

AN APPEAL TO THE SOVEREIGNS CONVENED IN PARIS
TO GRANT THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

GERMAINE DE STAËL

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Despite the violent crisis in which England has been embroiled for twenty-five years, that nation has never used the dangers she faced as an excuse for neglecting the good that was within her power. Constantly concerned about humanity in the midst of war, and about the common good at the very moment her political existence was under threat, she abolished the slave trade at the time she was waging the most vigorous fight against the doctrine of a perverse liberty. (1) The opposing parties among the English came together for a goal as much moral as it was religious. Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox collaborated on its behalf with equal ardor; and Mr. Wilberforce, a Christian orator, lent to this great work a perseverance the like of which is usually seen only among those working to further their personal interests.

The abolition of the slave trade, which took place seven years ago, did not affect the prosperity of the English colonies. The Negroes have sufficiently multiplied among themselves to supply the needed labor; and as always happens in the case of an act of justice, the public was ceaselessly alarmed over the possible disadvantages of this measure before it was enacted. But once it was, none of these supposed disadvantages were ever heard of again. Thus, thousands of lives and entire nations were preserved, without the financial interests of commerce having suffered.

Since that time, England, on signing the peace treaty with Denmark, made the abolition of the slave trade one of the articles of the treaty. The same condition was put to Portugal, which, up to now, has conceded only to restrictions. But today, since the confederation of sovereigns has met to enact the treaty and thus confirm the peace it has won with its might, it seems that nothing would be more worthy of the august congress about to open than to consecrate the triumph of Europe through an act of benevolence. The Crusaders of the Middle Ages never left for the Holy Land without binding themselves by some vow on their return. The sovereigns now meeting in France promised the good fortune of Africa to that propitious Heaven from which they obtained Europe's deliverance.

Many political interests will be discussed, but a few hours given to such a great religious interest would not be useless even to the affairs of this world. Thereafter, people would say: "It was at this Paris peace accord that the slave trade was abolished by all of Europe; thus, this accord is blessed, since it follows such an act of thanksgiving to the God of Hosts."

It has been proposed that a monument be raised to consecrate the fall of the oppressor who lay like a pall over the human race. Here we have it, a monument that can be raised with one word: the slave trade abolished by the kings who overthrew the tyranny of the conquest of Europe.

The sufferings these hapless Negroes are made to endure as they are transported from their homeland to the colonies almost make the very slavery which awaits them a relief. We provoke

war in the countries of Africa to make the victors surrender their war captives; to be sold into slavery is the accepted punishment along the coasts of Africa for all kinds of misdeeds. The black chiefs who take part in this vile traffic excite the Negroes to crime by inciting them to drunkenness or by any other means, in order to claim the right to have them transported to America. Often, under the ridiculous pretext of sorcery, these unfortunates are exiled forever from the shores where they were born, far from that land even dearer to primitive than to civilized men. "Long coffins," to borrow an expression from a French writer, carry them across the seas; the captives are stacked in the ship in such a way that they would take up more space if they were dead, for their bodies would then at least be stretched out on the wretched plank they are allowed.

In his address against the slave trade, Mr. Pitt said in so many words: "I know of no evil which has ever existed, and I cannot imagine any, worse than 80,000 people annually snatched from their native land by the concerted action of the most civilized nations of Europe." Mr. Pitt's principles were well-known, as was the part he played in the present triumph of the allied nations because of his convictions. Should his authority not be counted? And that of the three powers of England, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the king: does their authority not confirm the truth of the facts and principles now submitted to the monarchs' attention?

Finally, one cannot hide the fact that Europe owes a great deal to England, who has often resisted alone during the course of these twenty-five years; and nowhere has there been a battle which was not seconded by English soldiers or English aid. How does one repay the richest and most fortunate nation in the universe? A warrior receives from his sovereign a token of honor, but what can be done for an entire nation who has played the warrior's role? The great humanitarian act that England is commending to all the governments of Europe must be adopted: good must be done for its own sake, but also for the sake of the English nation who requests it and to whom it is just to grant this noble token of gratitude.

The same advocate of humanity, Mr. Wilberforce, is in England as head of the society of missionaries which must carry the enlightenment of Christianity into Asia and Africa. But how could one be called Christian if one is cruel? Could not the king of France, that pious heir of St. Louis and of Louis XVI, be asked to agree to the abolition of the slave trade so that this humanitarian act might persuade the hearts of those to whom the gospel is to be preached? Could one not ask this same agreement of Spain, who awakened national spirit on the continent? of Portugal, who fought like a great state? of Austria, whose sole concern was the well-being of the German empire? of Prussia, where both nation and king proved so simply heroic? Let us also ask this great gift of the Russian emperor, who limited his own ambition when there was no longer any outside obstacle to check it. An absolute sovereign fought to found the wise principles of political liberty; the crown of such a monarch should be composed of every kind of glory: the emperor of Russia rules peoples of diverse degrees of civilization within the confines of Asia; he tolerates all religions, he permits all customs, and the scepter, in his hands, is as equitable as law. Asia and Europe bless the name of Alexander. May that name resound as well on the savage shores of Africa! There is no country on earth unworthy of justice.

(1) That is, against the Napoleonic perversion of the ideals of the French Revolution. (Trans.)