



Center *for* Research Libraries
GLOBAL RESOURCES NETWORK

The Center for Research Libraries scans to provide digital delivery of its holdings. In some cases problems with the quality of the original document or microfilm reproduction may result in a lower quality scan, but it will be legible. In some cases pages may be damaged or missing. Files include OCR (machine searchable text) when the quality of the scan and the language or format of the text allows.

If preferred, you may request a loan by contacting Center for Research Libraries through your Interlibrary Loan Office.

Rights and usage

Materials digitized by the Center for Research Libraries are intended for the personal educational and research use of students, scholars, and other researchers of the CRL member community. Copyrighted images and texts may not be reproduced, displayed, distributed, broadcast, or downloaded for other purposes without the expressed, written permission of the copyright owner.

Center for Research Libraries

Identifier: 7f565f14-aa0e-40e3-8432-a7836c18c4f7

Range: Scans 001 - 006

Downloaded on: 2022-05-25 13:56:20

SLAVE TRADE. No. 1 (1878).

REPORT

ON THE

LABOUR QUESTION

IN

CUBA.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.
1878.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY HARRISON AND SONS.

[C.—2051.] *Price 1d.*

Report on the Labour Question in Cuba.

Consul-General Cowper to the Marquis of Salisbury.—(Received June 3.)

My Lord,

Havana, May 13, 1878.

I INADVERTENTLY omitted to forward to the Slave Trade Department of the Foreign Office a copy of the observations upon the labour question in Cuba which I embodied in my Commercial Report for the year 1876-77. I fear that this omission may have created some embarrassment, for which I offer my apologies. I propose, therefore, to do so now, introducing such alterations as the termination of the civil war and the Treaty betwixt Spain and China regarding immigrants may render necessary.

Ethnologically, the population of Cuba consists of three races, the European, the Asiatic, and the African, the American having been entirely annihilated by the former; the Europeans are represented almost exclusively by the Spaniards, the Asiatics by the Chinese, and the Africans by the negroes, but the number of Asiatics is so small, probably not more than 50,000 or 60,000, that they may be removed from this consideration; the European or Spanish race is said to number 800,000, and the African or negro, with the varieties consequent upon the mixture of the two, 600,000 out of a population of 1,396,530, thus classified in the census which was taken in 1861 :—

White males ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	468,087
" females ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	325,397
Free coloured males ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	113,806
" " females ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	118,687
Slaves, males ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	218,722
" females ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	151,831
Total ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,396,530

But I extremely doubt if the population of Cuba now greatly exceeds 1,000,000.

It will be seen that the Chinese are, as a separate body, excluded from this estimate, and if they are omitted altogether it may be one of the causes of the asserted increase of the population in 1864 to 1,500,000, the greatest amount ever quoted. The importation of Chinese coolies commenced in 1847 and ceased in 1873, during which period 116,267 were actually landed in Havana; these would have naturally formed the nucleus for an extension of the population by an industrious, sober, and tractable race, had not the exportation of women, it is said, been prohibited by the Chinese Government; but it is highly probable that the cupidity of those engaged in the traffic was one, if not the only, cause of the emigration being confined to men, who could so much better support the hardship of the voyage than women, who would scarcely consume more, and who could take care of themselves; but whatever the cause, an emigration intended to increase the labour power of the island, from its very incipience, bore the seeds of its own decay, and never could have proved, under the circumstances, anything but a temporary relief for the evil sought to be cured by it; in all probability there are not now 50,000 coolies in the island; in like manner the cessation of the civil war in America, and the outbreak of the insurrection here, caused the Americans who had desired to settle here to return to their own country; but the most serious cause of the decadence in the population of the country must be attributed to the insurrection itself and the atrocities which disgraced its commencement. These struck terror into the inhabitants, and those who escaped death in the field, execution at the garotte, or by court-martial, were glad to leave the country and to return to Spain, or to seek refuge in the United States, Jamaica, or the South

American Republics; and the tenacity with which the war has been continued has naturally ruined the finances of the country and occasioned an amount of taxation almost incredible and altogether insupportable, adding an additional incentive to depopulation.

My predecessor considered that in 1870 the population did not exceed 1,200,000, and I believe it has decidedly decreased ever since.

It is, however, an undoubted fact that the present amount of population is entirely inadequate to the wants of the country, and unless the rebellion is speedily suppressed it will continue to decrease, and with it the production and wealth of the island must decrease proportionately, for it is not the numerical deficiency of manual labour that has to be contended against; but even that is taxed to supply volunteers, police, and a vast number of other agents, the creations of the war; and there are even rumours of the system of conscription being introduced into the island, but such a notion was too wild to have been seriously entertained. The Chinese cannot increase, and for some unexplained reason the negroes do not, the mortality amongst their children being described as fearful and altogether unaccountable.

Thus the only two races in the island capable of outdoor labour are diminishing in numbers through natural causes, and at the same time slavery and forced labour are becoming extinct through the operation of the laws; first, the Chinese immigration has ceased for some time, and the contracts of those that are here are gradually expiring, and, secondly, the "Moret Law" is as surely extinguishing negro slavery; by this law all children born of slave parents after 17th September, 1868, and all slaves attaining sixty years of age were free; for certain services in the field under the Spanish flag slaves were freed, and numbers free themselves or are freed by their masters.

In 1875, the Junta de Colonizacion published a report of the operation of the law to that date; unfortunately, however, no return is made from the city of Havana, but even with that great omission, 50,046 slaves are reported to have been emancipated during the seven years between September 1868, and May 1875, thus—32,813 born free; 13,740 freed on account of age, 301 freed for service under the flag, and 3,192 freed through other causes. I have no reason to doubt the correctness of this report, and, therefore, taking the 50,046 as a numerical basis, about 7,000 a year became free, and consequently to this date it may be estimated that about 64,000 slaves have been freed, without calculating those in Havana, respecting whom no data exists. Leaving Havana, therefore, out of the question, there probably remain for agricultural purposes about 300,000 people, that is to say, 250,000 negroes and 50,000 Chinese; 500,000 more are urgently required to maintain the productions of the island at their present amount. The question is, where to look for them. The negro is beyond all comparison the most valuable immigrant for the tropics, no other can withstand lengthened field labour; then come the coolies, who are equally valuable in the manufacture of sugar, but cannot withstand the effects of exposure to sun and rain, but free immigration from Africa has not taken the place of the Slave Trade, and the island can look only to the coolies to supply its wants. The Spanish Government is, I hear, making strenuous efforts to induce the Chinese once more to permit the emigration to Cuba of its redundant population, and it is to be hoped that it will succeed, but it would be well to organize the service under its own responsible agents to prevent abuses, and for the Chinese Government to appoint a Consul here to protect their immigrants, not from the oppression of Government, but from the many rascals who infest Havana, and deceive and rob these poor people, and make a harvest out of their ignorance. I have never, until now, I regret to say, known any arbitrary or unjust act practised upon them by the Government; on the contrary, the permission allowed them at the expiration of their first contract to naturalize as Spanish subjects, or to choose a foreign Consul, through whom they obtain a cedula, is an act of the greatest humanity and liberality; nor do I believe that they are illtreated upon the estates at which they work. Those I have seen were well fed and clothed. In one respect they are worse off than the negro; the absence of females debars them from the enjoyment of every domestic tie, and in any renewal of Chinese immigration, the Celestial Government should insist upon a proportion of women being embarked with the men.

But this liberal and humane course has been infringed by a law, of which it is impossible to speak without indignation, obliging every Chinaman, at the expiration of his first contract, to renew it for a second term, or immediately to leave the country. Neither the exigencies of the war nor the want of labour can justify so gross a breach of faith; no one will more regret it than those who are the best friends of the Spanish Government, for it is probably the chief, if not the only cause, why Chinese are found in the rebel ranks, and why the Chinese Government has stopped the emigration; besides, so tractable, peaceable, and industrious a body of men, were altogether underserving of such treatment, for hitherto, after completing his first contract, the Chinaman has not become

a vagabond, but with his national aptitude for business has established himself, and by industry and frugality, many have become rich and prosperous citizens; as an instance of their progress, I may mention that they maintain more than one well-conducted theatre.

With my high estimation of the humanity and justice of the Spanish Government, I am astonished that it should have sanctioned a course which renders it obnoxious to the charge of a renewal of slavery under another name, and thus defeat that which must be the principal object of its desires, a free and copious immigration.

A company or society has recently been formed here under very distinguished auspices, for the importation of Chinese labourers; the general regulations appear to be admirable. It is proposed to bring them without any engagement here, so that they would be free to choose their own work; 25 per cent. are to be women, and a Chinese Consul appointed (if the Celestial Government will do so), to protect them, but the rule that they shall not be allowed to change their nationality, unless it be to become Spaniards, appears to be arbitrary and useless.

Cuba, to be restored to its former prosperity, requires peace, economy, and extended immigration, and all its well-wishers must hope that it will be successful in establishing the whole, and reasserting its right to the names of the pearl of the Antillas and the key of the Gulf once more.

Since writing the foregoing observations, the two most indispensable events for the renewed prosperity of the island are in a fair way of completion; indeed, the surrender of the rebel Chief Maceo may be accepted as the final end of the insurrection, and the restoration of peace; and the Emigration Treaty recently concluded between Spain and China, a copy of which I left at the Foreign Office when in England, will withdraw the barriers to a copious flood of immigrants, of which the country is in such urgent need.

The question remains, how will these opportunities be handled by the Government? Will freer institutions, sufficient to content the Cubans without outraging the feelings of the Spaniards, be introduced? Will the immigrants be fairly treated and their contracts respected? If we could answer both questions in the affirmative, a fraternal feeling might yet be renewed between the Spaniards and Cubans, and the great influx of immigrants would speedily deal the death-blow to slavery. Then, and not till then, can the financial difficulties be successfully handled; but if the questions can only be answered negatively, peace and immigration are delusions, words only, and the island will continue its course to ruin.

The above-mentioned Company or Society of Planters, of whom the Marquis of Alava was the President, sent a Commissioner to China on Sunday last to put the immigration Treaty into operation, and probably to bring out the Chinese Consul-General and his Vice-Consuls; it is doubted here if these gentlemen will possess due weight with the authorities, but as any unfavourable report from them may stop the immigration, I believe that they will prove wholesome checks upon the robbery or ill-usage of their fellow-countrymen. There is one condition of the Treaty which might be very much improved; the Vice-Consuls are to reside at the different ports of the island, where they would prove quite useless, as China has no commerce here; they should therefore be stationed at the principal towns in the sugar districts, where their countrymen will be employed, who would thus have easy access to them. The Consul-General would of course live in Havana, in communication with the supreme authority.

The Society of Planters has just lost its President, D. Julian de Zulueta, Marquis of Alava, by a fall from his horse; his death is justly felt as a national calamity at a crisis like the present.

I have, &c.
(Signed) H. AUGUSTUS COWPER.

SLAVE TRADE. No. 1 (1878).

Report on the Labour Question in Cuba.

—

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Com-
mand of Her Majesty. 1878.*

LONDON:
PRINTED BY HARRISON AND SONS.