

PROOF.

FABIAN TRACT No. 79.

Word of Remembrance and Caution
to the Rich.

BY JOHN WOOLMAN.

[FIRST PRINTED IN 1793.]

I.

"People may have no intention to oppress, yet by entering on expensive ways of life their minds may be so entangled therein, and so engaged to support expensive customs, as to be estranged from the pure sympathizing spirit." ("Remarks on Sundry Subjects."
First printed, London, 1773.)

JOHN WOOLMAN, the author of this hundred-year-old tract, lived in the New England Colonies, in the days when they still paid allegiance (and taxes) to the British Government.

He is usually known as a Quaker advocate of the cause of the slave, at a time when slave-holding was still looked on, even by most of his co-religionists, as an essential part of the normal and heaven-ordained state of society. It is, however, frequently overlooked that he perceived clearly that the question of slavery was but one phase of the Labor question: he wrote not only "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," but also "On Merchandizing," "On Trading in Superfluities," "On Schools." In his writings he enunciates, in simple religious phraseology, some of the truths which economists are only now beginning to understand: he is, as it were, the voice in the wilderness, the John the Baptist of the Gospel of Socialism.

The following essay contains the most connected account of his views on social questions. Though first printed in 1793, it was probably written about 1771, shortly before Woolman's death, and just before the publication of "The Wealth of Nations." But the ten years spent by Adam Smith at Glasgow University and Balliol College, Oxford, were passed by his American contemporary in work on his father's farm and in a small country store. So that the question naturally arises, by what authority is it that the working tailor says these things? Woolman's answer may be found in his Journal: his writings are "openings from the Lord," his words are spoken "from an inward knowledge that they arise from the heavenly spring." "There is," says Woolman,* "a principle which is pure,

"Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," 1762.



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placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, when the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, they become brethren."

John Woolman was, he tells us in his Journal, "born in Northampton, in Burlington County, West Jersey, in the year 1720." He was one of a large family, and, his parents being Quakers, he was brought up in conscientious Puritan fashion. He received "schooling pretty well for a planter," probably at the small country school of the village. This he supplemented by work in winter evenings, and with much reading of "the Holy Scriptures and religious books." Till he was about twenty-one he lived with his parents and worked on his father's farm. Then he left home for the neighboring village of Mount Holly, New Jersey, "to tend shop and keep books," for "a man in much business as a shopkeeper and baker." Here, in a small Quaker community, he made his home, and the plain, two-storey, whitewashed house in which he lived was standing fifty years ago, still overlooking a country rich with farms and woodlands. Here, on the 18th of eighth month, 1749, he was married to "a well-inclined damsel," Sarah Ellis; and here he brought up his little family.

But it was not his lot to die in this spot where he had passed so much of his life. In 1772 he felt a "religious concern" "to visit Friends [Quakers] in the northern parts of England." Notwithstanding the wishes of his friends, he thought it right to travel "steerage," and doubtless suffered from the thirty-eight days' voyage across the Atlantic. In his journeying through England he usually went about on foot in order to avoid participating in the cruelties under which post-boys and stage-horses suffered. Five months after leaving home he fell a victim to small pox, and died at York on the 7th of tenth month, 1772.

His business career illustrates the principles he advocated. Perceiving that "a humble man with the blessing of the Lord might live on a little," he learned the trade of tailoring and settled down in Mount Holly as a tailor, with a small retail business in trimmings, linings, and cloth—in spite of the temptation to enter the lucrative calling of general storekeeper, and his "natural inclination to merchandise." But even in his tailor's shop "trade increased every year, and the way to large business" in cloths and linen appeared open; but he tells us, "I felt a stop in my mind," "believing that Truth required me to live more free from outward cumbers." Not without some regret, some natural longing after the position of ease and wealth which he might have won for his family, he laid down merchandise in 1756 and lived as a working tailor without even an apprentice. Part of the time and energy thus freed from the cares of this world, he devoted to tending his garden and orchard, believing that "if the leadings of the Spirit were more faithfully attended to" . . . "more people would be engaged in the sweet employment of husbandry, and in the path of pure wisdom,

labor would be an agreeable healthful employment."* He gained leisure, moreover, to write many valuable essays, and to undertake journeys through the States in the service of the slaves. It is probable that his work was an important factor in the ultimate abolition of slavery.

The whole life of Woolman was a protest against superfluities. He saw with singular clearness that "every degree of luxury hath some connection with evil." Thus it is to an excess of fatigue, to an "increase of labor beyond that which our Heavenly Father intends," that he attributes the undue use of spirituous liquors among the poor. He held "that if such as had great estates generally lived in that plainness and humility which belong to a Christian life, and laid much easier rents and interests on their lands and moneys, and thus led to a right use of things, so great a number of people might be employed in things useful, that labor both for men and other creatures would need to be no more than an agreeable employ, and divers branches of business, which serve chiefly to please the natural inclinations of our minds, and which at present seem necessary to circulate that wealth which some gather, might, in this way of pure wisdom, be discontinued"†—an idea which is expanded in Section IV. of the following pamphlet. He carried his principles into even the smallest details of life. He did not feel easy to drink from vessels of silver at the house of a friend. He stipulated in his last illness that no medicines should be given that come "through defiled channels or oppressive hands." Believing that the dyeing of garments injured the material and led to uncleanness, he gradually adopted a costume of "natural" colored garments; yet he suffered much from the fear of ridicule, especially as light-coloured hats were coming into fashion at the time, and his motives might therefore be misunderstood! There is wonderful pathos in his simple account of these and other of his practices; and there is much practical sense in his longing that "people might come into cleanness of spirit, cleanness of person, and cleanness about their houses and garments."‡

The following extracts constitute about one half of the pamphlet.§ Omissions are, in every case, indicated.

Section I.

WEALTH desired for its own sake obstructs the increase of virtue, and large possessions in the hands of selfish men have a bad tendency, for by their means too small a number of people are employed in useful things, and some of them are necessitated to labor too hard, while others would want business to earn their bread, were not employments invented which, having no real usefulness, serve only to please the vain mind.

* "Remarks on Sundry Subjects."

† "Journal," eighth month, 1761.

‡ "Journal," 13th, ninth month, 1772 (the date of the last entry).

§ Published with "The Journal of John Woolman, with an Introduction by John G. Whittier." London: Headley Brothers, 14 Bishopsgate Without, E.C.

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RESULTS OF HIGH RENTS.

Rents on lands are often so high that persons of but small substance are straitened in taking farms, and while tenants are healthy and prosperous in business, they often find occasion to labor harder than was intended by our gracious Creator. Oxen and horses are often seen at work when, through heat and too much labor, their eyes and the motions of their bodies manifest that they are oppressed. Their loads in wagons are frequently so heavy that when weary with hauling them far, their drivers find occasion in going up hills or through mire, to get them forward by whipping. Many poor people are so thronged in their business that it is difficult for them to provide shelter for their cattle against the storms. These things are common when in health, but through sickness and inability to labor, through loss of cattle, and miscarriage in business, many are so straitened that much of their increase goes to pay rent, and they have not wherewith to buy what they require.

Hence one poor woman, in providing for her family and attending the sick, does as much business as would for the time be suitable employment for two or three; and honest persons are often straitened to give their children suitable learning. The money which the wealthy receive from the poor, who do more than a proper share of business in raising it, is frequently paid to other poor people for doing business which is foreign to the true use of things.

"UNIVERSAL LOVE" AS AGAINST LAWS AND CUSTOMS.

Men who have large estates and live in the spirit of charity; who carefully inspect the circumstances of those who occupy their estates, and, regardless of the customs of the times, regulate their demands agreeably to universal love, being righteous on principle, do good to the poor without placing it to an act of bounty. Their example in avoiding superfluities tends to excite moderation in others; their uprightness in not exacting what the laws and customs would support them in tends to open the channel to moderate labor in useful affairs, and to discourage those branches of business which have not their foundation in true wisdom. . . .

Section II.

GOD'S OWNERSHIP.

The Creator of the earth is the owner of it. He gave us being thereon, and our nature requires nourishment from the produce of it. He is kind and merciful to his creatures; and while they live answerably to the design of their creation, they are so far entitled to convenient subsistence that we may not justly deprive them of it.

MAN'S TENURE.

By the agreements and contracts of our predecessors, and by our own doings, some enjoy a much greater share of this world than others; and while those possessions are faithfully improved for the

good of the whole, it agrees with equity ; but he who, with a view to self-exaltation, causeth some to labor immoderately, and with the profits arising therefrom employs others in the luxuries of life, acts contrary to the gracious designs of Him who is the owner of the earth ; nor can any possessions, either acquired or derived from ancestors, justify such conduct. Goodness remains to be goodness, and the direction of pure wisdom is obligatory on all reasonable creatures.

NO CONTRACT JUSTIFIES OPPRESSION.

Though the poor occupy our estates by a bargain, to which they in their poor circumstances agree, and we may ask even less than a punctual fulfilling of their agreement, yet if our views are to lay up riches, or to live in conformity to customs which have not their foundation in the truth, and our demands are such as require from them greater toil or application to business than is consistent with pure love, we invade their rights as inhabitants of a world of which a good and gracious God is the proprietor, and under whom we are tenants.

Were all superfluities and the desire of outward greatness laid aside, and the right use of things universally attended to, such a number of people might be employed in things useful as that moderate labor with the blessing of Heaven would answer all good purposes, and a sufficient number would have time to attend to the proper affairs of civil society.

Section III.

GREAT ESTATES ARE A TRUST.

Section IV.

Our blessed Redeemer, in directing us how to conduct ourselves one towards another, appeals to our own feelings : " Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

HOW THE POOR LIVE.

Now, when some who have never experienced hard labor themselves live in fulness on the labor of others, there is often a danger of their not having a right feeling of the laborer's condition, and of being thereby disqualified to judge candidly in their case, not knowing what they themselves would desire, were they to labor hard from one year to another to raise the necessaries of life and pay high rent besides. It is good for those who live in fulness to cultivate tenderness of heart, and to improve every opportunity of being acquainted with the hardships and fatigues of those who labor for their living ; and thus to think seriously with themselves, Am I influenced by true charity in fixing all my demands ? Have I no desire to support myself in expensive customs, because my acquaintances live in such customs ?

TO THE CONDITION, BUT HE WAS REQUESTED TO SIGN OR LEAVE. HE SIGNED.

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THE GOLDEN RULE.

If a wealthy man, on serious reflection, finds a witness in his own conscience that he indulges himself in some expensive customs which might be omitted consistently with the true design of living, and which, were he to change places with those who occupy his estate, he would desire to be discontinued by them; whoever is thus awakened will necessarily find the injunction binding: "Do ye even so to them." Divine love imposeth no rigorous or unreasonable commands, but graciously points out the spirit of brotherhood and the way to happiness, in attaining which it is necessary that we relinquish all that is selfish.

Section V.

"AS OTHERS SEE US."

Let us reflect on the condition of a poor innocent man, on whom the rich man, from a desire after wealth and luxuries lays heavy burdens; when this laborer looks over the cause of his heavy toil and considers that it is laid on him to support that which hath no foundation in pure wisdom, we may well suppose that an uneasiness ariseth in his mind towards one who might without any inconvenience deal more favorably with him. When he considers that by his industry his fellow-creature is benefited and sees that this wealthy man is not satisfied with being supported in a plain way, but to gratify a desire of conforming to wrong customs increaseth to an extreme the labors of those who occupy his estate, we may reasonably judge that he will think himself unkindly used. When he considers that the proceedings of the wealthy are agreeable to the customs of the times, and sees no means of redress in this world, how will the sighings of this innocent person ascend to the throne of that great and good Being who created all, and who hath a constant care over his creatures! He who toils year after year to furnish others with wealth and superfluities, until by overmuch labor he is wearied and oppressed, understands the meaning of that language, "Ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Many at this day who know not the heart of a stranger indulge themselves in ways of life which occasion more labor than Infinite Goodness intends for man, and yet compassionate the distresses of such as come directly under their observation; were these to change circumstances awhile with their laborers, were they to pass regularly through the means of knowing the heart of a stranger and come to a feeling knowledge of the straits and hardships which many poor innocent people pass through in obscure life; were these who now fare sumptuously every day to act the other part of the scene until seven times had passed over them and return again to their former states,

THE GOLDEN RULE ONCE MORE.

I believe many of them would embrace a less expensive life, and would lighten the heavy burdens of some who now labor out of their sight, and who pass through straits with which they are but little acquainted. To see their fellow creatures under difficulties to which they are in no degree accessory tends to awaken tenderness in the minds of all reasonable people ; but if we consider the condition of those who are depressed in answering our demands, who labor for us out of our sight while we pass our time in fulness, and consider also that much less than we demand would supply us with things really useful, what heart will not relent, or what reasonable man can refrain from mitigating that grief of which he himself is the cause, when he may do so without inconvenience ?

Section VI.

TOO MUCH LABOR A CAUSE OF THE CRAVING FOR STRONG DRINK.

Section VII.

ACCUMULATION OF WEALTH FOR OUR CHILDREN.

If by our wealth we make our children great, without a full persuasion that we could not bestow it better, and thus give them power to deal hardly with others more virtuous than they, it can after death give us no more satisfaction than if by this treasure we had raised others above our own, and had given them power to oppress them.

Section VIII.

CHRIST'S TEACHING.

The greater part of the necessaries of life are so far perishable that each generation hath occasion to labor for them ; and when we look towards a succeeding age with a mind influenced by universal love, instead of endeavouring to exempt some from those cares which necessarily relate to this life, and to give them power to oppress others, we desire that they may all be the Lord's children and live in that humility and order becoming his family. Our hearts, being thus opened and enlarged, will feel content with a state of things as foreign to luxury and grandeur as that which our Redeemer laid down as a pattern.

For, as he lived in perfect plainness and simplicity, the greatest in his family cannot by virtue of his station claim a right to live in worldly grandeur without contradicting him who said, "It is enough for the disciple to be as his Master."

THE TYRANNY OF SELFISHNESS,

Tyranny as applied to a man riseth up and soon has an end ; but if we consider the numerous oppressions in many states, and the

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calamities occasioned by contending nations in various countries and ages of the world, and remember that selfishness hath been the original cause of them all ; if we consider that those who are unredeemed from this selfish spirit not only afflict others but are afflicted themselves, and have no real quietness in this life nor in futurity, but, according to the sayings of Christ, have their portion " where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched " ;

CAUSING UNREST :

if we consider the havoc that is made in this age, and how numbers of people are hurried on, striving to collect treasure to please that mind which wanders from perfect resignedness, and in that wisdom which is foolishness with God are perverting the true use of things, laboring as in the fire, contending with one another even unto blood, and exerting their power to support ways of living foreign to the life of one wholly crucified to the world ;

AND WASTE OF LABOR.

if we consider what great numbers of people are employed in preparing implements of war, and the labor and toil of armies set apart for protecting their respective territories from invasion, and the extensive miseries which attend their engagements ; while they who till the land and are employed in other useful things in supporting not only themselves but those employed in military affairs, and also those who own the soil, have great hardships to encounter through too much labor ; while others in several kingdoms, are busied in fetching men to help to labor from distant parts of the world, to spend the remainder of their lives in the uncomfortable condition of slaves, and that self is the bottom of these proceedings ;—

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

amidst all this confusion, and these scenes of sorrow and distress, can we remember that we are the disciples of the Prince of Peace, and the example of humility and plainness which he set for us, without feeling an earnest desire to be disentangled from everything connected with selfish customs in food, in raiment, in houses and in all things else ? That being of Christ's family, and walking as he walked, we may stand in that uprightness wherein man was first made, and have no fellowship with those inventions which men in their fallen wisdom have sought out.

Section IX.

The way of carrying on wars common in the world is so far distinguishable from the purity of Christ's religion that many scruple to join in them. Those who are so redeemed from the love of the world as to possess nothing in a selfish spirit have their " life hid with Christ in God," and he preserves them in resignedness, even in times of commotion.

As they possess nothing but what pertains to his family, anxious thoughts about wealth or dominion have little or nothing in them

on which to work ; and they learn contentment in being disposed of according to His will who, being omnipotent and always mindful of his children, causeth all things to work for their good ; but when that spirit works which loves riches, and in its working gathers wealth and cleaves to customs which have their root in self-pleasing, whatever name it hath it still desires to defend the treasures thus gotten.

CONNECTION BETWEEN WEALTH AND WAR.

This is like a chain in which the end of one link encloseth the end of another. The rising up of a desire to obtain wealth is the beginning ; this desire being cherished, moves to action ; and riches thus gotten please self ; and while self has a life in them it desires to have them defended. Wealth is attended with power, by which bargains and proceedings contrary to universal righteousness are supported ; and hence oppression carried on with worldly policy and order, clothes itself with the name of justice and becomes like a seed of discord in the soul. And as a spirit which wanders from the pure habitation prevails, so the seeds of war swell and sprout and grow and become strong until much fruit is ripened. Then cometh the harvest spoken of by the prophet, which " is a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrows." Oh that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the light, and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates ! May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions. Holding treasures in the self-pleasing spirit is a strong plant, the fruit whereof ripens fast. A day of outward distress is coming, and Divine love calls to prepare against it.

Section X.

THE EARTH ONLY A CONDITIONAL GIFT.

" The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's ; but the earth hath he given to the children of men." As servants of God our land or estates we hold under him as his gifts ; and in applying the profits it is our duty to act consistently with the designs of our Benefactor. Imperfect men may give from motives of misguided affection, but perfect wisdom and goodness gives agreeably to his own nature ; nor is this gift absolute, but conditional, for us to occupy as dutiful children and not otherwise ; for He alone is the true proprietor. " The world," saith He, " is mine, and the fulness thereof."

THE TRUE JUBILEE.

The inspired lawgiver directed that such of the Israelites as sold their inheritance should sell it for a term only, and that they or their children should again enjoy it in the year of jubilee, settled on every fiftieth year. " The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine, saith the Lord, for ye are strangers and sojourners with

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me." This was designed to prevent the rich from oppressing the poor by too much engrossing the land ; and our blessed Redeemer said : "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

When Divine love takes place in the hearts of any people, and they steadily act in a principle of universal righteousness, then the true intent of the law is fulfilled, though their outward modes of proceeding may be various ; but when men are possessed by that spirit hinted at by the prophet, and, looking over their wealth, say in their hearts, "Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength ?" they deviate from the Divine law, and do not count their possessions so strictly God's nor the weak and poor entitled to so much of the increase thereof, but that they may indulge their desires in conforming to worldly pomp.

THE LUST FOR LAND.

Thus when house is joined to house and field laid to field, until there is no place, and the poor are thereby straitened, though this is done by bargain and purchase, yet so far as it stands distinguished from universal love, so far that woe predicted by the prophet will accompany their proceedings. As He who first founded the earth was then the true proprietor of it, so he still remains, and though he hath given it to the children of men, so that multitudes of people have had their sustenance from it while they continued here, yet he hath never alienated it, but his right is as good as at first ; nor can any apply the increase of their possessions contrary to universal love, nor oppressing others without being justly chargeable with usurpation. dispose of lands in a way which they know tends to exalt some by

Section XI.

THE EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE : TREATMENT OF NATIVE RACES.

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Section XII.

While our minds are prepossessed in favor of customs distinguishable from perfect purity, we are in danger of not attending with singleness to that light which opens to our view the nature of universal righteousness.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR.

In the affairs of a thickly-settled country are variety of useful employments besides tilling the earth ; so that for some men to have more land than is necessary to build upon and to answer the occasions of their families may consist with brotherhood ; and from the various gifts which God hath bestowed on those employed in husbandry, for some to possess and occupy much more than others may likewise so consist ; but when any, on the strength of their possessions, demand such rent or interest as necessitates their tenants to a closer application to business than our merciful Father designed for

us, it puts the wheels of perfect brotherhood out of order, and leads to employments the promoting of which belongs not to the family of Christ, whose example in all points being a pattern of wisdom, the plainness and simplicity of his outward appearance may well make us ashamed to adorn our bodies with costly array or treasure up wealth by the least oppression.

RIGHT AND "RIGHTS."

Though by claims grounded on prior possession great inequality appears among men ; yet the instructions of the Great Proprietor of the earth are necessary to be attended to in all our proceedings as possessors or claimers of the soil. "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord," and those who are thus guided and whose hearts are enlarged in his love give directions concerning their possessions agreeably thereto ; and that claim which stands on universal righteousness is a good right ; but the continuance of that right depends on properly applying the profits thereof. The word "right" commonly relates to our possessions. We say, a right of propriety to such a division of a province, or a clear, indisputable right to the land within certain bounds. Thus this word is continued as a remembrancer of the original intent of dividing the land by boundaries, and implies that it was equitably or rightly divided, that is, divided according to righteousness. In this—that is, in equity and righteousness—consists the strength of our claim. If we trace an unrighteous claim and find gifts or grants proved by sufficient seals and witnesses it gives not the claimant a right ; for that which is opposite to righteousness is wrong ; and the nature of it must be changed before it can be right.

AN UTOPIA.

Suppose twenty free men, professed followers of Christ, discovered an island, and that they with their wives, independent of all others, took possession of it and, dividing it equally, made improvements and multiplied ; suppose these first possessors, being generally influenced by true love, did with paternal regard look over the increasing condition of the inhabitants, and, near the end of their lives, gave such directions concerning their respective possessions as best suited the convenience of the whole and tended to preserve love and harmony ; and that their successors in the continued increase of people generally followed their pious example and pursued means the most effectual to keep oppression out of their island ; but that one of these first settlers, from a fond attachment to one of his numerous sons, no more deserving than the rest, gives the chief of his lands to him, and by an instrument sufficiently witnessed strongly expressed his mind and will ;—

TWENTIETH PART OF UTOPIA UNDER A LANDLORD:

suppose this son, being landlord to his brethren and nephews, demands such a portion of the fruits of the earth as may supply himself, his family and some others, and that these others thus supplied out of his store are employed in adorning his building with

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curious engravings and paintings, preparing carriages to ride in, vessels for his house, delicious meats, fine wrought apparel and furniture, all suiting that distinction lately arisen between him and the other inhabitants ;

RESULT—IN POLITICS ;

and that, having the absolute disposal of these numerous improvements, his power so increaseth that in all conferences relative to the public affairs of the island, these plain, honest men, who are zealous for equitable establishments, find great difficulty in proceeding agreeably to their righteous inclinations—suppose this son, from a fondness to one of his children, joined with a desire to continue this grandeur under his own name, confirms the chief of his possessions to him, and thus for many ages there is one great landlord over near a twentieth part of this island,

IN RISE OF A “ PREDATORY ” CLASS.

and the rest are poor oppressed people, to some of whom, from the manner of their education, joined with a notion of the greatness of their predecessors, labor is disagreeable ; who, therefore, by artful applications to the weakness, unguardedness, and corruptions of others in striving to get a living out of them, increase the difficulties among them, while the inhabitants of other parts, who guard against oppression and with one consent train up their children in frugality and useful labor, live more harmoniously ;—

“ QUO WARRANTO ? ”

if we trace the claims of the ninth or tenth of these great landlords down to the first possessor and find the claim supported throughout by instruments strongly drawn and witnessed, after all we could not admit a belief into our hearts that he had a right to so great a portion of land after such a numerous increase of inhabitants.

The first possessor of that twentieth part held no more, we suppose, than an equitable portion ; but when the Lord, who first gave these twenty men possession of this island unknown to all others, gave being to numerous people who inhabited the twentieth part, whose natures required the fruits thereof for their sustenance, this great claimer of the soil could not have a right to the whole to dispose of it in gratifying his irregular desires ; but they, as creatures of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth, had a right to part of what this great claimer held, though they had no instruments to confirm their right.

CONCLUSION.

Thus oppression in the extreme appears terrible ; but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression, and when the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive.

To labor for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world.