


EARL OF DERBY

DWARD GEORGE GEOFFREY SMITH STANLEY, 14th Earl of Derby, British statesman and premier, happily styled by Bulwer-Lytton, "the Rupert of Debate," was born at Knowsley, Lancashire, March 29, 1799, and died there Oct. 23, 1869. He was educated at Christ Church College, Oxford, and entered Parliament in 1820. He did not, however, speak in the House until 1824, when he was heard on a variety of subjects and exhibited force and skill as a parliamentary debater. He became chief secretary for Ireland, and heartily supported the Reform bill in the stormy parliamentary sessions of the era. In 1833, he was appointed colonial secretary and was alike zealous and eloquent in carrying out the measures for slave emancipation. Owing to the position taken by the Whigs on the Irish Church question, he left their ranks and during Peel's administration was colonial secretary, 1841-45. Becoming Baron Stanley in 1844, he entered the House of Lords, where he was a recognized leader of the Conservatives, as well as one of the most brilliant speakers in the Upper House. On the death of his father, in 1851, he succeeded to the earldom of Derby. In 1852, for a few months, he was prime minister, and again, in the year between 1858-59, and after the resignation of Lord Russell's ministry, in 1866, was for the third time called upon to form a cabinet, and remained premier until his resignation, in 1868. The most important event of his third administration was the passage of the Household Suffrage bill. After his resignation, he continued to frequent the Upper House, speaking often and forcibly against the disestablishment of the Irish Church; his oratory, often brilliant and always clear, was logical and impressive. In literature his scholarship was manifest in his blank-verse translations of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" which were much admired for their poetic qualities. Politics, observed a writer, was with him "more of a gladiatorial display than a practical science. Yet on more than one occasion during his career he held the fate of ministries in his hand. There might be greater statesmen, men of larger breadth of view and wider capacity, as well as men surpassing him in the power of grasping details and initiating legislation, but there have been few more fascinating political leaders."

SPEECH ON SLAVE EMANCIPATION

I AM aware that we have been often taunted with our ignorance of the negro character; my belief is that any man may inform himself sufficiently on that point, and that we commit a grievous error when we suppose that the moral circumstances attendant upon slavery have so changed the physical character of the negro as to unfit him for freedom. It is a most dangerous error to attribute that to the physical

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qualities of the negro which results solely from the moral conditions which slavery has superinduced. It yet remains to be seen whether the negro is less industrious or less anxious to better his condition than other men. We are, however, told to look at the manumitted negroes, and we are taunted with the fact that not twenty negroes of those manumitted have ever returned to field labor. I very much doubt if altogether so many as twenty field negroes have ever been manumitted. From 1817 to the present time it does not appear that above 14,163 were manumitted altogether; three fourths of these were females; and I can have very little difficulty in imagining the motives which led to the manumission of those and to the manumission likewise of their male children. The remaining fourth were made up chiefly of domestic slaves and of mechanics; none of these were brought up to field labor, and it is no matter of surprise that when manumitted they should not have turned to that, the most degrading of the employments in which negroes are engaged.

The whole of this argument amounts to saying that the negroes are not fit for emancipation and that we must wait until they are; and that argument, if it be good for anything, goes too far; for it proceeds to the indefinite conclusion that we must postpone emancipation, not for ten or twenty or thirty years, but to some period no one can say how remote. I know that people will tell me we do not wish to perpetuate slavery—we merely wish to postpone it till the negroes are fit for freedom—till they manifest a disposition for laborious industry sufficient to qualify them for the privileges of free men. That argument, if it proves anything, proves too much. Do men ever show a disposition to labor until population presses upon food; and will that ever take place so long as the depopulating influence of slavery prevails? We are told

that the negroes own no domestic ties; nor will they so long as you keep them in that state of slavery which debases their principles, and which deprives them of foresight, and which takes away from them the motives to industry. The slaves have no education, and you deny them any; for, as slaves, they can have none. They have hitherto been treated as chattels attached to the soil—do you think they can be made fit for freedom till freedom has exercised its influence upon their minds and upon their moral character?

The treatment of the West India negroes is a stain upon a Christian age and upon a country professing itself Christian. If the slaves be made acquainted with religion they must learn that slavery is inconsistent with the Christian religion; and will you shut out religion in order that you may maintain slavery? Other countries have read us a severe lesson upon this subject. In colonies belonging to Catholic countries no man was allowed to possess a slave who did not provide the means of instructing him in the Catholic faith. Be that, however, as it may, this I will say, that this House will ill discharge its duty if it does not forthwith put forth a declaration of religious freedom as respects the colonies and does not compel the local authorities to leave to every negro within their limits the free, independent, and inviolable right of adopting whatever form of Christianity he may think proper.

The next point to which I mean to advert is the evidence of Mr. Dumas, himself a man of color, and who had the best opportunities of forming an opinion upon such subjects; because a case fell under his observation at Antigua of an experiment made upon 371 captured negroes and 36 freehold escheated slaves, which bore directly on this part of the question. If there were any case in which such an experiment could be made under favorable circumstances, it must cer-

tainly be when Africans newly captured and unaccustomed to slavery were to be maintained and regulated according to the manners of the inhabitants of civilized countries. Yet the result of this experiment at Antigua was such as I think the House will say afforded a convincing proof of the fitness of the negro for speedy emancipation. With the exception of a single case of petty larceny, the manumitted slaves had, up to July last, when he left the island, been guilty of no breach of the laws whatever. Their industry, as he stated, was remarkable, as well as the avidity with which they endeavored to obtain the possession of property, and the eagerness with which they copied the dress, the manners, and the speech of the Creoles. In some instances they had even the advantage of the Creoles; and most of the laborious works at St. Johns were performed by them. They had gone on so prosperously and so diligently in their career of industry that many of them had purchased their own houses; and out of the 371 captured slaves only one man and five women had been returned upon the bounty of the crown; these, too, being induced to do so by medical advice, as no longer able from age or infirmity to gain their own living.

There was a still more remarkable instance of the same kind in the Bahamas. There the slave population was not regarded by themselves, but by the freemen of the islands, as no longer belonging to the class of slaves, but as already half free. A gallant admiral has spoken of what he saw in the Bahamas and in the island of Cuba, where the soil was not only highly cultivated for raising the necessaries of life, but a large quantity of sugar was raised by free labor.

With respect to the case of the inhabitants of St. Domingo, in my mind it proves nothing at all. If we consider the horrors of their long struggle for liberty; if we call to mind

the uncertainty which hung over every species of property; if we remember the driving out of all the capital formerly employed in the cultivation of the island; if we add to these the ruin of every species of manufacture; if, under all these circumstances, the cultivation of sugar had been diminished, it would not be at all surprising. But the House will recollect that though sugar is not extensively exported from St. Domingo, yet sugar is very assiduously cultivated, as well as other necessaries and conveniences of life; and all this is done by the mass of free laborers, working on their own account.

I have a still stronger instance to adduce—the only instance indeed of the gradual emancipation of a slave population on a large scale with complete and entire success; and if I appear to dilate too much upon this topic the House will perhaps excuse me, considering the importance of the subject, when I state that ever since the plan for the emancipation of the West India slaves has been proposed I have had an opportunity of conversing with a person who could give me the most important information on the subject—I mean the president of Venezuela, who in 1821, the year in which the measure of emancipation was first put into operation, was the protector of slaves at Caraccas and consequently had the best possible opportunity of seeing what was done.

In 1821 it was determined by General Bolivar to carry into effect a general measure of emancipation. It had previously been a rule that such slaves as took part in the struggle against Spain should be liberated; but in 1821 it was resolved to proceed upon a general plan. For this purpose a fund was created for the purpose of redeeming the slaves, principally from a tax upon the proceeds of intestate estates. At the same time a tariff of the value of slaves was determined. They then proceeded to redeem the slaves. The older slaves

were first redeemed and those whose redemption cost the smallest sums of money; they next proceeded to purchase such as had the best claims in point of character; and they went on steadily in this course; so that, whereas in 1821 the number of slaves in Venezuela was 100,000, at the time of which I speak they were reduced to 25,000. This is an instance which must be extremely valuable to the House in its discussions upon this subject. Even in Venezuela there was no immediate measure of emancipation. A course was laid down—the certainty was given to the slave of ultimately attaining his freedom—and those who laid down the plan, which has proved so successful, did not fail to persevere in the course which has led to that success. Eager to take advantage of the opportunity thrown into my way by my interview with this gentleman, I put some questions to him upon such topics as seemed likely to afford useful information to me and to the House, for the purpose of directing us in the business of legislation on this important question.

The first objection which struck me against this plan was the jealousy of the unemancipated slaves against their more fortunate brethren. I therefore asked him, “What was the effect upon the minds of those whom you left in slavery at the time when you redeemed the others?” “There was not the slightest jealousy,” was his reply, “their condition was not wretched—they had indulgent masters—masters rendered more indulgent by the prospective freedom of their slaves. Still liberty was the object of their wishes; but seeing that they were sure in their turn to reap the same advantages they were content to wait in patience.” But as any assumption of superiority on the part of the emancipated slave might have in time destroyed this feeling, I asked a second question: “What effect had the acquisition of freedom upon the eman-

ipated slaves themselves? Did they feel any sense of degradation in mixing with those who had formerly been their companions? Had they any reluctance in joining them in the labors of agriculture?" "None in the least," he said, "if there be any difference between the free laborer and the slave, working on the same estate, it is only that the free laborer works with greater energy." The last question which I put to him was: "What effect had this substitution of free for slave labor upon the agriculture of the country?" "In 1821," he replied, "when the measure first came into operation, agriculture was reduced to the lowest ebb; it is now flourishing." In corroboration of this statement he showed me a letter from the treasurer of Venezuela, a near relation of a gentleman, a member of this House, in which it is stated that in the article of sugar, so far from any deterioration having taken place, the cultivation of it had only begun since 1821. Till there was a free laboring population in Venezuela not a single pound was raised in Venezuela. Now that country has begun to furnish Curacao with sugar, and Trinidad—the English island of Trinidad—with rum, which is sold as, or declared to be equal to, the best Jamaica rum.

Having thus stated in detail what I conceive to be the real circumstances of the case, having particularized the position in which this country is placed, which renders it impossible upon this point that the legislature should stand still, even if it would; having shown, from the events which have taken place in other colonies, that perseverance in our system is replete with danger; having dwelt upon the facts which are detailed in official documents, and stated the repugnance of the colonial legislature to take any effectual step, either for the immediate or the gradual abolition of slavery; having proved, in my opinion, the absolute and imperative necessity

by which this House is bound to advance calmly, but resolutely and determinedly, to the one great object, the ultimate and complete abolition—to the utter destruction of the last vestige of colonial slavery; having stated all this I now proceed to lay before the House the means by which this great object may, in my judgment, be effected, not without danger (for that can hardly be), but with the least danger that may be.

I will not enter now into all the details of the measure. I will merely show the outline of the measure which I intend to propose—a measure no doubt susceptible of amendments and modifications; for it is impossible that any government can propose a plan, particularly in so complicated a matter, which shall be in every respect unexceptionable, which shall not be liable to many great and grave objections; but the proposed measure is open to the consideration and the judgment of this House and of the country; and our wish is to try, if, by any means, we can reconcile contending interests and conflicting claims; if we can effect that great, that hallowed object—the extinction of slavery throughout every country that owes allegiance to the British crown.