

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE
SLAVE TRADE ON THE
COAST OF AFRICA**

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An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa by Alexander Falconbridge

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ALEXANDER FALCONBRIDGE

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COAST OF AFRICA**

James Parkhouse junr

AN
A C C O U N T
OF THE
S L A V E T R A D E
ON THE
C O A S T O F A F R I C A.

BY
ALEXANDER FALCONBRIDGE,
LATE SURGEON IN THE AFRICAN TRADE.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following sheets are intended to lay before the public the present state of a branch of the British commerce, which, ever since its existence, has been held in detestation by all good men, but at this time more particularly engages the attention of the nation, and is become the object of general reprobation.

Leaving to abler pens to expatiate more at large on the injustice and inhumanity of the *Slave Trade*, I shall content myself with giving some account of the hardships which the unhappy objects of it undergo, and the cruelties they suffer, from the period of their being reduced to a state of slavery, to their being disposed of in the West India islands; where, I fear, their grievances find little alleviation. At the same time, I shall treat of a subject, which appears not to have been attended to in the manner its importance requires; that is, the sufferings and loss of the seamen employed in this trade; which, from the intemperature of the climate, the inconveniencies they labour under during the voyage, and the severity of most of the commanders, occasion the destruction of great numbers annually.

And this I shall endeavour to do by the recital of a number of facts which have fallen under my own immediate observation, or the knowledge of which I have obtained from persons on whose veracity I can depend.

And happy shall I esteem myself, if an experience obtained by a series of inquiries and observations, made during several voyages to the coast

of Africa, shall enable me to render any service to a cause, which is become the cause of every person of humanity.

Before I proceed to the methods of obtaining the slaves, and their subsequent treatment, the treatment of the sailors, and a concise account of the places on the coast of Africa where slaves are obtained, (which I purpose to annex,) it may not be unnecessary to give a short sketch of the usual proceedings of the ships employed in the slave trade.

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A C C O U N T

O F T H E

S L A V E T R A D E, &c.

Proceedings during the Voyage.

ON the arrival of the ships at Bonny, and New Calabar, it is customary for them to unbend the sails, strike the yards and topmasts, and begin to build what they denominate a *bouse*. This is effected in the following manner. The sailors first lash the booms and yards from mast to mast, in order to form a *ridge-pole*. About ten feet above the deck, several spars, equal in length to the ridge pole, are next lashed to the standing rigging, and form a wall-plate. Across the ridge-pole and wall-plate, several other spars or rafters are afterwards laid and lashed, at the distance of about six inches from each other. On these, other rafters or spars are laid length-wise, equal in extent to the ridge-pole, so as to form a kind of

lattice or net-work, with interstices of six inches square. The roof is then covered with mats, made of rushes of very loose texture, fastened together with rope-yarn, and so placed, as to lap over each other like tiles. The space between the deck and the wall-plate, is likewise enclosed with a kind of lattice, or net-work, formed of sticks, lashed across each other, and leaving vacancies of about four inches square. Near the main-mast, a partition is constructed of inch deal boards, which reaches athwart the ship. This division is called a *barricado*. It is about eight feet in height, and is made to project near two feet over the sides of the ship. In this *barricado* there is a door, at which a centinel is placed during the time the negroes are permitted to come upon deck. It serves to keep the different sexes apart; and as there are small holes in it, wherein blunderbuffes are fixed, and sometimes a cannon, it is found very convenient for quelling the insurrections that now and then happen. Another door is made in the lattice or net-work at the ladder, by which you enter the ship. This door is guarded by a centinel during the day, and is locked at night. At the head of the ship there is a third door, for the use of the sailors, which is secured in the same manner as that at the gangway. There is also in the roof a large trap-door, through which the goods intended for barter, the water casks, &c. are hoisted out or in.

The design of this house is to secure those on board from the heat of the sun, which in this latitude is intense, and from the wind and rain, which at particular seasons, are likewise extremely violent. It answers these purposes however but very ineffectually. The slight texture of the mats admits both the wind and the rain, whenever it happens

pens to be violent, though at the same time, it increases the heat of the ship to a very pernicious degree, especially between decks. The increased warmth occasioned by this means, together with the smoke produced from the green mangrove, (the usual firewood) which, for want of a current of air to carry it off, collects itself in large quantities, and infests every part of the ship, render a vessel during its stay here very unhealthy. The smoke also, by its acrimonious quality, often produces inflammations in the eyes, which terminates sometimes in the loss of sight.

Another purpose for which these temporary houses are erected, is, in order to prevent the purchased negroes from leaping overboard. This, the horrors of their situation frequently impel them to attempt; and they now and then effect it, notwithstanding all the precautions that are taken, by forcing their way through the lattice work.

The slave ships generally lie near a mile below the town, in Bonny River, in seven or eight fathom water. Sometimes fifteen sail, English and French, but chiefly the former, meet here together. Soon after they cast anchor, the captains go on shore, to make known their arrival, and to inquire into the state of the trade. They likewise invite the kings of Bonny to come on board, to whom, previous to breaking bulk, they usually make presents (in that country termed *dashes*) which generally consist of pieces of cloth, cotton, chintz, silk handkerchiefs, and other India goods, and sometimes of brandy, wine, or beer.

When I was at Bonny a few years ago, it was the residence of two kings, whose names were *Norfolk* and *Peppel*. The houses of these princes were not distinguished from the cottages or huts of which the town consists, in any other manner,

than by being of somewhat larger dimensions, and surrounded with warehouses containing European goods, designed for the purchase of slaves. These slaves, which the kings procure in the same manner as the black traders do theirs, are sold by them to the ships. And for every negroe sold there by the traders, the kings receive a duty, which amounts to a considerable sum in the course of a year. This duty is collected by officers, stationed on board the ships, who are termed *officer boys*; a denomination which it is thought they received from the English.

The kings of Bonny are absolute, though elective. They are assisted in the government by a small number of persons of a certain rank, who stile themselves *parliament gentlemen*; an office which they generally hold for life. Every ship, on its arrival, is expected to send a present to these gentlemen, of a small quantity of bread and beef, and likewise to treat them as often as they come on board. When they do this, their approach to the ship is announced by blowing through a hollow elephant's tooth, which produces a sound resembling that of a post-horn.

After the kings have been on board, and have received the usual presents, permission is granted by them for trafficking with any of the black traders. When the royal guests return from the ships, they are saluted by the guns.

From the time of the arrival of the ships to their departure, which is usually near three months, scarce a day passes without some negroes being purchased, and carried on board; sometimes in small, and sometimes in larger numbers. The whole number taken on board, depends, in a great measure, on circumstances. In a voyage I once made, our stock of merchandize was exhausted in
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