

PRESENT STATE OF THE SLAVE-TRADE [Continued.]

To what extent those "most effectual measures" of His Most Christian Majesty Louis XVIII. were carried, and what success crowned "all his efforts" to wipe off this odious disgrace to the laws of justice, of religion, and of nature, we have in part shown in a former Article; and we shall now briefly inquire, whether the "efforts" of his successor, his present Most Christian Majesty Charles X., have been more successful in inducing all the powers of Christendom, and, at all events, his own subjects, to abandon so odious a commerce, now that twelve years instead of five, have passed away since the signing of this solemn compact of May, 1814. We shall confine ourselves, for the present, to the statement of a few cases of atrocious conduct on the part of the three principal acts of the slave dealers, those of France, Spain and Portugal. The other maritime nations of Europe have, as we believe, relinquished in good faith all intentions of carrying on the trade, and every wish of screening their subjects who may be concerned in it from punishment. Indeed, with the exception of a very few cases, there is no reason for thinking that the subjects of the king of the Netherlands are now engaged in this traffic. They have been deterred by penalties of increased severity; and the zeal of the officers and crews of the Netherlands navy has been stimulated and encouraged, by the government having given up its proportion of the prize money to the sailors.

The government of the United States is unquestionably influenced by an honest desire to put an end to the trade; and to accomplish this the more effectually, it entered into a negotiation with us, in which the principal of a mutual right of search was recognized; but the Senate, from some crochets of jealousy, refused its sanction to a treaty, which made the slave-trade piracy. In consequence of this unhappy refusal, several American vessels, generally under the Dutch flag, have been slaving on the coast of Africa; one of them, the *Bey*, was lately seized under the flag, the crew of which, consisting entirely of Americans, escaped the punishment that, had the American Senate been as wise as the American Cabinet, must have awaited them. Their cruizers, however, are we rejoice to know and say, honestly and actively employed in looking out for offenders against the laws.

The New States of Spanish America, interested as all of them had immemorially been in the traffic of slaves, have eagerly disowned and prohibited it. The abolition of slavery was one of the first acts of the Constituent Assembly of Guatimala. It declared not only that "every man in the republic is free," but that no one who takes refuge under its laws can be a slave; and it positively debarred any one who carries on the slave-trade from the privileges of a citizen. This law was no sooner promulgated than one hundred slaves from the Honduras escaped into Guatimala; and these, though demanded back by our superintendent, were justly allowed the full protection of the statute which had proclaimed them free.

The recent conduct of Spain, and of the late Spanish colonies, in regard to this matter, has been justly held up by Mr. Canning as a reproach to the ancient and civilized monarchy of France. The cabinet of Madrid has readily entered into treaties for the abolition of the trade, and the voluntary acts of the emancipated colonies for the extinction of slavery have been already mentioned. But the urgent and reiterated expostulations of our minister, on the utter inefficiency of the existing French law for prohibiting the trade, have hitherto proved

of little avail. In fact, the years 1824 and 1825, show an increased activity in the slave-trade under the flag of the allies; and we do not find, in the papers before us, any mitigation or diminution of those atrocities which, from the first, have been exercised in the prosecution of this traffic. An earnest wish, and even a hope, it seems was early expressed by our ambassador, Lord Granville, to the Baron de Damas, that the era of the reign of His Most Christian Majesty Charles the Tenth might be signalized by some decisive measures for the suppression of practices which he (Lord Granville) stated to be a scandal to the flag of France—and no doubt the answer was smooth. In vain, however, does Mr. Canning, up to this day, direct our ambassador to remonstrate in the strongest terms against the odious practices of the French slave-dealers, the indifference of the government, and the inefficiency of its regulations to check "this disgraceful traffic under the protection of the flag of France;" this traffic which, as he distinctly says, "disgraces the French name." The French minister is always ready enough with his assurances, that the French naval officers are strictly charged with the execution of the laws, and are zealous in intercepting slave-traders at sea, and in bringing the parties concerned before the tribunals; but, unhappily, these assurances are not supported by facts. We know, on the contrary, that the authorities, civil and military, seeing the indifference of the government, have openly, as well as secretly, lent their aid in support of the diplomatically denounced traffic; and we shall give one sufficient example. *Les Deux Nantais* was one of those numerous vessels annually fitted out of Nantes for the African coast.—The attention of the French government was specially drawn to this vessel by Sir Charles Stuart, in his note to M. de Chateaubriand, accompanied with a description of several other vessels fitting out at the same port for the slave trade, and terminating in a distant call on the French ministry to take means for preventing the intended voyage. M. de Chateaubriand, in reply, gave the usual assurances, "that the government of the King of France did not feel an interest less deep than that which was felt by the British government in the suppression of this odious traffic, and would not neglect any means for effecting the object."

The "interest," however, which the King of France took would seem to have been the other way; for, notwithstanding these assurances of M. de Chateaubriand, the *Deux Nantais* did perform her African voyage without any moi station, either at home or on the coast, until she was boarded by his Britannic Majesty's ship *Primrose*, off St. Domingo; when she was found to be laden with a cargo of 466 negroes from the river Sherbro and bound for Cuba, where she afterwards landed them. The case was so glaring, and the French government was so pressed upon it by our ambassador, that an order was sent to the Commissary of Marine at Nantes to seize the vessel on her return from the West Indies. On the very day, however, after the receipt of this order by the Commissary, the several pilots at the mouth of Loire were in possession of a circular, of which the following is a copy:

"Mahe, Master of the 'Deux Nantais.' The moment you receive this you will steer for the port of Antwerp, whither I intend proceeding without delay. Pray do not on any account whatever, put into a French port. Give the pilot, who is the bearer of this, and who will take you out to sea, a receipt upon producing which he will be paid by me one hundred francs for his pilotage. I wish you a good voyage. (Signed) OGERAY."

We need scarcely say, that at Antwerp he accordingly turned up, laden with a cargo of colonial produce. M. Damas put forward an attempt to justify the local authorities; but the case was found to be too strong for him, and the affair was reluctantly brought before the tribunals; and the *Deux Nantais* was finally confiscated. The notoriety and the novelty of this proceeding and its issue, alarmed the whole people at Nantes, and still more so the receipt of new orders addressed to all the ports by the minister of the marine; the result of which was, as stated by Sir Richard Clayton, (in a letter dated 25th of January, 1826,) that

"a temporary stop has been put to everything in this shameful commerce, and shares in the concern were yesterday endeavoured, from the alarm to be disposed of on the Exchange of 30 and 40 per cent loss, but without success."

But there was another reason to induce the government to put on the appearance of severity in the case of the *Deux Nantais*. It seems that public opinion (thanks to the British press and to the persevering remonstrances of Mr. Canning!) was beginning to declare itself in Paris against the infamous traffic. The merchants and bankers of that city already petitioned the legislature against it; they had held up Nantes as the great emporium for sanctioning a crime which they declared to be compounded of robbery and murder against which the law, they observe, as it now stands, recognizes not one single offender, namely, the captain of the ship, although his guilt is shared by the owners, and insurers, the advancers of capital, the supercargo, and the seamen. France has also its abolition societies, though yet in their infancy, who are scandalized at the barefaced proceedings of the dealers of Nantes.

"Thirty ships, (says one of them,) belonging to a civilized country, have sailed in the nineteenth century from a single port of one of the most enlightened nations in the world—a nation which honours letters, which admires the sciences and the arts, which publicly recognizes and professes the religion of Christ; and these ships have sailed, not to communicate to Africa the blessings of civilized life—not to go, guided by the spirit of Jesus Christ, that spirit of mercy and peace, and carry to the inhabitants of Africa the good tidings of salvation;—but to bear thither terror and desolation, to foment war and carnage, to pollute its shores with the most flagitious crimes, and to condemn thousands of innocent victims to the horrors of the middle passage, unparalleled in the history of the miseries of mankind."

The slave dealers of Nantes have also been told, by one of their own deputies, what their real character is.

"If the pirate is a criminal, an armed robber, often an assassin; so the man who orders, or shares in such a traffic, (for there is no difference between the slave-captain who executes, and the merchant who, from his counting house, in cold blood, gives out to his accomplice this execrable mission,) the man thus sharing and thus ordering is also a criminal, an armed robber, often an assassin; he is, moreover, as cowardly as he is forcible; he has not even the courage of a pirate. He does not deserve to be less hated, because he must be more despised."

The spirit of commercial avarice, however though checked, is not easily subdued; and we are therefore not in the least surprized that the trade under the French flag should, at the moment we are writing, be vigorously pursued as ever. If the government manifests, to say the least of it, a rigid indifference on the subject, we may be quite sure that the commanders of the few ships of war, ostensibly sent to the coast of

Africa for the suppression of the trade will imitate the supineness of the ruling power. While these traffickers are swarming on every part of the coast, it will, if any of them are captured. The master of one of them, which was boarded by one of our cruizers, said he had been visited by a French ship of war before he took on board his cargo, the commander of which only told him to take care he did not fall in with him on his coming out some ten days afterwards; as, if he did, he should be obliged to capture him: a friendly hint which, of course, was not lost upon the slave dealer. Another slave captain says of his owner,

"M. La Traite (who commands the *Flebe*) gave me plainly to understand that he was not ignorant of my voyage, and told me in parting, 'Be prudent, and look well about you.'"

There appears to be some ground, therefore, for the complaint of the Baron de Damas, "that the officers of the navy are disposed to do their duty very reluctantly." But why are they so disposed?—The reason is obvious enough—they meet with a degree of discouragement from the government and the civil authorities, which the spirit and the hardihood of a seaman can scarcely be expected to surmount. Yet one French officer at least has honestly done his duty. Captain Rachelier detained and sent to Senegal for a adjudication several French slaving vessels, and among others three that were afterwards boarded by the *Maidstone*; but mark the issue—they were all liberated by the court there, and, when shortly afterwards met by our Commodore, Bullen, they had already audaciously returned to complete their adventure.

The law, therefore, as it now stands, is either inadequate to the object, or there is a secret understanding that it is not meant to be acted upon. In truth, it is a mockery of common sense to proclaim a traffic to be unlawful, and to punish the offender with confiscation of the vessel only, while neither infamy nor corporeal punishment attaches to the individual, and while he knows that the profits of one successful voyage will more than compensate him for the losses he may sustain in two, by the capture of his ships. France objects to a mutual right of search, and to the capture of her ships actually engaged in the slave trade, because, forsooth, such a concession would militate against the honour of her flag—strange notions of honour, that can suffer the French flag not only to protect a trade which France has declared to be infamous and illegal, but to give security and protection to the wretches of other countries engaged in the trade who may choose to display it! France, however, may rest assured that even her flag would not be dishonoured in assisting the British flag in the work of extending humanity to the African race.

To be Continued.
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