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BEING THE JOURNALS OF

TWO MISSIONS TO THE KING OF DAHOMEY, AND RESIDENCE AT HIS CAPITAL,

IN THE YEARS 1849 AND 1850.

BY F. E. FORBES, COMMANDER R.N., F.R.G.S.



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PREFACE.

WHILE conversing one evening, on board Her Majesty's ship *Cyclops*, with the Hon. Captain Hastings, he remarked that great benefit might accrue from the visit of a naval officer to the King of Dahomey, at a time when the death of that king's chief agent and principal merchant, Da Souza, left him more at liberty to exercise his humanity, and to listen to the oft-repeated appeal to suppress the slave trade in his dominions. Having long had a desire to visit the interior kingdoms of Africa, and to witness the effects of the slave trade in the countries of its source, I instantly volunteered my services. But Captain Hastings, although senior officer and himself the proposer, did not feel justified in despatching me without the permission of the Commander-in-chief, whose pendant he was about to join.

The Commander-in-chief received the offer of my services, and at the same time a request from Mr. Duncan, the newly appointed Vice-Consul, that a naval officer should accompany him to the Court of Dahomey, and was pleased to confer on me the honour of the mission.

A great deal has been written on the state of the slave trade on the coast and at sea, together with the fate of the slaves in the Brazils. It is the object of the author, in giving publicity to the following Journals, to illustrate the dreadful slave hunts and ravages, the annihilations and exterminations, consequent on this trade; and to bring prominently before the British public the sacred service they are rendering their fellow-men, in prosecuting their increasing efforts to allay those fearful horrors.

I had been often a day or two journeying into various parts of the interior of Africa,

and had seen the state of the slave trade in its advanced systematic stage, and had considered the horrors of that division of it disgusting enough. I have visited baracoons, and seen men so fearfully attenuated, from want and over-exercise in the march to the coast, as to render nature unable to support the frame. I have seen the hold of a slave ship, and the horrors consequent on diseases arising from the crowded state and want of wholesome food to alleviate the cravings of hunger and thirst. I have seen the slave toiling in South America, and known that the labour of these was a matter of calculation to the master, whether, by continual toil and short life, he would gain more money than by light work and protracted miserable existence. But what are all these to the tragic scenes that introduce the slaves to slavery? A country living in peace with all around, and pursuing trade in the endeavour to become rich, is suddenly surrounded by a ruthless banditti; and how changed the scene! The old would be rejected if brought to market, they are sacrificed; the whole nation are transported, exterminated, their name to be forgotten, except in the annual festival of their conquerors, when sycophants call the names of vanquished countries to the remembrance of the victors.

This state of society will last as long as the slave trade exists. The question that should be asked is: Is it in the power of this country to stop it? I will not confine myself to opinions, but relate facts.

For six months in the year 1848, between the colony of Sierra Leone and Liberia, in Her Majesty's ship *Bonetta*, under my command, I captured six slavers. There were then four cruisers on that station, and two of which captured each two, and the third one slave ship, in the same space of time.