

The argument, 'That the colonial slaves are better off than the British peasantry', answered from the Royal Jamaica Gazette of June 21, 1823 / By Thomas Clarkson, M. A.

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APPENDIX.



THE ARGUMENT, "*That the Colonial Slaves are better off than the British Peasantry,*" Answered from the Royal Jamaica Gazette of June 21. By THOMAS CLARKSON, M.A. Extracted from the BRITISH AND COLONIAL REGISTER for August 21, 1824.

I KNOW of no argument more unfounded, and which has yet been more mischievous to the cause of humanity, than that "the slaves in the British colonies are better off than the labourers in Great Britain itself." Some thousands have been imposed upon by this argument; and the delusion, I believe, still continues to a considerable extent. It is time then, if it be false, that it should be done away; and happily there are, in my opinion at least, means of effecting this to the satisfaction of all but those who are determined not to be convinced. These means will be found in documents, the authority of which no one will question. I allude to the official contents of the Royal Gazette of Jamaica. Many other sorts of testimony might be objected to as fallacious. It might be said, for instance, "Your evidence is of too old a date, because things are altered now;—or, "Your evidence is only of the hearsay kind;—or, "The persons you quote were not long enough in the colonies to understand the system of slavery;—or, "They went thither with prejudiced minds, and are therefore prejudiced witnesses." But if we go to the Jamaica Gazette, and particularly of so late a date as June 1823, for evidence, we avoid all that our opponents might call dubious, and admit only what they must admit themselves. Each Gazette contains occurrences in the island during the preceding week. It advertises, among other things, the sales of slaves. It advertises, also, such of the runaway slaves as have been apprehended and sent to the public jail. It mentions the prison, or work-house as it is called, where they are confined. It describes their names and persons, with other particulars, that their owners may have an opportunity of claiming them. This account and description are required every week by law, and the jailor is obliged to give them upon oath. Now I have in my possession the Jamaica Royal Gazette for the week, from Saturday, June the 14th, to Saturday, June the 21st, 1823, which I obtained by accident; and it is from this that I mean to try to refute the argument before mentioned. It strikes me that I shall want no other assistance than this document to realize my design.

The first advertisement, which I shall notice in this Gazette, is this:

"Kingston, June 14th, 1823. For Sale: Darliston-Penn, in Westmorland (parish,) with 112 prime Negroes, and 448 head of Stock."

The second is one, where Slaves are to be sold to pay their master's debts. It begins thus: "Deputy Marshal's Office, Kingston, Jamaica, June the 7th, 1823." It then describes three slaves, belonging to three different owners, whom it announces separately for sale. It then describes a fourth lot, belonging to one owner, among whom are, "Lucy, a drudge; William, son of Lucy, a waiting boy, supposed age nine years; Joseph, another son, supposed age seven years; Susannah, Lucy's daughter, a waiting girl, supposed age five years; and Cuffey, another son of Lucy, supposed age two years." It then goes on to advertise a farther sale, consisting of twenty-three men, and concludes thus:

"Take notice, that I shall put up to public sale, at Harty's Tavern, on Monday, the 23d day of June instant, between the hours of ten and twelve o'clock in the forenoon, the above mentioned Negroes, and a cart, levied upon, under, and by virtue of the foregoing writs of Venditioni Exponas.

ANTHONY DAVIES, D. M."

I stop now to make a few remarks upon these two advertisements.

First, it appears that the slaves in the British colonies can be sold. Can any man, woman, or child, be sold in Britain?

It appears, secondly, that these slaves are considered in no other light than as cattle, or as inanimate property. The first advertised were to be sold with so many head of stock, and the others with a cart. Now, do we think or speak of our British labourers or servants in the same way? Do we not consider them, on the other hand, as of the same nature as ourselves? And do we not generally entertain a tender feeling towards them, and sympathize with them in occurrences of affliction and distress?

It appears, thirdly, that those slaves are sold for their master's debts. Can British labourers or servants be sold for the same cause, or on account of the imprudence or wickedness of their employers?

It appears, fourthly, that those slaves who are sold for their master's debts must often be sold separately from those with whom nature has joined them together by a consanguinity the most endearing, and by ties which are held the most sacred. In sales such as that in the first advertisement, where the estate and the slaves were to be sold together, the latter might suffer no other inconvenience than that of changing masters. But in sales which are compulsory, like those in the second advertisement; that is, where writs are executed by the Deputy Marshal for debt; scenes most revolting to humanity must often take place. Lucy and her children might, it is true, be sold together. But she may have had other children not included in the same levy; or she may have had a husband, and her children a father, from whom they may now be for ever separated. And the twenty-six men; where are their wives and children, and other connections? Here then we see the tenderest ties of nature forcibly broken asunder; and we may imagine, if we can, the distress of mind, and the sighs and tears, which accompany their final separation. Can such afflicting scenes occur among the peasantry of Britain? Who can interrupt their domestic enjoyments, with impunity? It is not in the power of the king himself to separate the husband from the wife, the mother from the child, or the parents from their children.

I come now to another part of the Gazette in question, which enables me to throw new light upon the argument, that "the slaves in the British colonies are better off than the peasantry of Great Britain itself." I find in this Gazette, that more than one hundred slaves are advertised as having run away from their masters, and as then detained in the jails or work-houses of the different parishes where they were taken up!!! What a fact is this!!! More than one hundred runaways appear in one Gazette to have been taken up and committed to jail!!!

But may I ask, runaways from what? Why, according to the accounts of our opponents, they must have been runaways from comfort—runaways from happiness. Was ever such a desertion heard of before from such a cause? We have heard of persons quitting their situations, because they were uneasy in them, but never because they were comfortable. This is only natural. It is implanted in our nature to seek and to cleave to whatever may be agreeable to us, but to avoid whatever may give us uneasiness or pain. We may be assured then that the slaves in question ran away, not because they were happy, but because they were miserable. They must have known before-hand, how difficult it would be to escape for any length of time, and that, if found again, they would be lodged in a jail, and returned from thence into the hands of their irritated masters to be whipped, to be put into the stocks, and otherwise barbarously used, if not to be made to work perhaps a part of the rest of their lives in chains; and yet, notwithstanding all this, they ran away. What then does this prove, but that

they chose rather to run the risk of the most cruel punishment, or rather of torture, at a future time, than bear their present condition? But is it true of British labourers, workmen, or servants, that they run away from their employers? I have heard of worthless individuals forsaking their homes, and leaving their wife and family chargeable to a parish: I have heard of mechanics leaving their masters, to go to the metropolis, or elsewhere, for more lucrative employment: I have heard of farming servants leaving their masters in one parish, to work for higher wages in another; but I never heard of men leaving their masters clandestinely, on account of evils which were considered to be insupportable: Such cases, thank God, do not occur in Great Britain.

It appears, then, by the Royal Jamaica Gazette, that there were, among the slaves in that colony, more than one hundred runaways from comfort in the jails and workhouses of the island, between the 14th and the 21st of June, 1823, which was probably a very small proportion of those who had absconded, being, indeed, only a few of those who had been caught. I say, only a few of those who had been caught; for almost every estate has its own hunter, who is sent out armed from time to time, to track and bring home his runaway fellow slaves. Of these no account ever appears in the Gazette.

Let us now see if we can collect any thing more from the same authority, which may enable us to judge farther as to the truth of the argument, that "the slaves in the British colonies are better off than the labourers of Great Britain itself."

We are struck, on examining the advertisements in this Gazette, with the description given of many of these runaway slaves. Numbers of them appear to have been branded with the initials of their owners' names, and other marks, on the naked flesh, with a heated iron, in the same manner as young horses or cattle are branded, when they are turned into our forests. The operation, however, is probably much less painful when performed upon a brute, than when performed on one of the human species. Some of the brand-marks upon these slaves, consisting, as they often do, of several letters, must have tortured no inconsiderable portion of flesh. Thus Mary, a Creole woman, is described in this Gazette as being 5 feet and $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch high, and as marked on the shoulders WH and IP sideways, with the shape of a diamond between the I and P; and Smart, a Creole man, as being 5 feet $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and marked apparently WMC on left, and apparently HB in one on the right shoulder. Billy, a Creole, is described to be 5 feet $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and to be branded AH on the breasts, and apparently the same mark, with DIO, or DIC, on the shoulders. Tom, again, a Nago, (African), is said to be 5 feet 2 inches high, and marked apparently RG on the shoulders, and PYBD on the right, and apparently LB on the left breast. Thus we see in this last instance one individual branded with no less than ten capital letters. And here let me shew the falsehood of an assertion circulated widely by our opponents, that none but Africans, or wild men from the woods, were branded by their owners; for out of the four persons just shewn to have been so cruelly marked, it appears, from the description given of them in this Gazette, that three of them were Creoles; that is, born in the colonies. The truth is, that many of the slaves are branded, whether they are Africans, or whether they are Creoles; and this operation is entirely at the will or discretion of their masters. But can any farmer perform such an operation upon his labourers, or any master upon his servants, in Britain? Woe be to him if he were to attempt it! Nor let this branding be thought of little consequence; for (independently of the pain) whatever degrades a man takes from him a portion of his comfort. Would a British peasant walk about with the

same air of independence, or be as comfortable as he appears to be, if he were to carry about with him, wherever he went, a mark which would shew, that while he bore the external image of a man, he was classed with the beasts of the earth. The very act of branding too is a proof given by the planters themselves, that their slaves are not as happy as those with whom they compare them; for if you ask them the reason of such a practice, they will tell you at once, that they brand them that they may know them again, in case they should run away. Yes, in case they should run away! What condemning words are these! Surely liability or a desire to run away, does not show any great satisfaction with the situation in which the slaves are said to be so comfortably placed.

We are struck, secondly, in looking further into these advertisements, at some of the apparatus of slavery which some of these runaways from comfort are described to have been made to wear. One of the advertisements runs thus: "Escaped from the place where they were at work, two Negro men-slaves, chained together; John, a Mungola (African), 5 feet 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, marked apparently MORGAN, with another letter, not plain, before it (observe here seven capital letters), on the right shoulder; and James Henry, a Chamba (African), marked S on the left shoulder," &c. Here, then, are two slaves, who, when they absconded, were chained together. It is obvious from the advertisement, that they had been made to do the plantation work in chains, and that in this situation they had run away.

But besides the comfort of wearing chains, we find others advertised as enjoying the privilege of wearing an iron collar. James, a Congo (African), is described thus: "5 feet 5 inches, marked AMC on right shoulder, with other letters, not plain, on both shoulders, and had an iron collar on when received." Again; the Creole Negro, Smart, whom we have before shewn to have been branded with five capital letters, is advertised "as having had (besides these marks) a rivetted iron collar on." These collars are well known in these regions of superior happiness. They are fastened round the neck by a rivet. No slave who wears them can take them off himself, however painful they may be by excoriating the flesh. This is the business of a blacksmith. The collar is employed for the purpose of suspending to them an iron chain, sometimes with a weight attached to it.

Formerly three or four projecting iron prongs were fixed to some of the collars, so as to prevent the wearers of them from even lying down to sleep, or from running away into the woods, as it would be difficult for them, on account of the projecting prongs, to pass through the matted branches of the shrubs and trees. But these prongs have been prohibited since the British Parliament have begun to inquire into the state of colonial bondage.

We have seen, then, two of these runaways chained together; and we have seen two others with iron collars on their necks, to which chains had probably been suspended. I presume I may say with certainty, that no such spectacle can occur in Britain. Indeed, I know of no farmer or master who has such articles in his possession. I know of no blacksmith who would make them for him. I know of no person who would assist him in putting them on. Besides, the use of such articles, even if he could command it, would subject him to the penalties of the law.

We are struck, thirdly, when we go farther into these advertisements, with a new species of description; namely, of certain marks and appearances on the backs of some of these runaways from comfort. I have already stated that Billy, a stout young Creole Negro-man, had been branded with no less than seven capital letters on his shoulders: but the Gazette gives us some farther particulars about him; one of which is, "that he had marks of flogging on his back." We find, again, in the

same Gazette, Francis, a Creole, described as being "5 feet $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and as having marks of flogging on his back." Again: William, a Mongola, is said to be "5 feet 3 inches high, to be marked WR on one shoulder, and to have marks of flogging on his back." We find Harriet, a Creole girl, thus advertised in the same Gazette: "4 feet 3 inches, no brand-mark, has scars on her back and stomach from flogging."—May I call the attention of the reader for a moment to this last instance? I am sure it will excite his sympathy. The wretches were not satisfied with whipping a poor young female on the back, but they must extend the sting of their agonizing whip to her *stomach!!!* What would be thought, what would become, of a master in Great Britain, who should attempt to use labourers, whether male or female, in this cruel manner? He would be considered as a barbarian, as a monster. His own village would rise up against him. Nay, I am not sure whether he would not be felled to the ground in the attempt, by those who were about him; and if he did not meet with punishment on the spot, he would be sure to meet with it from the laws of his country, at a future time. In Jamaica, the fact is stated as a matter of ordinary occurrence, without appearing to excite any feeling of indignation, much less any judicial proceedings.

We are struck, fourthly, on examining these advertisements farther, with other external marks and appearances, different from the former, on the persons of these runaway slaves. The following extracts from the Gazette will inform us sufficiently on this subject:—

Dolly, a Creole, 4 feet $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches, has a scar between her shoulders and on left temple.

Duncan Macpherson, a Nago (African), 5 feet 7 inches, has a blotched mark on his shoulders.

James, a Creole, 5 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, has large scars on his back and breast.

Robert Edwards, a Creole, 5 feet $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches, marked apparently IW on right shoulder, and has a scar on left cheek and forehead.

Smart, a Creole man, before mentioned to have had brand-marks, and also a rivetted iron collar on, is further described as having "a sore on the small of the right leg."

William Alexander, a Creole, 5 feet 6 inches, has several scars on his upper lip.

John, a Congo, has large scars on his shoulder, apparently from a brand-mark, and a scar on his forehead.

Mary, a Mungola, 5 feet 2 inches, marked apparently IB on right shoulder, has a small scar under her right eye, and scars near the outer part of each ancle-joint.

George, a Mungola, (African) 5 feet $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches, no brand-mark, has a scar on the inner part of his right leg, on shin, and on his forehead.

Sammy, a Creole boy, 4 feet 8 inches, no brand-mark, has a scar on his throat.

George, a Creole, 5 feet $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, has no brand-mark, has a scar on his forehead, on left eye-brow, and under right eye, a large scar on right outer ancle-joint, and a small scar on left shin.

Henry, a Creole, 6 feet, marked apparently ER on left shoulder, has a scar between his eyes, and near the right temple, and on left shin, and above the left inner ancle-joint, and has lost the right great toe-nail.

George, a Creole, 5 feet $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches, no brand-mark. The fore-finger of his right hand is bent downwards, has a large scar near the top of the right arm, and another on his forehead, about the left eyebrow.

Frank, a Creole, 5 feet, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, no brand-mark, has a scar on the left shin.

Thomas James, a Creole man, 5 feet $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches, marked RC on the left

shoulder, has scars on his shins, the first joint of the finger next the thumb of the left hand injured and crooked.

William, a young Creole man, 5 feet $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches, marked SB on shoulders, and has a blotch on the right breast.

Tom (before described to have been cruelly branded), has a sore on the small of his left leg, and some of his upper teeth are lost.

John, a Creole, 5 feet $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches, no brand-mark, has scars on eyebrows, and between the eyes, and one of his upper teeth is lost.

Robert Ellis, an Eboe (African), 5 feet $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches, mark not plain on left shoulder, has a scar above his right instep, and in the middle of his forehead, and his right upper front tooth is lost.

Billy (before mentioned to have been cruelly branded, and to have had marks of flogging on his back), is farther described to "have lost some of his teeth."

John, a Creole, 5 feet $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches, no brand-mark, has scars on eyebrows, and between his eyes, and one of his left upper front teeth is lost.

Quamin, a Creole, 4 feet $11\frac{1}{4}$ inches, no brand-mark, his right upper front teeth, and a part of the fourth and fifth toes of his left foot are lost.

Simon, a Mungola, 5 feet $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, marked apparently WR, heart on top, on left shoulder, many of his front teeth are lost.

John, a Creole, 5 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, mark not plain on left shoulder, lost his left upper front tooth, and has a bump on left shin.

Caroline Lewis, a Creole, 5 feet $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, lost her right upper front teeth.

George, a Creole, 5 feet $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches, one of his lower, and two upper front teeth are lost, and his right little finger bent downwards.

David Nugent, a Creole, 5 feet $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches, marked TB on shoulders, some of his upper and lower front teeth are lost.

Mary, a Mungola, 5 feet 2 inches, mark not plain on left shoulder, has lost the sight of her left eye, and nearly all her teeth.

Hardluck, a Creole, 5 feet 5 inches, marked apparently C or G reversed, a part of the second toe of his left foot, and his right upper front tooth are lost.

Dick, a young Creole boy, 4 feet $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, no brand mark, has lost the first joint of the thumb of his left hand.

James, a Moco, the first joint of the fore finger of his left hand is lost.

Richard, a Creole, 5 feet $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, has his left great toe crooked.

Here then is a long list of runaways (runaways from comfort) in the same Gazette, with marks and appearances on their persons, different from the former, by which their owners may know them again, when they are lodged in prison. Now, with respect to some of these marks or appearances, such as those occasioned by the loss of sight, or of teeth, or of fingers, or of toes, I shall leave the reader, in a great measure, to form his own conjectures. They may possibly have been the result of accident or disease. But what, if the Slaves' teeth should have ever been knocked out by owners or overseers in fits of passion! Let our opponents account for such appearances more satisfactorily, if they can. With respect to the other marks mentioned, they are described either as scars, or as sores, or as blotches upon the flesh. But how were these scars, sores, and blotches produced? We have reason to conclude, upon the authority of the Gazette itself, that some of the scars were the result of those painful burnings, by the application of heated iron letters to the skin, which have been before mentioned; for it is expressly said of John, the Congo, when he is advertised; "that he had scars on his shoulders, apparently from a brand-mark." We have reason to conclude again, upon the same authority, that others of these scars had been made by the whip; for Harriet, whose case I have noticed before, is advertised thus: "Has no brand-mark, but has

scars on her back and stomach, from flogging." With respect to the rest of these scars, and to those other marks, which are comprehended under the denomination of sores and blotches, there can be no doubt, where these are found upon the throat, or neck, or near the ankle-joints (of which we have given several instances in the preceding list), that they were generally the result of excoriations from the friction of iron collars, leg-irons, stocks, &c. Now, if we sum up the whole; if we add this last list of runaways from comfort to those before given, and to what else we may be able to pick up from the Gazette; we shall find about forty in the hundred of persons advertised in one Gazette, marked, or disfigured, or maltreated in the different ways described. Can such a proportion of mutilated, abused, persons be found any where, in an equal number of men and women, except among slaves? Can we imagine, that, if one hundred of our labourers or servants in Great Britain were taken into custody, as they came on a market-day into any town, and stripped and examined, we should be able to find such a number of defects, excoriations, excrescences, wounds, and injuries upon their persons? But if this account from the Royal Jamaica Gazette, of a single week, be so disgusting of itself, how afflicting, how appalling might it be made, if a person were to sit down with his pen in his hand, and add to it similar extracts from the other fifty-one Gazettes (no one of which has been noticed by me) for the other fifty-one weeks in the year! I am sure he would make a volume, which, if it did not stagger the faith of his readers, would fill them with horror. Yes, it would fill them with horror, and with astonishment too, if they should but chance to reflect that these enormities were perpetrated by persons who considered themselves to be Britons, and to whom you could not give a greater offence, than to tell them they were not Christians; and I know not at which they, the readers, would be most astonished, whether at the depravity which continued such a cruel system, or at the audacity which could defend it by comparing the condition of our British labourers with that of our colonial slaves.

I have now brought forward every fact which I intended to extract from the Royal Gazette of Jamaica, from Saturday, June the 14th, to Saturday, June the 21st, 1823, in order to refute the argument, that "the Slaves in our colonies were better off than the labourers of Great Britain itself;" and I think I have said enough to satisfy all candid men that it is false. But "hold!" says an objector: "you have taken but a partial view of the argument. The slaves in the colonies may perhaps be said to be better lodged, clothed, and fed, than the peasantry of the mother country, and you have not said a word about this in the comparison." It would be an easy task to disprove these assumptions; but I do not now say a word about them, because, when I undertook to refute the argument, I undertook to refute it from the Gazette, and the Gazette only. Now, as the Gazette says nothing upon these new points, I can of course collect no specific answer concerning them from that quarter. But the argument has nevertheless been fully answered, and this, from the Gazette itself, though it contains nothing upon the points in question. I trust it has been shewn, that if the Slaves in the British colonies should be supposed (and an extravagant supposition it would be) to be ever so well lodged, clothed, and fed, they are yet infinitely worse off than our British peasants: for though it may be very agreeable to sleep on a bed of down, instead of sleeping on a hard board; to have plenty of choice victuals, instead of coarse and scanty fare; and to wear good clothes, instead of being nearly naked, or clothed with rags; I cannot allow, either that soft lodging, or good eating and drinking, or fine clothing, form the principal enjoyments of a human being. A mind undisturbed by present or apprehended evils is worth all these pleasures put together. Indeed, what is it that constitutes the best part of a man's happiness? It is

liberty. It is personal protection. It is the unmolested enjoyment of his family and home. It is the due appreciation of him as a citizen and a human being. It is the sympathy of his fellow-creatures. It is the freedom and enjoyment of religious exercises. It is hope, blessed hope, the balm and solace of the mind. These and the like, are the principal component parts of the happiness of a rational being. Tell a man that he shall be richly clothed, delightfully lodged, and luxuriously fed; but that, in exchange for all this, he must be the absolute property of another; that he must no longer have a will of his own; that to identify him as property he may have to undergo the painful and degrading operation of being branded on the flesh with a hot iron; that he will be looked upon rather as a brute than as a man; that he may have to wear an iron collar, or an iron chain, and may be whipped and scarred at the discretion of his master; that, if his said master should get into debt, so as not to be able to satisfy his creditors, he himself must be sold, and his wife and children also; and that they may be sold separately, by which act they may probably be separated for ever from each other. Now tell him all this (for, as far as all these points go, the Gazette will bear me out), and do you think that he would hesitate one moment as to the choice to make? Would he not instantly break out into these or similar exclamations? "I prefer lying at my ease on a bed of straw, to lying on a bed of down, with an iron collar on my neck to grate it. I would rather forego fine clothing, than wear a chain, or fetters which would take the skin and flesh from my ancles. I would rather give up the pleasure of luxurious eating and drinking, than have a smarting back." Try the experiment: ask any man or woman in England to serve you on these terms, and give them wages to boot. They would spurn your offer, your meat and good drink, and your clothing and your wages: they would spurn them all with indignation. I should be glad to know what our peasants would think or say, if they were to be informed of the wretched condition of our colonial Slaves, item by item, in all the melancholy particulars, as I have extracted them from the Gazette; or what they would think or say, if they were informed, that they themselves had been classed, by certain writers, as below these very Slaves. I doubt not that these British peasants, these lower than the lowest of the earth, would be so shocked at the sufferings of these colonial Slaves, that they would consider them as the most abused of all God's creatures. Yes; they would consider their sufferings to be so great in variety and extent, that they would absolutely lose sight of their own; and you would find them giving way to the most generous compassion; and so shocked at the barbarity of the colonial masters, that they would break out into exclamations of indignation against them. And with respect to the comparison made between their own condition and that of the colonial Slaves, I am of opinion they could not be brought to believe that such a comparison could ever have been made: for they would naturally say at once: "We know that we cannot be sold. We know that we are neither looked upon nor treated as beasts. We know that no employer can brand us with a hot iron, or put an iron collar on our necks, or make us work in chains, or whip us at his pleasure. We know that our domestic endearments and enjoyments are our own; and that the king himself cannot separate us from our wives and children, so long as we are obedient to the laws." Happy, happy British peasants, who can hold such language with truth! May you always be able to hold the same language! and may you be for ever exempt from the comforts of colonial Slavery!