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# DISPATCH

RELATIVE TO

## THE SLAVE TRADE,

FROM

HIS MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS

AT

*SIERRA LEONE,*

ADDRESSED TO

VISCOUNT CASTLEREAGH, K. G.

DATED JANUARY 5, 1821.

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*Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, 1821.*

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Dispatch relative to the Slave Trade, from His Majesty's Commissioners at Sierra Leone, addressed to Viscount Castlereagh, K. G., &c. &c. &c.

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MY LORD,

*Sierra Leone, January 5, 1821.*

WE have the honour to state to your Lordship that the Spanish schooner *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat* was condemned here on the 2d November 1820, and eighty-four Slaves liberated, this being the only case of illegal Slave Trade which has been brought before the Mixed Courts for adjudication, since the opening of the new Commission.

As your Lordship would probably not be prepared to expect so great and so sudden a diminution in the business of these Courts, we are induced to think that some explanation of the causes which have led to that diminution may not be unacceptable. In this view we have the honour to state to your Lordship as the result of the best information which we have been enabled to collect:

- 1st. That the reduction in the number of cases for adjudication being, of course, occasioned by a similar reduction in the previous acts of capture and detention, has for its original cause the actual reduced state of the trade.
- 2d. That the number of captures made under circumstances which led to condemnation, and the activity of the cruizers in visiting and watching those vessels which they could not detain at the moment, have very much damped the ardour and restrained the enterprizes of the traders.
- 3d. That the supplies of Slaves on the coast are not obtained in the same numbers nor with the same facility and promptitude, even at the most noted Slave trading stations, as they were in former times and recently also.
- 4th. That the great tardiness and difficulty of obtaining supplies of Slaves at the trading stations on the coast are caused by embarrassments in the preceding operations of the trade in the interior, which embarrassments had previously arisen from the failure of the usual facilities of disposing of Slaves on the coast.

The facts here enumerated to your Lordship are the necessary effects of a system of restraints connected with each other in regular succession, and each reciprocally productive of the other.

The Slave ships have been prevented from taking off with their usual activity, the Slaves collected on the coast; the Native collectors at the sea towns have in consequence ceased to keep any number of Slaves in readiness for ships that may casually come to take them; and since their opportunities of immediate sale have been cut off, they have ceased to take the Slaves off the hands of the dealers and holders in the interior, or to purchase them with

alacrity when brought down: those in the interior are consequently become less alert, and are unprepared to supply occasional demands when they arise on the coast. Thus, in the same proportion as reciprocal facilities sustained and extended the trade in former times, the checks and restrictions now imposed operate reciprocally to discourage and reduce it.

The intelligence upon which this statement is founded has been furnished principally by the results of the cruizes of His Majesty's ships on this station, subsequent to the opening of the new Commission.

To the northward of the colony, the river Pongas, which is the principal haunt of the Slave traders on this part of the coast, has been specially visited by His Majesty's brig *Snapper*, Lieutenant Nash commanding, in company with the American sloop of war *John Adams*, Captain Wadsworth. This junction would, it was thought, combine a twofold authority for capture, according as the vessels found in the river should assume the American character, or that of any of the Powers comprehended in the treaties establishing the Mixed Commissions. Four vessels were found, two brigs, and two schooners. There were strong reasons to think the property American, but as the flag and the papers were Spanish, the American Officer, who was strictly forbidden to interfere with foreign flags, would not venture to make any seizure, and, as there were not any Slaves on board of the traders, the British Officer was equally debarred from detaining them.

His Majesty's brig *Thistle*, Lieutenant Hagan commanding, has since visited the same river, and His Majesty's brig *Snapper*, now commanded by Acting Lieutenant Pratt, cruizes constantly in its vicinity to prevent any escape. According to the reports from these ships the same vessels continue in the river; their cargoes have been landed, but the Slaves in return are not yet obtained. The length of time during which the seamen have continued exposed to the pestilential air of the river has occasioned among them very destructive sickness, which, it is said, few if any have survived. Recent information through merchants of the colony confirms this intelligence.

With respect to the state of the trade in the range of the cruizers to the southward of this colony, we have learned, by His Majesty's ship *Pheasant*, Captain Kelly, which arrived here about two months since from the southern station, that it has fallen into similar decay. Captain Kelly had chased a vessel supposed to be Spanish, which escaped by superior sailing, having first landed at Accra about fifty Slaves which she had on board when the chase commenced. These Slaves were surrendered to Captain Kelly and brought to Sierra Leone. Want of proof prevented legal proceedings, but the Slaves were landed and given in charge to the Acting Governor, and placed on the establishment for liberated Negroes, as is usual in such cases. Captain Kelly had not fallen in with any other Slave trading vessel; nor had he received any further information of the large ships strongly armed and manned for resisting search and capture which were reported to be on the southern coast about six months since.

His Majesty's brig *Thistle*, Lieutenant Hagan, took the Spanish schooner *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat* in a small river near Cape Mount with eighty-five Slaves. On board the *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat* were the mate and seamen and some Slaves belonging to a French schooner which had come in there for the same purpose; and had gone on shore and been lost. The Master of this French vessel had died. The Slaves transferred from her were included in condemnation with those of the *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat*, as already stated in the abstract of the case of this vessel which, under date of the 2d November 1820, His Majesty's Commissary Judge had the honour of transmitting to your Lordship.

Lieutenant Hagan had heard only of one vessel in the trade at the adjacent stations to the southward of Cape Mount. That vessel had been commanded by a person well known in this colony as a determined Slave trader; this person called Buntzen professed himself a Danish subject domiciled at St. Thomas's, but he traded under the Spanish flag. Immediately before Lieutenant Hagan received his intelligence, Buntzen had been assassinated by one of his seamen in a quarrel occasioned by the refusal of some liquor. It is added that the native dealers refused to admit the right of the successor in the command of this vessel, to the Slaves purchased for her, and that the voyage was in consequence frustrated.

At Gallinas, nearer to this colony, two French vessels have been employed in taking in Slaves; one of these, named *La Catharine*, has, it is said, succeeded in carrying off one hundred and fifty. The other is supposed to be still on the coast, having been very lately seen by His Majesty's ship *Pheasant* and His Majesty's brig *Thistle*, when she had not got any Slaves on board. It is therefore hoped that she may be met by one of two French cruizers which a short time ago passed down the coast in search of Slave traders of their own nation. These cruizers are *Le Henon*, of 22 guns, commanded by Captain *Du Plessis*, and the *Iris*, of 14 guns, Lieutenant *Laine*. No intelligence has hitherto been received of any capture made by either of these cruizers, and we learn by recent accounts from the *Gambia* that the *Iris* has returned to her station off the French settlements in that quarter.

The information obtained through His Majesty's cruizers and here recited in substance, will probably be deemed sufficient to sustain the fact of the actual reduced state of the traffic in Slaves. But as hopes and wishes may in such a case easily mislead into too sanguine calculation and too easy belief, it may not be amiss to add some further matters derived from the same or equally authentic sources.

That a great length of time is now necessary to complete a cargo of Slaves is a fact universally known and does not require to be established by proofs: during the lapse of this time there are three modes of passing the interval:

1st. Having landed the trade goods and a trading agent, to cruize off and on, visiting the station occasionally for general purposes, but principally in order to ascertain the progress of the collection, so as to suit the final approach for embarkation to the completion of the numbers. In this practice which for some time was general, the frequent visitations by His Majesty's cruizers, and the close observation of the movements of Slave trading vessels leading frequently to their ultimate capture, especially in cases in which a few Negroes casually on board could not be landed or sworn off as unconnected with the vessels and with the trade, have occasioned interruptions so inconvenient as to discourage the practice in a great degree.

2d. To put into small rivers, creeks or bays adjacent to the place of trade, and there remain until every preparation is made to put to sea with a full cargo. The recent capture of the *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat*, has shewn that such situations are not secure from attack and capture, and it is in these situations particularly, that the delay on the coast proves so fatal to the seamen; the atmosphere of the Mangrove swamps, by which all the small rivers are bordered, is malignant and destructive beyond calculation. The fevers generated by the miasma arising from these swamps, have deprived the Slave ships now in the river *Pongas* of nearly the whole of their crews. It is possible, however, that by means of trained Slaves, an effort to put to sea may be made by one or more of these vessels, if the cargoes of Slaves should be collected, or other Slave traders arriving may lend a few hands which would be sufficient.

3d. Another mode of passing the interval betwixt the arrival of a vessel on the coast and that of her departure thence with her cargo of Slaves, is to make a voyage to some convenient port and there remain until there is reason to think the collection completed, and every thing ready for embarkation. The Isles of Cape Verd are most convenient for this purpose, but, in a recent instance, an American trader who had landed his goods in the river Pongas, and passed thence to the Isles of Cape Verd to await the collection of his Slaves, chanced to enter the harbour of Bona Vista while the American sloop of war Hornet, Captain Reid, was lying there. The seamen of the Slave trader gave information to Captain Reid that she was employed in that traffic and she was, in consequence, seized and sent to the United States.

Thus in every alternative, dangers and difficulties, losses and capture, are placed in the way of those who are so desperately devoted as to continue to pursue the illegal traffic.

The presence of three American sloops of war of the first class strongly manned, has contributed greatly to restrain the trade and to multiply the embarrassments of all those concerned in it. These vessels have made many captures which have been sent to the United States for adjudication; a general terror has, in consequence, been spread with respect to those mixed adventures of subjects of different nations, which have been in use since the conclusion of the Treaties of abolition, for, although the American Commanders are strictly prohibited from interfering with foreigners, the obvious appearance of American interest would, without a doubt, be followed by a seizure, and circumstances which would not warrant seizure might probably be attended with other consequences scarcely less unpleasant to the Americans illegally interested.

From this statement it will be apparent that the execution of the Treaties for the suppression of illicit traffic in Slaves, has, within the short period since the establishment of the Mixed Commissions at this place, so materially checked that traffic that it may be considered in rapid progress towards extinction, for it must continue to decline while the present restraints are kept in activity, and there can be no doubt that they will be kept in activity until the extinction shall be fully accomplished.

We trust we may be admitted to offer to your Lordship our congratulations on this result which is the more gratifying as the system established by the Treaties was altogether new, and was consequently subject to many imperfections, and these imperfections were again the more embarrassing as the details of construction and of practice could not be settled without the intervention of time and experience.

The decline of the Slave Trade in the interior of Africa is the point of greatest importance in this communication; especially as we are led to think that a progressive discontinuance tending to permanent cessation is not beyond the range of reasonable calculation.

Slavery exists in every country of Africa, but domestic Slaves are not often sold in the course of traffic. Captives in war and persons condemned by form of law are the general stock of the trade, and it is found that hostile aggressions and unjust accusations, kidnapping and all kinds of atrocities ministering to the supplies of the Slave market, are employed according to the inducements furnished by immediate opportunity of sale, and disused when the prospect of disposing of the victims is remote and uncertain. The cost of maintaining and the trouble of guarding Slaves destined for sale, are burthens not easily to be borne, for the countries themselves are deficient in the means of subsistence as well as in those of safe custody. The labour of

a Slave destined for the traffic cannot be employed to any beneficial purpose as such employment would give too many facilities to the disposition to escape which already excites attempts too often successfully executed or defeated by the sacrifice of the life of the party.

The desire of foreign luxuries is the great motive for making Slaves, and if those luxuries can be supplied through the intermediation of any other branch of African commerce, there will not be any incentive remaining to counteract the inconveniences at present attached to the Slave Trade. During the existence of the Slave Trade no effort can substitute any commerce for one so universally established and so deeply fixed in the minds of the people by the habits of ages. But when that accustomed great resource shall be found no longer available, others of a less odious nature will be embraced with equal ardour, and pursued with the same persevering industry and attachment. It may be hoped that no very great length of time would be necessary to impress on the minds, even of the most barbarous, the superior gratification of an innocent and virtuous commerce, compared with the criminal and cruel enjoyments purchased by the enslavement and sale of their fellow creatures.

The practicability of this substitution and the happy effects produced by it are already exemplified in the timber trade now flourishing in the river of Sierra Leone, and in the virtuous industry and affluence diffused by that trade through a large extent of country adjacent to the creeks and bays into which the river divides itself.

The exportation of rice from this colony afforded for some time a prospect of a trade likely to prove doubly beneficial, inasmuch as it would establish itself coextensively and consistently with the improvement of agriculture. The sales of African rice in the West India markets have not recently been very encouraging. Some unfavourable influence has, in consequence, been felt in Africa, but there is reason to hope that the check will not be of long duration, for it has already begun to pass away. Palm oil is the article of legitimate commerce next in importance; but this as well as ivory, gold, and every thing else that the country affords can only be considered as subsidiary to some one of sufficient magnitude to constitute a staple such as the Slave trade has been, as the timber trade now is in this colony, and as the rice may, it is to be hoped, more generally become.

The articles of African produce exported from this colony, with the exception of timber and camwood, both of which are found in the Sierra Leone river, are derived from the Sherbro, close to the southward, and from several rivers to the northward, of which the river Pongas is the most important. In all these rivers the Slave trade is carried on as far as means and opportunity will admit; but chiefly in the river Pongas. The Slaves obtained in that river, and in all the others of the coast adjacent to it, are furnished by the Foulahs, or as they are sometimes called by European travellers, the Poules of Foutah Jallow. This nation occupies an extensive territory about 150 or 200 miles from the coast. The people are powerful and warlike, and accustomed to the breeding and the use of horses; they can collect a numerous irregular cavalry, and by sudden and rapid irruptions into the neighbouring countries, with this force, they have generally been successful in carrying off great numbers of Slaves. Recently, as it is reported, they have had to maintain some sharp contests, and have sustained losses which may give them a disinclination to these pursuits. This consequence may be more reasonably expected, as the embarrassed condition of the trade on the coast will operate conjointly with the losses in the interior, although we have recently heard that the Foulah chiefs have made an effort to overcome these embarrassments, and to re-open the Slave trade in the river Pongas. But the most favourable



grounds of hope with respect to the Foulahs arise from other considerations. The great national occupation of this people consists in rearing and feeding cattle, and this colony affords a beneficial market for their live stock, the consumption of which is already very considerable, with a progressive increase likely in a short time to make ample compensation to them for the loss of the Slave trade. They make likewise some butter which the colonists would purchase in as great quantity as this improved market would induce them to supply. Their horses also may be sold with advantage, and some are occasionally brought hither by small traders of the colony. Horses cannot be reared in the colony, and those that are imported are seldom of long life, consequently the demand must continue and must increase with the growth of the settlement. The present supplies are brought chiefly from the Gambia and from the Isles of Cape Verd. The Foulah horses are rather unsightly, but they are stout and serviceable, and as they are natives of a climate nearly the same as that of Sierra Leone they may be expected to prove more healthy than the others.

With these ample means of legitimate commerce, the Foulahs, it may be confidently hoped, will prosper by the extinction of the Slave trade rather than suffer by the diminution of it, and the trade which they may establish with this settlement would supply in return European commodities not only sufficient for their own wants, but give a large surplus to be transmitted to other countries more remotely situated in the interior of Africa. The circumstances of the present moment are particularly favourable to the formation of a direct intercourse with this people. Hitherto the trade between them and the colony has been carried through intermediate marts on the coast; one of these is Malagia, the capital of a chief called Sanassee, and the other is Fourricaria which belongs to Almami. These chiefs are of the Mandingo nation, the paramount sovereignty of which is claimed by Almami; the homage and tribute incident to this claim has been refused by Sanassee, and a war has in consequence arisen, which has caused much inconvenience to travelling as well as to agriculture and all pacific occupations, although attended with little bloodshed. The trade of the Foulahs especially has suffered so much interruption and depression that the chiefs of that people have been induced to make overtures to the traders at the river Pongas with a view to obtain the necessary supplies of European commodities by that channel. Almami of Tecmbo and the chiefs in immediate subordination to him had previously addressed a public letter to the Governor of this colony and to the African chiefs on the coast, praying the interposition of their influence for the re-establishment of the peace so much desired. This has induced the colonial government to dispatch a mission long contemplated for the purpose of inducing Almami of Tecmbo and the other chiefs of the Foulah nation to open an intercourse with the colony by a more direct communication through Port Logo at the head of one of the branches of the Sierra Leone river. Confident hopes are entertained of successful results from this mission, the management of which has been entrusted to Mr. O'Beirne of the medical staff.

We have not adequate means of ascertaining whether the coast to the southward possesses commodities capable of constituting a staple; but time and the enterprize of British travellers and traders, stimulated by the active spirit of beneficence which directs and sustains the efforts made in every direction for the improvement of Africa will, we are sure, bring forth resources on that part also of the coast, commensurate to those already in action in other parts.

In the trading stations near to Cape Mount, large quantities of country cloths are purchased at a shilling or fifteenpence each to be retailed in this

colony at five and six shillings. These cloths are of cotton first coarsely woven in webs of four inches wide, and subsequently sewed together in pieces of six or seven feet in length and four feet in breadth. They are used as coverings for tables and for country sofas and small beds, and occasionally as warm clothing for the person. As many as fifteen hundred of these cloths have been comprised in one shipment for the colony; four and five hundred are common numbers. They are previously brought from a great distance in the interior, and by the accounts of recent travels in the countries towards the sources of the Nile, it appears that cloths of a similar description are brought thither from the same places of manufacture. When it is considered that the payments for these cloths are made on this side of Africa entirely in goods brought from Europe, it will be matter of astonishment that the manufacturers can make them for so small a remuneration as that which they may be supposed to receive, when the ultimate price in the country, after passing, in all probability, through the hands of several traders, is so small as that which we have mentioned. It has been suggested that the exportation of the cotton in a crude state would be found a mode of trade, in this article, likely to produce great advantages to the Africans as well as to those who might purchase from them. Time and improved understanding will probably lead to this mode of interchange, but at present it is mere matter of conjecture.

We have now brought this communication to a close, and we have only to add our humble hope that the matters contained in it may be thought not unbecoming in us to offer to your Lordship's notice, nor unworthy of your Lordship's attention.

With the greatest respect, we have the honour to be,  
 my Lord,  
 your Lordship's most obedient  
 and very humble servants,

E. GREGORY.

EDWARD FITZGERALD.

*The Right Honourable Viscount Castlereagh, K. G.*

*His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,*

*&c. &c. &c.*