

**SIX MONTHS' SERVICE IN
THE AFRICAN
BLOCKADE, FROM
APRIL TO OCTOBER, 1848**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649027149

Six Months' Service in the African Blockade, from April to October, 1848 by Frederick Edwyn Forbes

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FREDERICK EDWYN FORBES

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THE AFRICAN
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SIX MONTHS' SERVICE
IN THE
AFRICAN BLOCKADE,

FROM
APRIL TO OCTOBER, 1848,

IN COMMAND OF
H.M.S. BONETTA.

BY
LIEUTENANT FORBES, R.N.,

AUTHOR OF "FIVE YEARS IN CHINA."

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON-STREET,
Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1849.



INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH H.M.S. Bonetta has been only six months on the coast of Africa, it must not be imagined that this Work has been composed merely from the experience of so short a service.

In order to give it a freshness, recent scenes and captures are indeed detailed, but the opinions contained in this volume, have been formed from a long series of service, viz.—of nine years in the West Indies; a voyage of four months in a slave ship (one of many captured) from Cuba to Bermuda; and another across the Atlantic to Sierra Leone, in 1838.

The Slave Trade is a vast speculation. The vast gains attending this traffic are scarcely conceivable, and, from the great number of vessels fitted for the purpose, most certain. The profitable result is pretty well calculated by the merchant;

and although it is a lottery to the people employed, he is safe enough. He fits out four, and expects to lose three vessels; if he should lose only two, he would consider himself lucky.

Captures are, therefore, really of small consequence to the Slave-merchant, and certainly of little use towards the suppression or extinction of the Trade. During twenty-six years, 103,000 slaves have been emancipated; while in the same period 1,795,000 slaves were actually landed! or rather more than over 69,000 slaves annually! (See Parliamentary Reports), and last year (notwithstanding the enormous proportion of empty vessels taken), 60,000 slaves were landed!!

On the other hand, the shipment is generally by agency, the merchant on the coast receiving bills to an enormous amount, payable only in the event of the vessel arriving in port. He is content to bear the loss should she be taken, because one cargo in six will pay him well. As a proof how much must be gained by this system, slaves were sold on the coast of Africa in 1847, for a mere song,—an old musket was considered too much,—while in the Brazils they realized 50*l.* a-piece.

So long as there is a demand there will be slavers. No native Government will declare the Trade piracy, though it be carried on as such, and even suppose they did, the Trade would only be checked, and perhaps stopped for a time, but then the price of labour in the Brazils would increase so much in consequence of the demand, that the moment the blockade was raised, hundreds would risk even a pirate's doom.

Burn and destroy wherever the merchant places his factory, and ruin must follow ; but relax vigilance and his successor will re-commence.

There is only one real cure for the Slave Trade, and that is the introduction of a cheap and useful system of Trade under Government superintendence, assisted by a reduction of prices at first, but no presents. Returns for a length of time would be necessarily small, but large quantities of palm and ground-nut oil, camwood and ivory, might soon be brought into the market.

A naturally indolent people are not to be made industrious in a day or a year ; but once open a market, and the whole state of society may be altered. The liberated African at Sierra Leone is a good example.

Africa being by no means over-populated, labour would soon rise in demand, and the people becoming civilized, would train their offspring to the management of agricultural implements, instead of warlike weapons, which, having no longer use for them, would be laid aside.

So vast a change cannot be effected for a long time to come ; in the meantime emigration might be promoted, which, subject to authority, could be easily managed.

Allowing that the Slave Trade would still be carried on for some years to come, it is not to be supposed that more than 60,000 yearly would be smuggled, exclusive of emigrants. The horrors of the transatlantic voyage, however, would be much alleviated by the raising of the blockade, there would be no fear of capture, and then the merchant would secure all the vessels he fitted out, and consequently be able to make a more liberal allowance of room and food to the slave.

For some time, no doubt, the practice of selling slaves would continue ; but, as the legitimate Trade increased, the other would diminish ; while the shipper, being no longer afraid of losses, would purchase according to the demand ; and not fill his

barracoons with all that were offered, sometimes with a chance of starving them, because he cannot supply the necessary amount of food.

Treaties might then be enforced if they were broken ; while now, to expect an African king to keep a treaty, and offer him nothing but a dazzling present—to do this is idle. It is only placing him at the tender mercies of his subjects, who, assisted by Slave-merchants, would assuredly murder him.

The scenes and captures, described in this Work, are from a service, now ended, on the northern division of the Blockade, which is divided into three stations, the other two being the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and the South Coast.

January, 1849.

