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NEGRO APPRENTICESHIP.

RETURN to An ADDRESS of the Honourable The House of Commons,
dated 7 December 1837;—*for*,

COPY of a MEMORIAL addressed to HER MAJESTY'S Government relative to the System of NEGRO APPRENTICESHIP in the British Colonies; and of any Reply thereto.

Colonial Office, }
8 December 1837. }

SCHEDULE.

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— No. 1. —

COPY of a MEMORIAL addressed to HER MAJESTY'S Government relative to the System of NEGRO APPRENTICESHIP.

My Lord,

17 November 1837.

WE avail ourselves of the favour which we have asked of your Lordship, and which in the midst of great pressing and public duties has been so promptly and courteously conceded to us, to appear before you as delegates from all parts of the United Kingdom, to represent the feelings and wishes of a vast body of Her Majesty's faithful and loyal subjects, on a question of vital importance and interest, which calls for immediate and most serious attention.

We beg to assure your Lordship, that, in common with the nation at large, we regard slavery in every form as a monstrous evil, directly opposed to the spirit of the British Constitution and to all the principles of our Holy Religion; and that we have adopted, and resolve to redeem, the pledge which was contained in a memorial presented to the Right Honourable Earl Grey and his colleagues by a body of delegates, who assembled in this metropolis in the year 1833, and expressed in the following unequivocal terms: "We feel bound, publicly and emphatically, to declare that while slavery obtains in any form, however modified and however sanctioned, we will never relax from our efforts, nor swerve from our purpose to exert that influence, which we may collectively or individually possess, to effect by all legitimate means its immediate and entire abolition."

We, your Lordship's memorialists, are fully and painfully convinced, by evidence of a character authentic and indubitable, of which a large portion is derived from official documents, that slavery in all its essential features, and in some respects under aggravated circumstances, still exists in the British colonies; that the principles of the Imperial Act, passed avowedly for its extinction, and to effect the emancipation of the Negroes, for which the immense sum of twenty millions was paid, have been systematically nullified, and its benevolent intentions grievously and shamefully defeated by the legislatures and special magistracy of the colonies, on whom its execution has been devolved.

We respectfully represent to your Lordship, that the result of this experiment accords with the obvious dictates of sound policy and the immutable principles of eternal rectitude, and confirms the impressive lessons of all past history, that slavery is an evil which no legislative enactments can effectually ameliorate, and nothing short of its utter extinction can remedy; and that the apprenticeship system, like all other modifications of crime, has demonstrated the absolute hopelessness of reconciling right and wrong, of combining light and darkness, while it warns us against any further perpetration of evil, under the presumption that good may ensue.

But we refer with a confidence, which is not weakened by the slightest misgiving, to the satisfactory results with which the measure of complete emancipation has been attended in the islands of Antigua and Bermuda, and we anticipate the same peaceful and prosperous results should a similar course be adopted through the entire range of our colonial possessions. If we have any

fears, it is not from the bestowment of "just and rational, of full and impartial liberty," but its denial to any class and portion of the Negro race; and the greatest dangers, in our apprehension, which menace the colonies, are those which would spring from the enfranchisement of one section of the apprenticed negroes, while another, and still larger portion, men of like passions, joined to them by natural ties, and suffering with them under equal wrongs, are left to all the bitterness of prolonged, and thus aggravated, bondage; thousands of them in the different colonies being originally of the number of those who, as non-prædials, were destined to obtain their freedom in 1838, but who are now transferred, by the fraud and cupidity of interested masters, to the less favoured class of apprentices.

We beg to assure your Lordship, that throughout the United Kingdom, so far as the actual state of the colonies has been made known, there is one indignant feeling of displeasure and disgust at the shameless manner in which the Negro population are treated by colonial legislation, and by special magistrates and planters. After having paid so many millions, the people feel that the Negroes in our colonies have become, not their property indeed, but their charge, the very wards and children of the nation, and that it is now more than ever the duty of the country to protect them from outrage and injustice, and to take care that they shall be admitted at once and fully to all the high and cherished privileges of the British constitution.

In every instance where the public has been informed that the Act, which was intended to bring relief and benefit to the slaves, and professing to invest them with the rights of freemen, has been abused to increase their burdens and aggravate their sufferings, it has occasioned the most grievous mortification and disappointment, and has aroused a more earnest and unappeasable demand for immediate, entire, and unconditional freedom to this injured race of men; and this feeling, we beg to assure your Lordship, is rapidly and universally spreading throughout the reflecting, religious, and influential classes of the British community.

All these and other considerations, founded on the policy as well as the justice and humanity of the measure, influence us to express to your Lordship our strong, unanimous, and fervent desire that your Lordship and the members of Her Majesty's Government will take the earliest possible period for introducing a measure to bring the system of Negro Apprenticeship in the Colonies to an end; and if it cannot be effected before that time, we respectfully suggest that the 1st day of August 1838, being the day already appointed for the emancipation of the non-prædials, would be a most appropriate time for that great object.

We further beg to state to your Lordship, that the proof and evidence for the justification of such a measure, if it ought not rather to rest on the eternal principles of justice and truth, and the solid basis of our own free constitution, are, in our opinion, already made so abundant and complete by official and Parliamentary documents, as to render any committee of inquiry in either House of Parliament unnecessary; that we should deprecate such a course of proceeding as calculated only to serve the purpose of mischievous delay, to defeat the ends of justice, and to prolong the misery of the Negro; and we do, therefore, most earnestly and respectfully entreat your Lordship to resist such a proposal.

Be assured, my Lord, that the reign of our youthful and beloved Sovereign, already so auspiciously commenced, and giving such bright promise of coming felicity and prosperity to a loyal nation, would receive an ornament of grace, and gain imperishable glory, by such an act of humanity and justice to that unhappy portion of Her Majesty's subjects who have so long groaned and suffered, with unexampled patience, in our colonies.

On their behalf the sympathies of the females of the United Kingdom are already awakened; more than 600,000 of whom have attached their names to addresses about to be presented to Her Majesty, and they will link with them the generous and amiable sympathies of the British Queen, whose own sex are doomed to a still larger share of suffering than ours from that system, the utter and immediate extinction of which we thus strenuously seek.

My Lord, we are very respectfully yours,
 (Signed, on behalf of all the Delegates, by)
R. Harward, Chairman.

— No. 2. —

REPLY.

Sir,

Downing-street, 27 November 1837.

I AM directed by Lord Glenelg to acknowledge the receipt of the memorial dated the 17th instant, presented by you and other gentlemen to his Lordship on the 18th, expressing a desire that Her Majesty's Government will take the earliest possible period for introducing a measure into Parliament to bring the system of Negro Apprenticeship in the colonies to an end, and further deprecating the appointment of any Committee of either House of Parliament for the purpose of inquiring into the working of the present system; I am to acquaint you, in reply, that Lord Glenelg, after an anxious and minute attention during the last two years and a half to the details of this subject, and after a careful consideration of all the information respecting it to which his Lordship has had access, does not feel that there are sufficient grounds to justify Her Majesty's Government in proposing to Parliament to make so essential an alteration in the Act of 1833 as that which is desired by the memorialists. His Lordship is further of opinion, that, however desirable it might be that the apprenticeship should be terminated by Acts of the Colonial Legislatures before the period fixed by law for its expiration, the proposal by the Government to the British Parliament of a measure for its immediate abolition would, without tending to shorten the duration of the present system, have the effect of producing irritation, excitement, and disappointment throughout the West India colonies. It would thereby, in Lord Glenelg's judgment, present a serious obstacle to the success of the constant and unremitting endeavours of Her Majesty's Government to secure to the apprenticed population the enjoyment of the immediate rights to which they are legally entitled, and to ensure the ultimate termination of the apprenticeship under circumstances the most favourable to their full possession and exercise of unqualified freedom. In the prosecution of this object, Her Majesty's Government will not hesitate, in case of necessity, to apply to Parliament for such additional powers as may be required to strengthen the hands of the Executive Government in the discharge of the arduous and responsible duty with which they are entrusted.

With respect to the desire expressed by the memorialists, that Her Majesty's Government should resist any proposal for the appointment of a Committee of either House of Parliament to inquire into the working of the present system, I am to inform you that Her Majesty's Government have, in the two last Sessions of Parliament, assented to the appointment of a Committee of the House of Commons on this subject, on the motion of Mr. Buxton, and that the inquiries of the last Committee having been interrupted by the unexpected termination of the Session, a short Report was presented to the House of Commons, which appears to have been unanimously agreed to, in which it is recommended that a Select Committee should be appointed to pursue this inquiry in the next Session of Parliament. On the ground of this recommendation, and of the admitted obligation on the Government to afford the fullest information which Parliament may require on so important a subject, Lord Glenelg directs me to state that Her Majesty's Government could not, in his opinion, be justified in refusing their assent to the appointment of such a Committee during the present Session, if a motion with that object should be made in either House of Parliament.

I have, &c.

(signed) *George Grey.*

Captain Harward, R. N.
&c. &c. &c.

NEGRO APPRENTICESHIP.

COPY of a MEMORIAL addressed to Her Majesty's Government relative to the System of Negro APPRENTICESHIP in the British Colonies; and of any Reply thereto.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,
8 December 1837.