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“A.B.”

New York Journal, March 28, 1792

I do not mean to exculpate Mr. Jay from the charge of being a member of the manumission society, which has afforded a copious field for declamation and abuse; but I am persuaded, that the principles and actions of that society have been greatly misrepresented; and it has been for some time expected, that in justice, both to themselves and Mr. Jay, they would have laid them fairly before the public. I am not a member of the society, and perhaps, ill qualified to undertake its defence, but I am certain, that an “absolute manumission of slaves” is not contemplated by them, without the consent of the proprietors, or an adequate compensation. Slavery, is indeed odious, and the practice of it in a free country, much to be lamented; but as the laws of society have tolerated the practice, it is but reasonable, that the abolition should be effected in such a way, as not to interfere with the regard that is due to private property.

The wisdom, humanity and justice of the legislature, will, without doubt sooner or later, place this business upon a proper footing: In the mean time, the manumission society, by the gentle methods of example and reason, have endeavoured to incite their fellow men, to bestow freedom where it was in their power; and have exerted themselves to guard those upon whom it had been voluntarily conferred, from violence and fraud; they have endeavoured to enforce those acts of the legislature, that prohibit the inhuman slave trade, which in too many instances, has been the means of tearing parents from their children, husbands from their wives; and is destructive of every feeling that ought to characterize a human being. In addition to these objects of the society, let me mention the institution and endowment of schools, by which the children of negroes may be rescued from ignorance and idleness, and become not only useful to the public in this life, but acquainted with those which appertain to their welfare in a future state. I trust, that such principles and practices cannot fail, when understood, of meeting with approbation. If Mr. Jay should be rendered unpopular on this account, the situation of the public mind is much to be regretted. We may boast if we please, of our free and excellent constitution, and call ourselves the most enlightened people to be found upon the globe; but in spite of all our boasting, we shall furnish the most irrefragable proof, that we are under the dominion of selfish passion, and involved in more than Cimmerian darkness.

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