

countrypeople in the neighbourhood of Montego Bay, where there is some reason to suspect he is now gone.

Two Pistoles Reward will be given on lodging the above Negro in any of the gaols of this island, or on delivering him at the above estate, or to the subscriber in Kingston.

J. SYMES¹¹

19 August 1780

'Maroon' communities – of slaves who managed to escape from their tormentors completely and, wherever the habitat allowed, formed independent communities of their own – plagued slave holders everywhere. This description of 1729, from a letter from Lieutenant Governor Sir William Gooch to the Board of Trade, Williamsburg, outlines a maroon community in Virginia.

MY LORDS:

... Sometime after my Last a number of Negroes, about fifteen, belonging to a new Plantation on the head of James River formed a Design to withdraw from their Master and to fix themselves in the fastnesses of the neighbouring Mountains. They had found means to get into their possession some Arms & Ammunition, and they took along with them some Provisions, their Cloaths, bedding and working Tools; but the Gentleman to whom they belonged with a Party of Men made such diligent pursuit after them, that he soon found them out in their new Settlement, a very obscure place among the Mountains, where they had already begun to clear the ground, and obliged them after exchanging a shot or two by which one of the Slaves was wounded, to surrender and return back, and so prevented for this time a design which might have proved as dangerous to this Country, as is that of the Negroes in the Mountains of Jamaica to the Inhabitants of that Island. Tho' this attempt has happily been defeated, it ought nevertheless to awaken us into some effectual measures for preventing the like hereafter, it being certain that a very small number of Negroes once settled

in those Parts, would very soon be increas'd by the Accession of other Runaways and prove dangerous Neighbours to our frontier Inhabitants. To prevent this and many other Mischiefs I am training and exercising the Militia in the several counties as the best means to deter our Slaves from endeavouring to make their Escape, and to suppress them if they should.¹²

For slaves who rebelled and failed, torture and death in its most excruciating forms were the standard fate. These two accounts, from Surinam in 1790 and Jamaica in 1832, tell of the gruesome death of executed rebels.

The Negro Joosje shall be hanged from the gibbet by an Iron Hook through his ribs, until dead; his head shall then be severed and displayed on a stake by the riverbank, remaining to be picked over by birds of prey. As for the Negroes Wierai and Manbote, they shall be bound to a stake and roasted alive over a slow fire, while being tortured with glowing Tongs. The Negro girls, Lucretia, Ambia, Aga, Gomba, Marie and Victoria will be tied to a Cross, to be broken alive, and their heads severed, to be exposed by the riverbank on stakes.¹³

At first shooting was the favourite mode of execution and many were thus disposed of. But when the novelty of this had ceased the gallows was put in requisition . . . The gibbet erected in the public square in the centre of the town was seldom without occupants, during the day, for many weeks. Generally four, seldom less than three, were hung at once. The bodies remained stiffening in the breeze . . . Other victims would then be brought out and suspended in their place, and cut down in their turn to make room for more; the whole heap of bodies remaining just as they fell until the workhouse Negroes came and took them away, to cast them into a pit dug for the purpose, a little distance out of the town.¹⁴

Every slave society was plagued by slave runaways. They ran away for a host of reasons. The following examples of advertisements for their return, from Virginia, South Carolina and Jamaica, provide revealing insights into the nature of local slavery – and capture personal details of the people involved.

Chesterfield, December 15, 1772

RUN away from the Subscriber on Sunday the 22nd of November, a new Negro fellow of small Stature, and pitted with the Smallpox; he calls himself BONNA, and says he came from a place of that Name in the Ibo country, in Africa, where he served in the Capacity of a Canoe Man.

RICHARD BOOKER¹

RUN away from the Subscriber about the 1st of September, in the upper End of King William [County], two new Negro Men, of the Ibo country, named CHARLES and FRANK, who have been in the Province about twelve Months, and it is supposed cannot tell their Master's Name. Charles is a large Fellow, with his Country Marks in his Face, and has lost or broke off one or two of his fore Teeth, which he says was done by a Cow in his Country. Frank is a smaller Fellow, well set, and has sharp Teeth. They carried with them a Dutch Blanket, had each a coarse hat, and other usual Summer clothes.

JOSEPH HILLYARD¹

TAKEN up, about one Mile from my Plantation, in St Matthew's Parish, Berkley County, two NEGRO-FELLOWS of the Guiney Country, who call themselves POMPEY and SAMBO; they are about five Feet ten Inches high, speak but very little English. They say that their Master's Name is JAMES BUTLER, and lives by the side of a River, and that their old Master lives on the other Side. By what I can learn by a Guiney fellow of mine, they have been run away ever since the Spring before last. They are entirely naked, and their Feet and Legs are swelled very

much by lying in the Cold, on which Account I thought it would not be prudent to send them to the Work-House. If the Owner of the above Fellows, should find any Difficulty in conveying a Letter to me, they may write to Mr JAMES COURSTONE, jeweller, in CHARLES-TOWN.

WILLIAM HEATLY⁵

RUN away some time in September last, from James Armstrong of Fauquier County, a Negro man named AYRE, belonging to the estate of the late Mr Allen Macrae, deceased, about 35 years of age, 5 feet 7 inches high, rather slim made, and of a yellowish complexion, has a remarkable twist with his mouth when he speaks, and although an African, affects to pronounce the English language very fine, or rather to clip it. As he can both read and write, it is more than presumable he may have forged a pass and by that means may have travelled where he pleased as a free man. His common wearing apparel was of striped country cloth, and had on half worn hat, and country made shoes, all of which he may doubtless have had the address to alter or change, long e'er now. Whoever apprehends and so secures the said runaway Negro, so as to be had again, shall receive ten dollars if taken within 20 miles of his home, and if at a greater distance, or out of the State of Virginia 20 dollars, if delivered to the aforesaid James Armstrong, his overseer, or brought to the Neabsco Furnace, all reasonable charges will be thankfully paid, by

THOMAS LAWSON⁶

RUN AWAY from the Subscriber on the 31st ult., an African Negro named JASPER, by trade a carpenter, speaks very plain English as he came young into the country. He is about 50 years of age, and I think about 5 feet 5 or 6 inches in height, short limb'd and well made for strength; he can read tolerably well, and is both sensible and very artful; he has a surly countenance, especially if offended, and is of a morose temper, fond

first at Teneriffe, where hee received friendly intertainment. From thence he passed to Sierra Leona, upon the coast of Guinea, which place by the people of the countrey is called Tagarin, where he stayed some good time, and got into his possession, partly by the sworde, and partly by other meanes, to the number of 300 Negros at the least, besides other merchandises which that countrey yeeldeth. With this praye hee sayled over the Ocean sea unto the Iland of Hispaniola, and arrived first at the port of Isabella: and there hee had reasonable utterance of his English commodities, as also of some part of his Negros, trusting the Spaniards no further, then that by his owne strength he was able still to master them. From the port of Isabella he went to Puerto de Plata, where he made like sales, standing alwaies upon his guard: from thence also hee sayled to Monte Christi another port on the North side of Hispaniola, and the last place of his touching, where he had peaceable traffique, and made vent of the whole number of his Negros: for which he received in those 3 places by way of exchange such quantitie of merchandise, that hee did not onely lade his owne 3. shippes with hides, ginger, sugars, and some quantitie of pearles, but he freighted also two other hulkes with hides and other like commodities, which hee sent into Spaine. And thus leaving the Iland, he returned and disemboqued, passing out by the Ilands of the Caycos, without further entring into the bay of Mexico, in this his first voyage to the West India. And so with prosperous successe and much gaine to himselfe and the aforesayde adventurers, he came home, and arrived in the moneth of September 1563.

Richard Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589, 1598 etc), 7 vols, London, Dent Everyman edition, 1926, VII, 5.

JOHN HAWKINS (1532-95) was a Plymouth man. After his second slaving voyage (1565) he was granted the device of 'a demi-Moor, proper, in chains' for his crest. Following the fiasco of San Juan de Uloa he engaged in double-dealing with the Spaniards with the connivance of Walsingham, obtaining the release of prisoners and £40,000 from Philip II. Appointed Treasurer of the Navy in succession to his father-in-law, Benjamin Gonson (1573), he was knighted for his part in the Armada campaign (1588). He died on the same West Indian expedition as Francis Drake.

9 James Penny describes the Middle Passage to Parliament, 1789

By the Evidence of JAMES PENNY, Esquire, it appears—That in the Eleven Voyages in which he commanded Vessels carrying Slaves from the Coast of Africa to the West Indies, and America, their Size was from nearly 200 to 300 Tons—That the Number of Slaves he usually took on Board was from 500 to 600—That this Proportion of Tonnage was not too small for the Number of Slaves he so took on Board—That the Slave Ships at Liverpool are built on Purpose for this Trade, and are accommodated with Air Ports and Gratings for the Purpose of keeping the Slaves cool—Great Improvements have been made at Liverpool, within these Twenty Years, in the Construction of these Ships—The Space between the Decks is sufficiently large to contain the Number of Negroes above-mentioned, and is plained very smooth and painted:—They are also provided with Wind Sails, and most of them have Ventilators—That in the number of Slaves he carried in his several Voyages, the Proportion was about Two Thirds Males, and One Third Females—That in Three Voyages he carried his Slaves to Jamaica—in One to Georgia—One to South Carolina—Two to Saint Kitt's—Two to Saint Vincent's—One to Grenada, and One to St. Lucia.—As to the Number of Slaves and Sailors he lost in each of these Voyages, he can speak only with Certainty to Four Voyages, from Papers in his Possession—That the Negroes of some Parts of Africa are subject to more Mortality than others, during the Voyage, from the Difference in their Strength and Constitution—Those Negroes from the Gold Coast and Whydah, who feed on Indian Corn, have in general little or no Mortality—Those from the Windward Coast, whose Food is Rice, are next in Degree most healthy—Those from the Bight of Guinea, who feed on Yams, are subject to the greatest Mortality—That upon an Average he estimated (from his own Experience, and from the best Information he has collected from others, conversant in the Trade) that the Mortality is about one Twelfth Part.—He delivered in the following Paper.

Voyages to Bonny, in the Ships Wilbraham and Nicholson.

			Died		Died Drowned	
1775/6	— Purchased	531 Negroes	27	— 40	Seamen	6 1
1776/7	— Do	539	— 24	— 38	Do	4 —
1777/8	— Do	560	— 31	— 48	Do	3 —

Voyages to Angola, in the Ships Carolina and Madam Pookata.

			Died		Died Drowned	
1781/2	— Purchased	571 Negroes	26	— 45	Seamen	0 1
1785	— Do	209	— 1	— 20	Do	3 —
1786	— Do	166	— 1	— 20	Do	2 —
		2576	— 110	— 211		18 2

First Voyage sold at Jamaica

2d	—	Grenada
3d	—	Jamaica
4th	—	St. Lucia
5th	—	Dominica
6th	—	Do

N.B. The Two last Voyages were performed on his Account, subsequent to his quitting the Trade as a Commander.

... That the Slaves in general do not shew any great Concern on their first coming on Board—They frequently express Fears, from an Apprehension of being eaten; which it is the Business of the Traders to remove—That with respect to the general Manner of treating them on Board, they are comfortably lodged in Rooms fitted up for them, which are washed and fumigated with Vinegar or Lime Juice every Day, and afterwards dried with Fires, in which are thrown occasionally Frankincense and Tobacco—They lie on the bare Boards, but the greatest Princes in their own Country lie on their Mats, with a Log of Wood for their Pillow—The Men Slaves are fettered when they first come on Board, from prudential Motives—but during the Passage, if they appear reconciled to their Condition, their Fetters are gradually taken off—The Women, Youths, and Children are always at Liberty, and are kept in separate Apartments—The Whole of the Slaves are brought upon Deck every Day, when the Weather permits, about Eight of the Clock—If the Weather is sultry, and there appears the least Perspiration upon their Skins, when they come upon Deck, there are Two Men attending with Cloths to rub them perfectly dry, and another to give them a little Cordial—The Surgeon, or his Mate, also generally attends to wash their Mouths with Vinegar or Lime Juice, in order to prevent Scurvy. After they are upon Deck, Water is handed to them to wash their Hands and Faces—They are then formed into Messes, consisting of Ten to each Mess, and a warm Mess is provided for them, alternately of their own Country Food, and of the Pulse carried from Europe for that Purpose, to which Stock Fish, Palm Oil, Pepper, &c. are added; after that, Water is handed them to drink, and the upper Decks are swept clean, where

they have been fed—They are then supplied with Pipes and Tobacco; both Sexes sometimes will smook—They are amused with instruments of Music peculiar to their own Country, with which he provided them; and when tired of Music and Dancing, they then go to Games of Chance—The Women are supplied with Beads, which they make into Ornaments; and the utmost Attention is paid to the keeping up their Spirits, and to indulge them in all their little Humours—Particular Attention is paid to them, when sick, and the most airy Part of the Ship is appropriated for the Hospital—That the Surgeon is provided with Medicines and with Wine, and Spices also, for Cordials, when the Sick require it; and he is encouraged to take Care of the Sick, by an Allowance of One Shilling per Head, in Addition to his Wages, and Privilege for every Slave that is brought to Market, which Privilege consists in the Average Value of Two Slaves, in Proportion to the Value of the whole Cargo—That the Reputation of the Captain, the Officers, and Surgeons, and their future Employment, in consequence, depend on the Care they take of the Slaves—That the Captain's Profit depends upon a per Centage on the Value of the Cargo at the Place where the same is sold—That in Time of War he has sometimes disciplined Part of the Negroes as Marines, and has had such Confidence in them, that he has frequently been upon the Quarter Deck in the Middle of them, when they have been armed, and have been entrusted with Powder and Balls—That after good Treatment he has frequently seen them perfectly reconciled to their Condition, and in Appearance as happy as any of his Crew—Is of Opinion, That the Treatment of the Negroes, on Board Ships in general employed in this Trade, is equally proper and humane with that he has just now described. . . . —Does not conceive that any Regulation, with respect to the Manner of purchasing them, could be made for their Benefit—With respect to the Manner of conveying them to the Islands in the West Indies, is of Opinion the Number to be conveyed in each Ship should be proportioned to the Tonnage of the Vessel; but he still continues of Opinion, that, constructed as our African Ships now are, the Allowance of Half a Ton for each Slave is more than sufficient—That it is so much the Interest of the Captains and Officers to take Care of their Slaves, that he does not think any Regulation made by Law would have the Effect of enforcing a kinder Treatment for them—Does not conceive that the French, or other Nations concerned in this Trade, treat their Slaves on the Passage better than we do. . . . Is of Opinion the French allow them pretty near the same Ship Room—That the Negroes are generally subject to Epidemic Disorders, such as the Small Pox and Measles, and to Fevers and Fluxes—Is of Opinion,

that in these Voyages the Sailors are generally more sickly than in a Voyage to the West Indies, particularly so when they are obliged to go up the Rivers of Africa to collect the Salves—but this Trade serves as a Nursery for Seamen—The Slave Ships are double manned:—they are forced to take out a great many good Officers, but near One Half of the rest of the Crew are Landmen and Boys—These are idle People picked up from the manufacturing Towns, who would not be received on Board a Ship, as Sailors, in any other Trade—but in the course of a Voyage or Two in this, they become Ordinary Seamen—That in this Trade strict Discipline is very necessary, and Drunkenness and Mutiny, particularly to be guarded against . . . They avoid whipping as much as they can, as it might alarm the Negroes, and discredit the Crew with them. . . .

We did not know what to think of this, but as the vessel drew nearer we plainly saw the harbour and other ships of different kinds and sizes, and we soon anchored amongst them off Bridgetown. Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate parcels and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten but to work, and were soon to go on land where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much; and sure enough soon after we were landed there came to us Africans of all languages. We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold without regard to sex or age. . . . We were not many days in the merchant's custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this: On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.

Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, written by himself*, 2 vols, London, 1789.

11 William Snelgrave on slave mutinies, 1734

For obvious reasons, pro-slavery witnesses ignored or played down the Africans' resistance to enslavement while on shipboard, instead exaggerating the care lavished by the slave-traders on their charges, and the docility of the blacks. The following extract, written for general interest long before the slave trade came under critical scrutiny, suggests that the reality was far more savage, with tension, repression, cruelty, plots and outbreaks the rule rather than the exception.

I come now to give an Account of the Mutinies that have happened on board the Ships where I have been.

These Mutinies are generally occasioned by the Sailors ill usage of these poor People, when on board the Ship wherein they are transported to our Plantations. Wherever therefore I have commanded, it has been my principal Care, to have the Negroes on board my Ship kindly used; and I have always strictly charged my white People to treat them with Humanity and Tenderness. . . .

. . . When we purchase grown People, I acquaint them by the Interpreter, "That, now they are become my Property, I think fit to let them know what they are bought for, that they may be easy in their Minds. . . . So after informing them, That they are bought to till the Ground in our Country, with several other Matters; I then acquaint them, how they are to behave themselves on board towards the white Men; that if any one abuses them, they are to complain to the Linguist, who is to inform me of it, and I will do them Justice; But if they make a Disturbance, or offer to strike a white Man, they must expect to be severely punished."

When we purchase the Negroes, we couple the sturdy Men together with Irons; but we suffer the Women and Children to go freely about: And soon after we have sail'd from the Coast, we undo all the Mens Irons.

They are fed twice a day, and are allowed in fair Weather to come on Deck at seven a Clock in the Morning, and to remain there, if they think proper, till Sun setting. Every Monday Morning they are served with Pipes and Tobacco, which they are very fond of. The Men Negroes lodge separate from the Women and Children: and the places where they all lye are cleaned every day, some white Men being appointed to see them do it. . . .

The first Mutiny I saw among the Negroes, happened during my first Voyage, in the Year 1704. It was on board the *Eagle* Galley of

London, commanded by my Father, with whom I was as Purser. We had bought our Negroes in the River of Old Callabar in the Bay of Guinea. At the time of their mutinying we were in that River, having four hundred of them on board, and not above ten white Men who were able to do Service; For several of our Ship's Company were dead, and many more sick; besides, two of our Boats were just then gone with twelve People on Shore to fetch Wood, which lay in sight of the Ship. All these Circumstances put the Negroes on consulting how to mutiny, which they did at four a clock in the Afternoon, just as they went to Supper. But as we had always carefully examined the Mens Irons, both Morning and Evening, none had got them off, which in a great measure contributed to our Preservation. Three white Men stood on the Watch with Cutlances in their Hands. One of them who was on the Forecastle, a stout fellow, seeing some of the Men Negroes take hold of the chief Mate, in order to throw him over board, he laid on them so heartily with the flat side of his Cutlance, that they soon quitted the Mate, who escaped from them, and run on the Quarter Deck to get Arms. I was then sick with an Ague, and lying on a Couch in the great Cabbin, the Fit being just come on. However, I no sooner heard the Outcry, That the Slaves were mutinying, but I took two Pistols, and run on the Deck with them; where meeting with my Father and the chief Mate, I delivered a Pistol to each of them. Whereupon they went forward on the Booms, calling to the Negroe Men that were on the Forecastle; but they did not regard their Threats, being busy with the Centry, (who had disengaged the chief Mate), and they would have certainly killed him with his own Cutlance, could they have got it from him; but they could not break the Line wherewith the Handle was fastened to his Wrist. And so, tho' they had seized him, yet they could not make use of his Cutlance. Being thus disappointed, they endeavoured to throw him overboard, but he held so fast by one of them that they could not do it. My Father seeing this stout Man in so much Danger, ventured amongst the Negroes to save him; and fired his Pistol over their Heads, thinking to frighten them. But a lusty Slave struck him with a Billet so hard, that he was almost stunned. The Slave was going to repeat his Blow, when a young Lad about seventeen years old, whom we had been kind to, interposed his Arm, and received the Blow, by which his Arm-bone was fractured. At the same instant the Mate fired his Pistol, and shot the Negroe that had struck my Father. At the sight of this the Mutiny ceased, and all the Men-negroes on the Forecastle threw themselves flat on their Faces, crying out for Mercy.

Upon examining into the matter, we found, there were not above

twenty Men Slaves concerned in this Mutiny; and the two Ring-leaders were missing, having, it seems, jumped overboard as soon as they found their Project defeated, and were drowned. This was all the Loss we suffered on this occasion: For the Negroe that was shot by the Mate, the Surgeon, beyond all Expectation, cured. And I had the good Fortune to lose my Ague, by the fright and hurry I was put into. Moreover, the young Man, who had received the Blow on his Arm to save my Father, was cured by the Surgeon in our Passage to Virginia. At our Arrival in that place we gave him his Freedom; and a worthy Gentleman, one Colonel Carter, took him into his Service, till he became well enough acquainted in the Country to provide for himself.

I have been several Voyages, when there has been no Attempt made by our Negroes to mutiny; which, I believe, was owing chiefly, to their being kindly used, and to my Officers Care in keeping a good Watch. But sometimes we meet with stout stubborn People amongst them, who are never to be made easy; and these are generally some of the Cormantines, a Nation of the Gold Coast. . . .

[On another occasion, Captain Messervy of the *Ferrers*] desired me to spare him some Rice, having heard, I had purchased a great many Tuns to the Windward; where he had bought little, not expecting to meet with so many Slaves. This request I could not comply with, having provided no more than was necessary for my self, and for another of my Owner's Ships, which I quickly expected. And understanding from him, that he had never been on the Coast of Guinea before, I took the liberty to observe to him, "That as he had on board so many Negroes of one Town and Language, it required the utmost Care and Management to keep them from mutinying; and that I was sorry he had so little Rice for them: For I had experienced that the Windward Slaves are always very fond of it, it being their usual Food in their own Country; and he might certainly expect dissatisfactions and Uneasiness amongst them for want of a sufficient quantity."

This he took kindly, and having asked my Advice about other Matters, took his leave, inviting me to come next day to see him. I went accordingly on board his Ship, about three a clock in the afternoon. At four a clock the Negroes went to Supper, and Captain Messervy desired me to excuse him for a quarter of an hour, whilst he went forward to see the Men-Negroes served with Victuals. I observed from the Quarter-Deck, that he himself put Pepper and Palm Oyl amongst the Rice they were going to eat. When he came back to me, I could not forbear observing to him, "How imprudent it was in him to do so: For tho' it was proper for a Commander

7 John Wesley warns slave owners and traders of retribution, 1774

John Wesley (1703–91) was the fifteenth child of a High Church Lincolnshire rector. He was educated at Charterhouse School and Christ Church, Oxford, ordained into the Church of England, and elected fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. It was at Oxford in 1729 that he joined a small band known as 'methodists' because of the rigour of their religious observance. In the course of a visit to Georgia in 1735 he met, and was greatly influenced by, a group of Moravian brothers. Three years later he experienced a conversion at a Moravian church service in London, and developed into an ardent Evangelical and, eventually, the founder of Methodism. The General Rules of 1743, in which Wesley outlined Christian ethics for his followers, included an injunction against 'buying and selling the bodies and souls of men, women and children with an intention to enslave them'. But it was not until the American Quaker abolitionist, Anthony Benezet, began correspondence with him in the early 1770s that he realised the enormity of the question. The result was his pamphlet *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, which included the following appeal—and warning—to those he held responsible for such iniquity. Wesley continued to preach against slavery, and lived long enough to give his support to the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

And, First, to the captains employed in this trade. Most of you know the country of Guinea; several parts of it, at least, between the river Senegal and the kingdom of Angola. Perhaps, now, by your means part of it is become a dreary, uncultivated wilderness, the inhabitants being all murdered or carried away, so that there are none left to till the ground. But you well know how populous, how fruitful, how pleasant it was a few years ago. You know, the people were not stupid, not wanting in sense, considering the few means of improvement they enjoyed. Neither did you find them savage, fierce, cruel, treacherous, or unkind to strangers. On the contrary, they were, in most parts, a sensible and ingenious people. They were kind and friendly, courteous and obliging, and remarkably fair and just in their dealings. Such are the men whom you hire their own countrymen to tear away from this lovely country; part by stealth, part by force, part made captives in those wars which you raise or foment on purpose. You have seen them torn away,—children from their parents, parents from their children; husbands from their wives, wives from their beloved husbands, brethren and sisters from each other. You have dragged them who had never done you any wrong, perhaps in

only some of them leaped into the sea, and resolutely stayed under water, till they could suffer no more from you. You have stowed them together as close as ever they could lie, without any regard either to decency or convenience. And when many of them had been poisoned by foul air, or had sunk under various hardships, you have seen their remains delivered to the deep, till the sea should give up his dead. You have carried the survivors into the vilest slavery, never to end but with life; such slavery as is not found among the Turks at Algiers, no, nor among the Heathens in America.

May I speak plainly to you? I must. Love constrains me; love to you, as well as to those you are concerned with.

Is there a God? You know there is. Is he a just God? Then there must be a state of retribution; a state wherein the just God will reward every man according to his works. Then what reward will he render to you? O think betimes! before you drop into eternity! Think now, "He shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy."

Are you a man? Then you should have an human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy, no sense of human woe, no pity for the miserable? . . . Do you feel no relenting now? If you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the great God deal with you as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands. And at "that day it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you!" But if your heart does relent, though in a small degree, know it is a call from the God of love. . . . Immediately quit the horrid trade: At all events, be an honest man.

This equally concerns every merchant who is engaged in the slave-trade. It is you that induce the African villain to sell his countrymen; and in order thereto, to steal, rob, murder men, women, and children without number, by enabling the English villain to pay him for so doing, whom you overpay for his execrable labour. It is your money that is the spring of all, that empowers him to go on: So that whatever he or the African does in this matter is all your act and deed. And is your conscience quite reconciled to this? Does it never reproach you at all? Has gold entirely blinded your eyes, and stupified your heart? Can you see, can you feel, no harm therein? Is it doing as you would be done to? . . . Have no more any part in this detestable business. Instantly leave it to those unfeeling wretches who

Laugh at human nature and compassion!

And this equally concerns every gentleman that has an estate in

our American plantations; yea, all slave-holders, of whatever rank and degree; seeing men-buyers are exactly on a level with men-stealers. Indeed you say, "I pay honestly for my goods; and I am not concerned to know how they are come by." Nay, but you are; you are deeply concerned to know they are honestly come by. Otherwise you are a partaker with a thief, and are not a jot honest than him. But you know they are not honestly come by; you know they are procured by means nothing near so innocent as picking of pockets, house-breaking, or robbery upon the highway. You know they are procured by a deliberate series of more complicated villany (of fraud, robbery, and murder) than was ever practised either by Mahometans or Pagans.

You therefore are guilty, yea, principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies, and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion; they would not stir a step without you; therefore, the blood of all these wretches who die before their time, whether in their country or elsewhere, lies upon your head. . . . O, whatever it costs, put a stop to its cry before it be too late: Instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood-guiltiness! . . . Do not hire another to shed blood; do not pay him for doing it! Whether you are a Christian or no, show yourself a man! . . .

Perhaps you will say, "I do not buy any Negroes; I only use those left me by my father." So far is well; but is it enough to satisfy your own conscience? Had your father, have you, has any man living, a right to use another as a slave? . . . It cannot be, that either war, or contract, can give any man such a property in another as he has in his sheep and oxen. Much less is it possible, that any child of man should ever be born a slave. Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature. . . . Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary choice. . . .

6 Equiano pleads the black cause, 1789

Few Africans left behind their own accounts of British slavery and the surviving written evidence is drawn overwhelmingly from the white master class. Consequently the personal testimony of Olaudah Equiano, a former slave who sprang to public prominence in the 1780s offers a unique insight into the tribulations of the black slave. Equiano established himself as the self-appointed spokesman for London's oppressed black minority, bringing their plight to the attention both of the government and royalty. His memoirs published in 1789 rapidly became a best-seller and formed an influential statement of abolitionist sentiment. (The Queen addressed in the letter was Charlotte Sophia, consort of George III).

March the 21st, 1788, I had the honour of presenting the Queen with a petition on behalf of my African brethren, which was received most graciously by her Majesty:

*To the QUEEN's most Excellent
Majesty.*

MADAM,

Your Majesty's well known benevolence and humanity emboldens me to approach your royal presence, trusting that the obscurity of my situation will not prevent your Majesty from attending to the sufferings for which I plead.

Yet I do not solicit your royal pity for my own distress; my sufferings, although numerous, are in a measure forgotten. I supplicate your Majesty's compassion for millions of my African countrymen, who groan under the lash of tyranny in the West Indies.

The oppression and cruelty exercised to the unhappy negroes there, have at length reached the British legislature, and they are now deliberating on its redress; even several persons of property in slaves in the West Indies, have petitioned parliament against its continuance, sensible that it is as impolitic as it is unjust—and what is inhuman must ever be unwise.

Your Majesty's reign has been hitherto distinguished by private acts of benevolence and bounty; surely the more extended the misery is, the greater claim it has to your Majesty's compassion, and the greater must be your Majesty's pleasure in administering to its relief.

I presume, therefore, gracious Queen, to implore your interposition with your royal consort, in favour of the wretched Africans; that, by your Majesty's benevolent influence, a period may now be put to their misery; and that they may be raised from the condition of brutes, to which they are at present degraded, to the rights and situation of freemen, and admitted to partake of the blessings of your

Majesty's happy government; so shall your Majesty enjoy the heartfelt pleasure of procuring happiness to millions, and be rewarded in the grateful prayers of themselves, and of their posterity.

And may the all-bountiful Creator shower on your Majesty, and the Royal Family, every blessing that this world can afford, and every fulness of joy which divine revelation has promised us in the next.

I am your Majesty's most dutiful and
devoted servant to command,

GUSTAVUS VASSA,

The Oppressed Ethiopian.
No. 53, Baldwin's Gardens.

... May the time come—at least the speculation to me is pleasing—when the sable people shall gratefully commemorate the auspicious era of extensive freedom. Then shall those persons* particularly be named with praise and honour, who generously proposed and stood forth in the cause of humanity, liberty, and good policy; and brought to the ear of the legislature designs worthy of royal patronage and adoption. May Heaven make the British senators the dispersers of light, liberty, and science, to the uttermost parts of the earth: then will be glory to God on the highest, on earth peace, and good-will to men. . . . May the blessings of the Lord be upon the heads of all those who commiserated the cases of the oppressed negroes, and the fear of God prolong their days; and may their expectations be filled with gladness! . . .

As the inhuman traffic of slavery is to be taken into the consideration of the British legislature, I doubt not, if a system of commerce was established in Africa, the demand for manufactures would most rapidly augment, as the native inhabitants will insensibly adopt the British fashions, manners, customs, &c. In proportion to the civilization, so will be the consumption of British manufactures.

* Grenville Sharp, Esq; the Reverend Thomas Clarkson; the Reverend James Ramsay; our approved friends, men of virtue, are an honour to their country, ornamental to human nature, happy in themselves, and benefactors to mankind!

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa . . . 1789, II, 243-50.