

COLORED EMIGRATION—BRITISH WEST INDIES.

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

IN REFERENCE TO

The emigration of colored laborers to the British West Indies.

MAY 3, 1852.

Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

to the House of Representatives:

As a further answer to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 5th January last, requesting information in regard to a circular of her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, in respect to the emigration of colored laborers from the United States to the British West India islands, I transmit another despatch addressed to the Department of State by the minister of the United States at London.

MILLARD FILLMORE

WASHINGTON, March 25, 1852.

[No. 162.]

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,

London, February 26, 1852.

SIR: I noticed some weeks since in the public journals, that a call had been made upon the President for any correspondence that had taken place relative to a circular despatch of Lord Grey on the subject of obtaining from the United States, colored laborers for the West India colonies, and that the President had responded to the call by transmitting my despatch number 143, with its enclosure.

I have now the honor to enclose a further circular despatch of Lord Grey, explanatory of his former despatch on this subject, which, he writes me, will be sent to the West Indies by the next mail; and to respectfully suggest that it be laid before Congress, that it may be referred to the same committee that has charge of the other correspondence on the subject.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
ABBOTT LAWRENCE.

The Hon. DANIEL WEBSTER,
Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

[Enclosure.]

DOWNING STREET, February 20, 1852.

Sir: My attention has been called to the fact, that some objections have been taken in the United States to that part of my circular despatch of the 16th of October, 1850, in which it was suggested, that among other measures to be adopted with the view of encouraging the emigration of the colored inhabitants of the United States to the British colonies, it might be expedient "to render binding in the colonies, on certain conditions, engagements to pay sums of money which might have been agreed upon by emigrants, although such engagements might have been contracted in America, and while the parties were in a state of slavery."

You are aware that this suggestion was founded upon statements which had been made to me, on what I believe to be good authority, that not only is there a desire for the emigration of the free people of color, but also that there are many owners of slaves in the United States who would gladly give liberty to their slaves, but for the expense with which arrangements for their removal would be attended.

It was believed that if such a desire existed among masters, it would be an arrangement mutually advantageous to both parties, if the slaves, in consideration of obtaining their freedom and being removed to British colonies, were enabled to secure to their former masters such sums of money as might be agreed upon.

The negro would easily, from the high wages his labor would command in some of the British colonies, be able to pay off a moderate amount of debt thus incurred; and to the masters it would be a great advantage, instead of having to incur the heavy expense of removing to Britain the distressed slaves, who could not by law be freed without being removed, they would be enabled not only to have persons conveyed to the British colonies without charge by means of the colonial bounty, but further, to receive back from the negroes, by instalments, a portion of the value of the property sacrificed by their manumission.

This was the object of the suggestion to which I have adverted; but it appears, from information which has lately reached me, that this has been misunderstood in the United States, and that it has been there supposed that it was intended to promote arrangements to be made for the removal of slaves from the United States without the consent of their masters.

I much regret that any want of caution in the manner in which my circular despatch was worded, should have led to so entire a misunderstanding of its intention; and I have to request that in any communications which you may have to make on this subject, you will be careful to use such language as cannot be in like manner misconstrued.

I have the honor to be, sir, your most obedient, humble servant.

GREY.