

Treasury African Companies (T70) Vol 177 pp 1-14

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# R E T U R N

FROM THE

Commissioners for Trade and Plantations,

TO THE HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE

ADDRESS of the said House to His MAJESTY,  
of the 29th Day of January 1777;

RELATING TO THE

General State of the Trade to *AFRICA*;

The Condition of the Forts and Settlements there,  
belonging to the *African Company*;

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In what manner the several Sums of Money, granted  
by Parliament for Maintaining and Support-  
ing the same, have been applied.

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TO THE HONOURABLE THE  
COMMONS OF GREAT BRITAIN,  
IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED.

His MAJESTY having been pleased, pursuant to an Address of this honourable House, to signify to us His Commands, by One of His principal Secretaries of State, that we should enquire into, and prepare, in order to be laid before this House, a Report of the General State of the Trade to *Africa*; the Condition of the Forts and Settlements there, belonging to the *African* Company; and in what Manner the several Sums, granted by Parliament for maintaining and supporting the same, have been applied; We have, in Obedience to these Commands, lost no Time, nor neglected any Means in our Power, for obtaining full and authentic Information in the several Particulars referred: And thereupon take Leave to report to this honourable House,

**T**HAT with respect to the First Object of our Examination, the General State of the Trade to *Africa*, although it is so expressed in the Reference, yet, as we conceive it would be foreign to the Intention of this honourable House, that Report should be made as to any other Trade but what is under the Direction of the *African* Committee, we have, in Conformity to this Construction, confined  
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our Enquiry to the State of the Trade carried on to the *Gold Coast* only: And we have also taken up this Enquiry from the Year 1758; as it appears by the Journals of this honourable House, that the Proceedings of the *African* Committee, previous to that Date, had been examined, and stood then approved.

From this Enquiry it appears, that this important Trade, consisting of Slaves, Ivory, and Gold, purchased of the Natives with Goods and Manufactures of *Great Britain*, and with *East India* Piece Goods, is in a very alarming Situation; — that the Price of *Gold Coast* Slaves, which are far the most valuable of any Slaves exported from *Africa*, hath increased to such Degree, as to become intolerably burthenfome to the Planters in the *West India* Islands, and elsewhere, having risen, within the Period of our Enquiry, from £. 13 to £. 27 Sterling *per* Head; — that Ivory is become scarce, and much advanced in Price; — and that the free *British* Merchant, who formerly used to import great Quantities of Gold from *Africa*, in Exchange for *British* Manufactures, is now obliged to carry out Gold from hence, or to procure the same in *Africa* at an exorbitant Rate, to enable him to purchase Slaves on the *Coast*.

That we might be able to assign the Causes of such an Alteration in so valuable a Branch of Commerce, we called before us several Merchants of the City of *London*; and examined several other Witnesses, some of whom have been in the Service of the Company on the Coast of *Africa*; others, who have been employed in Trade with, and for the Governors; and others, who have been Traders on the *Coast* for themselves: And having taken the Evidence, thus laid before us, into our Consideration, it appears, so far from this Trade having been carried on in a free and open Manner, for the Benefit of the Public, according to the Intention of this honourable House, and agreeable to the Spirit and Tenor of the Act, which constitutes the present Committee, That a private Trade, directly tending to a Monopoly, hath been set up and established by the Governors and Chiefs of the Forts in *Africa*; and that this private Trade, so injurious to the Interests of the Public, hath been carried on by them in Conjunction with Persons at Home, some One or more of whom have at the same Time been Members of the Committee above mentioned.

It appears that the Governors, by their daily Retail Traffick with the Natives in Spirits and Tobacco, engross almost

almost all the Gold on the *Coast*; by which they are enabled to provide this Part of the Assortment required in the Purchase of a Slave at an easier Rate, and to dispatch their Ships off the *Coast* with full Cargoes much more expeditiously than the private Merchant can.

It further appears in Evidence, That the Governors of the *British* Forts on the *Coast* carry on a very profitable Trade, by bartering Part of the Gold obtained by them as before mentioned, with the Commanders of the *Dutch* Forts, for *Brazil* Tobacco, which is become an Article equally indispensable with Gold in the Purchase of every Slave; and, that the said Governors also purchase, at the *Dutch* Forts, Slaves for their own private Trade, and ship the same upon their own Account:—That Ships, with Cargoes suited to the *African* Trade, have been consigned from *England* to the said Governors, by their Principals and Partners at Home; and that several other Ships belonging to the same Concern, after having been partly laden in *England*, have gone to *Holland*, to complete their Cargoes with the Goods and Manufactures of that Country, to the great Prejudice of our own:—That in the Year 1775, no less than 13 Ships from *Boston* and *Rhode Island* were dispatched from the *Gold Coast*, with 2288 Slaves, all purchased with *New England* Rum only; that those Ships traded chiefly with the Governors; and that one other Ship from *Rhode Island*, in the Month of *October*, 1775, sold her whole Cargo of Rum to the Governors, for Gold and Bills of Exchange. In fine, that the Governors and Chiefs of the Forts on the *Gold Coast*, availing themselves of the Advantages of a continued Residence on the Spot, and of the Use they make of the Stores, Slaves, and Vessels belonging to the Company, committed to their Charge, have been enabled already to engross more than One Half of the Trade; and by a Course of these Proceedings must, if not speedily put under proper Restrictions, effectually exclude the free *British* Merchant from any Share or Profit in the Trade. That although it does appear, that they have been repeatedly enjoined by the Committee, in their Instructions, to attend to their Duty, in keeping open the trading Paths, so that the Inland Traders might come to the Water Side to traffick with the Ships resorting to the *Coast* (by which Means a sufficient Supply of *Gold Coast* Slaves might have been had to satisfy the Demands of the Market, and at less exorbitant Prices) nevertheless the Governors do not appear to have observed

these Instructions of the Committee, but have greatly neglected the trading Paths; at the same Time securing to themselves such a Pre-emption of the best Slaves, as puts the general Trade under great Disadvantages, and in the End obliges the free Merchant to resort to their Stores for the Completion of his Cargo. With this View, and induced by the superior Quality of the *Gold Coast* Slaves to that of all others, it is given in Evidence to us, that the Governors have not confined themselves in the Purchase of Slaves to the *Gold Coast* only, but have bought up very many Slaves, of inferior Price and Condition, at *Gaboon, Lagos, Benin*, and other Marts, and have brought them to the Forts, thence to be exported with their *Gold Coast* Slaves; and Instances have been adduced, in the Case of unexperienced Traders, where they have been imposed upon the Purchaser as Slaves of the *Gold Coast*, to his certain Loss and Detriment.

From these and other Practices it follows, that a false State of the Trade is imposed upon the Public; and, whilst the free *British* Merchant is universally complaining that the Trade is falling fast into Decay, the Governors are enabled to make such Returns to the Committee, of Slaves exported from the *Gold Coast of Africa*, as upon the Face of them exhibit a very great Increase in the annual Exportation. A Return of this Sort hath been communicated to us by the Committee, and will be found in the List of Papers hereunto annexed, N<sup>o</sup> 1. But if the Committee, to controvert what is generally asserted by the Merchants, would infer from their Return, that the annual Exportation of real *Gold Coast* Slaves hath increased to almost double, in the last Six Years, to what it was in the first Six Years of the Period compared, we apprehend they will by no Means be warranted in their Conclusion; on the contrary, we have every Reason to believe, from the Whole of the Evidence before us, and upon the strictest Scrutiny, that the Merchants of *London* and *Bristol* are warranted in saying, That the Trade for Slaves to the *Gold Coast* is diminished; the Trade for Ivory much lessened; and the Trade for Gold totally lost. In fine, that *British* Manufactures are decreased in their Prices on the *Coast*, whilst every Article of the Produce of *Africa* has risen to a great Degree. But, for the further Confirmation of this Opinion, and for the Satisfaction of this honourable House in respect to this First and very interesting Part of our Enquiry, we take Leave to annex the Memorials and Reports of the said Merchants of *London* and *Bristol*,

*Bristol*, together with those of the Merchants of *Liverpoole*; which Papers will be found in the annexed List, numbered 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

We next proceeded to examine into the State and Condition of the Forts and Settlements upon the *Coast*; and it appears, That, notwithstanding, this honourable House was pleased, in the Year 1772, to grant the Sum of 2,400*l.* in Addition to the Sum of 4,000*l.* before granted, for the specific Purpose of repairing *Cape Coast* Castle, that Fort still remains in an unfinished State: That with respect to the rest (the late erected Fort of *Annamaboe*, and that of *Dixcove* excepted) they are in bad Condition, and some of them so ruinous as to be in no Degree tenable: That with respect to the Stores, we find great Deficiencies throughout; and as to the Ordnance, the Governor of *Cape Coast* Castle, in a late Report to the Committee, states the unserviceable Condition of the great Guns and Carriages; and, after informing them of a Rupture between the *Dutch* and *Danes*, and the Consequences to be apprehended if the *Dutch* should expel the *Danes* from the *Coast*, recommends to them to make Application to the Board of Ordnance thereupon. We have likewise examined the Returns of the Officers of the Royal Navy, communicated to us by the Admiralty; and having caused a comparative View to be made of the State and Condition of each Fort, separately considered, from the Year 1758 to the Year 1776, both inclusive, we beg Leave to refer this honourable House to these Papers (which will be found in the annexed List, from N° 8, to N° 17) for more particular Satisfaction in the Matter; observing only, that it appears, upon the Evidence of fundry Traders, who have frequented the *Coast*, that these Forts, being perverted from the Purposes of their original Construction, do no longer hold forth any Protection to the free Merchant in his Dealings with the Natives; but, by being made Repositories for private Trade, operate, under their present Direction, to the Prejudice and Discouragement of the general Trade.

Lastly, With respect to the Manner in which the several Sums of Money, granted by Parliament for maintaining and supporting the Forts and Settlements on the *Gold Coast*, have been applied, we have to observe to this honourable House, That we have with all possible Care and Diligence examined a great Variety of Books and Records, which, upon our Requisition, have been produced by the Committee, and explain-

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ed by their Secretary; and having selected from them such summary Accounts or Abstracts, touching the Expenditure and Application of the public Monies, as we conceive will best serve to give this honourable House the Information required, we have taken Leave to annex these Papers to our Report, the Titles of which will be found in the List from N<sup>o</sup> 18 to N<sup>o</sup> 32, both inclusive.

The Paper N<sup>o</sup> 18 will shew what Sums of Money have been annually granted by Parliament, from the Year 1750, to the Year 1776, both inclusive, for the Purposes above mentioned, amounting in the Whole to the Sum of 343,400 l. exclusive of the Sum of 112,142 l. 3 s. 3 d. paid as a Compensation to the Royal African Company for the Surrender of their Charter and Effects.

From the Paper N<sup>o</sup> 19, will appear the several Balances for and against the Company, within the Period of our Enquiry. These Balances are struck by deducting the Value of the Goods and Merchandize remaining in the Warehouses at the Forts, from the Amount of the Debt at the annual making up of the Accounts. By these Accounts it appears, that on the 1st of January 1757, the Governors of the Forts were in Advance for the Company, the Sum of 2,616 l. 15 s. 6 d. but that there then remained in the several Storehouses in Africa, Goods and Merchandize to the Amount of 4,406 l. 10 s. From that Period the Debt commenced, and hath annually increased to the End of the Year 1775, when it is stated to amount to the heavy Sum of 24,249 l. 16 s. 7 d.; and that there remained in the Storehouses, Goods to the Value only of 306 l. 11 s. 5 d. which leaves a Balance of 23,943 l. 5 s. 2 d. Coast Money, or 15,962 l. 3 s. 5 1/2 d. Sterling; and, although we are not furnished with the Balance of the Year 1776, (the Accounts being not yet received from Africa) we have good Reason to believe a considerable Accumulation hath been made to the Debt, exclusive of the Charges made on Account of the Towns of *Lagoe* and *Mumford*, as stated to this honourable House in the Petition of the Committee.

From the Papers N<sup>o</sup> 20, 21, 22, 23, will be seen a comparative State of the Civil and Military Establishments, and of the Number of Slaves which, at different Periods, have been kept and maintained at the Forts; and, although the Committee endeavoured to prevent the Encrease of this burthenfome Article of the Slaves, by an express Order made in the Year 1773, and repeated in 1774, forbidding the Purchase of any more Slaves; yet it appears by a Paper annexed, N<sup>o</sup> 33, that in the same Year, 1774, Governor *Mill* charged

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x. year new, but it ought to have been mentioned to show that the Money granted for this Year 1775 did not bear in Africa that Year, in course that the Public was indebted with Debt to their Servants for what they advanced during the whole year. Had it not been and been applied to the Service of that Year, either by paying it what might have been advanced from 1<sup>st</sup> July to the time of its arrival at the residence so to say, the Disbursements to the Public would not have been near so great as is herein it appears here - will serve to acquaint the Board of Trade of this matter or they would undoubtedly have given this in, in their Report

to the Public 420*l.* for Twelve Slaves, purchased for the Company's Service; and it also appears, that the said Governor hath, contrary to the Statute, sold some of the Company's Slaves off the *Coast*.

The Papers intituled, an Account of the Expenditure in *Africa*, beginning with N<sup>o</sup> 24, and ending with N<sup>o</sup> 32, are annexed for the Sake of giving a comparative View of the several Articles of Expenditure, stated in Columns, under their respective Heads, as extracted from the Books transmitted from *Africa*. These Papers conveying, as we conceive, the most comprehensive Account of the several Branches of Expenditure, to which the public Money is applied, we should gladly have continued them from the Year 1757, at which they commence, to the Period of 1775, when they close; but the great Labour and Length of Time requisite to select these Articles from such voluminous Accounts, not admitting of their being completed within the Course of this Session, we thought it better not to suspend our Report on their Account; and having completed Abstracts from the Year 1769 to 1775, we have also annexed Two for the Years 1757 and 1758, by which this honourable House will be able to form a Comparison of the Expenditure of latter Years with those of a remoter Period.

By this Comparison it will appear, That, although the Trade in general hath fallen off, and decreased to a very alarming Degree, yet the Establishments at the several Forts have been greatly augmented, and the Debt accumulated, from Year to Year, by an Encrease in almost every Article of Expence:— That as to the Establishments, whilst the Governors of the several Forts can avail themselves of the Servants, Slaves, and Supplies, thereunto belonging, it is not likely that they will yield a ready Concurrence in any Measures proposed by the Committee for their Reduction; and with respect to the Debt, whilst the very Mode, which is taken for sinking it, tends, as we conceive, to confirm and strengthen all the Causes that produced it, little can be expected on that Account.

To explain what we allude to, we must observe to this honourable House, that upon Examination we find, that the Stores, in which the Public Money is invested by the Committee, and which are annually sent out to supply the Forts, being paid away to the several Governors towards lessening the Debt due for their Advancements, are afterwards applied to the Purposes of their own private Trade; and, in the mean Time, the several Garrisons are furnished and supplied with

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Goods and Merchandize, advanced by the said Governors out of their own private Stores; many of which, being of an inferior Quality to those brought out by the Store Ship, are nevertheless passed in Account at the same nominal Value. This, together with many other Advantages, of which the Governors take Occasion to avail themselves, will serve to explain how they have been enabled to engross so great a Proportion of the Trade, to the Loss and Detriment of the free Merchant; and by what Means it hath come to pass, that the State of the Trade in general is of late Years so much fallen into Decay, notwithstanding it fully appears, that the Committee, in pursuance of their Duty, and agreeable to the Letter and Spirit of the Statute under which they act, have repeatedly urged their Governors to keep the Trade in general free and open to all His Majesty's Subjects, but without Effect.

It now only remains for us to remark to this honourable House, That it hath been the Practice of the Company's Servants on the *Coast*, to keep their Books of Accounts in different Currencies, after a very vague and indeterminate Manner; but upon Orders going out from the Committee, in the Year 1773, for altering the Mode, and reducing every Currency to one, viz. that which is denominated *Coast Money*, and which the said Servants had always stated as a fixt permanent Exchange of 50 *per Centum*, the Books for the Year 1775 were altered accordingly; but upon a close Inspection we find, that the Fallacy still continues; to demonstrate which to this honourable House, we have hereunto annexed the Papers N<sup>o</sup> 33, 34, by which it appears, that One Sixth Part of the whole Money annually sent out to *Africa*, for the Support and Maintenance of the Forts and Settlements, is by one Stroke of Management converted to the Governor's own Profit.

How far it would be possible, upon a strict Scrutiny into these Accounts, to liquidate the Debt charged as due to the Governors and Servants of the Company on the *Coast*, we cannot take upon ourselves to say; certain however it is, that the Mode in which they are passed and settled in *Africa* is not such as sufficiently restrains the Accomptant from the Possibility of misapplying the Public Money. As for the Monies applied by the Committee at Home, their Accounts being annually passed and examined by the Curfitor Baron of the Exchequer, under the Statute of the 23d of his late Majesty, we have no Observations to submit in this particular.

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We have now, to the best of our Power, endeavoured to fulfil our Duty to His Majesty, by submitting to this honourable House all such Facts and Circumstances as we conceive to be Matter of necessary Information in the Particulars referred. If it was requisite to add any Thing in further Explanation of the Advantages to be derived to this Nation and its Dependencies from the Trade in question, we need only refer to a Period within the Knowledge of several experienced Traders, antecedent to the Establishment of the present Company, when by the Records of the said Company it appears, that the annual Exportation of Slaves from the *Gold Coast* amounted on an Average to Ten thousand; and of *Whydah* Slaves (equal in Quality to *Gold Coast* Slaves) from Two to Three thousand, which Slaves were then purchased from Nine to Ten Pounds Sterling *per Head*; whilst the annual Importation of Gold into this Kingdom stood upon the Average at 100,000 Ounces, bought upon the *Coast* with Goods and Manufactures of *Great Britain* and the *East Indies*, to the Value of 35 Shillings Sterling *per Ounce*, and sold here at the Rate of 77 Shillings and 6 Pence *per Ounce*. But, without resorting to Records for Facts not within the Period to which we at first proposed to limit our Enquiry, the great Importance of the *Gold Coast* Trade is by nothing more clearly demonstrated than by the numerous and respectable Establishments which the *Dutch*, *French*, and *Danes* have there formed, and continue to maintain; and, so long at least as the *British* Forts and Settlements stand surrounded with Competitors in the same Pursuits, there cannot, we should think, be entertained a Doubt, as to the Policy of preserving those Forts and Settlements, not only from that Ruin and Decay to which many of them seem hastening, but in all Respects so provided and appointed, as may fully answer the Purposes of their Construction, by insuring to our Trade that Respect amongst the Natives, without which it must be lost to this Kingdom, by passing into the Hands of our Rivals. Under these Circumstances, we need not press the Necessity, so manifest in itself, of putting these Forts, and the Trade thereupon depending, together with the Application of all Public Monies granted for their Support, under such speedy Regulation and Reform, as may correct the Abuses herein pointed out, and secure for the future this most valuable Trade from those Disadvantages and Obstructions, of which the Memorials of the Merchants of *London*, *Bristol*, and *Liverpoole* complain, and which the Depositions of many reputable Witnesses, whom we have examined

examined to the Facts, corroborate and confirm; all which Depositions and Memorials together form an Evidence of such Moment as seems, in our Opinion, to demand the Attention and Interposition of this honourable House.

*Whitehall, April 24,*  
*1777.*

*Geo. Germain,*  
*Soame Jenyns,*  
*Robt. Spencer,*  
*Bamber Gascoyne,*  
*Whitshed Keene,*  
*C. F. Greville,*  
*Wm. Eden.*

## L I S T.

- N<sup>o</sup> 1.—COPY of an Account of the Number of Slaves exported from the *Gold Coast* of *Africa*, to His Majesty's Plantations in *America*, since the Year 1757, distinguishing each Year.
- N<sup>o</sup> 2.—Copy of a Memorial of the Merchants of *London* trading to *Africa*, to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations.
- N<sup>o</sup> 3.—Copy of a Memorial of the Merchants of *Bristol*, trading to *Africa*, to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations.
- N<sup>o</sup> 4.—Copy of a Letter from the Master of the *Merchants-Hall, Bristol*, dated 19th *March* 1777, to Mr. *Cumberland*, Secretary to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations.
- N<sup>o</sup> 5.—Copy of a Letter from the Mayor of *Liverpoole* to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, dated *February* 21st 1777.
- N<sup>o</sup> 6.—Copy of a Letter from the Mayor of *Liverpoole* to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, dated *February* 28th 1777, transmitting,
- N<sup>o</sup> 7.—The Report of a Select Committee of the Merchants and Traders of *Liverpoole* to the Coast of *Africa*.
- N<sup>o</sup> 8. to N<sup>o</sup> 17.—Comparative Views of the State and Condition of the several *British* Forts on the Coast of *Africa*, from the Year 1758 to the Year 1776; viz.
- N<sup>o</sup> 8. *Cape Coast Castle.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 9. *Annamaboe.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 10. *Tantumquerry.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 11. *Winnebab.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 12. *Accra.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 13. *Whydab.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 14. *Commenda.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 15. *Succondee.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 16. *Dixcove.*
  - N<sup>o</sup> 17. *Appolonia.*
- N<sup>o</sup> 18.—Copy of an Account of the annual Grants of Parliament, from the Year 1750 to the Year 1776, inclusive.
- N<sup>o</sup> 19.—Copy of an Account of the annual Balances, extracted from the Books received from *Africa*, from the Year 1751 to the Year 1775, inclusive.

N<sup>o</sup> 20.—Copy of an Account of the Civil and Military Establishments of the several *British* Forts on the Coast of *Africa*, for the Year 1758.

N<sup>o</sup> 21, and N<sup>o</sup> 22.—The same for the Years 1773, and 1775.

N<sup>o</sup> 23.—Copy of a List of the Company's Castle Slaves, for the Years 1758, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773.

N<sup>o</sup> 24, to N<sup>o</sup> 32.—An Account of the Expenditure in *Africa*, stated under the several Heads, from the Books transmitted from the *Coast*, for the following Years.

N<sup>o</sup> 24. For the Year 1757.

N<sup>o</sup> 25. For the Year 1758.

N<sup>o</sup> 26. For the Year 1769.

N<sup>o</sup> 27. For the Year 1770.

N<sup>o</sup> 28. For the Year 1771.

N<sup>o</sup> 29. For the Year 1772.

N<sup>o</sup> 30. For the Year 1773.

N<sup>o</sup> 31. For the Year 1774.

N<sup>o</sup> 32. For the Year 1775.

N<sup>o</sup> 33.—Copy of a Paper intituled, “*Anno* 1774, advanced by Governor *Mill*.”

N<sup>o</sup> 34.—Copy of a Paper intituled, “*Anno* 1775, paid to Governor *Mill*.”