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GOLD COAST.

DESPATCHES

ON THE SUBJECT OF

DOMESTIC SLAVERY AND INTRODUCTION OF SLAVES

BY

ASHANTEE TRADERS

INTO THE

BRITISH PROTECTORATE.

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.
June 1874.*

LONDON:

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Despatches on the subject of Domestic Slavery and introduction of Slaves by Ashantee Traders into British Protectorate.

No. 1.

Mr. Secretary Cardwell to Governor Blackall.

Sir, *Downing Street, February 3, 1866.*
ON your departure from this country by the last mail packet, I requested you to proceed to Lagos in order to assist the Lieutenant-Governor of that Colony in settling matters with the Government of Abbeokuta and with Porto Novo, and likewise in considering the question of the boundaries of the Colony.

But there is a serious question which has been pending since our occupation of Lagos, which your appointment as Governor and Commander-in-chief over the West Africa Settlements will, I hope, enable you to bring to a close, viz., the existence of domestic slavery in British territory, and the grant of compensation for the liberation of slaves.

I need scarcely remark that this state of things is inconsistent with the provisions of the Imperial Act 3 and 4 William IV, cap. 73, which has made all the Queen's dominions free soil, and by which, therefore, every person in Lagos has been free since it became a British Colony. I am fully aware of the extreme difficulty which a Governor must encounter in having to assume the control of a territory under British jurisdiction, in which domestic slavery, as in every part of Africa, is a constituent element in the fabric of society, and appreciate the endeavours of the late Governor Freeman and the present Lieutenant-Governor, to facilitate the transition from slavery to freedom.

But, unfortunately, as could hardly have been helped, the Ordinances which have been passed for that object are at variance with British law.

The Ordinances to which I allude are, first, the one passed in 1863 for registering all "slaves" in the settlement of Lagos, and in which provision is made that in case of a slave being apprenticed the period of apprenticeship shall be guided by the original cost of the slave, the present market value of slave labour, &c.

The second Ordinance relates to the Slave Commission Court in which provision is made for settling the amount of compensation to be given to the late owners of slaves being inhabitants of Lagos, &c.

When Colonel Ord was appointed Commissioner to inquire into matters on the West Coast of Africa, the question of slavery at Lagos was one of the questions which he was to consider, and on his arrival in that Colony he communicated with the Lieutenant-Governor on the subject.

In reporting the result of their communications, the Lieutenant-Governor remarked, in his despatch to me, that the Slave Commission Court, which was to supersede the Slave Registry Court, was "a safety-valve for the disaffection of the serf, while, on the other hand, it afforded the master a certain amount of protection against the total or immediate loss of what he had been accustomed to consider his property."

The Lieutenant-Governor, however, felt that both in its language and working, there was in the Ordinance constituting the Court, an actual though indirect recognition of slavery in British territory, and he announced his intention of limiting its operations as much as possible in the first instance, and eventually altogether, to territory not British, but he left the Ordinance in the shape in which it was originally framed.

I need scarcely inform you that a Colonial Ordinance made in violation of an Act of the Imperial Parliament, is *ab initio* illegal and void, and I have now advised Her Majesty to disallow the two Ordinances above mentioned, and they are disallowed accordingly.

In what terms, and with what precautions, you are to announce their invalidity or their abrogation to the Colony is a matter requiring your serious consideration. You will be careful to take such steps as may avoid disturbances in Lagos or conflict with neighbouring Chiefs whose slaves might take refuge in Lagos; and you will consider whether it would be advisable on the same occasion to recommend labourers and servants to continue with their employers while well treated by them.

I should hope that after the repeal of the Ordinances the ordinary Courts of the Colony might take cognizance of all complaints of violence or compulsory detention, but if you should think it necessary to have a prescribed punishment for such offences, or to have an Ordinance regulating the relations of master and servant, I should wish you to frame such Ordinance, and send it to me for consideration, taking care that it contains no recognition of slavery in any shape.

With regard to fugitive slaves from the neighbouring territories, I need only remark that a Fugitive Slave Law in Africa is out of the question, and that it will be for the Chiefs, therefore, to take precautions against their slaves entering British territory, and for the Colonial Government to take care that no official inducements are held out to fugitives, and to warn them that if after entering British territory they again quit it, they must do so at their own risk.

But the readiest and most effectual way of escaping from all these embarrassments, is to confine British territory within the smallest compass which may be practicable, and if it should be found that British law cannot be fully established in the Island of Lagos, and in the towns occupied by us, we must confine the area of British territory, as at the Gold Coast, to the land occupied by the Government buildings, constituting the rest of the territory acquired from Docemo, a Protectorate where our influence could be used to soften and gradually destroy slavery, without our authority being called on to abolish it.

Supposing, however, that you do not find this course necessary, I should wish you to define the boundary of the settlement, so that the British territory be restricted to the Island of Lagos, and the towns of Badagry, Palma, and Leckie; but I should be glad to receive your opinion whether it is absolutely necessary to retain the three towns above-mentioned, and whether, without holding them, the principal stream of trade would not find its way through the mouth of the Lagoon to the town of Lagos.

In any case it will be requisite, in order to secure the Customs Revenue, to keep sovereignty over the sea-board and the waters of the Lagoon.

The question still remains of the permanent retention at Lagos of a detachment of regular troops, which I requested you in my despatch of the 20th ultimo to report upon.

I have, &c.
(Signed) E. CARDWELL.

No. 2.

The Earl of Kimberley to the Governor of the West African Settlements.

Sir,

Downing Street, January 12, 1872.

I HAVE had under consideration your despatch of the 15th November last, inclosing despatches from the Acting Administrator of the Gold Coast, regarding the introduction of slaves by Ashantee traders into the British Protectorate, for the purpose of sale, and the course pursued by him in consequence, and requesting my decision on the general question before giving any definite instructions to Mr. Salmon.

The position of the British Government in the Protectorate is that of influence over people who are not British subjects, and whilst every means should be taken to induce the natives to desist from such practices as those reported by the Acting Administrator, it does not appear to me that it is advisable to interfere by direct legislation.

Her Majesty's Government can give no countenance whatever to the purchase of slaves, on the ground that it may be an act of humanity, because the slaves would be in a worse position if they remained in the hands of their captors.

It may be better for the individual slaves, but the general result of such mistaken benevolence must obviously be to promote, rather than discourage, the Slave Trade, and to lead the natives to believe that in some circumstances it is justifiable to engage in this atrocious traffic. The British Government have succeeded, after great sacrifices, in putting a stop to the exportation of slaves by sea from West Africa; and they are bound

by every principle of their policy to prevent, if possible, the prosecution of the Slave Trade in a territory for the Government of which they are indirectly responsible.

I think the proper course would be to endeavour to come to an understanding with the Chiefs of the protected tribes to forbid the Slave Trade within their several districts.

If they enter into agreements with the Gold Coast Government to this effect, that Government can then enforce those agreements, which will be in the nature of Treaties. It will, of course, be understood that any slave imported into what is strictly British territory must be at once set free.

I shall be glad to receive your Report * as to the best mode of giving effect to what I have proposed, and, meanwhile, you will convey to Mr. Salmon my approval of his proceedings, which appear to have been judicious.

I have, &c.
(Signed) KIMBERLEY.

* No reply received.

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