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# THE SPEECH

OF

SIR SAMUEL ROMILLY,

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON THE TWENTY-EIGHTH OF JUNE,

1814,

ON THAT ARTICLE IN THE TREATY OF PEACE

WHICH RELATES TO

## The Slave Trade.

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1814.

# THE SPEECH

## A SPEECH, &c.



To those Members who were present when it was arranged in what order the business respecting the Treaty should be brought before the House, it cannot be necessary to point out the injustice of the noble Lord's<sup>1</sup> charge against my honorable and learned Friend,<sup>2</sup> of having brought forward his motion<sup>3</sup> at an improper time. If he has moved for these papers only twenty-four hours before the Treaty is to be taken into consideration, it is because he has yielded to the wishes of others; and has, for their convenience, and most especially for the convenience of the noble Lord himself, postponed his motion. It was desired by my honorable Friend, who sits behind me,<sup>4</sup> that his intended

<sup>1</sup> Lord Castlereagh.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Horner.

<sup>3</sup> The motion was for an Address to the Prince Regent, that His Royal Highness would be pleased to give directions that there be laid before the House, Copies of all Representations made on the part of His Majesty's Government during the late Negotiation for Peace, and of all Communications, which passed between His Majesty's Minister and the Allied Powers relative to the Abolition of the African Slave Trade.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Wilberforce.

Address, which was yesterday unanimously voted by the House, should precede my learned Friend's motion for papers; this was the wish, too, of the noble Lord, expressed by him in his place; and he cannot have forgotten the reason he assigned for it, namely, that he doubted not, that, in the debate upon the Address, he should convince my learned Friend, that his motion was unnecessary. The Address would have been moved for, a week ago, but for the noble Lord's indisposition. It was on his account alone that it was postponed to yesterday. The noble Lord was requested to defer the discussion of the Treaty for a few days; but upon this he was inexorable. Though no possible inconvenience could attend the delay, he insisted that the Treaty should be taken into consideration to-morrow. And after all this, and when it has been at his request, and for his personal convenience, and because he will not put off his own motion, even for four-and-twenty hours, that this debate comes so close upon the consideration of the Treaty, the noble Lord is unjust enough to impute blame to my learned Friend, for not bringing on his motion sooner. In the same spirit, and in a style of great exaggeration, he says, that the Treaty has been lying a whole month upon the table before these papers are called for, although at the moment when I am speaking, a month has not elapsed since the Treaty, which bears date only the 30th of May, was signed, and although it was not till the 3d of the present month that this House was informed from the Throne, that it would attend to our wishes on this important part of the negociation.

I certainly shall not, Sir, by complimenting the noble Lord and his colleagues for their sincerity, and their services in the cause of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, provoke the same extraordinary return as my learned

the high and presumptuous tone which the noble Lord has this day assumed, from expressing my strong disapprobation of that article in the Treaty he has concluded, which relates to that odious trade. If I knew, indeed, what claims the Ministers had to praise upon this subject, I would not refuse to do them justice, even though my commendations were to be met with the same disdain as my learned Friend's; but I am really at a loss to conjecture on what those claims can be founded; and recollecting, as I do, in what manner, and to what an extent the Slave Trade has of late years been carried on by Portugal, while the eminent services we had rendered that State gave us so good a right to require the total sacrifice of it on her part, I can see no reason to applaud His Royal Highness's Ministers, either for the zeal or the success of their exertions.

It is impossible, I know, to speak of this article of the Treaty in the severe, but just terms, which in my opinion it deserves, without incurring the imputation of acting with party views. Conscious that I am not in the smallest degree influenced upon this occasion by such motives, I regard all such imputations with contempt; but it may be well for those who are forward to cast them, to recollect that party is not the exclusive reproach of opposition, and to consider, whether they, who defend and applaud in public what, in the secret of their own bosoms, they utterly reprobate and condemn, are themselves exempt from that party-spirit with which they suppose others to be infected.

The noble Lord objects to the production of the papers moved for, because this article cannot, he says, be properly estimated, when taken disconnected from the rest of the Treaty and from the whole negociation; and yet the noble Lord was content last night to enter into his justification

upon this single article, and to postpone the rest of the Treaty to a future discussion ; and well, indeed, may this part of the Treaty, from its higher importance, and as being the only subject of negotiation upon which this and the other House of Parliament thought it right to interfere with the executive Power before the measure was concluded, challenge a distinct and independent examination.

We are not, the noble Lord tells us, aware of all the difficulties which, upon this article, he had to contend with. We must not imagine, he says, that the French ascribe to us all the merit which we claim for our Abolition of the Slave Trade. They do not give us credit for all that humanity and that love of justice which we pretend to. They doubt our sincerity, and, not the common people only, but persons of a higher order ; and even those, as he plainly gives us to understand, with whom he had to negotiate, entertain that doubt. It would be highly interesting to gain a sight of the papers, if it were only to observe how the noble Lord repelled that foul and unjust suspicion. No person better than himself, who had, to the very last, in this House, resisted the Abolition, could have assured them of the perfect sincerity of those who had so long persevered in that just and righteous cause, and who, at the last, owed their glorious triumph to the strong sense and feelings of the nation loudly and repeatedly declared.

The proofs of our sincerity are so many and so powerful, that the noble Lord cannot fail to have pressed them irresistibly upon his opponents. If to have relinquished this trade, when we almost singly, of all the nations of the earth, might have carried it on ; and when we might have

<sup>a</sup> Many of the arguments noticed in this Speech, were used by Lord Castlereagh on the preceding night, in the debate on Mr. Wilberforce's motion for an Address.

prosecuted it to a greater extent, and with a much greater profit, than we or any other country had ever before derived from it. If to have persevered steadily for seven years in this self-denial, and never to have shown the least symptom of an inclination to yield to the strong temptation, which this lucrative monopoly was holding out,—if facts like these left France unconvinced, then, indeed, is she not open to conviction.

But what is the course which the noble Lord has pursued?—To prove how much we are in earnest on this important point, he has, on behalf of the British nation, affixed his signature to a treaty, which, after recognizing the injustice and barbarity of the trade, contains a stipulation, that, for five years, it shall be carried on. To remove all doubt of our perfect sincerity, he makes us parties to a convention, by which, with fine professions of a holy regard for justice and humanity, we sanction, for a certain definite period, the practice of every species of oppression, robbery, and murder. What better plan could he have adopted, if his object had been to convert suspicion into proof, and to put into the hands of our detractors the formal and sealed evidence of our baseness and hypocrisy?

What a melancholy prospect too does this French notion of our insincerity, thus confirmed by the noble Lord, afford, with respect to the stipulation, that at the end of five years, the trade by France shall altogether cease! Our only object being to gain some credit to ourselves, and to appear to all Europe the seeming champions of justice and humanity, the French are not unwilling to gratify our criminal vanity, and have, therefore, amused us with a declaration, that, after five years, they will cease to be traders in men—a declaration in which they have just as much sincerity as they impute to us; and having secured to themselves a trade, which they know will continue after the

stipulated period shall have elapsed, they pride themselves, no doubt, upon having met this nation of dissemblers with their own arts of dissimulation.

Amongst other difficulties in the negociation, France, we are told, would not submit to the humiliation of having the performance of a moral duty imposed on her. The cession, or the retention of conquered provinces, might well be subjects of negociation, without imputation upon a nation's honor, but to exact that the rules of natural justice should be observed; and to enforce a moral principle at the point of the bayonet, implies a species of degradation. I am unable (I confess it) to enter into these diplomatic refinements, but, if there be humiliation in stipulating not to carry on a trade repugnant to humanity and justice, that humiliation France has submitted to, since she has engaged, after five years, to renounce the trade for ever; and how the honor of that nation would have been more deeply affected by an immediate renunciation than by one, which is to be preceded by five years of licensed devastation, piracy, and murder, the noble Lord has left wholly unexplained. To me, indeed, it appears that the negociation might have been conducted on this point in a manner the most honorable to both nations. The trade does not, at present, exist for either. With England it has ceased for the last seven years, by our own voluntary renunciation of it. With France it has ceased for upwards of twenty years, by the peculiar circumstances in which the war had placed her. France and England might have treated upon this subject on equal terms. Each might have contracted with the other, that this odious traffic should be revived by neither, and a treaty might have been concluded more glorious for both, than any that has been recorded in the annals of mankind.

The prejudices of the French, the noble Lord says,

were to be attended to. That they have not at once adopted our opinions, cannot surprise us. We were long before we acted on them ourselves. Having been nearly twenty years abolishing this trade, can we complain that France requires an interval of only five to prepare for its abolition? But when this question is asked, it should be recollected what the obstacles were which, in this country, so long retarded the accomplishing that great act of justice. They were obstacles which have no present existence in France, but which are preposterously under the operation of this treaty to be created, in order, as we learn from the noble Lord, that by the slow progress of reason they may be in time overcome. The extensive influence of Liverpool, and Bristol, and other great trading towns, opposed difficulties with us which it required much time and patience to remove. Happily no such influence now exists in France, but it seems that, by the revival of the trade, such an influence is to be generated, and to be fostered. Let the cause of humanity, the noble Lord says, be promoted in France by exactly the same means as it was in England. In other words, let Nantes and Bourdeaux, and other maritime towns, become the Bristols and Liverpools of France; let large capitals be embarked in the trade; let the support of many thousands of individuals be made to depend on its continuance; enlist the activity and zeal of commercial enterprize and adventure against you; multiply without number the enemies to the abolition, and then wisely trust to reason to refute their arguments and silence their clamors. Embody against you the most uncontrollable passions and strongest interests, and most formidable combinations of men, and then calmly appeal to argument, to philosophy and to religion, to disperse and to disarm them. Expect that some Clarkson will appear in



France, who will consume his valuable life in the service of the most oppressed and despised of his fellow creatures. Wait till some Wilberforce shall arise, who, with unexampled perseverance in spite of clamor, and obloquy, and ridicule, will maintain his steady course, till he sees the great object of his life accomplished. Rely upon the slow but certain effects of free discussion in popular assemblies, and by an unrestrained press; and till all these causes shall have fully operated, be content that the work of death and devastation shall go freely on upon the shores of Africa.

With us a most formidable obstacle to the speedy Abolition of the Slave Trade existed in the strong and inveterate prejudice entertained by the proprietors of West Indian estates, that its sudden Abolition must be soon followed by the destruction of their property. Their terrified imaginations painted to them insurrections breaking out in all the islands, and involving their plantations in one common ruin; or if, contrary to all expectation, they should escape this sudden destruction, yet they foretold the gradual but certain waste of their slaves, the inevitable and rapidly increasing depopulation of the colonies by disease and death, without the possibility, when all supply of fresh negroes was denied, of ever repairing the growing evil. This obstacle, once so gigantic, the noble Lord had it in his power in an instant to dispel. He had only to direct the view of the French negociators to the large and valuable colonies which he was restoring to them by the Treaty, and which, under the Abolition, had been for years in the enjoyment of perfect internal tranquillity, improved cultivation, and increasing population and prosperity.

An argument which in this country we heard often and too successfully used against the Abolition, is, that the trade, though renounced by us, would still be carried on by other

and rival states ; and that we should see them extending their commerce, increasing their wealth, and improving their maritime resources at our expense, while the cause of humanity was in no degree promoted, and not one African the less would be torn from his native land. Many thousands have been the lives which have fallen a sacrifice to this pernicious argument. Against the noble Lord, however, it was an argument which cannot have been urged with success ; for it could not be doubted, that the powerful voice, and more powerful example of France, added to those of Great Britain, must have commanded the total Abolition of this nefarious Trade, by the general consent of all the Powers of Europe.

Let us not, then, be told, that in desiring time to prepare for the abolition, France is only following the example we have set her. France, it must be again observed, is not required to abolish the trade, but not to embark in it anew ; and, with all the difficulties which the Abolitionists had to encounter here ; with all the cause of just reproach, which certainly belongs to us, for having been so tardy in effecting what justice and religion, and our national honor, so long, so loudly, and so imperatively called for ; yet it cannot be denied, that from the first moment when the attention of the public was awakened to the subject, there never was a time when this nation would have consented to incur the enormous guilt of creating such a traffic.

But although France is to revive the trade, it is only for five years that it is to be revived. Not, indeed, that there is any positive stipulation that at the end of that period it shall absolutely cease ; but, if I have rightly understood the noble Lord according to his construction of the Treaty, France merely engages, that after the five years, she will, by an act of her own, utterly renounce all commerce in Slaves ; and, upon this assurance the noble Lord relies. He really be-

believes that the French nation, who, now that they are yet strangers to the Trade, except as they have heard and read of it, and are capable, like impartial and philosophical observers, to estimate it justly, are not only not deterred by the horrors which it presents from embarking in it, but are even eager to plunge into this sea of blood, will, when they are once deeply and eagerly engaged in it, and are largely enriching themselves with its guilty profits, have the generosity and magnanimity to relinquish it for ever.

In the mean time, and when the five years shall have expired, numerous difficulties, which do not now exist, will have arisen to obstruct the performance of their engagement. How differently circumstanced will France then be from what she is at present! Great capitals will be embarked in the trade; numerous vessels will be employed in it; many thousands of individuals will have accustomed themselves to look to it for subsistence or support. France, too, will probably have engaged in, and long prosecuted her schemes for the reconquest of St. Domingo; and projects on this head have been talked of, (but which, I trust, are not really entertained), the mere mention of which chills the heart with horror. When all these changes shall have taken place, by what arguments shall we persuade France to be faithful to her engagements? It cannot be by insisting on the great principles of justice and humanity. You have yourselves, she will reply, by the very Treaty which you require us to fulfil, admitted that justice and humanity must sometimes yield to expediency; and the present expediency is of a far higher nature than that which prevailed, when you concluded the treaty with us. We had then few sacrifices to make; we must now ruin the fortunes of thousands, who have themselves well-founded claims upon our humanity. We have reconquered St. Domingo, but it has been after a long and arduous struggle, which has cost

us innumerable lives. We have expended immense treasures, and have consumed the flower of our armies; and now that at such a price we have recovered, what may be to us the most important of our foreign possessions, you would fain persuade us to retain it, just as war has left it, with its wasted plantations and desolated fields, a barren and depopulated island, because your humanity revolts at our supplying it with negroes. That humanity would better have proved itself to be sincere, by insisting at first upon an immediate and perpetual Abolition, instead of suffering us to shed so much blood, and to waste such important resources, for the avowed purpose of re-establishing our valuable plantations, and then, when the season has at last arrived for repairing the mischief which it was well known must precede the benefits we had in view, endeavouring to prevent us from reaping the fruits of our dangers and exertions.

I confess that I deeply lament, that five years has been mentioned in the Treaty as the period at which the trade is definitively to cease. Being fully convinced, for the reasons I have given, that the trade will not end when that period arrives, I cannot but think, that the fixing it now as the moment of its termination, will only have the effect of giving a wider range and additional vigor and spirit to the trade at its commencement, and of rendering those, who engage in it, more earnest in their pursuits, and less under the controul of any moral restraint. The traffic, no doubt, will be entered upon with all the eager spirit of adventure with which a new trade is always received; and at the same time the adventurers in it, understanding that it is to be but of short duration, will be disposed to profit to the utmost of the golden opportunity while it lasts. Intent on making their fortunes, they will persuade themselves that not a moment is to be lost; and the scruples which they might

have entertained at the fraud, and rapine, and bloodshed which they will meet with in their way, will be lulled by the reflection, that those evils are only transient and temporary.

It was with great surprise that I heard the noble Lord declare, that he really believed that the Trade would last only for five years, and that it would be carried on till that period with the honest expectation that at its arrival it would cease; for in saying this, the noble Lord surely could not mean to intimate, that it would be prosecuted on a larger scale, and assume a more atrocious character than it ever yet had done; and yet I cannot recollect the arguments used by the noble Lord himself upon former occasions, and suppose him unconscious that this must be the case. In a debate, which I remember took place in the year 1806, when this House resolved, that it would, at a time to be afterwards fixed, abolish the Trade, the noble Lord, as well as the right honorable Gentleman<sup>1</sup> who sits near him, strenuously opposed that resolution, upon this, amongst other grounds, that the fixing a future time for the Abolition must always have the effect of giving new life and a wider extension to the trade while it lasted; and experience, the noble Lord observed, had shewn, that the fixing such periods always afforded a rich harvest to Liverpool. By the noble Lord's own reasoning, therefore, he has consented to a renewal of this detestable traffic, under circumstances which must add to its horrors, and extend its devastation; and that very increased activity and extension must, when the stated period for its termination arrives, make its termination impossible.

That the British nation should be parties to a treaty, by which a traffic in human beings is sanctioned, is alone a

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bathurst.

sufficient cause of reproach, but to feel the whole extent of the disgrace which this Treaty brings upon us, it is necessary to consider what the real nature of this traffic is. The Slave Trade is, indeed, no-where mentioned but with some epithet which expresses the horror that it inspires. It is described as inhuman, as sanguinary, as detestable, or by some other vague and general term of reprobation; but such terms can convey but a very inadequate notion of the real horrors of this Trade, to those nations which are happily strangers to it in practice. But, in this country, it is in no such imperfect and indefinite mode that this horrible traffic, this foul reproach to civilized society is known. What the Trade really is, we have fully ascertained. We have, as it were, reckoned up and taken the exact dimensions of all the miseries and agonies it inflicts. What might seem to others to be the heightenings and amplifications of eloquence, we, alas, know to be plain fact, incontestably proved. We have made ourselves acquainted with the Trade in its manifold, complicated, and unexaggerated horrors. We have dared to scrutinize minutely into every part of it. We have, by long and patient examinations of numerous witnesses, traced, in the very heart of Africa, the superstitions and barbarism, in the darkness of which its nations are still enveloped, to this powerful cause. On those shores which have intercourse with Europeans, we have almost with our own eyes beheld the wasted fields, and ruined villages, and flying inhabitants, which with certainty denote that slave-ships are hovering on the coast. We have even descended into the holds of the ships, and have had the courage to survey, and to expose to open day, the chained and crowded victims, writhing with agony, or wasting with disease, during the protracted sufferings of the middle passage. We have traced up to this, as their source, all those habitual severities and cruelties, and that

constant contempt of human life and human misery, which distinguish West Indian from every other species of slavery: and it is this trade, thus known to us in the full extent of all its abominations; this system of fraud and oppression, and rapine, and cruelty, and murder, examined into, understood, scrutinized, exposed, and execrated, to which the noble Lord has, by the Treaty, given the sanction of the British name!

If the Treaty had been in other respects less favorable to us, we should at least have had the consolation of reflecting, that we had not profited by this dereliction of all honorable principle, and that we had not sold our consent to such enormous injustice; but with the stipulations in our favor which we know that it contains; with St. Lucie and Tobago, and the Isle of France retained by us; with the engagement, that no fortifications shall be erected in the French settlements in India, and with the other benefits which we have bargained for, how can we defend ourselves from self-reproach, or silence our consciences, which tell us that these concessions have been purchased for us with the blood of Africa.

In consideration of our receiving these benefits, we consent that France shall carry on the Slave Trade; and to enable her the more successfully to carry it on, we restore to her her ancient factories on the coast of Africa. She is to be reinstated in Goree and Senegal, almost in the centre of that large district from which this fatal trade had been wholly extirpated, and where we saw the dawn breaking of that happier condition which the natives were beginning to enjoy. This is the prosperous region which we consent to abandon to the ravages of the slave-merchants of France. Like faithful stewards, we have improved the country for them while it has been in our hands; we have increased its population; we have encouraged its inhabitants

to settle in its peaceful villages ; we have, by the instruction we have given them, and the confidence we have taught them to place in Christians, soothed them into a fatal security ; and we deliver up to its bitterest enemies this improving territory, well stocked with plentiful crops of negroes, and supplied for its savage hunters with abundance of human game. The very benefits we have conferred on these unhappy beings, the comforts to which we have accustomed them, and the knowledge we have imparted to them, will only embitter their misfortunes, and make them feel more acutely the full extent of the misery and degradation which now awaits them.

But turning our view from Africa, to consider how the West Indian islands we have ceded will be affected by this article of the Treaty, I cannot, I confess, but entertain great doubt whether we had any right to make such an alteration in the condition of its inhabitants as this stipulation must necessarily effect. The great population of all the islands consists, we must recollect, of negroes and of slaves. This population, notwithstanding their degraded and unhappy state, have claims upon us to protect them, and have rights which we are bound to maintain. Though the slaves of their masters, they are the subjects of the Crown, and are entitled to the protection of the law. The Abolition of the Slave Trade has done much to meliorate the condition of these unhappy men, and has mitigated the character of their slavery. To accomplish this, indeed, was, I think I have heard my honorable Friend say, the principal object which he had in view when he first entertained the design of putting an end to this detestable trade. The calamities of Africa and the horrors of the middle passage had not at first presented themselves to his view. He foresaw that West Indian slaves would be less likely to be worn down by continual and exhausting labors, or to



be sacrificed by sudden gusts of passion, or deliberate resentment in those on whom they were entirely dependent, when their loss could not be replaced by the never-failing supply which the Slave Trade afforded. To some degree what he foresaw has come to pass. Wretched, indeed, is their condition still; but it is less wretched than it was, when fresh cargoes of slaves were every year exposed to sale in the markets. We have had, indeed, some remarkable proofs of the improvement of their condition. Not the least of them is, that since the Abolition, we have seen what no eye before had ever beheld, and no ear had ever heard, a white proprietor brought to trial for the murder of his slave, convicted, and publicly executed. All improvement, however, with them, is now at an end. By the terms of the Treaty, we have not merely transferred the dominion over these colonies to a foreign state, but we have in effect agreed that their inhabitants shall pass under a more cruel bondage than that which they groan under at present, since we have consented that there shall be withdrawn from them the most effectual of all restraints upon those wanton abuses of power, to which men in a state of domestic slavery must be constantly exposed.

When applied to the island of Guadaloupe, these considerations acquire ten-fold force, and place the conduct of Ministers in a most extraordinary point of view. In the last year we ceded that island to Sweden, but under an express stipulation that the Slave Trade should never be carried on there. Sweden could not, without a breach of national faith, either by herself, or by any other power to whom she might have transferred the colony, have polluted its shores with this inhuman traffic. But what we would not allow Sweden to do, we do ourselves: we consent that the island shall be given up to France, without affording it any protection against the Slave Trade. We make

ourselves parties to a violation of our own treaty; and, without compunction, sanction a breach of those conditions, which, with such seeming anxiety, we had provided for the happiness of the colony.

But after all, we are told, that to submit to all this was matter of necessity; for on this point France was determined not to yield. We had only to choose, it seems, between permitting her to carry on the Slave Trade or still prosecuting the war; and the noble Lord asks whether, for such an object as that of putting an end to the Trade five years sooner or later, we should have been justified in prolonging such a contest, without the assistance, too, of our allies; and, he adds, with Lord Wellington's army far advanced into France, and wholly unsupported. But really, Sir, I cannot think that these difficulties presented themselves with quite so formidable an aspect as the noble Lord would represent. I cannot forget that he has himself assured us, that the Sovereigns, our allies, were sincerely and zealously desirous to abolish the Slave Trade; and when I recollect the circumstances in which France stood, and the extraordinary events which had preceded the negotiation, I cannot persuade myself that England was obliged to treat so much in the spirit of a conquered country, that merely because France was pleased to threaten a continuance of the war, we were necessarily to relinquish the just demands that we had made. The noble Lord must himself admit, that so high a tone, so unreasonably assumed by France, could have afforded no justification for his yielding every thing, no matter how unjust, which it might have been her pleasure to exact. If she had presumed to dictate to us, as the indispensable price of peace, that Gibraltar should be ceded to her, the noble Lord assuredly would not have thought a prospect of the continuance of war a sufficient reason for making a sacri-

fice to France of that proud monument of our glory ; and yet, for no better reason, he has sacrificed to her what, in my judgment, was a monument of much greater glory to the British name.

But who, indeed, can be credulous enough to believe, that we ever were reduced to the necessity of relinquishing either peace or the Abolition of this traffic ? If we were to admit that France, in the situation in which she stood, could with any appearance of reason have peremptorily insisted on carrying on the Trade, yet was it not most obvious, that we had a right to retain the colonies which conquest had made our own, unless France would consent, that from them at least the Trade should continue, as it then was, wholly excluded ? Who, indeed, can look at the Treaty, and observe what we have retained, and what we have stipulated for, without being convinced that we never were reduced to this pretended necessity ? but we preferred, it seems, Tobago and St. Lucie, and the other comparatively light advantages which we have secured for ourselves, to the honorable duty which was imposed upon us, of effacing for ever the foulest stain that had ever blotted the character of Europeans and of Christians.

Long and lasting must be the reproach which this has drawn upon us. The noble Lord has complained, indeed, of the melancholy suggestions of my honorable Friend, with which, he says, he has endeavoured at this hour of congratulation, to dash the cup of enjoyment from the lips of the nation. I confess it appears to me, that this is the moment, of all others, when it most becomes us to appreciate the real nature of this article of the Treaty, and to consider in what light it places us as a nation. It is now, while our ears are vibrating with shouts of triumph, and while our imaginations are still dazzled with the splendor of our late rejoicings, that it behoves us to examine the

part that we have acted in the great events which have taken place, and to consider whether we have fulfilled the high destiny to which God seemed to have called us; whether, on the contrary, we have not basely deserted the cause of our fellow-creatures which was committed to our hands; and whether, while we are drinking of this intoxicating cup, and feasting at the banquet which is set before us, some unperceived hand is not inscribing on the wall, the sentence of our condemnation.

To obtain the concurrence of other States, in the Abolition of the Slave Trade, has long been an object of earnest solicitude to this House; even before we had passed an act to abolish it for ourselves; but when, under the administration of 1806, no doubt was entertained that such a law would speedily be enacted, this House presented an address to the Crown, entreating his Majesty to take measures for establishing, by negociation with foreign powers, a consent and agreement for abolishing the African Slave Trade; and representing to his Majesty, that this House felt the justice and honor of the nation to be deeply and peculiarly involved in that great object; and we were assured, by his Majesty, that these our wishes should be attended to.

In 1810, this House again approached the throne, and, after expressing its deep regret that the efforts which the King had made to induce foreign powers to concur in relinquishing this disgraceful commerce, had been attended with so little success, earnestly besought his Majesty to persevere in those measures which might tend to bring about so desirable an end. The same gracious answer was returned to these renewed entreaties, the same royal pledge was again given, that it should not be through any omission on the part of the crown, that our hopes and wishes should be disappointed.

At last an opportunity presented itself for realizing those

hopes, and gratifying those wishes, such as the most sanguine could hardly have pictured to themselves in their fondest dreams of prosperity;—a concurrence of circumstances the most fortunate, I should rather say, the most providential, for rendering the great benefit to our fellow-creatures and to posterity; such an opportunity for concluding the most glorious treaty that ever was entered into between rival and contending nations, as might have warmed the coldest heart, and have inspired the most vulgar mind with a noble and virtuous ambition.

That such a crisis had arrived, we knew could not escape the observation of any man, that it would pass away unimproved we did not suppose possible, and yet, that there might be no omission on our part, that we might, as it were, make assurance doubly sure, that where such important interests were at stake, there might not be even the appearance of our being, in the smallest degree, wanting to ourselves and to mankind, this House unanimously resolved again to address the throne, and to represent to it all that the occasion demanded of us, the right which our situation gave us to insist upon this point with the enemy, the evils that would result, and the dreadful responsibility we should incur, if it were given up, and the solemn assurances and pledges which the Crown had repeatedly given us, and upon which we had firmly relied. And after all this, possessed of such advantages, strengthened by such an address, and stimulated by such considerations, what is the treaty which the Ministers have concluded? One that disappoints all our hopes, blasts all our prospects, seals our perpetual disgrace, and leaves us to deplore, that we have lost an opportunity of benefiting mankind, and ennobling ourselves, such as the world will, probably, never again afford!

That I take this view of the subject will, I know, by

some persons, be ascribed to the spirit of party ; but thinking, as in my conscience I do, that in concluding this Treaty, every moral and religious duty has been disregarded, ought I, from any such trivial consideration, and, because I cannot blame the measure without censuring the men who are the authors of it, to refrain from expressing my real opinion ? Let me rather again remind those who, thinking as ill of the Treaty as I do, are yet so far influenced by their partiality to Ministers, that they will either observe criminal silence, or give their sanction to it by their votes, that they are, indeed, acting from the worst of party motives ; and let me caution all such persons how, at any future time, they receive favors at the hands of Ministers, lest their consciences should tell them that such favors have been obtained at the expense of the happiness and blood of Africa.

My honorable Friend<sup>1</sup> indeed, who practises every Christian virtue, has expressed, in strong terms, his disappointment and regret at this Treaty ; but yet he has the exemplary forbearance, while he deeply deplores, not to censure the conduct of the negociator. A most remarkable instance of Christian charity it unquestionably is, for there is no individual in his Majesty's dominions, who, if in considerations of such a superior importance, we could be allowed to mix any thing which merely affected ourselves, has more reason to complain than my honorable Friend. There is no man living whom it can have robbed of a larger portion of happiness. After devoting the best part of his virtuous life to this great object ; when by long continued and unwearied exertions, after repeated disappointments, and by a perseverance without example, he had, at last, at a mature period of his life, accomplished

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wilberforce.

the object to which he had devoted all the faculties of his mind ; when he was beginning to reap the full rewards of his long labors,—rewards the most congenial to his heart, and the best adapted to services such as his,—the satisfaction of seeing the progress of the good of which he had been, in so great a degree, the author ; while he was every year receiving from Africa and from the West Indies, the tidings of the improved condition of his fellow-creatures ; while he saw in Africa the dawnings of civilization, the calm and the tranquillity which reigned in their contented villages, the instruction which was afforded to their youths, and the comforts which the light of true religion was every day diffusing among the natives ; and, on the other hand, in the West Indies, the mitigation of the labors and sufferings of the Negroes, and law extending its protection to those unhappy outcasts of society ; while he was cheering his mind, long depressed by the miseries which he had been compelled, for so many years, to dwell upon, with the refreshing sight of this comparative happiness, and was eagerly looking forward to the further progress of this great good, and was expecting, from still greater improvements in the moral existence of those to whom he had already been so great a benefactor, the best consolations of his declining age ; what a prospect of the future has the noble Lord opened to him !—The sudden revival of this horrid traffic, upon the largest scale and in its most ferocious spirit ; all his exertions and his anxieties, and his sacrifices of time, and health, and fortune, endured in vain ; a renewal of the plunder and carnage, and devastation, which used to lay waste the shores of Africa ; new fleets sailing across the Atlantic, freighted with human misery in every form and every degree ; new markets opened, in which rational beings, like beasts of the field, are to be again exposed to public sale ; the revival of a

more severe and a more cruel species of bondage, more exhausting toils, a lower species of degradation, augmented tortures ; an aggravation of all the anguish of body and mind, which wastes and consumes so large a portion of our fellow-men ; and the sickening certainty, that all these complicated evils tend to confirm and perpetuate and aggravate each other, and that they forebode scenes more dreadful even than those which they exhibit !

Such are the melancholy prospects which this treaty affords to those who had been earnest in procuring the Abolition, and who were pleasing themselves with the reflection of the great benefits which they had obtained for mankind, or, in other words, to the great majority of the British nation. With these prospects before us, I cannot applaud the treaty. I am desirous, with my honorable Friend, to have all the information that can throw light upon the negociation ; but if that information is withheld, and I am compelled to decide with no other lights than I at present possess, I must say, that the treaty appears to me, as far as it respects the Slave Trade, to be repugnant to justice and humanity, disgraceful to the British name, and offensive in the sight of God.

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THE END.

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