

A NOTE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE SLAVE TRADE

By C. R. FAY

THE Minutes of the Old Board of Trade (His Majesty's Commissioners for Trade and Plantations) have as their serial number C.O. 391, with one volume per year. One of these volumes, C.O. 391.84 (for the year 1777), has an appendix of questions and answers (an embryo committee of enquiry) relating to the structure of the Slave Trade on the African Gold Coast. The witness is a trader.

Q. What changes have there been in the trade since 1763?

A. The trade in general has suffered greatly since I have known it, both as to the difficulty of obtaining slaves and the price at which they are purchased. In 1763 a male slave might be bought at about £13 sterling, which now costs £23. Gold, which is become a necessary article in the purchase of a slave, is obtained by the Free Trader with great difficulty. We are obliged to send Manchester and India Goods up to Cape Apollonia to be bartered for Gold, and to await its return. In my last voyage for 120 ounces of Merchandise I got only 40 ozs. of gold.

The oz. of merchandise I rate at 40 shillings value that of Gold at £4 sterling, so that all above 80 ozs. of merchandise was loss upon the Exchange. In the purchase of a slave we must give 2 ozs. of gold.

(Ounce of merchandise appears to mean 'forty shillings worth of merchandise'. 'Must give 2 ozs.': does this mean '2 ozs. of the purchase money must be in gold'?).

Q. Was gold a necessary article in the purchase of a slave when you entered the trade?

A. No, we bought them with manufactures—gold was then brought home: now we carry it out.

Q. Do not the servants of the African Committee carry on trade at the Forts?

A. They do. (Witness then enumerates the advantages under which these servants work e.g. the Black Merchants prefer to trade with them, since they then have no need of canoes in which to go out to the ships).

Q. Does not this competition between the sedentary trade and that of adventurers operate to raise the price of slaves and sink that of British manufacturers?

A. Certainly it does; it gives the Black Merchants a handle to manage the Markets for slaves, which they do with

great policy, to the great increase of the price of slaves, and to the lowering of that of the manufacturers of this country. In 1763 the price of negroes stood at about 8 ozs. (i.e. of merchandise) for men and 6 for women, the ounce being then at 36/-: now the price stands at 11½ for men and 9 for women, and the oz. is now at 42 shillings.

In the meantime the manufacturers of Great Britain are much lessened in their demand, and the East India goods at least are doubled. The number of slaves likewise that come to market is much reduced; this must be the consequence, when the same quantity of goods can be obtained for a less quantity of slaves.

Q. Did you deliver goods at the Forts?

A. I did, and in return took up slaves, which I delivered to St. Vincent's

Q. How many?

A. In all 361,225 prime slaves from the Company's Forts; and the rest I had from the Dutch.

Q. What did you barter with the Dutch for these slaves?

A. Brandy, India goods and gunpowder.

Q. Are the slaves at the Forts sold at a higher price than those bought of the Black Traders?

A. They are, and generally from 1½ to 2 ozs. advance.

Q. With what commodity is the slave purchased in the first instance?

A. In the interior parts of the country with gold.

Q. What becomes of that gold?

A. The chiefs in the interior amass it and occasionally come down to the coast and buy up all the goods and commodities there to be sold, so that sometimes the Forts are stripped of all their Furniture and Effects.

Finally the witness states that the Dutch Forts are in good condition and the English Forts not so good.

The above evidence was given jointly by Mr. Coghlan, the merchant who had petitioned the Board for redress of grievances, and David Dunn, a Captain in the Trade.