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'Those who wish to see the Slave System decline, and at length gradually and safely': The Ambitions of Cambridge Abolitionism

Seven years after the abolition of the slave trade, the 'Chancellor, Masters and Scholars' of Cambridge drafted another antislavery petition urging the British Parliament to take decisive action on one of the most pressing issues of the day. On 4 July 1814, the situation appeared no less critical. In the Atlantic Ocean, the first years of the abolition act had revealed Britain's measures to be a paper tiger – smuggling continued in the face of potential fines – so Parliament introduced the Slave Trade Felony Act in 1811, which denounced slave-trading as 'contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy' and made that practice a 'capital felony'. Across the Channel in France, it had been more than a decade since Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte had sent an army to crush the Saint-Domingue revolutionaries and re-establish enslavement in Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and the wider French Caribbean (costing the French thousands of troops, treasure, and the life of Napoleon's brother-in-law Charles Leclerc, who led the expedition and died from yellow fever). The work of abolition was far from over.[1]

Alongside the cities and towns of York, Scarborough, London, and Bedford, the University – in a petition that has never been studied – called for the 'total Abolition of the *African* Slave Trade'. Applauding the 'wise and benevolent measures, which have been carried on for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade', the petitioners 'looked forward with a confident hope, to the prospect of its complete Annihilation'. The politics in the Senate House had, at times, spilled out into the open, and William Chafy, the Master of Sidney Sussex, had previously tried in vain to block an address calling for more action in abolishing the slave trade – not, it must be noted, because he was a fervent proslavery activist, but rather because of his support for Robert Jenkinson, the 2nd Earl of Liverpool's anti-abolitionist administration (Liverpool's father was a trustee for a plantation). Claiming to be acting in the absence of another pro-Liverpool man – Philip Douglas, the Master of Corpus Christi – Chafy's efforts were in vain, and the petition passed by two votes. Thankfully, this time the abolitionist petitioners avoided another political contest (in fact, the members of the Senate noted that Prince William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester, had won the electoral contest for University Chancellor in 1811 on account of

his entrenched opposition to enslavement). In the petition, the Senate also congratulated Parliament on inducing 'Foreign Powers to imitate the noble Example which it has displayed', however they 'beg[ged] to express their regret at the very different prospect now held out on the part of the Government of France'. The Cambridge men were concerned for 'the African Settlements [in Senegal] and West Indian Colonies [of Guadeloupe and Martinique] now restored to France, [with] the most serious consequences to the general Cause of African liberty and Civilization'. In supporting British colonisation in West Africa and the Caribbean as the 'Guardians of Learning and Religion', they expressed their 'abhorrence' of France's colonial activities in the Atlantic world and hoped to 'express those Sentiments' that had been 'foremost to avow and inculcate; and which, as they humbly hope, they have been instrumental in promoting'. The Cambridge Senate had again brandished its anti-slavery credentials after a period of public silence on the issue following its earlier petitions to Parliament.[2]

The 1823 petition went further, proposing measures to end enslavement. The Senate proclaimed that the 'existence of Slavery is inconsistent with the Principles of British Legislation, of Sound Policy, & of Justice; and contrary to the feelings of Humanity and to the Spirit of the Christian Religion'. The petitioners condemned the British Caribbean colonies for having taken 'no effectual measures… for the Gradual Termination of Slavery & the preparing of the unfortunate Subjects of it for Freedom; or even to the mitigating of their wretched Condition'. They hoped for an end to a system that had practiced 'Arbitrary & Debasing Corporal Punishments' – an end to violent slave societies where 'Enfranchisement is so greatly discouraged, where Marriage is infrequent, & where Religious Instruction & the Duties of the Sabbath are nearly altogether precluded'. Under attack for these sentiments from some slaveholder members of Parliament, Cambridge pushed for the 'mitigation' of enslavement, with further legal 'Provisions' advised if the Caribbean colonies complied – with the express hope that, 'eventually', these policies would result in its 'final and Complete Termination'.[3]

If many Cambridge fellows and students agreed that enslavement had to end, that was where the consensus on its termination or reformation ended. For more than thirty years, Cambridge-affiliated men invested in and propagated almost every abolition measure, from the promotion of slave-free commerce to the Christianisation of enslaved Black people. These gradual measures, however, stood at odds with the immediatism that was more popular in Black and white radical circles. Furthermore, as with the slave trade debate, there were numerous Cambridge intellectuals and alumni who either operated in a middle ground, supporting the plantation regime in the belief that Christianising Africans would produce more docile workers, or they supported the proslavery lobby in its efforts to attain compensation. Examining each of these approaches in turn, the chapter follows the stories of abolitionist activists in Cambridge, overseas missionaries and ameliorationists, and proslavery campaigners to

illustrate how Britons were continuing to think through and develop their positions on enslavement.

Over the course of the more than three decades between the abolition of the slave trade and the end of slavery in 1838, proslavery campaigners and antislavery activists, many of whom formed the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions in 1823, again fought for political and intellectual supremacy. The abolitionists' ambitious goal was to hasten the end of enslavement. Cambridge alumni and fellows, as was often the case, occupied all sides of the debate. As with the Cambridge Senate, white abolitionists such as William Paley and William Wilberforce were supporters of gradualism – that slavery should gradually end once enslaved people had reached a certain age or after a period of apprenticeship to their former masters to teach them how to work and live as free labourers. Although not involved in the day-to-day running of the Society (he had resigned from Parliament in 1825 due to ill health), Wilberforce was a co-founder. Clarkson, however, was frustrated at the pace of change. In 1824, he admitted that the end of the slave trade had not 'materially improved' the conditions of the enslaved, and he called for abolitionists to '*resume their labors*'. He understood radical Britons' impatience for slavery's immediate termination, writing in in his diary that 'Everywhere People are asking me about *immediate abolition*, and whether that would not be the best'.[4]

Radical abolitionists, such as the Quaker schoolteacher Elizabeth Heyrick, attacked white Britons for their conservatism. The same year as Clarkson's pamphlet, Heyrick's *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* mocked the Anti-Slavery Society for its 'slow, cautious, accommodating measures' toward enslavers. 'We make slow progress in virtue', she frankly observed, 'lose much time in labour, when, instead of going boldly forward in its straight and obvious path, we are continually enquiring how far we may proceed in it without difficulty and without opposition'. Heyrick regretted that abolitionists, through their cautiousness, had helped to delay and forestall the end of racial slavery.[5]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was emblematic of the tensions amongst white antislavery activists concerning slavery, abolition, and race. As we have seen, Coleridge had condemned slave-traders and hoped that they would receive 'burning punishment' for their crimes, and he maintained that Britain's wrongs in West Africa would result in divine retribution. (Coleridge even aimed to turn his words into deeds – he had proposed a new colony, "Pantisocracy," on the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania without distinctions of class or rank.) Still, he advocated African religious conversion, rather than the more ambitious goal of raising Black people to the status of white Europeans through the immediate end of plantation slavery. In an 1812 Lecture on Shakespeare, Coleridge revealed his opinion of Africans, arguing that Othello had to be a 'Moor' because 'negroes were not known except as slaves' and could not

possibly rise to the position of a general. 'I utterly condemn your [abolitionist's] frantic practice of declaiming about their rights to the black themselves', he wrote on abolition. 'They [the enslaved] ought to be forcibly reminded of the state in which their brethren in Africa still are, and taught to be thankful for the providence which has placed them within the reach of the means of grace'. In a similar fashion to many abolitionists, Coleridge believed in the civilising and disciplining potential of the plantation regime.[6]

Youthful opposition to the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, of course, did not naturally result in an overwhelming condemnation of enslavement later in life. For instance, William Lamb, the 2nd Viscount Melbourne, who as a Trinity undergraduate had delivered a prize-winning December 1798 sermon in the college chapel which was printed and distributed (and which Charles James Fox had quoted in the House of Commons). In the sermon, Lamb hoped that the cause of improving human knowledge would 'civilize the rude millions of Africa' and 'strike the fetter from the galled limbs of the supplicating slave'. After attaining the Prime Ministership in July 1834 (a position that he held on two occasions in 1834 and from 1835 to 1841), however, he described abolition as a 'great folly' and he dismissed Sir Thomas Fowell Buxtons's pleas to establish 'posts in the interior of Africa' as a bridgehead to 'civilising that continent' through the spread of a legitimate trade in goods and the end of the slave trade. He was not alone: Thomas Robert Malthus, a former Jesuan fellow and author of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (a landmark 1798 treatise which had been used by both abolitionists and proslavery activists to prosecute their case), opposed the slave trade but his pen was notably silent on the issue of abolishing racial chattel slavery. In truth, George III, the Viscount Melbourne, Malthus, and Coleridge had thought through their positions on enslavement and racial justice over the course of many decades – and, on numerous occasions, Britons arrived at more conservative and prejudicial positions concerning the rights of enslaved Black people than their youthful exuberance would suggest.[7]

Financial funding from Cambridge for abolitionism underwent a significant transformation too. Colleges had provided important (and noteworthy) sums to SEAT, yet Cambridge institutions were not as generous to the African Institution and Anti-Slavery Society. From 1822 to 1828, the Cambridge subscribers included the Reverend Henry Godfrey, the President of Queens' (£10.10 donation), the Reverend William Mandell, a Queens' fellow (£10.10 donation), John Stevens Henslow of St John's (£1.1 subscription), James Plumptre, (£10 10s. donation), William Whewell of Trinity (£1.1 subscription), William Farish (£3.3s subscription); and the Reverend Henry Venn of Trinity (a £2.2s donation and £1.1s annual subscription), who was a prominent committee member of the Anti-Slavery Society. Aside from the gown-wearing population, the Banker, MP, and thirteen-times mayor John Mortlock provided £500 and audited the Institution's accounts. From the university, the most generous sum

arrived from an 'Association among the Undergraduates' (£22.17), proving that undergraduates were (once again) at the forefront of the debate within the university. The subscription lists do not mention if the colleges contributed their funds, suggesting that Cambridge had concluded much of its institutional financial support for abolition.[8]

At Cambridge, the university members and donors had numerous opinions on how to end slavery. Abolitionism continued to be a contentious issue at the dawn of a new century, even as the colleges were no longer actively involved in donating to or financing antislavery organisations. William Woodis Harvey, though, had prior experience of a post-emancipation society before matriculating as a Queens' sizar in March 1824. Born in Penzance, Harvey was one of the many Wesleyan preachers who travelled to Haiti after it had successfully declared its independence on New Year's Day 1804. Heralding a new 'State of Haiti', the Declaration inspired its Black citizens to 'deny the inhuman government that for long has held our minds in humiliating thralldom any hope of reenslaving us'. 'In short', Jean-Jaques-Dessalines' secretary, Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre, wrote, 'we must live independent or die'. Arriving in 1818, Harvey formed the crest of an Anglican wave that sought to drive French Catholicism from the island of Hispaniola. The young man's experiences in Haiti were far from auspicious, however – and his visit to the island may have coloured his writings on the new nation and its post-emancipation life. Though wielding a prized letter of introduction from Wilberforce, Haitians were not rushing to attend his sermons and the archbishop, who Harvey dismissed as an 'infidel' that was motivated solely by profit, stopped children from attending and singing at his morning service. The Cornishman was fortunate he just had to deal with one disgruntled dignitary: a Wesleyan missionary in Port-au-Prince claimed that he was forced to hold his meetings in private because of the 'violence of the mob'.[9]

Returning to Britain, Harvey enrolled at Cambridge with the encouragement of the Reverend Charles Valentine Le Grice, a college fellow and Paley critic. There, he joined other students in questioning the efficacy of slaveholding or the other contentious political and social problems of the day. At the Cambridge Union Society, founded in 1815, undergraduates debated global issues ranging from Spanish American to Greek independence (with the Union donating £20 to the latter cause) to Irish colonisation to the morality of Black enslavement. On the latter topic, the student debaters were well-informed: the Society, at various points, subscribed to or owned copies of the *Jamaica Chronicle* newspaper, the Oxford alumnus George Wilson Bridges' proslavery *A Voice from Jamaica*, the treatise *An Appeal on Behalf of the Sugar Slaves of the West Indies*, the pamphlet *Stephens on the Condition of Negro Slaves*, and Zachary Macaulay's *Negro Slavery*. Activists may have also mined the college archives for resources on the history of enslavement. In one antislavery pamphlet, a polemicist mentioned that, from the records of our 'Saxon ancestors'

in England, 'several entries' of 'manumissions exist in a MS. of the four evangelists in the library of *Corpus Christi*, or *Bennet* College, Cambridge'. The records were used as evidence that Britain's ancestors in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval England were committed to ameliorating slavery before it was 'unhappily again revived' through the 'discovery of America'.[10]

The slavery question was, unsurprisingly, a contentious subject for students debates, and in March 1824 the Society discussed whether 'the condition of slaves in the West Indies previous to 1800, such as to entitle the planters to the support of Parliament'. With the planters defended by, among others, the former Union President, John Job Rawlinson, and the slaves by seven students, the motion was defeated with 78 in favor of the slaves and 55 for the enslavers. Two years later, in May 1826, the Union debated another motion: 'Has the conduct of the Legislative Assemblies in the West Indian Colonies up to the year 1806 been such as to entitle them to the approbation of the Country'. Again, the result was 11 in the affirmative and 51 in the negative, an indictment of the white colonists' treatment of the enslaved. Students, as with the slave trade, were, once again, in the vanguard of radical white opinion concerning the end of enslavement.[11]

The Union papers are light on details concerning these debates, but the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported a sensational 1825 Town Hall meeting on the abolition of chattel slavery. The meetings, which also took place in other cities such as Birmingham, provided an opportunity for residents to pressure their local representatives to support abolition. The Reverend James Scholefield, the evangelical Regius Professor of Greek (and a passionate supporter of the Sierra Leone mission), and William Farish were two such attendees. Scholefield was an experienced political combatant: two years earlier, he was a member of a Cambridge committee that supported Greece's more than eight-year revolution against the Ottoman Empire – a cause, the committee declared, 'for the Greek against the Barbarian, for Liberty and Oppression, for the Cross against the Crescent'. For the Reverend, abolitionism and Greek independence were conjoined struggles between liberty and oppression. He thundered that Britons had 'borne the burthen and shame of sanctioning the [slave] system quite long enough, and he trusted they were now determined to tell the Government, in firm but respectable language, that they would tolerate it no longer'. In advocating for a 'speedy abolition', Scholefield was rather isolated at Cambridge in his proposal for immediatism. Though a bitter pill to swallow, Scholefield suggested that the 'burthen' of compensating slaveholders might 'bring about this desirable measure'. The Professor saved most of his invective for Britons, like Stephen Fuller, who claimed that the white poor lived in worse conditions than West African slaves, attacking them as men of 'slavish minds' who 'deserved to be hooted out of society as not possessing common English feeling'. Farish concurred with Scholefield. Giving a vote of thanks to the mayor, he remembered that a previous Vice-Chancellor, Peter Peckard, and Thomas Clarkson

had 'been one of the first persons who called attention to this subject', and he recalled Peckard's sermon 'upon the cruelty of the system &c. that the pamphlet came out with a black border round the pages, similar to the newspapers on melancholy public occasions'. As the meeting was dissolved, Farish and Scholefield had tried to ensure that town and gown were united in their opposition to enslavement.[12]

The question remained *how* and *when* to abolish that system, however. Having spent almost six years in Haiti, Harvey, in his *Sketches of Hayti*, was convinced that gradual abolition was the wisest course of action. For the Queens' man, the Haitian Revolution presented Britons with a unique opportunity to witness how a 'people newly escaped from slavery' were 'still suffering and exhibiting in their character, its pernicious and demoralizing effects; gradually returning from scenes of confusion and bloodshed, to habits of industry, peace, and order; steadily aiming, amidst frequent reverses, to establish a regular and independent government'. From Cap-Français, the capital of the autocratic Henri Cristophe's new Kingdom of Haiti, Harvey reported that Haitians had struggled 'to improve their agriculture, to repair an exhausted population, to form commercial connexions, and to introduce a knowledge of the arts and sciences'. Harvey identified the source of these social, economic, and intellectual ills: he blamed the Revolution's 'excesses and cruelties' on French legislators, who had 'contended for *immediate* emancipation; forgetting, in the heat of their zeal, the unfit state of the negroes at this period to value and improve the advantages of freedom; and thus overlooking the propriety and necessity of a gradual method of liberating them'. No disinterested narrative of Haitian politics, the *Sketches*, which Harvey wrote and published whilst a student, warned white Britons about the effect of immediatism – the laying 'waste the plantations', the destruction of property, and the 'massacre' of 'unprotected proprietors without distinction'. Such a scene of anti-white bloodshed, which he blamed on Dessalines (referring to the 1804 massacre of between 3,000 and 5,000 white and mixed-ethnicity French inhabitants), had occurred because 'uneducated, barbarous' and 'uncivilized' Haitians were incapable of self-rule. If enslaved Africans were emancipated in a 'gradual manner, in which the British government proposes to liberate the slave of the West India colonies', their situation, the Cambridge member claimed, would be far 'superior'. The *Sketches* was a handbook on how *not* to end slavery.[13]

Four years later, in 1831, another "Member of the University of Cambridge" published their *Suggestions on the Abolition of Slavery in the British Colonies; or, Slavery Gradually Starved to Death Upon a Low Diet*. They promoted East India sugar and an end to the Caribbean monopoly over that product. As monopolies, they argued, diverted industry from more profitable activities, officials had to mitigate enslavement to make producing Caribbean sugar dearer – 'to treat, feed, and clothe them better' – and thereby convince enslavers to employ free labour. The 'invasion' of the Caribbean's monopoly,

with close to 60,000 tons of Jamaican sugar exported in 1798, would 'absolutely constrain them to adopt measures of gradual emancipation'. Avoiding the 'violent and convulsive consequences… under any other system of abolition', the "Member" confidently claimed, was 'best calculated both morally and intellectually to prepare the slave for the reception and fruition of freedom, to instruct him, in fact, in the rudiments of liberty… he would be most cordially reconciled to his master, being united to him by the threefold bond of gratitude, affection, and mutual voluntary dependence'. The plantation system and bonds of dependence between Black and white colonists could then continue.[14]

British antislavery activists had tried to propagate East India sugar for decades, and the pamphlet was similarly attached to market-based solutions to the plantation's abuses. With more than 70,000 copies published, William Fox's *Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum* helped to inspire women-led boycotts of Caribbean sugar in Britain. Images and cartoons displaying the 'Barbarities of the West Indies', with enslaved people being boiled in sugar vats, which further defined a link between sugar-production and violence. Such activism had been going on in Cambridge, too. Thomas Musgrave, the Professor of Arabic, held meetings at his house where the attendees pledged to not use articles produced by enslaved people.[15]

Building on these nonimportation measures, the "Member" implored the government to take decisive action on the 'Slave Question' – an issue that continued 'wantonly to exasperate the country… a country, provoked by innumerable parliamentary abuses, and, above all, smarting under the painful conviction, that their voice is unheard by Government, their wishes uncompiled with, their complaints disregarded, and their wrongs unredressed'. Domestic political corruption and transatlantic enslavement were interconnected vices. Enslavers had purchased rotten boroughs to disenfranchise Britons and supplied them with '*luxuries*', ensuring that the disreputable title of 'Slave owner' had become an honourable distinction in public life. To counteract the enduring power of the planter class, the "Member" pondered how to end slavery 'with the least expenditure of life, happiness, and property' – a panacea to 'England [being] enslaved by her own colonies'.[16]

The abolitionist ignored the realities of East India Company rule, which Edmund Burke and other parliamentarians had pilloried for corruption, violence, and avarice – with "Nabobs" returning to England to enjoy their riches. In fact, Caribbean slaveholders, such as Francis Buchanan, claimed that East India enslavers were committing abuses there too – and the slavers had some truth to their claims of antislavery hypocrisy: the government had banned the export of enslaved people from Calcutta on 22 July 1789 and had halted the importation of slaves into Bombay in 1805, but the East India Company was more hesitant to challenge plantation or domestic bonded labour systems.

Bonded labour was 'reproduced and even reinforced' and adapted in colonial British law, and forms of hereditary debt bondage, called *al-amanji*, were 'appropriated and modified by the new colonial rulers'.[17]

Applauding the East Indian sugar growers, the anonymous "Member" nevertheless argued that an end to the Caribbean sugar duty would provide for the moral and political regeneration of Europe. Drawing upon the work of the political economist Adam Smith, and travel narratives from Poland to Mexico, the author denounced slavers' reliance on duties and taxes to thwart the importation of superior East Indian sugar. If economic profits and prosperity depended on the rate of demand for a product, as the author claimed, then the welfare of free people of colour would increase in turn as they were loosened from their shackles and enabled to produce more (assuming, of course, that the enslaved were less efficient than free labourers). Criticising the 'passion for absenteeism' amongst British Caribbean slaveholders and the policy of a 'mitigated' state of slavery, the "Member" was careful to inform his readers that Black people were not degraded by their enslavement. 'Are the emancipated blacks of Hayti', he noted, 'a slothful and inactive race? are they such in Sierra Leone? in the United States? and, above all, are they such in our own colonies (the liberated Negroes I mean)?' Stoking fears of political corruption, the enemy from within, the pamphlet was also addressed to the planter class, who would, in the absence of enslavement, 'begin to think of economizing, not only in the cultivation of his sugar plantations, but in all his domestic arrangements and expenses' employing cattle, engaging in crop rotation, and introducing technological advancements to improve their apparently unproductive estates. In truth, the annual profits on Caribbean sugar production were sometimes as high as £1.7 million (and agricultural profits from that region could rise up to £2.5 million including other staples).[18]

The end of slavery, the author implied, would also unravel the tangled financial webs of mortgages and debt that financed the plantations. Far more than the 'opiate' of 'melioration', which he believed the government had propagated to 'stupify the public mind', the author dreaded the 'volcano' of immediate abolitionism. Angered by abuses and usurpations, the suddenly-free labourers would, he predicted, descend like 'some bedlam of maniacs, or some caravan of wild beasts' to commit 'carnage, plunder, outrage, and devastation' in the colonies. The abolitionist shared the enslavers' fear that immediatism would unleash a 'confederacy of lawless savages' upon the colonies. Alongside racialised fears about Black majority rule, the author's qualified support for East India rule would have appealed to his Cambridge contemporaries. University luminaries continued to invest in India stockholdings, such as the King's fellow, Dean, and former Cambridge Vice-Provost, Martin Thackeray (who bequeathed his extensive library and £1,000 to fund a college prize in mathematics for Eton alumni).[19]

George W. Craufurd, a prominent King's fellow, protested the 'Impolicy of the Slave Trade' as well. Craufurd had familial connections to slavery – his

grandfather, Sir Alexander Craufurd, owned Grenville Estate in Jamaica and, through his wife, he mortgaged Heart's Ease in the same colony. (Grenville was left to George's father, also named James.) George's two elder brothers joined the British army, and the eldest, Thomas, was killed in action at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. George, however, remained at Cambridge after his education as a King's Scholar at Eton and at King's College in 1820. A fellow for nineteen years, two as Bursar and another seven as a Divinity Lecturer, he was ordained in the Church and held a chaplaincy with the EIC. Both an abolitionist and the inheritor of a fortune tied to slave wealth, Craufurd donated £1,000 to King's and another £1,000 upon his death two years later to support a Divinity Lectureship. The involvement of abolitionists in the plantation economy was not unusual at Cambridge, though. The Reverend Adam Sedgwick was a Professor at Cambridge and was commemorated and acclaimed as the namesake of that university's Natural History Museum. The natural scientist was 'disgusted' that the parliamentarians had accepted 'slave-grown sugar' – and he mentioned to his contemporaries that he had 'sucked in a hatred of slavery from my mother's breast and learnt it from my father's knee'. Coincidentally, Sedgwick was co-trustee to a Jamaican plantation, an estate which was awarded £3,783 in compensation for 174 enslaved.[20]

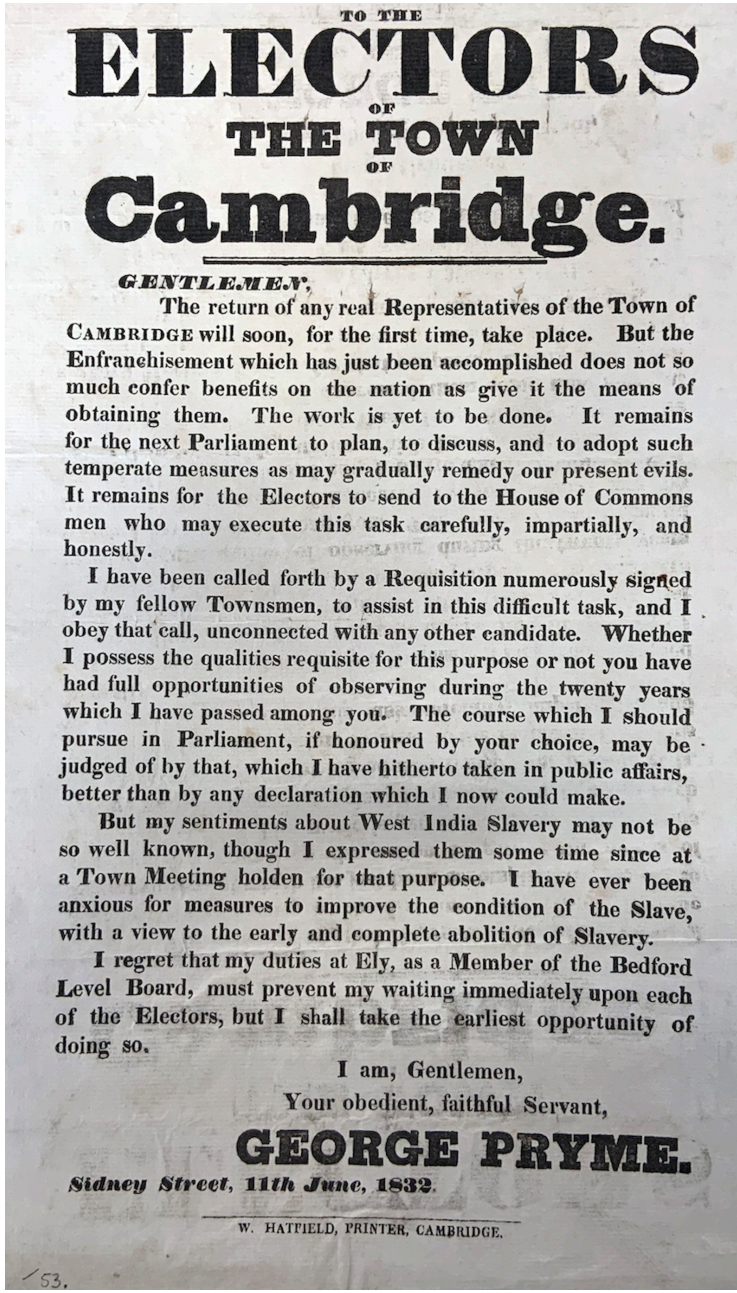
Craufurd directed his energies to abolishing slavery – yet he admitted in 1832 that the 'greater part of mankind are very little moved, except by motives of SELF-INTEREST', so he identified several economic arguments against enslavement. For one, the expense of furnishing the enslaved 'liberally with food and raiment' was an unnecessary cost to production if the labourers were free and fed and clothed themselves (in reality, enslaved people fed and clothed themselves whilst working small plots of land on plantations). Appealing to consumers, he argued that such an 'ADDITIONAL CHARGE' was a 'direct tax' levied on Britons that need not be paid if East India sugar was purchased instead. Furthermore, he observed that slavery was a loss to the British economy from interest payments for purchasing the enslaved (£84,000), insurance (£42,000), the inferiority of enslaved labour (£70,000), and accidents on the plantation (£14,000). The total loss from slavery over seven years was £1,540,000. Given this financial burden, Craufurd asked 'How many more years shall this wretched system continue, and be actually SUPPORTED by us?' Craufurd's consideration of statistics appealed to readers because the British Association for the Advancement of Science had founded a "Statistical Section" at Cambridge in June 1833 in the rooms of Richard Jones, a Trinity political economist, who had lectured on the 'Evils attendant on slavery in all its forms'. Abolitionists made their cause an issue of statistics – and their calculations found the rationale for enslavement wanting.[21]

Britain's slave empire was on the ballot. In the wake of the Reform Act, which abolished smaller, unrepresentative districts and gave representation to male smallholders and artisans (expanding Cambridge's electorate to 1,400

voters), the 1832 Cambridge election was another battleground in the national debate on African slavery. In the organised chaos of Britain's election system, Oxford and Cambridge often held elections for county, borough, and the university all at the same time (with the electors for the latter restricted to MAs and doctors). The contested elections of the nineteenth century were a welcome change from the relative monotony of eighteenth-century local politics (the Whigs had held that seat uncontested for almost forty years, from 1737 to 1774). The contest for the two-member seat was between Charles Philip Yorke, a Tory who had served as the MP for Cambridgeshire (1790–1810) and Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor Brougham, Francis Jeffrey, the Lord Advocate, Thomas Spring Rice, 1st Baron Monteagle of Brandon, and George Pryme, an abolitionist and Cambridge's Professor of Political Economy. Pryme's lectures had considered 'Whether [the] labor of [a] slave is dearer than that of a freeman?', concluding that the Romans had suffered due to the 'scarcity of capital' amongst the middling farmers, which meant their 'great landed proprietors were… compelled to cultivate their own estates by the labor of captive enemies reduced to slavery' – ensuring that Rome, reduced to 'plunder and extortion' as the 'chief sources of wealth, they neglected all others'. The Whig supporters Pryme and Rice were victorious in the election, but the contest soon divided and embittered the Cambridge electors as Yorke's champions cried foul to the voting public that their man had been defamed as a proslavery activist.[22]

Publishing broadsides, Yorke's beleaguered supporters denounced the Whigs for their scurrilous accusations. Using pseudonyms such as "Fair Play" and "An Abolitionist," they noted that Yorke 'declares his abhorrence of Slavery, and avows his determination to vote for *its abolition*'. Pryme, who became a prominent abolitionist voice in Parliament and sceptic of slaveholder compensation, argued that he had 'ever been anxious for measures to improve the condition of the Slave, with a view to the early and complete abolition of Slavery'. The "Abolitionist," however, considered Yorke as 'true a FRIEND to the SLAVE' as these men, and, to prove the point, published excerpts from all the candidates, including Pryme's address at the Red Lion inn on 11 June (see Figure 5.1). The charges dogged Yorke's campaign, and he belatedly republished his 13 September speech at the Eagle Inn as a broadside declaring his credentials as a 'friend to humanity' who detested enslavement and prayed for the introduction of measures which, 'consistently with common justice, and the well-being of the slaves themselves, will bring about the extinction of the slave system'. These charges would not disappear in the Cambridge political cauldron.[23]

The one saving grace for Yorke was that he did not own a plantation, as that issue had become a millstone for candidates in the 1830s. Henry John Adeane, the successful Whig candidate for the 1830 election, had defended claims that, since he was a trustee for an uncle's plantation (and therefore had an 'interest in the continuance of slavery'), he could not be 'sincere' in his support for gradual abolition. Eager to distance himself from that stigma, Adeane tried to convince



TO THE

ELECTORS

OF

THE TOWN

OF

Cambridge.

GENTLEMEN,

The return of any real Representatives of the Town of CAMBRIDGE will soon, for the first time, take place. But the Enfranchisement which has just been accomplished does not so much confer benefits on the nation as give it the means of obtaining them. The work is yet to be done. It remains for the next Parliament to plan, to discuss, and to adopt such temperate measures as may gradually remedy our present evils. It remains for the Electors to send to the House of Commons men who may execute this task carefully, impartially, and honestly.

I have been called forth by a Requisition numerously signed by my fellow Townsmen, to assist in this difficult task, and I obey that call, unconnected with any other candidate. Whether I possess the qualities requisite for this purpose or not you have had full opportunities of observing during the twenty years which I have passed among you. The course which I should pursue in Parliament, if honoured by your choice, may be judged of by that, which I have hitherto taken in public affairs, better than by any declaration which I now could make.

But my sentiments about West India Slavery may not be so well known, though I expressed them some time since at a Town Meeting holden for that purpose. I have ever been anxious for measures to improve the condition of the Slave, with a view to the early and complete abolition of Slavery.

I regret that my duties at Ely, as a Member of the Bedford Level Board, must prevent my waiting immediately upon each of the Electors, but I shall take the earliest opportunity of doing so.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient, faithful Servant,

GEORGE PRYME.

Sidney Street, 11th June, 1832.

W. HATFIELD, PRINTER, CAMBRIDGE.

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Figure 5.1 Election broadside on behalf of George Pryme to the Electors of the Town of Cambridge, 11 June 1832, Collection of Election Broadsides, Handbills, and Squibs. Cambridgeshire Archives.

the electors that he was little more than a 'faithful servant' in the 'management' of the estate on St Kitts, which had fifty-eight enslaved workers. The Reverend Maberly (who we met in the first chapter) remained unconvinced, claiming before a cheering local audience that Adeane had 'used the common argument of the West India Planters, and others that were opposed to the emancipation of the slaves, that their minds were not prepared, that they were not sufficiently enlightened for the reception of liberty'. Local candidates had attempted to avoid the issue of abolition (some had advocated that the 'white slavery' of British labourers be eliminated first), but abolitionist opinion alongside the agricultural distresses of the winter of 1829–1830 in a rural constituency had inspired distrust of rich landholders and slaveholders who claimed political independence whilst holding material interests in enslavement.[24]

Craufurd soon interrogated Yorke on the question of enslavement. Alongside prints depicting a slave ship and the horrors of the plantation, the King's man was driven to write his polemic after seeing placards in town that celebrated the Tory grandee's abolitionism. Denouncing the self-proclaimed 'friend to the slaves', he labelled Yorke as one of their '*most effectual* enemies' because he was committed to 'delay[ing] to an *indefinite* period their emancipation'. Furthermore, Yorke – calling himself a 'plain sailor' – had supported gradualism and claimed that the enslaved were 'so far BETTER OFF' than white English labourers. A 'sudden emancipation', Yorke claimed, was 'fraught with danger to the colonies, and misery to the slaves themselves'. Whilst the candidate was committed to emancipation 'on principles fair and equitable to the proprietors of Colonial property, and with safety to the commerce of our country', Craufurd detailed the murders, torture, and abuse that enslaved Africans, treated 'as *brute cattle*' – worse than a 'farmer's dog' – received on the plantations. Forced to grow and market their own produce, Craufurd argued that enslaved workers had shown through their '*incredible industry*' that they were prepared for freedom. It was not the first or last time the Cambridge electors were confronted on slavery or forced labour regimes, as printers published numerous pamphlets addressed to town and gown electors throughout the nineteenth century.[25]

Cambridge abolitionists and ameliorationists had an impact beyond their university. Beilby Porteus, a Christ's fellow and major benefactor and the Bishop of London, illustrates the persistence of ameliorationist thought in the Caribbean. The Atlantic slave economy was a constant feature of Porteus's life. His father Robert was a Virginian enslaver who had inherited a 692-acre plantation on the York River – a property named "New Bottle" that was a gift from Richard Lee I, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses (the colony's legislative assembly) and owner of a 4,000-acre property with ninety African enslaved persons. Robert had had a successful career in Britain's oldest North American slave society. The then-governor Alexander Spotswood appointed him to the ruling

Council of State in 1713, and he only moved back to England because of ill health and to better educate his children. Beilby, the youngest son, was a beneficiary of his father's wealth and sound decision-making, earning his bachelor's degree in 1752 and his doctorate in 1767. Elected a college fellow the same year that he graduated, Porteus's reputation was further enhanced after his poem, *Death: A Poetical Essay*, won the prestigious Seatonian Prize for claiming that human beings were responsible for their sins.[26]

Ordained as a priest in 1757, Porteus then became the chaplain to Thomas Secker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1762, was appointed a chaplain to King George III, and was then nominated the Bishop of Chester fourteen years later in 1776. Porteus was not an immediate convert to the antislavery cause. William Knox, the Archbishop's advisor, claimed that Porteus had argued, in a letter to Benezet that was attributed to Thomas Secker, that the SPG could not condemn slavery because it would make enslavers 'more suspicious and cruel' and ensure that slaveholders were 'more unwilling' for Africans to 'learn Christianity'. Knox, a former plantation owner, wrote: 'Had proper attention been shown to what they recommend [in] respect [to] the treatment of the negroes in the Colonies, much of the present outcry against the slave trade would have been prevented, and it is a little extraordinary that the present Bishop of London [Porteus]' had asserted proposals for reform given that he had maintained the status quo. Slavery was not high on Porteus's list of priorities. In the House of Lords, his legislative contributions included bills against Sunday evening social clubs – indeed, he instructed the clergy to bring about a 'reformation of manners among the common people' – and he feverishly worked with William Wilberforce in 1787 to secure a proclamation from George III condemning vice and immorality in Britain.[27]

Defeat in the American Revolutionary War, not a profound religious awakening, motivated Porteus to reconsider the 'means and ends of empire'. Inspired by James Ramsay's invocation to proselytise to enslaved persons, who were, in his view, held in spiritual darkness without respite from despotic enslavers, Porteus claimed that American independence was divine judgement on Britons for failing to create a Protestant empire. Porteus's February 1783 annual sermon to the SPG was the moment when he pushed his fellow clergymen to consider dramatic action. Drawing upon Ramsay's plan for a spiritual awakening in the Caribbean, he declared: 'If there are any human creatures in the world who concentrate in themselves every species of evil here enumerated, who are at once poor and broken-hearted, and blind, and captive, and bruised, our Negro-slaves are beyond all comparison those creatures'. He condemned their treatment as 'mere machines and instruments to work with, as having neither understandings to be cultivated nor souls to be saved'. Without any 'knowledge of a Creator or Redeemer', Caribbean enslavers had ensured that the enslaved were 'heathens, not only in their hearts, but in their lives; and knowing no distinction between vice and virtue, they give themselves up freely

to the grossest immoralities, without so much as being conscious that they are doing'. His solution: mass conversion and a new code of laws, modelled on France's *code noir*, that facilitated their 'improvement'.[28]

"Improvement" was the operative word for Porteus's project. He had little interest in ending chattel slavery (despite such views being aired by some of his contemporaries) – rather, he hoped to develop a new generation of enslaved Christian Africans who remained 'uncorrupted by those heathenish principles and savage manners with which the constant importation of fresh slaves from Africa has never failed to infect them[.]' Beginning with the SPG's Codrington plantations in Barbados, the Bishop planned a reformation of manners, with a new code of laws making the enslaved populace amenable to the 'blessings of society and civilized government' and therefore to Christian conversion, thereby transforming "rebellious" slaves into dutiful workers without the 'smallest injury to the rights, the property, or the emoluments of the planter[.]'[29]

Porteus was committed to Christianising enslaved Africans. In 1788, he published another call for the instruction of enslaved people, arguing – in language reminiscent of Anthony Ellys's SPG sermon – that 'the best Christians make the best servants'. Ending the slave trade, as he had advocated five years earlier, would ensure that "savage" Africans were not transported to the Caribbean and corrupt "seasoned" enslaved people in the Americas. (Along with Henry Dundas and Lord Hawkesbury, the President of the Board of Trade, he had served on the committee of enquiry established on 11 February 1788 to investigate 'the present State of the Trade to Africa, and particularly the Trade in Slaves'.) Porteus soon put words into actions. Acquiring the Brafferton estate, which the English scientist Sir Robert Boyle's executors had purchased to fund the College of William and Mary's Indian School, Porteus founded the "Society for the Religious Instruction and Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West Indies" in 1794. Under a royal charter, the Society was committed to amelioration and paid stipends to ministers in the Caribbean to inspire them to educate and proselytise to enslaved Africans.[30]

The Society soon published a Bible for the instruction of the enslaved population, with the sections on slave rebellion in the Book of Exodus carefully removed. Cambridge efforts to propagate the Bible amongst the enslaved continued: in Surinam, a 'C. A. Austen, Esq. of Queen's College, Cambridge' assisted the British and Foreign Bible Society (which Wilberforce and the Welsh clergyman Thomas Charles founded in 1804) in publishing an 'edition of the New Testament in the Negro-English'.[31]

From its inception, enslavers were integral to the Society, with ex-officio members including the clergies of London and Westminster, the President of the Board of Trade, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Lord Mayor, three London aldermen, and four representatives of Caribbean planters and merchants. Aside from providing oversight, the merchants and

plantation owners were the largest donors to the Society, with three organisations – the West India Planters and Merchants of London, Liverpool, and Glasgow –providing £1,200 in funds by 1824. University men were on the list too: Richard Burgh Byam, the King's fellow and benefactor, was a prominent enslaver donor; and John Ireland, the Dean of Westminster, who established the Dean Ireland's Professorship of the Exegesis of the Holy Scripture at Oxford, subscribed £20.[32]

One year before his death, Porteus published another pamphlet in 1808 imploring the *Governors, Legislators, and Proprietors of Plantations* to Christianise the enslaved. In that letter, he recapitulated how his 'official connexion' to the Caribbean had led him to bring the 'blessings of Christianity to Heathens inhabiting his Majesty's dominions'. Applauding abolition in 1807, Porteus hoped that it would encourage enslavers to maintain 'the stock of slaves sufficient for the cultivation of your lands' and facilitate 'the natural increase of the Negroes at this time in the islands'. Still, Porteus did not identify the violence on the plantations as a reason why Africans died in such wretched conditions. To him, Christianity was a check on the 'most fatal [of] obstructions': the *'promiscuous and unbounded illicit commerce of the two sexes*, in which the Negro Slaves are permitted to indulge themselves without any check or restraint'. Bound by the 'moral restraints' of marriage, the bishop foresaw a population explosion in the Caribbean, and proposed that schools be established in Britain's colonies there. The funds, he proposed, should be raised from enslavers to fund Christian education because the "proprietors" would undoubtedly 'reap all the benefits of the institution, in the increase of their native Negroes, and will consequently save all the enormous sums formerly expended in the importance of fresh slaves from Africa' – a benefit, he wrote, which they 'cannot, I think, reasonably object'. Porteus, a former Christ's fellow and benefactor, had laid the groundwork for a plantation enterprise that would attempt to control Africans' bodies and souls.[33]

Porteus's passing did not end his dream of a Christian empire. Several Cambridge men hoped to Christianise Africans – and Richard Burgh Byam was one of their number. On 4 December 1820, he wrote to the Bishop of London, William Howley, recounting his experiences in the Caribbean assisting 'with the Improvement of the lower classes of the Inhabitants there'. The most pressing topic – an attitude that he shared with the Cambridge petitioners in the opening anecdote – was the 'Marriage of the Slaves'. He recounted the experiences of two mixed-ethnicity enslaved people who wanted to marry, and he envisioned – along the same lines as Antigua – that a more 'enlightened and liberal understanding… may become familiar among the white Inhabitants than have been ever hitherto admitted in favor of their ignorant and degraded Brethren'. Antigua, he argued, had achieved more in the 'moral Improvement' of its 'working classes' than any Caribbean colony, and he prayed that a spirit of "improvement" would proliferate throughout the region.[34]

The Reverend John Hothersall Pinder, an alumnus of Caius, also published sermons on enslaved African morals. Following university, he was ordained as a deacon in 1818 and a priest the following year. Returning to Barbados, he was appointed the chaplain of Codrington plantation from 1818 to 1827 and then Codrington College's principal from 1829 to 1835. The Cambridge alumnus was at home: following its founding, men from the ancient universities occupied the College's highest positions of authority, such as Mark Nicholson of Queen's College, Oxford, who was recommended for the post of Schoolmaster in 1797 by his Provost and the Dean of Christ Church. Pinder also had family nearby, and he intended on using their estates as a laboratory for his moral mission in the Caribbean. He planned to visit his father's plantation – around two miles from the College – 'to instruct his Slaves' on the 'afternoon allotted [for religious instruction]' and there 'make the young Negroes commit to memory the Creed – The Lord's prayer – & ten commandments – then use a selection of the Common Prayer, with a portion of Scripture – and conclude with a lecture'. To achieve that end of religious conversion, he published in 1822 his paternalistic *Advice to Servants*. Pinder proclaimed: 'It is the duty of the master to establish the worship of God in his family, where thanksgiving, prayer for blessings, and confession of sin may daily be offered up to the Almighty by all the members of the family'. Listing the duties of masters and the enslaved, Pinder mentioned that their obligation was 'to *advise* a servant, when they see any bad or faulty habit creeping on upon them; if advice is neglected, they must reprove; if their reproof is set at nought, they must use other means'. Pinder's reference to "other means" required no elaboration, either to enslavers or enslaved.[35]

Byam, writing from Cambridge in 1825, made another significant contribution to ensuring that the 'Slave System decline[d]', which he claimed could 'at length *gradually* and *safely* become extinct'. Praying for moderation in the slavery debate, the fellow ensured that his readers understood that he was a clergyman, '*Owner of West India Property*', and member of Barbados's governing council. Crusading for the 'Improvement of the Condition of the Negroe Population', he proposed that free labour was both more practicable and profitable than enslaved labour. For four years, he conducted religious experiments on his plantation which gave him the 'amplest opportunities… of studying the Negroe character, and of fitting it for the reception of freedom, if ever the power of setting such an example should be within his reach'. Unlike many of his fellow planters, he felt that there were 'no evil consequences' from emancipation, and that his plantation, which had a parish church nearby, could set an example to his more recalcitrant landed neighbours. There was a significant legal roadblock to his moral revolution: enslaved Africans formed 'a part of the *Security* to Merchants in England, for money advanced under the repeated depressions of Colonial interest'. To achieve abolition, he proposed establishing a sinking fund to free 250 enslaved people with each of the shares costing £100 pound (in total, around £25,000 to fill the share allotment) – with the

securities held in Goslings and Sharpe Bank. The banking scheme's records did not survive, but Byam's renewed call for 'greater Moderation' in the abolition debate resonated beyond Cambridge.[36]

Henry Nelson Coleridge, the nephew of William Hart Coleridge, the Bishop of Barbados, propagated these ameliorative opinions to the British public. Following an exemplary education at Eton and Cambridge, where he received two Browne Medals for Latin and Greek poetry, the younger Coleridge was awarded a fellowship at King's from 1821 to 1829. In 1825, the distinguished scholar departed the familiar surroundings of college life for a six-month Caribbean tour alongside his uncle, who was a fervent advocate for Black education and the reorganisation of Codrington College. The voyage, which he published anonymously as *Six Months in the West Indies*, would be more educational than another tour of France, Italy, Switzerland, or a 'Polar expedition', he argued, because it allowed him to consider, from a supposedly "impartial" perspective, whether 'men set down as fanatics or tyrants' were worthy of those epithets given their financial, political, and social status as imperial subjects. From the first word to the last, Coleridge wanted the public to view him as a moderate mediating between the polemics of the African Institution and the 'Planters'. The Cambridge man's claim of impartiality was spurious at best (he later argued, concerning Trinidad, that 'If ever I turn planter, as I have often had thoughts of doing, I shall buy a cacao plantation'). Moreover, in a later edition, he argued that the 'Abolitionists' had precipitated an 'awful crisis' that had 'hacked' at Britain's colonial power – a species of 'domestic treason' that was unprecedented in the annals of the British Empire.[37]

Depicting the Caribbean as a Little England, Coleridge's sympathetic narrative, which he later publicised as from a 'Late Fellow of King's Coll., Cambridge' (though he undertook the voyage whilst a fellow), presented the plantation regime shorn of its violence or the realities of living in Black majority societies. The narrative was, in essence, a literary counterpart to James Hakewill's 1825 painting *Harbour Street, Kingston* showing Jamaica's wide boulevards, maintained buildings, gleaming redcoat soldiers, and disciplined inhabitants carrying goods to market – a genteel English town on America's shores. In truth, European visitors were struck by the vibrancy of colonial marketplaces – spaces that were, to an extent that concerned white colonists, dominated by the enslaved and free people of colour. Women carried goods to market, spending most of their Sundays, which was the only day they had free from the backbreaking work on the plantations, selling the produce whilst their husband and children tended the plots and harvested enough produce for the family's consumption. By land or coasting vessels, the enslaved sold provisions and 'a few course manufactures, such as mats for beds, bark ropes of a strong and durable texture, wicker chairs and baskets, earthen jars, etc. for all which they [found] ready sale'.[38]

As his ship came into port and docked in Barbados, Coleridge certainly feared the 'mass of black faces' and their 'violent feelings', and, in turn, he

complimented the "planters" on their lineages, patriotism, educations, gallantry, 'feudal' hospitality, technological innovations, and refinement – with Bridgetown alone boasting two literary societies and an agricultural society dedicated to sugar, that 'noble plant'. Far from a 'carceral landscape', punctuated with the sounds of whips and bells (and with the severed heads and rotting corpses of executed Black enslaved people often left in the sun as a warning to the enslaved), he described the Caribbean as a 'sublime', 'lovely', 'verdant', 'beautiful', and 'delightful' environment where planters' houses, windmills, and churches punctuated a landscape of picturesque valleys and tilled fields. Clearly, in tone and argument, the King's fellow followed other British travellers to the Caribbean, including Nevil Maskelyne, who had become more supportive of the planters following their visits, with many comparing the lives of its Black inhabitants favourably to white labourers. To Coleridge, the Caribbean slave societies were rustic 'country villages in England'.[39]

Cunning and obsequious, the enslaved and free Africans who populated these societies were, to Coleridge, figures of distrust or disgust. The nakedness of enslaved women particularly shocked the Cambridge fellow, and he commented on how the immodest exposure of their bosoms was the 'most disgusting thing in the manners of the West Indian slaves'. Coleridge argued that it was the enslavers' responsibility to 'correct' the attitudes and morals of the enslaved – without whites, he countered, Africans would resort to debauchery and violence. Frustratingly for Coleridge, the enslaved did not embrace white generosity – as with the Trinidad governor providing money to children (who he called 'naked niggerling[s]' and compared to a 'sucking pig') – with 'pleasure' or 'gratitude'. Amongst their racial "betters," he complained, the enslaved did not know when to remain silent – 'every passion', he argued, 'acts upon them with strange intensity; their anger is sudden and furious, their mirth clamorous and excessive, their curiosity audacious, and their love the sheer demand for gratification of an ardent animal desire'. The enslaved were, to him, the very opposite of refined British subjects, yet Coleridge enjoyed his newfound power – indeed, he found 'nothing more delightful' than to be greeted by 'negro girls' with 'How d'ye, massa?' He advocated for the improvement of enslaved conditions, but he acknowledged that the Black inhabitants performatively embraced European policies and then they 'relapse[d] with certainty the moment the external compulsion ceases'. Interestingly, enslaved clothing – not just the lack thereof – was a particular focus of his writings. He advocated for Africans to purchase and wear fashionable clothing, such as hats, because 'new comforts' through conspicuous consumption would stir within people a fear of losing such possessions, which would provide a 'stimulus to industry' and a 'spur to improvement'. Black opinions did not figure in Coleridge's arguments concerning the means and ends of their improvement.[40]

Storming the 'Castle of [Black] Indolence', the Cambridge man recognised that the planters were integral to his civilising project. Coleridge fervently

believed that slavery's ills were owed to the 'different education' and 'different tempers' of the master class (in fact, he considered it unlikely that a youth educated at 'Oxford or Cambridge' could become 'monsters' once they landed in Carlisle Bay in Barbados or St John's Harbour in Antigua). Defending slaveholders, he observed that Black butlers or ladies' maids were 'scarcely beneath' the same class of white English workers – they received no wages and were condemned to a lifetime of bondage, he carefully admitted, but under 'their masters' protection' they enjoyed all the necessities of life (he even noted that some had even refused freedom when offered). The crimes of slavery, in his opinion, either occurred because white smallholders did not have the means to support their workers, the enslavers had become excessively "familiar" with their slaves, or because the Caribbean constitutions governed these colonies 'on the model of England' when they were, in fact, more akin to Athens or Sparta – city-states where there was a similar 'equality amongst the free' and a 'restlessness of spirit'. To Coleridge, anti-African violence was the result of such modern white Athenians and Spartans being exasperated about British 'interference' and 'tyranny'. Establishing the religious and constitutional legality of enslavement (the latter of which, in 'every age of its existence' had authorised slavery), Coleridge asked his readers to resist the 'spirit of the times' and admit an inconvenient truth: African slavery was not an 'exception to the general freedom of mankind' – it was rather like that practiced in Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Russia. Coleridge, of course, conveniently ignored the fact that those states and empires had not predicated their slave systems on racial difference.[41]

Amelioration, not immediate emancipation, was his ambition for the 665,000 enslaved Africans who lived in the British Caribbean in 1834. Aside from clothing, Coleridge advocated for a raft of measures, including the modernisation of prisons. On Saint Vincent, he criticised the existing legislature for spending an enormous sum on churches but did not think to raise funds for a 'tread-wheel'. Prison treadmills were introduced into English prisons in 1779 to transform obstinate prisoners into industrious labourers – and Coleridge, amongst other plantation reformers, advocated for that device's usage in Jamaica, arguing that a 'chained slave' did not perform the work of one hour of a British labourer but there was the potential for further efficiencies 'on the steps of the Brixton staircase'. He feared that there were threats to his plans from within, however – and the potential scourge, in his mind, of Methodism inspiring slave 'insurrections' was another obstacle to reform. To mend that potential schism, Coleridge advocated the expansion of Church of England membership and attendance in the colonies because 'negros are a very curious and observant race, and after they have learnt that there is a God' they had discovered 'that their master does not worship in the same manner'.[42]

Towards the end of the narrative, in a chapter entitled 'Planters and Slaves', Coleridge addressed the African Institution with his ameliorative proposals, noting that enslavement should 'hardly at present' be abolished. Concluding

that both abolitionists and ameliorationists wanted to raise the enslaved to 'an equality' with the 'rest of the citizens of the empire', he differed over the means to achieve that vision. His '*moral* cause' was founded on several objectives: education, particularly the provision of Bibles and prayer books; the enacting of colonial codes for the 'protection' of slaves (including the abolition of Sunday markets and freeing women from corporal punishment); and allowing freedom to be purchased at 'market price' on the Spanish plan. In avoiding the 'sudden revolution[s]' seen in Haiti, Coleridge's understanding of emancipation was predicated on the notion that the enslaved must prove themselves 'fit to be free'.[43]

Henry had travelled to the Caribbean to treat his rheumatism (and to distract from an engagement to his first cousin); still, the travel account overshadowed the trip's humble origins and became an almost-instant sensation. Favorable reviews were featured in the newspapers, excerpts were published in print, the work was sold as far afield as the colony of New South Wales, and the essayist and antiquarian Charles Lamb, in a March 1826 letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, applauded his 'excellent sense' on the question of slavery. The pamphlet and its author had their detractors, however. One Birmingham writer condemned Coleridge for ignoring the 'horrible licentiousness' of the plantations – indeed, in condemning the young traveller for his *School-boy Conceptions of Rights and Wrongs*, the polemicist argued that if he had reported 'but one tenth part' of this 'filthy subject' then 'his readers would have been tolerably convinced, that to talk of making good moral characters of the Negroes, while you keep them in bondage under the present system, is just as wise, as to talk of making a dandy of a chimney-sweeper, while you insist that his soot-bag shall never be taken off his back for an instant'. Coleridge's family were also unimpressed with their youthful relative, and their opinions illuminate the tensions within families concerning enslavement and abolition. Henry's cousin, the poet Hartley Coleridge, pointedly argued that there was a 'flippancy' and 'vulgarity' about the work since it did not communicate 'sufficiently the moral enormity of the slave system'.[44]

Cambridge proslavery activists were similarly passionate about their chosen cause. Their number included Peter Borthwick of Jesus and Downing colleges, John Pollard Mayers of St John's, the Reverend Richard Bickell of Sidney Sussex, and the Reverend Stephen Isaacson and Ralph Bernal of Christ's. Denouncing the abolitionists as zealots intent on crippling the empire, Bernal advocated for amelioration, not abolition, to be British imperial policy. He claimed before the House of Commons in May 1823 that the 'general body of Planters' were in favour of 'any real amelioration of the condition of the negroes; but at the same [it] must be traced out slowly and cautiously, and, in order to produce certain and beneficial effects, must be undertaken with a due regard to the capability of the negroes for receiving those advantages which it might be proposed to

confer on them'. Amelioration, for proslavery activists, was again replete with racial stereotypes – that the enslaved were unready for freedom or for unsupervised labour. If reform was achieved in haste, Bernal worried, the British colonies would suffer the same fate as '*St. Domingo*'.[45]

Following the example of Coleridge and other contemporaneous British polemicists, Bernal and Stephen Isaacson maintained that instances of violence on the plantations were rare. After arriving in the Caribbean, Isaacson argued in August 1832 that he had seen 'the crowded churches of the West Indies – the happy, intelligent countenances of the slaves, as they crowd to the courts of the Lord's house, eager to catch the glad tidings of salvation, and drink of the fountains of living waters'. Coleridge and Isaacson had a common vision of the plantation. Comparing the 'peasantry' in England to the enslaved, Isaacson noted that Black people were in a 'prosperous state' and that Britain had been the 'last' to enter the slave trade and the 'first' to abolish it – and that cause, he claimed, was driven by reformist enslavers, who had civilized their Black workers.[46]

Unlike his fellow alumni, the Reverend Richard Bickell advertised his membership at Cambridge in his pamphleteering. His 1825 book *The West Indies as They Are; Or A Real Picture of Slavery* listed his illustrious titles: 'A Member of the University of Cambridge, Late Naval Chaplain to Port-Royal [Jamaica], Sometime Curate of that Parish, and Previously of the City of Kingston, in the Aforesaid Island'. The frontispiece highlighted his reputation as a five-year resident of Jamaica and learned gentleman, who was admitted a pensioner at Sidney Sussex on 13 October 1817. Two years later, there is a record of a "Rev. Bickell" having married Elizabeth, daughter of John Anderson, who owned Clifford's Plantation in Jamaica; and Bickell came into the ownership of two smaller properties on that island, including "Whitecroft" with around twenty-three enslaved African labourers.[47]

Bickell had established his credentials, and he used that position to advocate for amelioration. 'Let every Saturday be given to the Negroes for working their grounds and carrying their surplus provisions to market', he wrote, '[…] Let the Sabbath be kept holy: Let none but magistrates have the power of flogging: Let them encourage marriage among their overseers, and lessen the power of overgrown and rapacious attornies'. On Christianising Afro-Jamaicans, Bickell had some experience (the Jamaican parish registers record him as having baptised 'a free quadroon', a 'free mulatto', and the daughter of two persons of colour). To Bickell, amelioration was in the planters' self-interest, ensuring that the plantation would 'return a handsome income to the proprietors of estates and merchants; and would be a happy and favoured home to the then improved and grateful Negro; who, in a few years, instead of being the untutored and grovelling savage he now is, and the revengeful one he is inclined to be… would become a contented and virtuous servant'. If the enslavers wanted to maximise profits, then Bickell pressured them to envision amelioration as the continuation of enslavement by more profitable means.[48]

On occasion, Cambridge fellows were caught in the proslavery crossfire. In a June 1828 newspaper, "A West Indian Proprietor" lambasted John Lamb, the Master of Corpus Christi and associate of the abolitionist Professor Scholefield, for organising, along with the Mayor of Cambridge, another antislavery Parliamentary petition. 'Had you, Reverend Sir', the "Proprietor" declared, 'given your sentiments with a due consideration to truth – and had you not… [thrown] utter abuse and slander against a respectable portion of British subjects, in violation, of that holy religion, the badge of whose sacred order you have been invested with, this letter would never have been addressed to you'. Turning Lamb's words against him, the "Proprietor" quoted the Master's statement that emancipation was 'calculated as much for the benefit of the Master as the slave… these West Indian proprietors – these slave drivers are unchristianized, brutal, and cruel, and so long as they have slaves to command, as long will they remain so'. Rejecting these accusations, the slaver maintained that his compatriots had 'received liberal educations in Great Britain' from schools and universities with 'two thirds' of proprietors having 'never visited the West Indies' – perhaps warning Lamb not to bite the hand that had fed Cambridge. In the future, as a 'Master of a College', the polemicist hoped that he would preach 'a spirit of peace and good-will' rather than an 'unfounded calumny' against his fellow British subjects.[49]

Britain's continued sweet tooth might have been one reason for the author's indignation against John Lamb. Sugar from both the Caribbean and Morocco remained a valuable British import – the most valuable until 1820. In Cambridge's case, Corpus Christi mentioned 'Barbary sugar' from North Africa in leasing arrangements relating to the College's tenement on Bene't Street (now the site of the world-famous Eagle pub). From 1609 to 1838, the leases included a cash payment and one pound of 'good Barbary sugar merchantable at audit time' – a testament to the value of a good that was celebrated in a Thomas Gresham play. Though North African enslavement had little of the systematised and financially sophisticated plantation, mercantile, and insurance economies visible in North and South America, Moroccan sugar was predicated upon enslavement. The Moroccan sugar economy greatly expanded during the reign of Sultan al-Mansur, who along with his brother defeated a Portuguese army at the Battle of Ksar-el-Kebir and thereafter reigned from 1578 to 1603. Following his victory, writers reported that the Sultan constructed 'sugar refineries like pyramids' in the south and, with the gold and enslaved Africans which he had acquired from his military campaigns in the Sudan, enlarged Morocco's sugar industry (with much of that produce making its way to England because of an alliance between both nations). European dominance in the sugar market (thanks to the Caribbean trade) dampened al-Mansur's ambitions, but the linkage between sugar cane cultivation and enslavement on Moroccan plantations continued until abolition. Thanks to these tenement arrangements, the fortunes of the largest slaveholding society in the Maghreb and the lives of Cambridge's humble urban tenants were intertwined.[50]

Cambridge men were involved in other forms of proslavery literature besides pamphlets and published speeches, however. Cambridge-educated enslavers wrote poetry to propagate the image of benevolent slaveholders. The Scottish doctor James Grainger, enjoying the patronage of a Trinity undergraduate, published his famous *Sugar Cane* in 1764; still, M. J. Chapman's 1833 poem *Barbados* was a significant, yet often unrecognised, contributor to proslavery literature too. The preface illustrated the anti-Black intentions of the poem, with Chapman intending to 'stop the current of frantic innovation, that threatens with almost instant ruin both colonies and empire'. Chapman, a Trinity alumnus, contrasted the happiness of enslaved Africans with the death and destruction reaped through a servile revolt. Referencing Haiti, Chapman painted an apocalyptic image for his readers: a 'sea Of blood and battle wade to liberty! Hence comes the plot, the agony of strife, The toil of treason, and the waste of life; The sound of battle, rushing through the trees; The hurried tramp of frantic savages! The slave, infuriate, pants for Freedom's smiles, And Hayti's fate attends our Eden-isles'.[51]

Black sexual violence against white women figured prominently in his account, and, to control those passions, Chapman outlined how enslavers had civilised African-descended peoples, arguing that 'Polygamy has now nearly ceased among the slaves; and the authority of the marriage-sanction is generally recognised by them', further propagating the racist myth of the promiscuous, polygamous slave. The charge of polygamy, Sarah Pearsall notes, was 'shorthand for societies lacking law and religion' – an indication that Black people were 'unfit for freedom and full citizenship'. Similarly, Chapman used the fear of enslaved revolts, African sexual deviancy, and the image of the civilising plantation to counter the abolitionist drive for gradual or immediate emancipation.[52]

Cambridge alumni lobbied government to preserve slavery. By 1830, the enslavers and their representatives in Parliament had ensured that no government measure had been passed to end enslavement. A large part of their success was due to one man: John Pollard Mayers, Barbados's agent in London. Having matriculated at St John's in 1794, he went on to the Middle Temple and was called to the Bar in 1799. Using his skills of negotiation and conciliation, Mayers – like Fuller and the multitude of Cambridge men who supported the West India Lobby before him – accumulated oral testimonies and statistics from Barbadian enslavers to establish the humanitarian nature of plantation management, and ensured that compensation was both realized and that enslaved had control over the process. Yet, in his efforts, he was undermined by enslavers, who did not want the government prying into their affairs and were reluctant to provide such information to Mayers. Facing down the proprietors' intransigence, he negotiated with the government to provide enslavers with a golden parachute. He urged them to accept wage payments for Black apprentices and, when emancipation appeared a near-certainty, he assisted Caribbean

slavers in attaining as much monetary compensation as was conceivable from the government. In February 1833, he contacted Viscount Goderich at the Colonial Office and convinced him that, since land was held individually in Barbados, the slaveholders would have to be paid a much larger indemnity than previously thought. Though Mayers was not instrumental in providing around 20 million pounds in compensation to Caribbean enslavers, he emphasised Britain's complicity in slavery to shame Parliament into providing slaveholders with reparations that allowed them to survive emancipation with their fortunes largely intact.[53]

The end of enslavement in the Caribbean was greeted with contrasting opinions in Cambridge. Joseph Romilly, a Trinity fellow, both voiced these sentiments and witnessed them firsthand. In April 1834, Romilly wrote a very revealing passage in his diary that indicated his position on the question of slavery. 'Finished Monk Lewis's account of his slaves in Jamaica', he quipped, 'the book is charming: shows its author in a very amiable point of view: his banishing the whip, giving the Slaves *every* Saturday, making a grand quarterly feast for them, distributing prizes to the deserving, is all excellent – Would that many Planters had been like him[.]' The volume in question was Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, which was written between 1816 and the latter's death at sea in 1818 and eventually published in 1834. Well-connected in literary circles, "Monk" Lewis, as he was then known, had been educated at Christ Church, Oxford, and had been in feverish correspondence with Wilberforce about whether to free the 500 enslaved persons that Lewis had inherited on his father's Jamaican plantations.[54]

Though Romilly saw enslavers as redeemable proprietors, a Cambridge election that he observed in June 1841 revealed that the politics of slavery remained paramount. Sir Alexander Cray Grant, an alumnus of St John's who received almost £14,000 in compensation for his plantations, ran for a parliamentary seat in Cambridge. Observing the race, Romilly reported that there was 'A great deal of excitement on Parkers Piece from a Banner being carried about representing a Planter flogging a black; the Planter was a strong likeness of Sir A. Grant'. Whether a member of the town or gown waved this banner, slavery remained at the forefront of Cambridge life, and many students, alumni, and fellows were committed activists in this debate. Grant was ultimately successful in his efforts to unseat a local Whig MP, with a local paper denouncing the former slaveholder, in a rather revealing passage, as 'a most respectable representative of the Tories, lay and clerical, gown and town, voters and non-voters, bullies, burghers, and bigots'. The papers soon turned against each other, with the *Cambridge Independent Press* denouncing the *Cambridge Chronicle* for its defence of a former enslaver who held property in 'human flesh'.[55]

The successful election of Grant was more feared because the Caribbean sugar duties were being debated in Parliament, and it was likely that Sir Alexander would attempt to enforce the planters' 'monopoly' through the

imposition of an 'extravagantly dear price' on 'foreign sugar'. The issue of monopolies had become a bitterly debated issue in Britain and Cambridge, with Thomas Perronet Thompson, publishing as a "Member of the University of Cambridge" more than a decade earlier, likening the Corn Laws (a set of tariffs which maintained high prices for barley, wheat, and oats to the benefit of rich landowners) to enslavement. The Queens' man argued that there 'is a unity of principle; both systems being founded on the oppression of the weak for the advantage of the strong'. The Sugar Duties Act of 1846 were passed at the same time as the repeal of the Corn Laws, ensuring that there would be no preferential treatment for British colonists (and thereby flooding the British market with cheaper Cuban and Brazilian slave-grown sugar). Slavery had ended, but the politics and power of slaveholders remained a fraught question in both rural and urban Britain.[56]

For much of the university's history, Cambridge has been associated with the struggle for abolition and anti-racism – and for good reason. Numerous luminaries of that humanitarian struggle were educated within its wood-panelled rooms and, in many cases, developed their antislavery beliefs in conversation with professors and fellows. Rather than an outlier, however, Cambridge remains an instructive case study about the varieties of political experience and opinion concerning enslavement and the slave trade. Amongst gradual abolitionists and ameliorationists, the age of abolition was an era of experimentation when fellows debated how best to end the slave system without a revolt or revolution on the Haitian model. In the process, these men, whether students or college fellows, targeted the perceived symptoms of enslavement – the violence, lack of clothing, educations, and religion, for instance – rather than the racial foundations of a plantation system that its proponents had every intention of continuing and protecting after abolition.