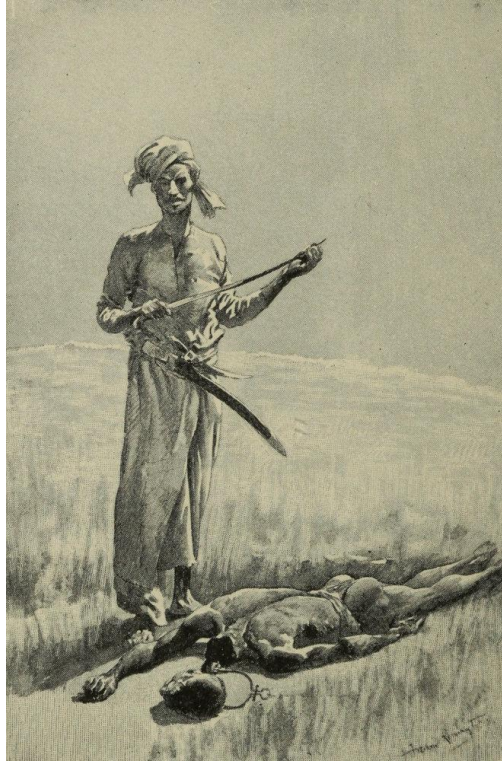


SLAVERY
AND THE SLAVE TRADE IN
AFRICA

BY
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Slavery and the slave trade in Africa



IN THE REAR OF A CARAVAN'

SLAVERY

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“It is desirable that accurate information on the enormities of the slave trade should be spread at home and abroad, and that to slave-holding states all evidence proving the superior advantages of free labor should be freely supplied,” was a sentiment uttered by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at the jubilee meeting of the Antislavery Society. His vast and influential audience cordially responded to it.

It seems to me that the same sentiment should also be published for the benefit of all those in America or England who are or may become interested in the welfare and progress of the negro races, and of their advancement towards civilization. With that view, I shall endeavor in this article to lay before you the present actual condition of Africa in respect to slavery, the slave trade, and slave-raiding, and the efforts which are being made to remedy their destructive effects, and to extirpate the causes, by opening the continent to the influences of legitimate trade.

The maritime exploration of the African coasts by the Portuguese navigators in the fifteenth century was the direct cause of the first inception of the traffic in negroes, and first started the no less inhuman system of slave-holding which this century has seen expiated by one of the most sanguinary wars of which we have any full record.

The exploration of the interior of the continent, accompanied as it has been by revelations respecting the appalling sufferings of

innocent peoples, of the wholesale destruction of tribal communities, and the annihilation of their humble industries, has so cleared the way to the right comprehension of the worst features of the slave trade that we begin now to see pretty clearly the measures that must be adopted not only for its thorough suppression in the continent, but to obliterate all traces of its past horrors.

The excesses which were committed by the cupidity and hard thoughtlessness of our forefathers have been atoned for to some extent by their children by the immense sacrifices which they have made. They have freely risked their lives on the battle-field, on board of the cruisers along the unhealthy coasts of Africa during their long and faithful service as the world's maritime police, along the various lines of exploration, in the many mission fields; they have also given treasures of money towards freeing themselves from the shame of any connection with the slave trade by moral or actual connivance, or by countenancing its existence.

In regard to the suppression of the slave trade in little-known Africa we have been, however, too apt to adopt pessimistic views; and as in North and South America we were slow to perceive our duties, or to appreciate the advantages that would result from relieving ourselves from the odium attached to slavery, so after the event we are too apt to remind ourselves of the immense trouble and treasure it cost us to cast it off. Our impatience is excited at the portentously large figures of expense, compared to which the figures of profit seem so infinitesimal, and the rate of progress so insignificant. My endeavor shall be to lessen this feeling of disappointment, and to show how we have been steadily advancing, even in mid-Africa, to extinguish the traffic, and what prospects

we have of eventually seeing it abolished altogether from the face of the earth.

From the year when Vasco de Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope (1497) to the year 1807, when the British government prohibited the exportation of slaves over the high seas, is a period of 310 years. During all this time Africa was surrendered to the cruelty of the slave-hunter, and the avarice of the slave-trader. While its people were thus subject to capture and expatriation, it was clearly impossible that any intellectual or moral progress could be made by them. The greater number of those accessible from the coast were compelled to study the best methods of avoiding the slaver and escaping his force and his wiles—the rest only thought of the arts of kidnapping their innocent and unsuspecting fellow-creatures. Yet ridiculous as it may appear to us, there were not wanting zealous men who devoted themselves to Christianizing the savages who were moved by such an opposite spirit. In Angola, Congo, and Mozambique, and far up the Zambezi, missionaries erected churches and cathedrals, appointed bishops and priests, who converted and baptized, while at the mouths of the Niger, the Congo, and the Zambezi their countrymen built slave-barracoons and anchored their murderous slave-ships. European governments legalized and sanctioned the slave trade, the public conscience of the period approved it, the mitred heads of the Church blessed the slave-gangs as they marched to the shore, and the tax-collector received the levy per head as lawful revenue.

But here and there during these guilty centuries words of warning are not wanting. Queen Elizabeth, upon being informed of the forcible capture of Africans for the purposes of sale, exclaims solemnly that “such actions are detestable, and will call down vengeance on the perpetrators.” When Las Casas, in his anxiety to

save his Indians, suggests that Africans be substituted for them, the Pope, Leo X., declares that “not only the Christian religion but Nature herself cried out against such a course.”

One hundred and sixty-five years after the discovery of the Cape, Sir John Hawkins pioneers the way for England to participate in the slave trade, hitherto carried on by the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch.

A century later a king of England, Charles II., heads an English company which undertakes to supply the British West Indies yearly with 30,000 negroes.

After the Asiento Contract, under which for thirty years England secured the monopoly of supplying the Spanish West Indies with slaves, as many as 192 ships were engaged every year in the transportation of slaves from the African coast. The countries which suffered most from the superior British method of slave capturing and trading and slave-carrying were Congo land, the Niger Valley, the Guinea and Gold coasts, the Gambia, Cross, and Calabar lands.

The system adopted by the British crews in those days was very similar to that employed by the Arabs to-day in inner Africa. They landed at night, surrounded the selected village, and then set fire to the huts, and as the frightened people issued out of the burning houses, they were seized and carried to the ships; or sometimes the skipper, in his hurry for sea, sent his crew to range through the town he was trading with, and, regardless of rank, to seize upon every man, woman, and child they met. Old Town, Creek Town, and Duke Town, in Old Calabar, have often witnessed this summary and high-handed proceeding.

Boswell, the biographer of Dr. Johnson, called the slave trade “an important and necessary branch of commerce;” and probably the largest section of the British public, before those antislavery champions Clarkson and Wilberforce succeeded in persuading their countrymen to reflect a little, shared Boswell’s views, as well as his surprise and indignation, when it became known that there were English people who talked of suppressing it.

That the slave trade must have been a lucrative commerce there can be no doubt, when we consider that from 1777 to 1807 upwards of 3,000,000 Africans had been sold in the West Indies. All those forts which may be seen lining the west coast of Africa to-day were constructed principally by means of the revenue derived from the slave tax.

In 1833 slavery was abolished throughout the British dominions, and the government agreed to pay the slave-owners of the West Indies £20,000,000 redemption-money for 1,000,000 of slaves. On the 1st of August, 1834, the famous Act of Emancipation came into operation. Throughout the West Indies the eve of the great day was kept by watch meetings, in acclamations of praise and thanksgiving. It is said that when the hour of midnight began to strike, the singing and the shouting ceased, and the congregations knelt down and listened with bated breath to the solemn strokes of the bell which announced their freedom, and ere the new day was a minute old the loud strains of “Glory Allelujah!” burst from the now enfranchised people. They flung themselves upon one another’s breasts, clapped their hands, cried and laughed, but louder than all other sounds were the cries, “Praise God! Glory! glory to God!”

Ten years later, the abolition of the legal status of slavery in India freed 9,000,000 of slaves. Then, little by little, the nations implicated in slavery gravitated to the side of the emancipators. In 1846 the Bey of Tunis, through British influence, decreed that all slaves touching his territory should become free. The French Republic in 1848 declared by a brief act that no more slaves should be admitted into French territory. In 1861 the autocrat of Russia decreed the emancipation of 20,000,000 serfs. The history of the great struggle in the United States is too recent for it to be forgotten that it occasioned the proclamation of freedom on January 1, 1863, by which 6,000,000 of slaves were admitted to the rights of freemen. Finally, and only four years ago, Brazil, after long and laborious efforts of her most enlightened men, heard that the law of abolition of slavery had passed through her Senate—and thus the cruel and inhuman system of man holding fellow-man as a chattel and barterable property was extinguished throughout all America.

It therefore required eighty-two years to extirpate slavery within lands professing to be civilized. Africa in the mean time was not neglected. Her burdens and pains were gradually but surely being reduced. The cruising squadrons sailing up and down the eastern and western coasts made it extremely difficult for slave-ships to break through the close blockade, and after the introduction of steam it was rendered impossible. Education had also greatly spread, and it became a universal conviction that slave-trading was as wicked as piracy.

It has since been attempted by more than one power to continue the trade under the disguised form of cooly and contract labor. Were it honestly conducted, and the contracts punctually executed on the part of the employers, there can be no doubt that it would be a

means of elevating the benighted people into a higher standard by the contact with and example of a superior or, rather, more advanced race. But it requires a strong and enlightened government to act as umpire in such cases, and governments, unless they find their influence remunerative, do not care to take too much trouble. The ignorant islanders of the South Seas have suffered terribly from this supineness, indifference, or want of close scrutiny and rigid enforcement of every detail in the contract by the Queensland government. They have been decoyed on board the labor-ships under various pretences, and conveyed away never to return; or they have been allowed to go to the Queensland plantations uncared and unprovided for; or, after the term of contract has expired, they have been landed on islands with which they were totally unacquainted, and become food for savages or been made slaves. That such things should be possible in a British colony argues a woful ignorance of the uses of a government, inexcusable stupidity, a shocking lack of feeling, and an incredible amount of ingratitude. It would not be difficult to prove such a system worse than open slavery.

The Portuguese have also been until recently offenders against public sentiment in the matter of exporting “colonials” from Angola for the cocoa groves of Prince’s Island and the sugar estates of St. Thomas. These colonials are natives collected from the interior, who, before embarkation, are looked at by a government functionary, and then have tin tickets slung around their necks, are given a blanket and a few flimsy cottons, and are deported to the islands for a term which to too many of them must be indefinite. The official declared that all was fair and just, but no one with a fair mind on viewing a barge-load of these unfortunates could possibly accept such a statement from an underbred and

illiterate official as a voucher. It appears to me that if the colonials are absolutely required for the islands by the Portuguese, or contract kanakas by Queensland planters, their engagement might be made as honest as an agreement with a number of English navvies for the Suakim-Berber Railway, or Italians for the Congo Railway, or Jamaicans for the Panama Canal. But it should be remembered that the lower, the more degraded, and more ignorant the people from whom these labor gangs are drawn, the greater are the responsibilities of the government sanctioning such engagements. For in cases where the government authorizes “contract labor” or “colonialism,” it should be prepared to supply to the ignorant native that care, knowledge, prudence, and security which the English, Italian, and Jamaican navvies possess by education, color, and experience. And it is only in this way, and no other, that coolyism, colonialism, and contract labor can be relieved of their objectionable features.

We may now see that the progress of the world in philanthropic feeling and sentiment has been continuous, and as satisfactory as its progress in the adoption and use of the mechanical inventions of the age. It has been comparatively slow, but the world is large and its nations are many; but for an idea—born in the sympathetic heart of the humble Fox—to be found permeating the minds of all the civilized peoples of the world, until all authority is ranged on its side, is surely wonderful. Wherefore we may go on hoping and working till no son of Adam shall be found a slave to his fellow in all the world.

Now let us see what has already been done, or may in the near future be done, in Africa, which has been during historic time the nursery of slaves. I have before me an autograph letter of Dr. David Livingstone, written in 1872, wherein he concludes a long

exposé of the evils of the slave trade which he had met in his travels thus: "The west coast slave-trade is finished, but it is confidently hoped, now that you have got rid of the incubus of slavery [in America], the present holders of office will do what they can to suppress the infamous breaches of the common law of mankind that still darken this eastern coast, and all I can add in my loneliness is, may Heaven's rich blessings descend on whoever lends a helping hand!"

It was this and other letters from Livingstone which provoked that earnest attention to Africa which I feel convinced will not abate until it will be as impossible to kidnap a slave there as in England. The traveller's death, which occurred a few months later, stirred his countrymen into action. At a great meeting held at the Mansion House the necessity for vigorously grappling with the slave trade on the east coast was unmistakably expressed. It resulted in Sir Bartle Frere being sent to Zanzibar to engage the Sultan's co-operation. For that prince derived a considerable revenue from the duty on imported slaves; his subjects were the people against whom Livingstone had written those terrible indictments; the British Indian merchants residing in his capital furnished the means whereby the Arabs were equipped for their marauding expeditions. But with all Sir Bartle's tact, discretion, and proverbial suavity, the mission intrusted to him narrowly approached failure. Fortunately, in Dr. (now Sir) John Kirk, the consul-general, the British government possessed an official of rare ability, and who from long acquaintance with the Sultan knew him thoroughly. Through his assistance, and the opportune appearance of Admiral Cumming with a powerful fleet, a treaty was finally concluded, and the Zanzibar prince was enlisted on the side of the antislavery cause.

Those, however, who expected too much from the treaty were greatly disappointed when, a few months later, reports reached England that the slave trade was as flourishing as ever. No suspicion was entertained of the sincerity of the Zanzibar prince, for upon every occasion involving the punishment of the slavers he proved his honesty by permitting the law, without protest, to be applied. The objects of the treaty were being, however, evaded by the enterprising Arabs on the mainland, who marched their caravans northward along the coast to points whence at favorable opportunities they could ship their captives to ports in southern Arabia or in the Egyptian protectorate.

To counteract these new proceedings of the Arabs, another large meeting was convened at Stafford House in May, 1874, for the consideration of other means of suppression of the trade. I suggested at that meeting that commissioners should be appointed at various ports along the coast whose duty it would be to keep a record of the number of persons attached to all caravans bound for the interior, as well as of the material of their equipment; that each caravan leader, before receiving permission to set out, should be compelled to bind himself not to engage in the slave trade, and that such leader on returning to the coast should, upon being convicted of having evaded or broken his obligations, forfeit his bond and be fined \$5000; that each captain of a slave-vessel, upon conviction that he was engaged in the transport of slaves, should receive capital punishment; that trading depots should be established on Lakes Nyassa and Tanganika to encourage legitimate commerce in the natural products of the interior; and that the lake coasts should be patrolled by flotillas of steam-launches. The above were the main features of a plan which I still believe would have been adequate in meeting the wishes of the principal speakers in that

assembly. Those who know what has since been done by the imperial German government along that same coast and on the lakes will perceive how closely the suggestions are paralleled to-day by the actions of the German commissioners and the trading depots on the lakes belonging to the African Lakes Company. No caravan is permitted to leave without search; gunpowder and arms are confiscated; slave-traders are tried, and hanged after conviction (the chief judge on the German coast lately sentenced seventeen Arabs to be hanged at Lindi). The trading depots of the African Lakes Company are pre-eminently successful in subserving the antislavery cause by suppressing the odious trade in slaves. Had the British done then what is being done now, no other power could have usurped her rights in the immense territory lately abandoned to the Germans.

The history of events at Zanzibar for some years following consists principally of relations of capture of slave-dhows and the confiscation of the vessels, the visit of the Zanzibar prince to England, the appointment of a number of vice-consuls to the principal ports along the coast, the departures of explorers for inner Africa, the gradual but steady increase of missionaries in the interior, and the establishment of Christian missions at Usambara, Mombasa, and Nyassa.

Meanwhile the Arabs in the far interior had discovered a new field for bolder operations in a country west of Lake Tanganika, called Manyuema, and the enormous forested area adjoining it to the north, which has lately been discovered to be about 400,000 square miles in extent. Nyangwé, the principal town of Manyuema, is situate but a few miles south of the vast forest, on the right bank of the Lualaba. It was the furthest point of Livingstone's explorations. Manyuema is surpassingly beautiful, the soil is exceedingly fertile,

and the people, though troubled by tribal feuds, are industrious cultivators. By the time Livingstone had penetrated the country the Arabs had assumed lordship over it, and each chief was compelled to pay tribute to them in ivory. The Arabs not only monopolized the ivory, but the fear of them was so great among the Manyuema that, to protect themselves from too many masters, they elected to serve some one powerful Arab, to whom they surrendered themselves, their liberties, as well as their properties of all kinds. In a few years Manyuema was emptied of its elephant teeth. The Arabs then began to extend their operations into the forest, suffering many a disaster and mishap as they advanced. But continuous practice enabled them in the end to thwart the craft of the forest natives, and to acquire that experience by which eventually they easily became masters of every country they entered. The success attending the ventures of such men as Dugumbi, Mtagamoyo, Mohammed-bin-Nasur, and Abed-bin-Salim, and scores of lesser leaders, increased the avarice and excited the ardor of younger and more daring spirits. An apprenticeship with men who had grown gray in the arts of slave-catching and ivory-raiding had taught them that it was a waste of time to pretend to barter cloth and beads as practised in lands east of Lake Tanganika. They had realized how complete was the isolation of the forest aborigines, how the little settlements buried in the recesses of the forest were too weak to resist their trained battalions, and how the natives shrank from facing the muzzles of their thundering guns, and how they might range at will and pillage to their hearts' content through an unlimited area without let or hindrance.

Having become experts in the science of tracking, ambuscades, and surprises, they became anxious to win fame and fortune after a

manner never dreamed of by the earlier traders. The verb “to buy” was to be banished from the vernacular. All that was bestial and savage in the human heart was given fullest scope, unchecked and unreprieved. Hence followed the most frightful barbarities and massacres, which spared no age and regarded no sex; fire, spear, arrow, and iron bullet precluded furious loot and pitiless seizure.

Among the earliest to put into practice the terrible knowledge they had gained during their tentative incursions into the forest were Abed-bin-Salim, Tippu Tib, Sayid-bin-Habib, Muini Muhala, Rashid (the nephew of Tippu), Nasur-bin-Suliman, and others. Abed-bin-Salim’s case is typical. Among the young Swahili who followed his fortunes were four youthful squires, or apprentices, named Karema, Kiburuga, Kilonga-Longa, and Kibongé. The last of these has given his name to an important Arab station just above Stanley Falls; the other three have since become famous among the Central African rapparees and slave-thieves. The names under which they have severally become notorious, and for which they exchanged those derived from their parents, are synonymes given by the bush natives for rapine, lust, murder, arson.

In 1878 Abed-bin-Salim despatched coastward a caravan consisting of Manyuema slaves bearing 350 tusks. At Zanzibar the ivory was sold, and the proceeds invested in double-barrelled guns, Minie rifles, and carbines, gunpowder, percussion-caps, buckshot, and bar lead. Within twenty months the new weapons and war munition reached Nyangwé. Kibongé soon after was sent by his master Abed down the Lualaba as supercargo and store-keeper at a station to be strategically chosen, and his three confederates became leaders of three divisions of booty-gatherers, and to draw all slaves, ivory, and flocks of goats into the slave-hold of Kibongé. A native village near the confluence of the Leopold with the

Lualaba River was taken, and without loss of time was palisaded as a measure of security. Canoe after canoe was added to their flotilla, in order that detachments might make simultaneous attacks at various points along the Leopold, Lufu, Lowwa, Lira, and Ulindi rivers.

Ivory was the first object of the raiders, women the second, children the third. Ivory was now rapidly rising in value, for the slaughter of fifty thousand elephants in a year makes it scarce. In this region, hitherto unexploited, it was abundant. The natives frequently used it to chop wood upon, or to rest their idols while shaping them with the adze. Being so heavy, two tusks were used to keep their bedding of phrynium leaves from being scattered. They made ivory into pestles to pound their corn, or they stood the tusks on end round their idols, or employed them as seats for their elders in the council-house. Women were needed as wives and servants for the marauders; the little girls could be trained to house-work, and bide the growth of the little boys, with whom eventually they would wive, and who in the mean time would be useful as field hands or for domestic duties.

In a village there would probably be found, on an average, ten tusks, good, bad, and indifferent, thirty full-grown women, and fifty children above five years old, besides a few infants. At the first alarm, a scream from a child or a woman, the warriors and their families dash frantically and pell-mell out of their huts. Then from the ambuscade a volley is fired, and a score fall dead or wounded to the ground, whereat the unseen foes leap out of their coverts to despatch the struggling and groaning victims with knife and spear; and some make mad rushes at a group of terrified children; others dart for a likely-looking woman; a few leap in pursuit of a girl who is flying naked from the scene; some chase a

lad who bounds like an antelope over the obstructions. Those not engaged in the fierce chase enter the village, and collect to argue over the rights to this or that child. When four or five hundred men rise upon a village whose inhabitants are numerically inferior to them, the event is followed by much fierce discussion of the kind which is not always amicably or easily settled, even when the matter is submitted to the arbitration of the leaders. The rest of the band scatter wildly through the village, and begin collecting the frightened fowls and the bleating goats, rummaging roofs, insides of gourds, and every imaginable place where a poor savage might be likely to hide his little stock of curios and valuables; others manacle the captives, and question them harshly about their neighbors, or indulge in barbarous fun with some decrepid whitehead. When the results of these pillaging expeditions became known in Nyangwé, and the laden canoes disembarked their ivory, slaves, and fat goats of the famous forest breed, it kindled the envy and cupidity of even Tippu Tib and Sayid-bin-Habib.

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