was done under the authority of the magistrate, to do the same thing for any purpose of his avarice or resentment. To suppose that the sufferings of Slavery, were ever inflicted by the divine authority, but as the punishment of crimes, would be a charge against infinite justice and goodness; and whenever Slavery was inflicted as a punishment, it became necessary to provide for the treatment of Slaves, which was perhaps nothing more than to limit and restrain the sentence; but to conclude from these examples that the people of one country, were to make them the rule of their treatment to the people of another, would be to turn the sentence into common practice, and which would make it as lawful for the people of one nation to put those of another to death, because many ages ago, some had forfeited their lives as others had their liberties by their crimes. —What crime have the people of Africa committed, and where is our authority to oblige them to receive such a sad variety of sufferings by our means? None of the people of that vast continent ever came to these kingdoms to do us any injury; no necessity of self defence can be pretended for our contributing, as much as we do, to ruin their country and make Slaves of its inhabitants; reason, natural justice and revelation, unitedly prohibit any such practice as making a Trade in their Persons, and forcing them by thousands to spend their lives in labouring for our advantage, in any situation, much more in one where they are exposed to the worst treatment; suffering the loss of liberty and every right of rational beings, of all power over themselves or their offspring; and enduring by force well nigh every

every possible injury which can render human life completely and constantly miserable, and as far as can be done, under the continuance of their existence, destroying as much as human treatment can destroy, all the designs for which life and being were given for *their* happiness as much as for our own. And thus suffering at our hands, are we not to consider it as applicable to them, that,—*Their Redeemer is strong—he will thoroughly plead their cause*; and that all the goodness of GOD is pledged for their relief; and that the continuance of the injuries we have done them, equally call for the interposition of his justice; and which in the turn of a few years to come, may make the deliberations of our whole nation on their sufferings and our treatment of them, as perfectly insignificant, as within the few years that are past, they have been made to multitudes of the same people who were, under our authority, placed in the same situation; but to whom deliverance has come by other means—“The last war having amidst a *multitude* of evils, such as *war* necessarily produces, been attended with one accidental effect, which, whatever may be thought of it in a commercial view, I do not scruple in a religious one, to call a blessing; It has very greatly impeded and diminished that opprobrious traffic in which *this* country has for a long time taken the *lead*, the *Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*.”* And which war has been followed, by the restoration of the rights of humanity to thousands of Africans in America, by placing them as men with men, at liberty to acquaint themselves with GOD, to worship and obey him; to discharge every relative obligation; to labour for themselves and to reap

* Bishop of Chester's Sermon, Feb. 23, 1783.

reap the rewards of their own industry, and in the public peace and common good to find their own — A change of situation from evil to good, from so much misery to so much happiness, produced under events and circumstances so perfectly beyond all human designs, as seems not only to make it warrantable, but to require it as a duty to ascribe it to GOD, and number it among the great instances of his goodness, *in delivering the needy when he crieth; the poor also and him that hath no helper; redeeming them equally from all the effects of the deceit and violence of those who led them away captive and would detain them in that situation.*

And as a further reason for considering the release from Slavery of so many Africans in America, as an act of the divine administration, to trace this deliverance to its first commencement, it is found to have proceeded from the purest principle of a few, who profess to worship GOD as a SPIRIT, no less than as their CREATOR and REDEEMER, attributing to his sacred influence upon the human mind, every good thought, and the inclination and capacity to perform every good work: Thus believing themselves taught and directed, and with great caution and diffidence, under the oppression of sorrow for the afflicted and of fear to offend, a small number of persons among the people called *Quakers* in America, became first the private and afterwards more publicly the advocates of the people of Africa, saying no other than that which the Almighty so many ages ago required in behalf of another oppressed people — *That THEY should let them go; for their disobedience to which they were not only punished but as a nation totally destroyed.*

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But this request of liberty to the Africans meeting with serious consideration it was regarded and obeyed, and under many difficulties, and at much expence to the body of people who were first called upon to change the condition of their Slaves into that of freemen and fellow subjects, they soon generally, and now without a single exception, have allowed the plain directions of revelation and the dictates of reason and justice to take place, and out-weigh all the considerations of interest ; and in their obedience they have already found their reward ; they have reaped the fruits of peace on reflection, many have approved and followed their example, and this has extended itself to public authority ; to these returns are to be added the grateful attachments of the poor people, to whom they restored the rights of religion and justice which had been so long withheld ; and the vigour and animation of their industry as freemen and hired servants, has given them and the world a new proof, in the greater advantages arising from their labours, that obedience to the laws of GOD includes its own reward, and, as the highest inducement for every possible act of goodwill from men to men, that in this life, the bounty of the Most High, is inseparably annexed to the duty and obedience of public bodies of mankind, to his divine command, to do as we would be done by.* And when the reasons, for believing that
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* John Woolman, one of the first promoters of relief to the Africans in America, died in the city of *York* ; and to that degree was he impressed with a sense of its being his duty, to close his life with his testimony against Slavery, that he requested in his last illness, that nothing might be given him which had been
raised

the discharge of the Africans from Slavery and the discontinuance of the Trade, were agreeable to the declared will of GOD, against either forcing into Slavery, or refusing to let those go who are already in that situation, the continuance of our national conduct in obtaining and using Slaves, would appear to give us the same cause to expect the penalties annexed to the breach of the laws of GOD, and an opposition to the nature and designs of his government, as they have to expect punishment, who will continue to offend against the laws of any government.

Our Trade and treatment of the people of Africa, have continued during a great part of the last and from the beginning of the present century; and for more than twenty years, we have been publicly and continually called upon to compare this part of our national conduct, with the principles of natural justice and the express laws of GOD; all the arguments of religion, reason, and humanity have been used by men of seriousness,

raised by the labour of Slaves; as he had from his first engaging in their cause, carefully avoided whatever he knew or believed had come through their hands, who were unjustly compelled to labour without any requital, which in his view made every grain that grew on the ground cultivated by their labours, to pass through a medium of injustice and oppression. His writings, published under the title of his Journal, seem to give the clearest view of the first rise of the design of obtaining the abolition of Slavery, at the same time that they present to our view a man feeling for the miseries of men, and giving himself up as the servant of every measure which in his esteem tended to their relief; and the success of his labours, shew the encouragement that is given for every just and well-grounded measure on the side of humanity.

ness, learning, and piety ; all the sufferings we are the means of inflicting, upon the inhabitants of a fourth part of the world, have been made to pass in review before us ; from the first inducements offered by our Trade, to these natives of Africa who live by the oppression of the rest, to the expiring moans of unpitied Slaves dying in our colonies, under the severity of their toil and the cruelty of their treatment ; by the testimony of men most worthy to be believed, we have seen and heard the whole of *our* conduct and of its effects ; and one great appeal hath been made to us as from heaven itself, by the servants of GOD and Religion, to do them justice, to stop our Trade and set them free ; to be consistent with ourselves, and as a nation, receiving and establishing by the whole system of our government the revealed will of GOD, to obey the laws which we allow to be of divine obligation, and by discontinuing the offences against them, which our fore fathers in this instance first began to commit, avoid the penalties the ALMIGHTY hath declared and we acknowledge to be annexed to his laws, and receive from his bounty all the blessings he hath promised to the nations whose laws and government are made to correspond with his own.—All this represented and all this rejected, or measures adopted upon the principle of compounding our crimes with infinite justice, and only continue that degree of wrong which we judge most for our interest as a nation, and for that of the subjects concerned in the Trade and property of the Slaves, what are we to look for but that this “ Commerce persisted in, may draw down the vengeance of an offended God to visit, not only Great Britain, but all Europe, with every calamity which they
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justly deserve who even connive at the destruction, or permit the captivity of HIS OFFSPRING.”* It may do it in our own time, to prevent the influence of our example upon those who shall live after us in this island, and to prevent those sufferings of our fellow creatures, and to vindicate the honour of the laws of God and of his government which we will not allow to be of equal consideration with our apparent interests. Or, the long-suffering of the ALMIGHTY may suspend his justice, and the same trial of obedience be offered to the next or a more distant age. But the crime continued in, must call for the punishment as certainly as that God is just and his mercy over all his works.

That the punishment, as it is declared in the New-Testament, is as *just* in its nature, as it is reasonable to expect it to be certain in its execution, they who offend being left to proportion their own punishment, by the injuries they choose to commit. But being no greater how dreadfully severe will it be, to receive no other than the returns of our own conduct, and be punished by the same avarice which now inclines us to make and keep the people of Africa as our Slaves, and by being given up as a nation, to the evil we would continue to commit, be as much inclined to make Slaves of each other, as now we are of the Africans; to have the people of one party set upon those of another, with the same designs which we now by our Trade and use of Slaves encourage and reward among the inhabitants of
Africa

* Conclusion of the Discourse of W. Mason, M. A. at York, January 27, 1788.

Africa. To have our towns and cities burning for the same purposes as they are now set on fire by our means in the country we so cruelly invade, by the divisions and wars produced among the people we induce to take each other for our Slaves. To see or to be among the number of our fellow citizens and countrymen, seized, sold and delivered on board of ship and conveyed away to live and die the Slaves of the people of any distant nation whom we only know by their name, and which we have been taught to dread next to the name of *death* itself; and in their hands to be driven by the lash of unlimited tyranny to labours above our strength, to have all our rights turned into sufferings without remedy; and to have our oppression, affliction and sorrows, deemed necessary to bring us low and keep us so, to prevent our entertaining the least hope or prospect of a successful resistance of the wrongs we receive.

From a prospect like this, it is as natural for the human mind to turn away, as it is for us to avoid whatever offends the mind, or gives us personal pain, and every sentiment of self-love shrinks back with indignation at any such supposition as that the treatment we have shewn shall ever be returned to ourselves; and will not allow us to think it to be within the possibility of events, that as a nation we shall ever be treated as we have acted, and reap a return of the sufferings, which, against all that could be said to the contrary, we would continue to inflict. This was the opinion of those nations, who had by *their* crimes exposed themselves to their measure of punishment, on the delivery of those divine messages, which are preserved in the scriptures, for mankind to apply to the same conduct to the end of
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the world ; influenced by their apparent interests, they were bent upon the continuance of their crimes, and would not allow the prospect of the punishment, to produce any effectual change in their measures ; no more than have been produced in this country for two hundred years past, by the standing admonition of all the truths of revelation summed up in such standing rules, as—*I will recompence their way upon their head.— I will render to all the inhabitants all their evil.— He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.* Passages which have received their repeated, awful confirmation, by the variety of cases recorded in the scriptures, of the ruin of those cities and nations which were too proud to obey Omnipotence itself ; and bold and self-confident enough, to avow by their conduct, that they would risque the public safety and prosperity, on the supposition that all they heard of the laws by which the CREATOR of the world governed it by his providence was fable and falshood ; charging those who advanced the contrary with presumption, in supposing what the *Amighty* would do, though the certainty of crimes continued in should be followed by their punishments, was among the plainest proofs of experience. And those charges of presumption seem to have been the most common course which mankind have taken, to relieve themselves of all uneasy apprehensions, in offending against those laws of reason and natural justice, which are so plainly declared in Revelation ; and there appears to be some reason, from the practice of mankind, for saying, That few charges are more likely to be taken for granted, than such as are brought against those who venture to bring down the belief of revealed truths

truths to the practice of common life, and apply them as the rules of judging of right and wrong, and the clearest discoveries of the courses of safety and prosperity, as well as of those which lead to danger and ruin. But to shew on which side the presumption lies; let us consider ourselves to be the eye witnesses to a conduct like that of which so many were unhappily guilty in the capital of this kingdom, within all our memories; and if after we had seen lawless numbers setting fire to the houses of their fellow citizens, who had never offended them, they proceeded from one part of the country to another, and did the same mischief wherever they came; it might justly be deemed *presumption*, to say, That on *such a day* those daring violations of the public peace should receive their punishments; because the time and circumstances of punishing the guilty depended upon the pleasure of the Government itself: But would it be *presumption* in a spectator of such crimes, to say, What were the punishments which the laws had annexed to the crimes of which he was a witness; or that those punishments were as certain as that there was a Government possessed of the power of administering its own laws; and that they who would continue in the commission of their crimes, could have no hope to escape, whatever the lenity of Government might be to such as ceased from the wrongs they had done, upon the first notice that convinced them of their delusion. Would not the *presumption* be on the side of those, who would go on to commit the crimes, and act as if there was no government? Or, if there was, it either had not the justice, or was without the power to punish them; a supposition which is not true even among the
 most

most uncultivated nations of mankind, who are under the necessity for their common safety, to unite in punishing those who invade the rights of their society. And shall it be supposed, that infinite wisdom and goodness hath provided neither law nor justice between the nations into which the world is divided, but what they can do that they may, and enjoy a successful impunity to any crimes they may judge it to be their interest to commit? Is the material system of the universe, and the whole course of nature, under a government of no greater exactness, than to warrant us to draw such a conclusion, as that the whole society of mankind are under no laws, are as nations, subjects of no supreme universal government: The *material* being but for the use of the *rational* world, is it not to be inferred, as Revelation declares it to be, that GOD is the Law-giver, Governor and Judge; and that he never forsakes the world for a moment, but that his *goodness* is ever engaged to deliver the afflicted from their sufferings, and to shew the *severity* of his justice, when all the offers of his mercy are in vain to the guilty.

Nothing is more certain than that the Trade in Slaves, all the effects produced by it in Africa, and the sufferings of Slaves in our Colonies, may not together amount to the *idea* of a crime in the esteem of self-interest; and that it may sincerely be thought that we, who are *whites* and *christians*, are not to suffer any restraints in our commerce, or diminution in our revenues, from any motives of tenderness or justice to them who are blacks and heathens; but if there was no danger to fear any returns of our treatment of them, is it becoming

ing the dignity of a nation, whose honour it is not to allow by its laws a single instance of Slavery, to permit its subjects to make the buying and selling of Slaves their common traffic; that a nation, whose laws protect every subject against the smallest instance of violence, should allow of a Trade which produces continual wars, and spreads devastation through a number of nations, every one of which is far more numerous than our own; and that we, who would think it as mean as unjust, to take the labour of the poor, and not pay them their wages, shall give our public sanction as a people to the compelling *four hundred thousand* of the people of Africa, to spend their lives in continual labours within the dominions, and not only deny them any requital whatever, but deprive them of all the rights which belong to them as men in common with ourselves. Is it the report which we would wish all future ages to receive of this nation, in the present, that we gave full liberty to render a fourth part of the earth, the residence of misery and wretchedness in the extreme to its inhabitants; that it was our policy to procure and to treat human beings as only made to labour for our interests; and that the use we made of our power, was to exercise oppression over those who were incapable of resisting it. That as a nation establishing christianity by our laws, and continually publishing and appealing to its sacred truths, when fairly applied to, to give effect to its excellent maxims, there was neither disinterestedness nor resolution enough to do it; to purchase the whole property of Slaves, at the expence of the nation which had allowed their oppression, and set them free; to raise them to the condition of subjects, and prohibit

prohibit a Trade and practice forbid by GOD, with all the plainness and force, with which we can conceive of our own reluctance to the same treatment; and as much opposed to every principle of justice and to the wisdom and equity of the entire system of our own government, as violence and wrong can be to the public peace of mankind, and as contrary as the *crimes* of individuals and of whole nations are declared, by the ALMIGHTY himself, to be to their true interests and happiness.
 7. St. John iii. 8.—St. James iv. 17.

YORK, *March 29, 1788.*



