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P A P E R

RESPECTING THE

TRAFFIC IN SLAVES IN ZANZIBAR.

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.
August 1893.*

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Paper respecting the Traffic in Slaves in Zanzibar.

Mr. Rodd to the Earl of Rosebery.—(Received July 10.)

My Lord,

Zanzibar, June 12, 1893.

THE inclosed letter from the "Daily News" has been sent me under a cover stamped with the name of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

The position of the writer, who signs in his capacity as Secretary to the above-mentioned Society, is calculated to lend a certain authority to observations which convey a very erroneous impression as to what goes on in this part of the world.

In the first place, the writer finds it satisfactory to note that, in the case of the recent detention of a dhow under French colours off Zanzibar, "the provisions of the Brussels Act have been loyally maintained by France," but in so doing, he appears to have failed to appreciate that what was remarkable about this case was the signal instance it afforded of the failure of all such provisions as the Brussels Act affords, when not backed up by an active search at sea.

The writer then goes on to state, with a special insistence that he is not speaking at random, that the highest authorities maintain that for one slave set free at least twenty are "smuggled through," but he does not state where to. From these premises, he arrives at the amazing conclusion that an aggregate of from 40,000 to 50,000 slaves are annually "carried away captive from Zanzibar and the neighbouring ports."

One may here again be permitted to ask, "Where to?" and to add that the total population of this island has been estimated at some 200,000, a total which is probably a good deal above the mark.

Now, what is the real state of the case? A certain amount of petty Traffic in Slaves, no doubt, is secretly carried on between the Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba and the coast. On calm days they can be taken over by ones and twos in canoes from the mainland, and surreptitiously landed about the islands, but this small local traffic, which is rendered difficult by the vigilance exercised, and by the fact that raw slaves soon learn that they can have redress and justice here, does not involve any particular hardship beyond those engendered by the state of servitude generally, so little so, in fact, that of late a number of the impoverished natives from the interior have been voluntarily offering themselves as slaves at the coast, and it is evidently not this small local Traffic, or exchange of slaves, which the writer has in view in speaking of the thousands annually "carried away captive from Zanzibar."

The writer must, therefore, have had in mind the Arabs who come down from the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf with a view to procuring slaves in Zanzibar.

If this be so, I would first point out that the northern dhows which come to trade in Zanzibar are only able to make one journey there in the year. They avail themselves of the north-east monsoon to run south with cargoes of dates, ghee, dried shark, &c., and return north in April, as soon as the south-west monsoon, which prevails for the other half of the year, sets in.

It is during April and part of May, when the wind enables them to return, and during this period only, that the attempt is made to run slaves to the Persian Gulf.

They arrive chiefly during the months of February and March. Taking the dhows of all sizes, small and great, which came south this year to Zanzibar from ports in the Red Sea, from Muskat and the Persian Gulf, the harbour Returns show fourteen for February and thirty-seven for March. These figures include dhows belonging to Indian merchants, which are, of course, under no suspicion of being concerned in Slave Trade, and all in fact that come down from the northern ports directly, whatever their port of first departure may have been. Beside the larger buggalows, these figures also include the smaller dhows, which are only capable of carrying a few passengers besides their crew.

The possibilities of removing wholesale shipments of slaves from Zanzibar are thus considerably narrowed. And even of the dhows which belong to Arabs from the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, it must not be assumed that all intend to incur the heavy risks involved in slave running, although there are probably few who would not do so if the opportunity offered without fear of detection; but the losses and penalties consequent on detection are so severe, that the majority of them now take trade cargoes north with them, and the number coming south is said to be annually decreasing.

A certain number, however, undoubtedly do try to secure consignments of slaves for Arabia.

In a place like Zanzibar, where all the owners of domestic slaves are also slave-dealers in sympathy, if not in fact, it is no difficult matter to purchase or kidnap children in a manner which will almost defy detection. Children are lured into houses in the native quarter, under pretext of carrying parcels for a small reward, and when once inside are made prisoners. In the intricate mazes of the native town, which covers a very large area, it is not difficult to conceal them; they are moved at night by ones and twos through dark streets into the country for embarkation, and the singular impassiveness and indifference of the native races makes the task of the kidnapper easy. Not a cry is raised by the children who are led away, and, were it raised, I doubt whether it would attract any attention.

The attempt is then made to get them on board the dhows, and this is accomplished in various manners, which it would take long to detail, in which every resource of craft and ingenuity is employed.

Should this be accomplished without detection, the dhows have still to run the gauntlet of Her Majesty's ships patrolling Zanzibar waters.

The children recently found by the boats of Her Majesty's ship "Philomel" in charge of five Arabs, on a small island some 1½ miles from Zanzibar, on the 22nd April, were detected largely owing to information supplied to the ships from the authorities on shore; and during the previous days some 250 houses in the native quarter, as well as in country districts, had been searched by the Sultan's troops in the hopes of finding their place of concealment. Three smaller groups of slaves, also destined for the north, had also been found on shore the previous week, owing to the loyal co-operation of the Sultan, and duly liberated; and that is my answer to the writer when he inquires, "What are the British authorities in Zanzibar doing?"

Zanzibar is not a British Colony, but only a Protectorate, and the British authorities there consist of Her Majesty's Agency and four British officers occupying the responsible posts of the Sultan's Government, who are laboriously endeavouring to train a native police and develop an Administration which will some day be strong enough to deal with the marauders I have referred to. With the limited resources which the island can at present dispose of, it is not possible to maintain a coastguard or a flotilla of small boats to watch all the bays and creeks of the two large islands, or to police effectively the country villages, and a considerable amount of illegal traffic would inevitably be carried on during the months of April and May were it not for the constant supervision exercised at sea.

Information is pretty generally obtainable as to what dhows are likely to attempt to run slaves, and the closest vigilance is exercised over their movements. Should any get away without detection we are almost certain to hear of it, and, from the information which I have received, it is my conviction that very few slaves have been removed from the island this season.

A certain number may have escaped our vigilance; but even so, I adhere to my opinion that very few slaves have been removed this year beyond those which have been recaptured and liberated, and all our information tends to show that those engaged in this traffic are bitterly complaining that their trade is made impossible.

It is, therefore, a matter for regret to find a writer who officially represents an influential body publishing a letter in the press, which, though written in all good faith, appears to me to indicate a culpable ignorance of a subject on which the public will assume him to be an authority, a letter which is seriously calculated to mislead and to convey to British officers an unmerited reproach.

I have, &c.
(Signed) RENNELL RODD.

Inclosure.

Extract from the "Daily News" of May 9, 1893.

SLAVES KIDNAPPED IN ZANZIBAR.

To the Editor of the "Daily News."

British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,

55, New Broad Street, London, May 9, 1893.

Sir,

FROM a private source I have heard some particulars of the capture of slaves made in Zanzibar Harbour by Her Majesty's ship "Philomel" on the 9th April, a short telegraphic notice of which has already appeared in the "Daily News." Owing to the vessel flying a French flag and the circumstances of her sailing appearing to be suspicious, application was made to the French Consulate, where ready assistance was obtained. On searching the vessel, which was destined for the Persian Gulf and owned by Arabs residing there, a hatchway was opened covering a small concealed chamber not many feet square. On doing this, a number of boys and girls, estimated at about fifty, immediately stretched out their hands and arms, and pleaded piteously for water, food, and air, as there was practically no ventilation. Presumably this close confinement was only intended to last till the ship was well out at sea, but even then, had the dhow not been captured, a large number must have succumbed to their terrible privations. Although it is very satisfactory to find that in this case the provisions of the Brussels Act have been loyally maintained by France, it is well to call attention to the fact that some of the highest authorities still maintain that where one slave is captured and set free at least twenty are smuggled through. As 200 slaves have been captured in one month, it is easy to calculate that something like 4,000 have been carried away captive from Zanzibar and neighbouring ports, or an aggregate of from 40,000 to 50,000 a-year. If to this is added the numbers killed in procuring the slaves, the sum total becomes incredibly large. In making this estimate I am not speaking at random, but from information received from authorities that cannot be questioned. It may well be asked, what are the British authorities at Zanzibar doing to allow this state of things; and when is the British Government going to carry out the suggestion made by Sir John Kirk in 1884, and urged by this Society upon every Foreign Secretary for many years past, for the abolition of the legal status of slavery? Nothing short of this can possibly stop these scandalous kidnappings, which are carried on in an island under the protection of the British flag.

I am, &c.

(Signed) CHARLES H. ALLEN, *Secretary.*

PAPER respecting Traffic in Slaves in Zanzibar.

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