

# The Gleaner

AND NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

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*Nec arancorum sane texus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt, nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes.*

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## THE GLEANER.

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### TRADE WITH THE COUNTRIES ON THE NIGER.

WE arrive now at the important question, what prospers this great interior communication opens to British Commerce. Its branches in Africa since the abolition of that dark one, which Britain has so justly prescribed, have been limited; and high authorities have even doubted if they could admit of any great extension. But it must be observed that the intercourse has hitherto been almost exclusively with the coast; the territory along which is comparatively unproductive, and its inhabitants idle and miserable. It has always been found, in proportion as travellers penetrated inland, that they came to a superior region and people; that, contrary to what takes place in other continents, all the large cities, all the valuable and prosperous branches of industry, were at a distance from the sea. This has been imputed, and not without some reason, to the demoralizing influence of the European slave-trade. But there is besides a physical cause which must have a powerful influence. A much greater extent of the surface of Africa than of any other continent is situated between the tropics, and even immediately under the line. Sterility is there produced by the scorching rays of the sun, to which the coasts from their low level, are particularly liable, and by which many tracts are rendered parched and arid. Others, by the same low situation, are exposed to the inundation of the great rivers, which, swelled by the violent tropical rains, spread often into wide pestilential swamps. But the interior territory becoming always more elevated, enjoys a more temperate climate, and is diversified by hills and mountain ranges, the streams from which supply copious moisture, without deluging the territory with any permanent inundation. The countries rendered accessible by the Niger, and its tributaries are undoubtedly the most productive and industrious in all Africa; and their population, notwithstanding the difficulty of forming any precise estimate, can scarcely be rated at less than twenty five millions. It seems impossible that British enterprise can find access to such a region, without drawing from it very considerable results. The two questions which call for consideration are—the articles of British produce, for which a vent may be found in this quarter of the world; and the commodities which may be procured in exchange. Under the first head we may at once refer to that manufacture in which Britain most excels, and has carried to the greatest extent. Cotton fabrics are alone suited to the climate of Central Africa, and in fact clothe her entire population. It is true, they are manufactured with skill within the country itself; but the example of India, where Manchester and Paisley have supplanted in their native seats the superb muslins and calicoes of Dacca and Masulipetum, leaves little doubt that the less brilliant products of the African loom would be unable to withstand the competition. There is even no need of recurring to so distant an illustration. Manchester clothes Bonny and Eboe, at Kiama, more than two hundred miles inland; her robes, of coarse and gaudy patterns, formed the favourite ornaments of the negro damsels, though their moderate original cost had been raised by a long land carriage to an almost ruinous height. The navigation of the Niger seems hitherto to have been little instrumental in diffusing commodities through the interior. The communication is almost entirely between city and city. The chief of Damugge did not know the existence of Eyeo or Youri. It was only at Egga, the limit of the more improved and industrious districts, that European commodities began to appear. Besides cotton stuffs, arms, it is to be feared would be a prominent article; but not to mention their use in hunting, perhaps the exchange of the European

for the African mode of warfare would on the whole rather advance civilization. Jewels, toys, every gaudy and glittering object, is suited to the rude taste of the African chiefs; and as they have not yet learned to distinguish the real value of these commodities, high prices might for some time be obtained, though experience and competition would doubtless open their eyes. The returns claim our next attention, and form rather a more difficult subject. At the head of the exports we placed manufactured cottons, and at the head of the imports we are disposed to place the raw material. This is produced abundantly, and if we may trust the report of travellers, of excellent quality, over the whole of tropical Africa. European commerce seems never to have reached the cotton-growing districts, which are all considerably in the interior. The demand in Britain is immense, the annual imports being valued at nearly eight millions sterling. This demand too would be augmented, if Africa, like India and the United States, after supplying the raw material, took back the manufactured produce. Indigo, moreover, the most valuable of dyeing stuffs, and which Britain imports sometimes to the value of upwards £1,000,000, is produced in these countries plentifully, and, it is said, also of excellent quality. Hides and skins, and some gold, would be the only important additional articles, for palm oil, at present the most extensive one, being produced in the countries near the coast, is probably furnished to the full extent of the demand. After considering what are likely to be the objects of the trade on the Niger, the mode of conducting it presents another question equally important and difficult. The obstacles are indeed such that, according to the ordinary resources of river navigation, they appear altogether insuperable. The pestilential atmosphere along the shores of this delta and its lower estuaries—the violent and turbulent character of the native tribes, who would doubtless regard the British as rivals and enemies—could scarcely be surmounted unless by some peculiar agency. This, however, seems to be found in steam, which gives such an entirely new character and power to river navigation. Propelled by it, the vessel could be carried in one day and night from the ocean to the head of the delta, and thus pass swiftly through the region of the pestilence; it could also penetrate and leave behind it hostile fleets of armed canoes. Practical skill and experience must decide, whether the steam vessels should be brought direct from England, or be stationed on the coast, where the goods brought out by sailing vessels could be transferred into them. The first of these plans, if practicable, would avoid the cost of transhipment, and the dangers to health incurred during such an operation on a coast, every spot of which is insalubrious. It may be worth suggesting, whether the Formosa or Benue branch might not be the most advantageous for ascending the river. The navigator would thus at once reach the head of the delta, above Kiree, avoiding the dangerous bar at the mouth of the Bras river, and the fierce rivalry of the natives, which would be encountered both there, and still more in the Bonny channel. It may be presumed, however, that the trade can never be carried on with facility, or to any great extent, without a station on the Niger itself, where a depot of European and African goods could be formed; whence smaller vessels might ascend the inferior rivers, or those parts of the great stream of which the navigation is difficult or obstructed.

There would be an obvious convenience in endeavouring to obtain by purchase one of the numerous islands by which the channel is in one place diversified. The only danger might be, of their being rendered unhealthy by a low and damp situation; in which case a salubrious and defensible position might be found on one of the heights by which a great extent of the river course is bordered. It remains only that we enquire

what connection can be traced between these new discoveries, and our previous knowledge of Africa; whether any, and what anticipations have been formed by ancient writers of that lower course of the Niger which has now for the first time been navigated by Europeans. These will, we believe, be found extremely limited. Ptolemy, who delineates the river as entirely inland, and without any branch flowing to the southward, evidently had no idea of this termination. The case may be somewhat different with regard to the Arabian writers, who describe their 'Nile of the Negroes' as flowing westward and falling into the Atlantic. We have endeavoured to shew, in a former article, (June 1826,) that their settlements were all in the territory now called Houssa; and that their Nile was not the Niger of Park, but a compound of the streams flowing along that plain, particularly the Quarta, or Zirmie. It may be supposed that this last stream, joined to the part of the Niger navigated by Lander, formed their Nile, and that they thus only erred by supposing a tributary to be the main branch. But the great imperfection of their knowledge is clearly proved by the ignorance of all the details now observed by our traveller; and more particularly by the statement, that from Tocur (Socatoo) to the Uli, where the great river fell into the sea, was only eighteen days' journey, which cannot be rated so high as 300 miles, while the real distance to the gulf of Benin does not fall short of 700. There may, however, be room to believe, that they might receive a general intimation of the termination of the Niger in the Atlantic, and might suppose the remotest city in that direction of which they obtained intelligence, to be at the point of its entrance; as Sultan Bello supposed Rakah and Funda to be sea ports at the mouth of the river. The name of Youri bears some resemblance to that of Uli, and is readily convertible. But the pits in which the salt of Uli is said by Edrisi to have been found, and the desert along which it was conveyed, suggest the western salt mines, and seem to prove that Uli was Walet, and that the Lake Dobbie, in that imperfect state of knowledge, was confounded with the Atlantic. The only writer who discovers a distinct knowledge of any part of the Niger navigated by the present travellers, is Leo Africanus. He describes it as a flowing between Guber (which is still well known as a country of Houssa, and appears then to have been its ruling state) and Gago, whose fruitful territory, rude habitations, the innumerable host of the royal wives, and its situation 400 miles south from Timbuctoo, clearly establish to be Eyeo. But he fails altogether to trace it farther, or follow its progress downwards to the Gulf of Benin. On the contrary, he represents it as flowing in a westerly direction from Timbuctoo to Guinea (Jenur), and thence to the ocean. This impression he evidently derived from the Portuguese who early began to consider the Senegal and Gambia as the estuaries of the Niger. This last opinion continued to be prevalent among modern Europeans; hence the only attempts made to reach the Niger, were by the English from the Gambia, and the French from the Senegal. They proved abortive; and Deisle and D'Anville obtained positive information, that these rivers had no connection with the Niger, which rose in the interior, and flowed eastward to Timbuctoo. Yet they could never fully overcome the general prepossession to the contrary, and had themselves no correct idea as to its termination. Reichard, a German writer, had the merit of starting, and Mr. M'Queen, of warmly supporting the hypothesis, which has now been so happily verified, affords the main key to the geography of interior Africa. Notwithstanding the great importance of this discovery, it has by no means completed even the outline of our knowledge respecting the central regions of this continent. The Tchadda, with all the countries on its banks, which