

Remarks on the Slave Trade

REMARKS on the SLAVE TRADE,
Extracted from the AMERICAN MUSEUM, for May, 1789.

It must afford great pleasure to every true friend to liberty, to find the case of the unhappy Africans engrosses the general attention of the humane, in many parts of Europe : but we do not recollect to have met with a more striking illustration of the barbarity of the slave trade, than in a small pamphlet lately published by a society at Plymouth, in Great Britain ; from which the Pennsylvania society for promoting the abolition of slavery have taken the following extracts, and have added a copy of the plate, which accompanied it. Perhaps a more powerful mode of conviction could not have been adopted, than is displayed in this small piece. Here is presented to our view, one of the most horrid spectacles — a number of human creatures, packed, side by side, almost like herrings in a barrel, and reduced nearly to the state of being buried alive, with just air enough to preserve a dregree of life sufficient to make them sensible of all the horrors of their situation. To every person, who has ever been at sea, it must present a scene of wretchedness in the extreme ; for, with every comfort, which room, air, variety of nourishment, and careful cleanliness can yield, it is still a wearisome and irksome state. What then must it be to those, who are not only deprived of the necessaries of lie, but confined down, the greater part of the voyage, to the same posture, with scarcely the privilege of turning from one painful side to the other, and subjected to all the nauseous consequences arising from sea-sickness, and other disorders, unavoidable amounts such a number of forlorn wretches ? Where is the human being, that can picture to himself this scene of woe, without at the same time execrating a trade, which spreads misery and desolation wherever it appears ? Where is the man of real benevolence, who will not join heart and hand, in opposing this barbarous, this iniquitous traffic?

Philadelphia, May 29, 1789.

“The above plate represents the lower deck of an African ship, of two hundred and ninety-seven tons burden, with the slaves stowed on it, in the proportion of not quite on to a ton.

“In the men’s apartment, the space, allowed to each, is six feet in length, by sixteen inches in breadth. The boys are each allowed five feet, by fourteen inches. The women, five feet then inches, by sixteen inches ; and the girls, four feet by one foot, each. The perpendicular height, between the decks, is five feet eight inches.

“The men are fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists, and by irons riveted on their legs — they are brought up on the main deck every day, about eight o’clock, and, as each pair ascend, a strong chain, fastened by ringbolts to the deck, is passed through their shackles; a precaution absolutely necessary, to prevent insurrections. In his state, if the weather is favorable, they are permitted to remain

about one third part of the twenty-four hours, and during this interval they are fed, and their apartment below is cleaned ; but when the weather is bad, even these indulgences cannot be granted them, and they are only permitted to come up in small companies of about ten at a time, to be fed, where, after remaining a quarter of an hour, each mess is obliged to give place to the next, in rotation.

“It may perhaps be conceived, from the crowded state, in which the slaves appear in this plate, that an unusual and exaggerated instance has been produced ; this, however is so far from being the case, that no ship, if her intended cargo can be procured, ever carries a less number than one to a ton, and the usual practice had been, to carry nearly double that number. The bill, which has passed this last session of parliament, only restricts the carriage to five slaves for three tons : and the *Brooks*, of Liverpool, a capital ship, from which the above sketch was proportioned, did, in one voyage, actually carry six hundred and nine slaves, which is more than double the number that appear in the plate. The mode of stowing them was as follows : platforms, or wide shelves, were erected between the decks, extending so far from the sides towards the middle of the vessel, as to be capable of containing four additional rows of slaves, by which means the perpendicular height above each tier, after allowing for the beams and platforms, was reduced to two feet six inches, so that they could not even fit in an erect posture ; besides which, in the men’s apartment, instead of four rows, five were stowed, by placing the heads of one between the thighs of another. All the horrors of this situation are still multiplied in the smaller vessels. The *Kitty*, of one hundred and thirty-seven tons, had only one foot ten inches ; and the *Venus*, of one hundred and forty-six tons, only one foot nine inches perpendicular height, above each layer.

“The above mode of carrying the slaves, however, is only one, among a thousand other miseries, which those unhappy and devoted creatures suffer, from this disgraceful traffic of the human species, which, in every part of its progress, exhibits scenes, that strike us with horror and indignation. If we regard the first stage of it, on the continent of Africa, we find, that a hundred thousand slaves are annually produced there for exportation, the greatest part of whom consists of innocent persons, torn from their dearest friends and connexions, sometimes by force, and sometimes by treachery. Of these, experience has shewn, that forty-five thousand perish, either in the dreadful mode of conveyance before described, or within two years after their arrival at the plantations, before they are seasoned to the climate. Those who unhappily survive these hardships, are destined, like beasts of burden, to exhaust their lives in the unremitting labors of slavery, without recompense, and without hope.

“It is said by the well-wishers to this trade, that the suppression of it will destroy a great nursery for seamen, and annihilate a very considerable source of commercial profit. In answer to these objections, Mr. Clarkson, in his admirable treatise on the impolicy of the trade, lays down two positions, which he had proved from the most incontestable authority — First, that so far from being a nursery, it has been constantly and regularly a grave for our seamen; for, that in this traffic only, more men perish in one year, than in all the other trades of Great Britain in two years :

“And, secondly, that the balance of the trade, from its extreme precariousness and uncertainty, is so notoriously against the merchants, that if all the vessels, employed in it, were the property of one man, he would infallibly, at the end of their voyages, find himself a loser.

“As then the cruelty and inhumanity of this trade must be universally admitted and lamented, and as the policy or impolicy of its abolition is a question, which the wisdom of the legislature must ultimately decide upon, and which it can only be enabled to form a just estimate of, by the most thorough investigation of all its relations and dependencies; it becomes the indispensable duty of every friend to humanity,

however his speculations may have led him to conclude on the political tendency of the measure, to stand forward, and assist the committees, either by producing such facts as he may himself be acquainted with, or by subscribing, to enable them to procure and transmit to the legislature, such evidence as will tend to throw the necessary lights on the subject. And people would do well to consider, that it does not often fall to the lot of individuals, to have an opportunity of performing so important a moral and religious duty, as that of endeavoring to put an end to a practice, which may, without exaggeration, be stilled one of the greatest evils at this day existing upon the earth.

“By the Plymouth committee,

“W. ELFORD, chairman.”

The logo for Monticello, featuring a stylized signature of Thomas Jefferson in a cursive script above the word "MONTICELLO" in a bold, serif, all-caps font. The entire logo is rendered in a light gray color against a dark blue background.

Th. Jefferson
MONTICELLO