

**THE CASE OF OUR WEST-
AFRICAN CRUISERS AND
WEST-AFRICAN SETTLEMENTS
FAIRLY CONSIDERED**

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The Case of Our West-African Cruisers and West-African Settlements Fairly Considered by
George Smith

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BY THE

REV. GEORGE SMITH, M.A. OXON.

AUTHOR OF AN "EXPLORATORY VISIT TO THE CONSULAR CITIES OF CHINA."

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GREAT BRITAIN, in the year 1807, consented to abandon her participation in ~~the~~ iniquities of the Slave Trade, which, during an age of comparative moral darkness, she had been willing to bear. Although slavery was still permitted to exhibit its form, and to protract its existence in the colonies, yet henceforth British subjects were prohibited, by the severest terrors of law, from any share in the African Slave Trade. But the battle of slave emancipation in our colonies continued to be fought during another generation: and in spite of the hostility of the West-Indian interest, the terrors of a French revolution, and the slave rebellion in St. Domingo, all alike disingenuously employed to associate the question of slave emancipation with the wild excesses of the Jacobin, and to rob the African Negro of his inalienable birthright,—in 1833 slavery was expunged from the British Statute Book, and the flag of freedom waved over our West-Indian islands. Having sacrificed Twenty Millions sterling on the altar of justice and humanity in accomplishing this act, we were found prepared and willing to follow up the step by a continued annual outlay of treasure and life, which, after all, is a paltry, though righteous, recompense for our past share in the crime. International treaties with the different European Powers were formed,

and the arts of diplomacy have been systematically and perseveringly employed to sweep the African coast clean from the atrocities of the slave ship, and to banish this most pernicious form of piracy from the Atlantic Seas.

And if ever a spark of genuine and allowable patriotic satisfaction can find a place in the bosom of a Christian Briton, it is when he dwells on this bright spot of his country's history. He beholds, in the pursuance of this noblest of moral victories, party interests cheerfully sacrificed, prejudices bravely encountered, jealousies willingly confronted, and national energies nobly expended. He feels that living nations may depreciate, and pseudo-philanthropists may grudge, this her costly outlay; but he appeals with generous confidence to the decision of posterity, and believes that the decision of future history will be just in its award. The testimony of future history has already been anticipated by one of the ablest writers of the junior branch of the great Anglo-Saxon family, from whose mind not even the consciousness of American inconsistency with the grand pretensions of republican liberty could expel the candid concession and generous eulogium:—

“Great Britain, loaded with an unprecedented debt, and with a grinding taxation, contracted a new debt of a hundred millions of dollars, to give freedom, not to Englishmen, but to the degraded African. I know not that history records an act so disinterested, so sublime. In the progress of ages, England's naval triumphs will shrink into a more and more narrow space in the records of our race. This moral triumph will fill a broader, brighter page.”*

* Dr. Channing.

But notwithstanding all the past efforts of Britain, we have yet to mourn over the fact, that the Slave Trade in Western Africa has only been checked, and not extinguished; and that, with all our good intentions and purity of motive, we have had, and still have, to contend with difficulties on the part of second and third-rate Powers, which, as long as they are permitted to exist, and until they are removed by a firm diplomatic hand, will considerably neutralize and counteract this expensive effort of national philanthropy.

Without at present anticipating the evidence, which a subsequent part of our argument will render more appropriate in the latter part of this pamphlet, it may here be stated, once for all, that the true question to be considered is not, whether the present system of a cruising squadron has been successful or unsuccessful in extinguishing the Slave Trade; for we admit, that with all the checks that have been opposed to the traffic, the greater part remains still to be accomplished in the work of extinction. The subject of inquiry rather is, whether, on the one hand, more stringent measures cannot and should not be adopted to render that system more effective for the prevention of the Slave Trade; or whether, on the other hand, the British legislature, in a spirit of utter desperation, ought to be called upon to recede from the honourable position which our country has assumed; to take a backward step in the career of national benevolence; to leave the oppressed Negro race in Western Africa to their wretched and inevitable fate; to open anew the flood-gates of the slave traffic; and to suffer the torrent of slavery to flow, as formerly, unchecked in its channel of desolation and blood.

Efforts are made by some of the leading journals* to excite a disposition in the public mind to retrace our steps on this important question; a question which is not one merely concerning the short-lived interests of our commercial prosperity or national power, but which involves interests of so transcendent and affecting a character, as to have a direct bearing on the moral and social well-being of a vast continent, and ultimately on the penetration of Christian light into the dark interior of that devoted land.

It is a fact also, too manifest to escape notice, that many of our politicians evince a disposition to abandon

* The writer of a leading article in the "Times" of February 5th, 1848, gravely proposes the following measure for the relief of the West-Indian interest from the ruin asserted to be the consequence of emancipation:—

"From all this meddling there follows one result. We are bound for the consequences, and are now called on to do something. We must mend what we have contributed to break. The measures of aid most likely to be of permanent utility are a matter for inquiry. One thing, however, we may say, by way of illustration: *Were we to apply our money and ships in buying, on the African coast, 50,000 head of Negroes a year, and landing them free in our West-Indian ports, it would tend far more to the prosperity of our islands, and to the suppression of the Slave Trade, than all that our settlements and cruisers have done, with the balance of expense very much in our favour.*"

We may doubtless thank the writer of these sentiments for his candour and plain speaking. We may gather the real desires and intentions so frequently screened behind a depreciation of the effects of African cruisers and African Missions. The writer would have us revert to a system of virtual Slave Trade, by purchasing from their barbarous chiefs a few hundred thousand of Negroes, who are to be conveyed by force to the West Indies, and there *to be landed free!*—*free* (it is to be presumed) in every thing except the necessity of working on the estates on the conditions imposed by the planters. This *freedom* differs from slavery only in name.

the preventive system as ineffectual, and to console themselves in the idea that British responsibility has ceased in the utter hopelessness of the case. Public parsimony has, too, its advocates: an impatient outcry is raised against the asserted useless outlay of public wealth; so that discouragement at supposed failure, and false views of public economy, exert their combined influence in causing forgetfulness of our debt to Africa, and lukewarmness in the cause of slave abolition.

It will be the object of these pages,

I. To consider the influence of the system of preventive cruisers in checking the Slave Trade.

II. To describe the various agencies for the diffusion of Christian civilization on the African coast, which have been in operation under the protection of our cruisers.

III. To suggest those practical measures of a remedial kind which may render the present system of cruisers more effective for the speedy abolition of the African Slave Trade.

I. In perusing the voluminous documents which are, from time to time, submitted to the British Parliament, on the various subjects arising out of the Slave Trade, the conviction will be fixed in every candid mind, that we are now arrived at a crisis in the history of this most important question; that the present period is one full of hope and promise; and that the withdrawal of our cruisers from the African coast, at this time, would be a suspension and cessation of our preventive system, at a moment when the obstacles to success are, to an unprecedented extent, diminished, and the ultimate suppression of the Slave Trade appears nearer than ever within our grasp.