

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

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The African Slave Trade by Thomas Fowell Buxton

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THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON

**THE AFRICAN
SLAVE TRADE**

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THE
AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

BY
SIR THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON, Esq.

"This is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them
squared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a
prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore."—
Isaiah, xlii, 22.

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INTRODUCTION.

No one possessing any knowledge of, or anxiety on the subject of the Negro race can fail to deplore the present state of Africa.

Desirous to ascertain why it is, that all our gigantic efforts and costly sacrifices for the suppression of the Slave Trade have proved unavailing, I have employed some leisure time in surveying this whole subject, and in tracing out, as far as I have been able, the true cause of our failure. My original impression was, that, in increased efforts at sea, and in reducing Portugal to the necessity of executing her engagements with us, the effective remedy was to be found, and that little more than these would be required for the gratification of the ardent desire felt by the British nation for the abolition of the Slave Trade. But a closer scrutiny into the facts of the case has conducted me to a different conclusion. There are, I now think, reasonable grounds for believing, that we should still be disappointed, although we were to double our naval force engaged in that

ranch of service, and although it were resolved to take the most peremptory measures with Portugal.

I do not underrate the value of our maritime exertions. I think it may be good policy, and, in the long run, true economy, to multiply the number of our vessels, to do at once and by a blow all that can be done in this way; to increase our expenses for a few years, in order to escape the necessity of incurring cost, not materially less, for an indefinite period. Neither do I wish that our government should address Portugal in any terms short of a declaration, that our cruisers will have orders to seize, after a fixed and an early day, every vessel under Portuguese colours engaged in the slave-traffic, to bring the crew to trial as pirates, and inflict upon them the severest secondary punishment which our law allows. Decisive measures of this kind would, there is no doubt, facilitate our success, by removing some of the great impediments which stand in the way of other remedial measures; nevertheless, I am compelled, by the various evidence which it has been my province to examine, to place my main reliance, not on the employment of force, but on the encouragement which we may be able to give to the legitimate commerce and the agricultural cultivation of Africa.

We attempt to put down the Slave Trade "by the strong hand" alone; and this is, I apprehend, the

cause of our failure. Our system, in many respects too feeble, is in one sense too bold. The African has acquired a taste for the productions of the civilised world. They have become essential to him. The parent,—debased and brutalised as he is,—barter his child; the chief his subject; each individual looks with an evil eye on his neighbour, and lays snares to catch him,—because the sale of children, subjects, and neighbours, is the only means as yet afforded, by European commerce, for the supply of those wants which that commerce has created. To say that the African, under present circumstances, shall not deal in man, is to say that he shall long in vain for his accustomed gratifications. The tide, thus pent up, will break its way over every barrier. In order effectually to divert the stream from the direction which it has hitherto taken, we must open another, a safer, and a more convenient channel. When we shall have experimentally convinced the African that it is in his power to obtain his supplies in more than their usual abundance, by honest means, then, and not till then, we may expect that he will be reconciled to the abolition of the Slave Trade.

This work does not fully carry into effect the design with which it was commenced. To a descrip-

tion of the extent and horrors of the Slave Trade, the failure of our efforts for its suppression, and the capabilities of Africa for legitimate commerce, I had intended to add some practical suggestions for calling forth the latent energies of that quarter of the globe, and for exhibiting to its inhabitants where their true interest lies.

Upon consideration it appeared that a premature disclosure of these suggestions might be inconvenient; I therefore withhold that part of my subject for the present, with the intention of resuming it hereafter; but, although I am disabled from entering into detail, and consequently from rendering this work as practically useful as I had hoped, it may not be altogether without benefit to expose, to the public eye, the atrocities which to this day are in full operation in that land of misery, and to point out the source from which, as I believe, a remedy can alone be hoped for.

The principles of my suggestions are comprised in the following propositions:—

1. That the present staple export of Africa renders to her inhabitants, at infinite cost, a miserable return of profit.
2. That the cultivation of her soil, and the barter of its productions, would yield an abundant harvest, and a copious supply of those articles which Africa requires.