

NEGROES AND THE SLAVE TRADE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I do not join in the belief that the African is our equal in brain or in heart; I do not think that the average negro cares for his liberty as much as an Englishman, or even as a serf-born Russian; and I believe that if we can, in any fair way, possess ourselves of his services, we have an equal right to utilize them to our advantage as the State has to drill and coerce a recruit who in a moment of intoxication has accepted the Queen's shilling, or as a shopkeeper to order about a boy whose parents had bound him over to an apprenticeship. I say an equal right, because if soldiers were abased and degraded by their profession, or if the duties of an apprentice tended to make him a worthless member of society, it would be an iniquitous exercise of tyranny to take advantage of the position of these persons to their manifest injury. But when the soldier is taught self-respect, and is made into a nobler man than he could have become if left in his village, and if the apprentice is trained into a useful member of an industrious class, there can be no just complaint of tyranny. These persons are simply treated as children by their masters, and compelled to do what they dislike for their future good and for that of society at large. Therefore, Sir, I say, with regard to these negroes, if we can by any legitimate, or even quasi-legitimate means, possess ourselves of a right to their services, and if we can insure that our mastership shall elevate them, and not degrade them, by all means work them well; but in proportion as we cannot act favourably upon them our interference becomes a curse to the Africans.

It is often argued, "let us not be too curious about the antecedents of the negroes, who are collected by the native chiefs (of course for a 'consideration') as candidates for free emigration. Very likely they may be captured for this express purpose, but what of that? Africans are always fighting, and have no notion of personal liberty, and if the conquerors choose to sell their prisoners instead of keeping them as slaves, why should we abstain from buying?" To this I reply that the disorganization induced in the whole of African society under the temptations of the slave trade is something truly frightful. We know, Sir, in our own country the effect of laws that give a premium to crime, and your columns have often denounced them. Raise the Custom-house tariff, and honest fishermen turn into ruffianly smugglers; allow people to insure their houses for more than they are worth, and what street would be secure from fire? The very burial clubs tempted mothers to murder. The award of "head money" had effect, about which report was rife, upon our cruisers in the Malay waters. The railway mania tempted the respectable landowners of England to cheat corporate bodies without a qualm, and now the temptation of West Indian commerce seems sufficient to draw a section of Englishmen into the very vortex of an African slave trade. If, Sir, your readers will try to imagine themselves in a position where every fellow-creature is as a bank-note, which has only to be laid hold of and presented to one of the ever ready agents to be payable at sight, they will succeed in picturing to themselves the awful disorganization which must necessarily ensue—the wars for captives, the false accusations to obtain prisoners, the mutual suspicion of neighbours, and the abandonment of all steady labour for the lottery of slave catching. Most earnestly, therefore, do I deprecate an action on our part which, directly or indirectly, in the slightest degree would reintroduce a sale of negroes. The peaceful habits which have slowly been fostered among many African tribes would be swept away in a moment under the pressure of a temptation they were not strong enough to bear. What, then, is to be our course? I cannot believe that it is impossible for an African to enter our service in the colonies without being degraded like those in America. Let the philanthropists show how we can act justly towards our blacks when we get them. Now, as to how they are to be got. I do not at all think that adequate attempts have ever been made to obtain a free African immigration. The number of recruits depend on the skill of the recruiting officer. We must ingratiate ourselves more with the African tribes generally. As it is, those a few days' journey from the coast know little or nothing of us. You are doubtless aware, Sir, that the generally spread belief concerning the whites is that they buy slaves in order to carry them across sea, and there to eat them. It will require time to disabuse the native minds of these kinds of notions, but I fully believe it is to be done, and that by a consistent and judicious political action we may make our service respected, if not actually sought after; and that by watching the turn of events and taking advantage of great national suffering, such as that the Caffres are now labouring under, we may succeed in deporting vast numbers of Africans to colonies where they will do us good service, and in which we shall not have to reproach ourselves with neglecting our duty towards them.