

On the use and abuse of NEGRO SLAVES.

THE use of negro slaves hath occasionally afforded a good deal of matter for doubt and controversy: It hath been consider'd as the misfortune of this country, that there is a necessity of using them instead of those of our own complexion, who are the common labourers in *Europe*. On the other hand it hath been regarded as the peculiar advantage of these Northern colonies, that there is no occasion for introducing negroes in such numbers, as to endanger the common wealth from an insurrection of them; which is too much the case in some of our Southern colonies, and all the West-India islands: The first of these positions is only partially true; the other wholly so. It is indeed to be wished, that we had more *European* labourers; but it will not follow, that if we had ever so many white labourers, we should therefore have no black; for as hands are the riches of an industrious people, the accession of hands that are useful and not dangerous, will always occasion an encrease of riches; But it never can be adviseable to introduce foreign hands in such numbers as to endanger the very being of the state; the safety of which ought always to have the first place in political considerations.

Perhaps, before a regulation of the use of slaves should be attempted, it may be proper to shew, that we have a right to use such at all; for the contrary is affirmed by a considerable set of people, who do not generally allow themselves the liberty of bringing their publick principles to the test of private reason. The question, whether a christian can lawfully treat any person as a slave, hath been thoroughly canvassed: It may therefore be sufficient at present

to observe, that slavery is only a mode of subordination, whereby men are by the wisdom of providence placed under one another in a chain almost infinite; and that christianity did not abolish subordination among men, or any particular mode of it, but only provided against the abuse of it, by explaining and enlarging the duties of humanity: That this has been so understood in the first ages of christianity, is evident, from slavery remaining in most christianised countries for some ages after their conversion, particularly in *England*, where *Villainy* (which was no other than a legal mode of slavery) was in being at the time of queen *Elizabeth*.

It seems (but is not) a distinct question, whether one *Christian* can use another *Christian* as a slave: The negative of this was for some time a reigning vulgar error: till it being apprehended, that the fear of losing their negroes prevented the planters from propagating christianity among them. The government in *England* took some pains to circulate the opinions of the best lawyers, that the baptising a slave did not enfranchise him: But, alas! this has had no other effect than to shew, that what was attributed to a concern for their property in their slaves, was really to be placed to their indifference to religion. And in these parts, where one may truly say, religion carries a fairer face than in the Southern, or the island colonies; it is every day's observation, that in many sober families professing a regard for all religious duties, there is as total an indifference about the religion of their negroes, as if they were not of the same species. But our saviour published the gospel for the use of *all* mankind, for slaves as well as free men; for black as well as white.

Since christianity therefore seems to be too rich a pearl to be cast before negroes, I would recommend to the owners of them, that if they will not make christians of their slaves, they will at least act as christians themselves in their treatment of them. This may be perhaps the first and best step towards inculcating the doctrines of christianity among them:

D

M

If they experience the benevolence of that religion, they will be more easily induced to admit the authority of it. And indeed one of the reasons, why christianity did not abolish slavery, is, that its doctrines tend so to mitigate the severity of its state, as to make an abolition of it unnecessary. But those masters, who do not apply the precepts of their religion, and particularly that golden one, to do as they would be done by, to their slaves as well as their neighbours, may assure themselves, that they exercise an usurped dominion over those unhappy creatures. For the use of these, I shall give the following relation, which I have from very good authority.

A captain of an *English* man of war, who was stationed for some time on the coast of *Guinea*, after having in vain searched for improvement and amusement from the civil and religious usages of the common people there, at length met with a philosopher; who, superior to the vulgar prejudices, profess'd a certain knowledge of the profess'd divine dispensations. From him he had this account of the creation and disposition of mankind.

"When the supreme power had created the world, he set about making the man who was to have the dominion of it: He made him black, with cur'd hair, and thick lips, and every way fashioned him for beauty: He gave him the most delightful part of the earth to live in, where the sun perpetually warmed him, and the earth, of her own accord, brought all the necessaries and even luxuries of life, without wanting his care. For all these blessings he required no other return, but that they should love one another, and adore him as their common father: They, dissolved in ease and pleasure, soon forgot these simple precepts, and not only quarrell'd with one another, for what they did not want; but were unthankful for what they had."

"The great Being was offended, and found it necessary to punish these ingrates: For which purpose he created another set of men, which he made white; these he placed in the Northern parts of the world, at a dis-

tance from the sun, in a country continually subject to the inclemency of frost and snow, where the earth would give nothing spontaneously, but the inhabitants must owe to their own toil and labour all their subsistence. This severe lot made this new white creation hardy, bold, industrious, and cunning: They invented many arts to mitigate the severity of their climate; amongst which, as they are destitute of the common comforts of life, which happier countres enjoyed, they contrived to cross the seas, and pass into other parts of the earth, to fetch from thence whatever they wanted, or thought that they wanted."

"Now the Divine Justice began to shew itself: The white man, whose luxuries and desires knew no bounds, was directed to consider the black man to be made for his use, and accordingly treated him as such, and still continues (not without the connivance of the wretched blacks themselves) to carry away many thousands every year, to be tormented for the rest of their lives. And so it must be till the Divine Justice is satisfied; and until, at a proper time, these tormentors shall be removed, and the original lord, the black man, shall be restored to the possession of the earth."

I will not pretend to vindicate the system of this *African* gymnosophist; but to those who are offended at it, I will observe, that it must be owing to the practice of the whites, that it had its foundation, and from thence only must it derive all its further support. Perhaps if this philosopher had ever been in the *West-India* islands, he would by no means have given up his opinion: When he had seen so many thousands of negroes treated in a much worse manner than useles brutes are in *Europe*, and denied so much interval from intense labour, as is necessary to prolong their lives to the common period, and allow for the propagation of their species; when he had consider'd that this proceeding is contrary to the interest of their cruel masters themselves, who by thus shortning the lives of their slaves, and preventing the increase of them, put themselves to an expence of fresh importation of
negroes,

negroes, to a much greater value than the gain arising from the overworking them; and lastly, when he was told, that these masters profess to have a divine ordinance, revealed by God for the universal use of all mankind, to lead them to eternal happiness, and yet refuse to communicate it to their poor slaves: Will he have any doubt but that such men were created only to be the ministers of divine vengeance on the reprobate negroes?

But let us hope, that this is not always the case; let us relieve ourselves by looking at another scene, perhaps not so frequent, but full as practicable, and much more pleasant: Let us suppose a master of negroes, who considers them as persons put in a subordination to him; to whose la-

bour, moderately used, he hath a right, as they in return have to expect from him the necessaries and some of the comforts of life; who knows them to be his fellow creatures, and therefore (if he is a christian) will use them in such a manner as he would expect to be used, if he was in their situation; and lastly, and above all, who having the good fortune to have the will of God revealed to him, whereby he may safely conduct himself through this life to everlasting happiness, will endeavour to communicate this knowledge to his black fellow creatures, that they may be partakers of the benefits intended for all mankind. Such a man will not be a devil, to torment the negroes, but an angel, to shew them their way to eternal bliss.