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SLAVES IN DEMERARA, &c.

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RETURN to an Address of The Honourable the House of Commons,  
dated 12 May 1829;—for

COPY or Copies of any Order or Orders in Council respecting the  
Manumission of SLAVES in *Demerara* or *Berbice*, which have been issued  
since the Examination of Evidence upon that subject before the PRIVY  
COUNCIL.

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Colonial Department, }  
Downing-street, }  
25 May 1829. }

HORACE TWISS.

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*Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,*  
*2 June 1829.*

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AT the COURT at WINDSOR the 18th of March 1829.

Present :—THE KING'S Most Excellent MAJESTY in Council.

Whereas there was this day read at the Board a Report from the Right Honorable the Lords of the Committee of Council, upon Four Petitions from various Proprietors and Mortgagees of Estates in the Colonies of *Demerara* and *Berbice*, in the words following; viz.

“ Your MAJESTY having been pleased by Your Order in Council of the 5th of February 1827, to refer unto this Committee Four Petitions from various proprietors and mortgagees of estates in the Colonies of Demerara and Berbice, setting forth, That on the 15th of May 1823, the following Resolutions were passed by the House of Commons; viz First, ‘ That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the Slave Population in His Majesty’s Colonies.’ Second, ‘ That through a determined and persevering, but, at the same time, judicious and temperate enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the Slave population, such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty’s subjects.’ Third, ‘ That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose at the earliest period that shall be compatible with the safety of the Colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property.’ That similar Resolutions were afterwards adopted in the House of Lords on the 7th of March 1826. That subsequent to the passing of the Resolutions of the House of Commons, certain regulations have been made by order of Your Majesty in Council, with reference to the Slave population of the colonies of Trinidad, St. Lucie, and the Cape of Good Hope: That these regulations have been recommended to the Court of Policy in Demerara, to which body, according to the practice of the constitution of that Colony, the power of enacting laws for its government has hitherto been supposed to belong: That the Court of Policy has evinced the most anxious desire to act up to the principle declared by the two Houses of Parliament, and has adopted to an extent exceeding what the members could entirely reconcile to their principles, or to a rigid sense of their own duty, many of the regulations submitted to them by Your Majesty’s Secretary of State: That to one of the said regulations, however, which authorized a Slave to obtain his freedom without the concurrence of his master (and which is popularly called ‘ compulsory manumission’), the court of Policy, after mature consideration, was unable to accede: That the said Court stated to Your Majesty’s government the grounds of its objections; but that notwithstanding, Earl Bathurst, then one of Your Majesty’s Principal Secretaries of State, in his dispatch to the Lieutenant Governor of Demerara, of the 25th of February 1826, declared, that should the Court of Policy continue to decline adopting this regulation of compulsory manumission, his Lordship would submit to Your Majesty the expediency of enacting it by direct Royal Authority: That notwithstanding their desire to act in concurrence with the wishes of Your Majesty’s government, the Court of Policy, bound by the sacred obligation of their oath to forward the interests of the Colony according to their conscience, felt themselves compelled still to refuse their consent to the proposed regulation, and declined to adopt the same; and that the Memorialists are therefore led to expect as a consequence, that Your Majesty will be advised to issue an Order in Council, in conformity with Earl Bathurst’s dispatch, to enact compulsory manumission as the law  
of

of the Colonies of Demerara and Berbice : That the Memorialists conceive it to be undeniable, that the system of compulsory manumission proposed to be introduced does trench upon the right of property, and may even bring its existence into peril : That it must influence, to the greatest extent, the moral condition of the negroes, and may, perhaps, endanger the lives and safety of every white inhabitant of Demerara and Berbice : That compulsory manumission at this time, and in the present state of civilization of the negroes, whether in freedom or slavery, is directly at variance with the wise and prudent maxims which form the basis of the above-mentioned Resolutions of the House of Commons, and with that no less sound opinion, " that the condition of the Slave is only to be improved through the medium of his master : " That so far from advancing the time when the Slave may be beneficially admitted to a participation in the rights of freemen, it will retard it more than any measure that can be pointed out : That the free negroes in the West Indies are so averse to labour in the field, that they cannot be induced to work for hire, or to carry on the cultivation of the country, in a regular and effectual manner : That from the fertility of the soil in Demerara and Berbice, subsistence is procured by a very small portion of labour ; and having hardly any other wants to supply, no incentive would exist sufficient to overcome their natural aversion to labour ; so that they would pass the remainder of their time in indolence, a burden to the public, and depraved and unhappy in themselves : That before the gradual emancipation of the Slave population in the West Indies can be brought about without injury to the Slaves, with safety to the state, and without injustice to the interests of private property, the Memorialists submit that the attention of Your Majesty's government should be turned towards their moral, intellectual and religious improvement : That the Memorialists are aware of the great advantages that would be derived to them and their property, if they could obtain its cultivation by the labour of free negroes working for hire ; but they state as their unqualified opinion, that such an end is wholly unattainable in the present condition of the black population in the West Indies : That the Colonies of Demerara and Berbice do not afford one instance of a Slave made free, or a free-born negro ever having worked as a hired labourer in the cultivation of the soil : That while St. Domingo was cultivated by the labour of Slaves, it produced nearly as much sugar as all the British West India islands put together ; for the last thirty years, it has been cultivated by free negroes, and does not regularly raise sufficient for the supply of its own population ; that this defalcation is occasioned by the aversion of the inhabitants to work, and to remedy the grievance, a law has recently been promulgated, obliging the free population to compulsory labour, which is enforced by military interposition : That a more conclusive instance of the impossibility of procuring the cultivation of land in the West Indies by the labour of free negroes, in their present condition, can hardly be conceived : That one of the bad consequences of this measure will be the abolition of the present system of task-work, a system greatly facilitating the labour of the Slave, and proceeding solely from the good will of the master : That, naturally, when the master shall feel that the hours which this system leaves at the disposal of the Slave are to be employed to amass sums which will deprive the master of the slave's services by compulsory manumission, he will be compelled, in self-defence, to put an end to this mild system, and to require the labour of the slave for the whole time which the law allows : That one of the arguments used in defence of compulsory manumission is, that as the slave must obtain his liberty by the produce of his industry, the constant labour necessary to amass an adequate sum will have established habits of industry and perseverance in him : That this mode of reasoning appears to the Memorialists fallacious and unsound : That the negro, in labouring for the price of his liberty, must necessarily limit his wants and desires to the utmost, for the purpose of hoarding his savings : That, during this period, therefore, no new desires or wants will have arisen in the negro's mind which may act as a stimulus to labour when he shall have obtained his liberty : That when this object is gained he will remain satisfied with the possession of mere subsistence and relaxation from labour : That if all that constitutes happiness in his eyes is his already, and he has a more than ordinary aversion to labour, from constitutional habits and the effects of the climate, it is not to be expected that he will expose himself to fatigue to purchase nothing more than he can enjoy without it, the absence of laborious exertion : That voluntary manumission is a circumstance of common occurrence among the proprietors of Demerara and Berbice : That all the advantages resulting from this circumstance, the more important, because they are for the most part bestowed on deserving slaves, must fall to

to the ground if compulsory manumission is adopted : That this measure will seriously affect the interests of the proprietors and mortgagees of property in the Colonies as well as the Slaves themselves ; That the measure submitted to the Court of Policy was in substance this ; that any Slave desirous of purchasing the freedom of himself or of his family should be empowered to do so, and that if the owner should be unwilling, or demand a greater sum than the value of the Slave, one appraiser should be appointed by the owner, one by the protector of Slaves, and an umpire by the Chief Judge of the Colony, and on payment of the sum appraised by them into the Treasury, the Slave should be manumitted : That the proposed measure will put an end to the good understanding which now generally exists between the master and the Slave, in consequence of its creating an entire separation of interests between them : That the motives which induce the master to bestow kindness on his Slaves, must cease to operate, when it becomes manifest that these acts of kindness are to be used against the master's own interest ; and from the withholding of these benefits, the Slave loses his energy and readiness to labour, which at present render him valuable : That in addition to this, as the value of a Slave depends on his capacity and willingness to work, the price that a Slave must pay for emancipation will vary with his character and powers : That the active, zealous and efficient labourer must necessarily bear a value far exceeding that of his feebler, less healthy and less energetic companion, and must therefore pay a larger sum to indemnify his master for the loss of his services : That this system, therefore, in fact, offers a premium to carelessness and inattention, and tends to depreciate all the qualities that make a man a useful member of society : That the value of negroes in many cases likewise depends upon casual circumstances, nowise personal to themselves, but connected with the peculiarities belonging to the estates to which they are attached : That an inequality of price, arising from such such circumstances, must always, in the mind of the slave, bear the appearance of injustice and partiality : That under this system, besides concealing or repressing dexterity, industry, and other qualities which render a Slave valuable, the negro may resort to personal disablement, or reduce his body from a healthy to an apparently unhealthy state, in order to reduce the price of his manumission : That the proposed measure will greatly increase the temptations for Slaves to steal the property of their masters : That Earl Bathurst, in his dispatch of the 25th February 1826, after adverting to the evils that would arise if the purchase-money of a Slave were to be obtained from any other fund than his own industry, proposes to obviate these evils : That a certificate of good conduct for five years should be required of the protector of slaves before manumission is completed : That the impossibility of the protector being acquainted with the character of every individual in a population of 70,000, so as to make his certificate of any value, is a sufficient objection to this proposition : That such a reference to previous character can by no means meet the artifices to which the Slave may have recourse to depreciate his character : That the injury to the proprietor will not be confined to the loss he may suffer from being deprived of the services of the Slaves who may emancipate themselves ; an injury more serious will be sustained from the ill-effects which the emancipation of a part will produce upon those who shall remain unable to procure their liberty : That as no proprietor of estates in the West Indies ever maintains more Slaves than are necessary for the cultivation of his property, when the emancipation shall have proceeded to a certain extent, the Slaves remaining will be unable to carry on the cultivation, unless tasked beyond their strength ; so that the plantation must be neglected and the owner ruined, or the labours of the slave increased beyond endurance ; for to supply their place by voluntary labourers has been shown to be impossible : That as manumissions increase, the value of the Slaves who continue on the property will become so great as hardly to be made the subject of compensation to the master ; for the compensation to be adequate must be little less than the whole value of the estate itself : That the removal of every Slave who obtains his freedom, must increase the value of those who remain behind ; if it increases so much as to put it beyond the reach of those who continue, the object of the measure is defeated, while the Slave is disgusted at being deprived of that emancipation which his more fortunate neighbour has procured : That if it proceeds, and many Slaves obtain emancipation, the cultivation of the Colony cannot be carried on where labour is not to be procured for any compensation : That on most West India plantations not more than one-third part can be considered as efficient for field cultivation, considering the old and infirm, the infant and helpless, all of whom are unserviceable

unserviceable, but whom the proprietor is compelled by law to support: That the young and able, and those in the prime of life, would lose no time in availing themselves of any opportunity to obtain their freedom: That on the contrary, the old Slaves on a plantation, knowing that they would soon be exempt from work and entitled to that maintenance from their masters which in a state of freedom they would have to earn for themselves, would make no attempt to procure their own liberation, but would devote their earnings to the ransom of their children: That this double operation of the young and efficient freeing themselves, or being freed by their aged connections, and the aged and infirm remaining to be supported by the proprietor, would at once increase the burdens of a plantation, and diminish its ability to bear them: That the most injurious consequences would result from any systematic plan for procuring the freedom of female children: That if such a course should be adopted all prospect of continuing the population of the Colonies would be at an end, and the means of cultivation would expire with the present generation: That the price of infant females being comparatively small, the Memorialists cannot but entertain the most serious apprehensions that under the influence of misguided zeal this plan might be adopted to a most alarming extent, whether the means should be supplied from a fund raised in this country, or by the Slaves themselves, at the instigation of certain persons who entertain the strongest desire for the extermination of slavery, without regard to its consequences on the property of their fellow subjects: That such a plan would likewise have the most pernicious effects on the morals of the female part of the Slave population: That owing to the proceedings which have already taken place in this country, and the dangers which are felt to impend over the Colonies, property in the West Indies has decreased in value to a considerable extent; and that if the proposed measures are carried into execution, the interests of all those who have embarked their capital in these Colonies will be affected in a yet more serious degree: That the Memorialists conceive that the measures proposed to be carried into effect are an infraction of the sacred right of property, with which it is the principle of the British constitution never to interfere, except for great public purposes, and with adequate compensation to the proprietors: That the Memorialists feel that compulsory manumission of the Slaves, which is destructive of the rights both of the proprietor and mortgagee, is directly at variance with that fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property, which by the Resolutions of both Houses of Parliament was made a condition precedent to the emancipation of the Slaves, and is in direct violation of those statutes, upon the faith of which the parties embarked their capital: That this system will also seriously affect the safety of the Colonies and the interests of Great Britain: That when by the operation of this system the number of Slaves shall have been reduced, the consequences must be that the Colonies will to a great degree cease to be cultivated and productive; and instead of being a benefit they will become a burden and expense to the mother country: That the greatest misfortune that could befall the colonies would be a spirit of discontent and insubordination among the Slave population: That since the recent agitation of this subject of manumission great excitement has prevailed in the minds of the Slaves; and expectations of obtaining their freedom have been raised, the disappointment of which may lead to the most dangerous and fatal results: That the Memorialists therefore cannot but feel that this measure of compulsory manumission, so far from being in accordance with the resolutions expressed by both Houses of Parliament, is at variance with them in every part, and must necessarily defeat the objects they were intended to advance: That the Memorialists feel the most sincere and most anxious wish to improve the condition of the Slaves at present, by every means in their power, and to concur in their gradual emancipation as soon as it can be effected with justice and with safety: That of all the measures of Your Majesty's government they have opposed the plan of compulsory manumission only; and they are opposed to this because they believe the time not yet arrived when freedom can with benefit or safety be granted to the negroes; but that the progressive amelioration of their condition, the diffusion of education and moral instruction, the better appreciation of the blessings of a pure religion, should be allowed to exercise their salutary influence until slavery was insensibly softened into freedom: That on all these grounds, every consideration which ought to sway the councils of your Majesty, policy, justice, regard to the sacred rights of individuals, rise in appeal against the proposition for issuing an order giving freedom to the Slaves without the concurrence of their masters: And humbly praying that they

they may be heard by counsel, and may be allowed to produce witnesses in support of the allegations contained in their said Memorials; and that Your Majesty would be pleased to direct that no Order in Council may issue allowing the Slaves in Demerara to purchase their freedom without the concurrence of their masters; and to direct that an Order lately passed by the newly constituted council in Berbice for the purpose of allowing Slaves so to do in that colony may be rescinded, or for other relief in the premises: the Lords of the Committee, in obedience to Your Majesty's said Order of Reference, did, on the 24th of February 1827, take the said Memorials into consideration, and were pleased, on the 7th July, to hear council on behalf of the Memorialists in support of the allegations contained in the said Memorials; and on the 7th of November 1827 their Lordships, upon further consideration of the matter, were of opinion that it would be proper to give the Memorialists an opportunity of offering evidence upon the effect of that part of the Ordinance of the Council of Berbice which relates to the compensation to be made to the masters of the Slaves to be manumitted by virtue of that Ordinance, with a view to ascertain whether the practical effect of the mode of compensation therein provided would be injurious or inadequate; and made a communication of their intention to hear evidence to the Memorialists: And Your Majesty having been pleased, by your Order in Council of the 16th of November 1827, to refer unto this Committee the humble petition of Thomas Hyde Villiers, esquire, setting forth, that he has been appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and Council of the Colony of Berbice, in South America, to be agent for the said Colony in this country, and as such agent to solicit Your Majesty's attention to all laws or ordinances proposed or made by the said Lieutenant Governor with the advice and consent of the said Council; that on the 25th of September 1826 a certain ordinance was made by the said Lieutenant Governor and Council, intituled, "An Ordinance for promoting the Religious Instruction and bettering the State and Condition of the Slave Population in His Majesty's Colony of Berbice;" that certain merchants and others, proprietors and mortgagees of estates in the said Colony, have presented a petition to Your Majesty, praying that so much of the said Ordinance as enables the Slaves within the said Colony, upon certain conditions, to purchase their own freedom, may be rescinded; and that the said Petition having been referred by Your Majesty to this Committee, the said petitioners have been heard by counsel before this Committee in support of the allegations of their said petition; and that the Lords of the Committee have been pleased, by their Order of the 7th of November 1827, to direct that the said Memorialists should have an opportunity of offering evidence upon the effect of that part of the said Ordinance respecting compulsory manumission which relates to the compensation to be made to the masters of the Slaves to be manumitted by virtue of that ordinance, with a view to ascertain whether the practical effect of the mode of compensation therein provided would be injurious or inadequate; and humbly praying that the said Thomas Hyde Villiers might be permitted, as such agent as aforesaid, to appear by counsel before this Committee, when the said evidence shall be produced, and to put such questions to the witnesses, and offer such evidence and suggestions as he might be advised touching the matters contained in the said Order of this Committee of the 7th of November 1827. The Lords of the Committee, in obedience to Your Majesty's said Order of Reference, proceeded to take the said petition of the said Thomas Hyde Villiers into consideration, and their Lordships did, on the 19th, 20th and 21st of November 1827, hear witnesses, on oath, respecting the matters contained in their Lordship's said Order of the 7th of November (such witnesses being examined by the counsel for the aforesaid Memorialists, and cross-examined by the counsel for Mr. Hyde Villiers); and on the 30th of November, and the 3d, 5th and 6th of December 1827, their Lordships proceeded to hear the observations of the counsel for the aforesaid Memorialists, and also for Mr. Hyde Villiers, on the evidence which had been submitted to their Lordships; and the Lords of the Committee having this day resumed the consideration of the whole matter so brought before them, their Lordships do agree humbly to report as their opinion to Your Majesty, that no sufficient cause hath been shown why Your Majesty should rescind so much of the said Ordinance of the said Lieutenant-Governor of Berbice in Council, as enables the Slaves within the said Colony to effect the purchase of their freedom upon an appraisement, in cases where the owner of any such Slaves may not be consenting, or by reason of some legal disability may be unable to give any valid consent to such purchase; and the Lords of the said Committee have further agreed humbly

## SLAVES IN DEMERARA AND BERBICE.

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humbly to report as their opinion to Your Majesty, that it may be expedient that Your Majesty, in Your Privy Council, should issue an Order confirming and giving effect to the said Ordinance of the said Lieutenant-Governor in Council, with such modifications, with a view to the more effectual execution thereof, as may appear advisable; regard being had to the laws of the said Colony, which laws Your Majesty hath been graciously pleased to preserve and maintain."

His Majesty having taken the said Report into consideration, was pleased, by and with the advice of His Privy Council, to approve thereof.

(Signed) *C. C. Greville.*

(A true Copy.) *James Buller.*

Council Office,  
25th May 1829.



SLAVES IN DEMERARA, &c.

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RETURN to an Address of The Honourable the House of  
Commons, dated 12 May, 1859;—for,

COPY or Copies of any Order or Orders in  
Council respecting the Manumission of Slaves  
in *Demerara* or *Berbice*, which have been issued  
since the Examination of Evidence upon that  
subject before the PRIVY COUNCIL.

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Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,  
2 June 1859.

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