



**A MISSION  
TO GELELE**

**AND THE AMAZON  
WARRIORS OF DAHOMEY**

**RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON**



A Mission to Gelele, King of  
Dahomey

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## **PREFACE TO THE MEMORIAL EDITION**

THIRTY years ago, no Europeans were at Dahomey. None ventured into the interior to the Court of the Savage known as King Gelele. His time was spent in wars, his best troops being his many thousand Amazons, women crueller and fiercer than men. The prisoners were tortured, and their throats were cut. Whenever he required to send a telegram to his father, a man was slaughtered, and his soul was despatched with it. Women were cut open alive, in a state of pregnancy, that the King might see what it was like. Animals were tied in every agonizing position to die; impaling and cannibalism were common, and it was impossible to go out of one's hut without seeing something appalling.

Thirty years ago, Richard Burton was chosen to go to Dahomey, and to live with this savage, to endeavour to induce him to abandon these cruelties. He went as Her Majesty's Commissioner, bearing presents from the Queen. The King gave ample reasons for not being able to alter the customs of the country. He sent return presents to Her Majesty, and gave three to Richard Burton for his „favourite squaw.“ The King treated Richard very well, but any freak or sudden superstition might have caused him to be put to a cruel death. Gelele said that his prisoners of war represented his income, that his own people would kill him if he stopped “the customs,” that if he received 50,000 a year he would attempt it, and that the only presents he wanted were a carriage and horses, and a white woman.

When Richard returned, he told me that he had seen enough dreadful sights to turn his brain. Earl Russell wrote me: „Tell Captain Burton that he has performed his mission to my utmost and entire satisfaction.“

The following is his modest account of that mission, and information concerning the country, which I think and trust may prove infinitely useful to the French Army now occupying Dahomey.

And I beg of the French Army, when they have righted the wrongs of the human race, to turn a kind thought to those of the poor tortured animals.

As in the Memorial Edition of the „Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah,“ Mr. Leonard C. Smithers has corrected the proofs from Sir Richard’s own copy of the first edition, and has passed the sheets through the press.

ISABEL BURTON. July 12th, 1893.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST (1864) EDITION

IN the Preface affixed by an anonymous hand to „The History of Dahomy,“ [\[i\]](#) published nearly three fourths of a century ago, we are told that the „short interval from Whydah beach to Abomey is perhaps utmost beaten track, by Europeans, of any in Africa.“ The Author thereupon proceeds to show a difference of 104 miles between the maximum and minimum estimates of the distance, which is nearly doubled by the most correct.

In this Year of Grace, 1864, there is at least an equal amount of uncertainty concerning the „Land of the Amazons“; but it shows rather in things metaphysical than physical. So well informed a journal as the „Saturday Review“ (July 4th, 1863), gravely informs its readers that „The King of Dahomey has lately been indulging in a sacrifice of 2000 human beings, simply in deference to a national prejudice (!), and to keep up the good old customs of the country“ (!!).

This complete miscomprehension of the subject, coming from such a quarter, induces me to attempt without fear so well worn a theme, and to bring up to the present time a subject worthily handled by Snelgrave, [\[ii\]](#) Smith, [\[iii\]](#) Norris, [\[iv\]](#) Dalzel, M'Leod, [\[v\]](#) and Forbes. [\[vi\]](#) And if, in depicting the manners and ceremonies of this once celebrated military Empire, and in recounting this black Epopæia, there has been a something of excessive detail, and there shall appear much that is trifling and



superfluous, the kindly reader will perhaps find for it a reason.

My principal object, it may be frankly owned, has been to show, in its true lights, the African kingdom best known by name to Europe. But in detailing its mixture of horrors and meanness, in this pitiless picture of its mingled puerility and brutality, of ferocity and politeness, I trust that none can rightfully charge me with exaggeration, and I can acquit myself of all malice. „A nadie si elogia con mentira, ni se critica sin verdad.“

So far back as 1861 I had volunteered, as the Blue Book shows, to visit Agbome. The measure not being then deemed advisable, I awaited till May June, 1863, when an opportunity presented itself. In the meantime (December, 1862 January, 1863), Commodore Wilmot, R.N., Senior Officer of the Bights Division, accompanied by Captain Luce, R.N., and by Dr. Haran, of H.M.S. Brisk, devanced me, and that officer proved the feasibility of a visit to Dahomey. Returning to Fernando Po, I soon received the gratifying intelligence that her Majesty's Government had been pleased to choose me as the bearer of a friendly message to King Gelele. The official letters are, by permission, given in extenso below.

*FOREIGN OFFICE, August 20th, 1863. SIR,*

You were informed by my Despatch of the 23rd of June last, that you had been selected by Her Majesty's Government to proceed on a Mission to the King of Dahomey, to confirm the friendly sentiments expressed by Commodore Wilmot to the King on the occasion of the visit which he made to that chief in the months of December and January last.

I have accordingly to desire that as soon after the receipt of this Despatch as it may be feasible to do so, you will proceed to Dahomey, taking care first, by previous

communication with the King, to ascertain that a proper reception will be accorded to you.

You will, on your arrival, inform the King that the many important duties which devolve on Commodore Wilmot as the Officer in command of Her Majesty's Naval Forces on the African Coast, have prevented him returning in person to confirm the good understanding which it is hoped has been established between the King and Her Majesty's Government by the Commodore's late visit. You will state that the Commodore faithfully reported all that passed between him and the King, and that he correctly made known the wishes and feelings of Her Majesty's Government on the several topics on which he addressed the King.

With regard to the question of the export of slaves from his territories, you will not fail to impress upon the King the importance which her Majesty's Government attach to the cessation of this traffic.

Her Majesty's Government admit the difficulties which the King may find in putting a stop to a trade that has so long existed in his country, and from which his ancestors have derived so much profit, but his income from this source must be very small compared with that of former kings, and it will be to his interest to find out some other source of revenue, before that which he now derives from the sale of his fellow-men to the slave dealers is entirely put a stop to. You will remind the King that he himself suggested to Commodore Wilmot that if we wished to put a stop to the slave trade, we should prevent white men from coming to buy them, and you will state that Her Majesty's Government, having determined that the traffic shall cease, will take steps to prevent effectually the export of slaves from his territories. You will add, in illustration of what you state, that Her Majesty's Government have concluded a treaty with the United States Government, which will

prevent, for the future, any American vessels from coming to ship slaves.

With regard to human sacrifices, I rejoice to find from Commodore Wilmot's Report, that the number of victims at the King's customs has been exaggerated.

It is to be feared, however, that much difficulty will be experienced in prevailing upon the King to put a stop entirely to this barbarous practice, which prevails more or less openly, along the greater part of the Western Coast of Africa. But we must seek by whatever influence we may possess, or be able to attain, to mitigate, if we cannot at once prevent, the horrors of these customs, and I rely upon your using your best efforts for this purpose.

The King in his interview with Commodore Wilmot expressed a wish that English merchants should come and settle and make trade at Whydah, and he offered to help to repair the old English fort there, and to permit it to be garrisoned by English troops.

You will thank the King for this mark of his confidence, and you will at the same time state, that as he has promised to protect any British merchants who may settle at Whydah, Her Majesty's Government put entire faith in his promises, and see no necessity for sending English soldiers to garrison the fort there. You will, however, add, that there is one thing needful in order that the King's wishes in regard to the settlement of English merchants at Whydah should be carried out, and that is, that there should be a sufficiency of lawful trade to induce them to do so.

English merchants cannot take slaves in return for their goods, they must have palm oil, ivory, cotton, and such other articles as the country is capable of producing. The King will see, therefore, that it must depend very much on his own exertions, and those of his subjects, whether it will be worthwhile for British merchants to settle at Whydah. Should however the King think fit to enter into an

engagement with Her Majesty's Government to encourage lawful trade, and to promote, as far as lies in his power, the development of the resources of his country, Her Majesty's Government would be willing to appoint an agent at Whydah to be an organ of communication with the King and to assist in carrying out his views.

As an earnest of their friendly feelings, Her Majesty's Government have caused the presents, of which a list is inclosed, to be prepared and forwarded to you for presentation to the King. You will see that, as far as possible, the King's wishes as expressed to Commodore Wilmot, have been carried out in regard to, the articles selected for presents, with the exception of the carriage and horses, and with respect to these you will explain to the King, that in the first place it would be a difficult matter to get English horses out to the Coast, and even supposing they arrived safely at their destination, it would be very doubtful, from the nature of the country and climate, whether they would long survive their arrival.

If, however, our future relations with the King should be of a nature to warrant such a proceeding, Her Majesty's Government would not hesitate to endeavour to comply with his wishes, by sending him an English carriage and horses.

I have only in conclusion to add, that it has been suggested to Her Majesty's Government that among the King's captives there may still be some of the coloured Christian prisoners taken at Ishagga, and if on inquiry you should be able to ascertain that this is the case, you will state to the King that it would be taken by Her Majesty's Government as an earnest of his friendly feeling, and as shewing a desire to perform his promises to them, if he would restore these prisoners to liberty.

I am, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant,  
(Signed) RUSSELL.

*EXTRACT. FOREIGN OFFICE, August 20th, 1863.*

SIR,

With reference to my other Despatch of this day's date containing instructions for your guidance on proceeding to Dahomey, I have to state that you should, if possible, stipulate with the King before proceeding to Abomey, that there should be no human sacrifices during the time of your stay in his capital, and you will, under any circumstances, decline to sanction these sacrifices by your presence, if they should unfortunately take place whilst you are in the country.

The last packet from the West Coast brought reports of the King of Dahomey having died from the effects of a wound received in one of his slave-hunting expeditions. Should these reports be well founded, it will be advisable that you should ascertain something of the character of his successor before proceeding to the Dahomian capital, and I leave it to your discretion to proceed subsequently to Abomey, and to deliver the presents to the new King or not, as you may after due consideration deem advisable.

I have requested the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to give directions that you may be conveyed to and from Whydah in a ship of war, and I have also informed their lordships that it would be advisable that a medical officer should accompany you, if one can be spared from her Majesty's ships for this purpose.

I am, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant,  
(Signed) RUSSELL.

FOREIGN OFFICE, July 23, 1863.

SIR,

With reference to my Despatch of the 23rd ultimo, instructing you to hold yourself in readiness to proceed on a mission to the King of Dahomey, I have now to acquaint you that the presents with which you will be entrusted for the King, and the instructions for your guidance, will be



forwarded to you by the packet which leaves Liverpool with the African mails on the 2nd of August, and you will therefore make your arrangements accordingly.

I am, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant,  
(Signed) RUSSELL.

LIST OF PRESENTS forwarded to CAPTAIN BURTON by packet of the 24th August, 1863, for presentation to the KING OF DAHOMEY.

One forty feet circular crimson silk Damask Tent with Pole complete (contained in two boxes).

One richly embossed silver Pipe with amber mouth-piece, in morocco case. Two richly embossed silver Belts with Lion and Crane in raised relief, in morocco cases. Two silver and partly gilt Waiters, in oak case. One Coat of Mail and Gauntlets. (Contained in one deal case, addressed to Captain Burton, H. B. M.'s Consul for the Bight of Biafra, West Coast of Africa.)

September, however, was hardly the month to be preferred for crossing the Great Agrime Swamp, and my health required a change of air before submitting to the *peine forte et dure* of a visit to a West African King. A few weeks upon the South Coast, in the delicious „Cacimbo, [\[vii\]](#) „ soon brought me up to working mark, and the following pages will tell the rest.

In Chapter XIX., I have taken the liberty of personally addressing my friend Dr. Hunt, author of „The Negro's Place in Nature.“ He has called for the results of my humble experience I had written the remarks before seeing his able and graphic paper and I have done my best to aid him in dispersing the mists with which „mere rhetoric of a political and religious nature“ has invested the subject.

Some excuse may be expected for the length of the Appendix: the object has been to supply the Public with as

complete a picture of present Dahomey as my materials, and my capability of using them, have permitted. The items are as follows:

I. Reprints of previous modern notices.

A. Extract of a letter from the Reverend Peter W. Bernasko, Native Assistant Missionary, dated Whydah, November 29th, 1860, and describing the Grand Customs. („Wesleyan Missionary Notices,“ February 25th, 1861).

B. Despatches from Commodore Wilmot respecting his visit to the King of Dahomey in December, 1862, and January, 1863, and describing the Platform Sacrifice.

C. Dahomey, its People and Customs, by M. Jules Gerard, describing the Oyo Custom of Kana.

IV. A Catalogue of the Dahoman Kings, with the dates of their various exploits, their „strong names,“ and the events of their reigns. It is merely produced as *documens pour servir*: I have not only analysed the several histories, but have gathered from the natives traditions and explanations of the royal titles. Moreover, I wish these volumes to be a picture rather of the present than of the past.

The Pages now offered to the Public are the result of a three months' personal study of Dahomey, my work extending over the day, and often half through the night. I may venture to assert that, by comparing its results with the authors before cited, the labour expended upon this monogram will become apparent

It only remains for me to apologize for the involuntary errors which will doubtless be found in the following volumes, and to hope that I may, at some future time, find an opportunity of correcting them.

BUENA VISTA, FERNANDO Po,  
April 20, 1864.

## CHAPTER I. I FALL IN LOVE WITH FERNANDO PO.

*This fertile soil, which enjoys a perpetual spring, is considered a strong prison, as the land of spectres, the seat of disease, and the mansion of death.*

*Said of Bengal by its Moslem conquerors.*

*A Ilha Formosa, the lovely island of Fernando Po, has, like most beauties, two different, indeed two opposite, aspects.*

*About Christmas time she is in a state deeper than rest,*

*A kind of sleepy Venus seemed Dudu.*

Everything, in fact, appears enwrapped in the rapture of repose. As the ship glides from the rolling, blustering Bights into that wonderfully still water, men come on deck feeling they know not what; *Çela porte à l'amour*, as the typical Frenchman remarks. The oil-like swell is too lazy to break upon the silent shore, the wind has hardly enough energy to sigh, the tallest trees nod and bend drowsily downwards, even the grass is, from idleness, averse to wave: the sluggish clouds bask in the soft light of the sky, while the veiled sun seems in no hurry to run his course. Here no one would dream, as does our modern poet, of calling nature „ sternly fair.“ If such be the day, conceive the cloister-like stillness of a night spent in the bosom of Clarence Cove. Briefly, Fernando Po, in the dry weather, is a Castle of Indolence, a Land of the Lotophagi, a City of the Living-Dead.

But as I saw her in November, 1863, and as she had been for the six months preceding, the charmer was not to be recognised by that portrait. A change had come over her Madonna-like face -- as is sometimes witnessed in the „ human organism.“ The rainy season had set in earlier than usual; it had opened in May, and in November it was not ended. A heavy arch of nimbus, either from the north-east or the north-west, gathered like a frown on the forehead of the dull grey firmament. Presently the storm came down, raving like a jealous wife. In a few moments it burst with a flood of tears, a sheet of „ solid water,“ rent and blown about by raging, roaring gusts, that seemed to hurry from every quarter in the very ecstasy of passion. Baleful gleams of red thready lightning flashed like the glances of fury in weeping eyes, and deafening peals of thunder crashed overhead, not with the steady rumble of a European tempest, but sharp, sudden, and incisive as claps of feminine objurgation between fits of sobbing. These lively scenes were enacted during half the day, and often throughout the night: they passed off in lady-like sulks, a windless fog or a brown -blue veil of cloud settling hopelessly over the face of heaven and earth, till the unappeased elements gathered strength for a fresh outburst.

Amidst this caprice, these coquetries of the „ Beautiful Island,“ man found it hard to live, but uncommonly easy to die. Presently all that was altered, and the history of the metamorphosis deserves, I think, to be recorded.

The shrew was tamed by an inch and a half of barometric altitude. The dictum of the learned Dr. Waitz, the Anthropologist, no longer holds good. [\[viii\]](#)

When I first landed on this island (September, 1861), Sta. Isabel, nee Clarence, the lowland town and harbour, was the only locality inhabited by the new Spanish colony. Pallid men were to be seen sitting or lolling languid in their

verandahs, and occasionally crawling about the grass-grown streets, each with a cigarette hanging to his lower lip. They persistently disappeared in the dry season, whilst their example was followed by the coloured „liberateds“, and the colonists during the „balance“ of the year. H.B.M.'s Consulate is situated unpleasantly near a military hospital: breakfast and dinner were frequently enlivened by the spectacle of a something covered with a blanket being carried in, and after due time a something within a deal box being borne out on four ghastly men's shoulders. And strangers fled the place like a pestilence: sailors even from the monotonous „south coast,“ felt the ennui of Fernando Po to be deadly grave-like.

At length Yellow Fever, the gift of the „Grand Bonny,“ which was well-nigh depopulated, stalked over the main in March, 1862, and in two months he swept off 78 out of a grand total of 250 white men. [\[ix\]](#)

The „Beautiful Island“ was now going too far. Seeing that the fever did not abate, H.E. the Governor de la Gandara determined to try the effects of altitude. A kind of „quartelillo“ -- *infirmierie* or *baraque* -- was hastily run up in twelve days, beginning from June 22nd, 1862, by M. Tejero, Commandant of Military Engineers. The site, a kind of shelf over the village of Basile, about 400 metres above sea-level, received the name of Sta. Cecilia. On the day after its completion, July 6th, nineteen *pénitenciers*, or political prisoners, the survivors of some thirty men that had died of yellow fever in the hulks, were transferred to the new quarters; two were lost by attacks of the same disease contracted on the seaboard, the rest of those condemned to *travaux forces* kept their health, and were returned to their homes in November, 1862.

This old *baraque* is now nearly always empty, being converted into a kind of lodging-house. Its dimensions are 11-50 metres long, by 6 broad, and raised on piles 1-50



high; the rooms are three in number, one large, of 6 metres by 4-25, and the other two of 4-25 metres by 3.

Seeing the excellent result of that experiment, H.E. Sr. D. Lopez de Ayllon, the present Governor, to whom these pages are respectfully inscribed, determined to increase operations. Major Osorio, of the Engineers, was directed to build a *maison caserne*, intended to accommodate white soldiers not wanted for duty at Sta. Isabel. It was begun March 22nd, finished September 5th, and opened November 30th, 1863. The *rez de chaussée* lodges forty men, the second story as many more, whilst the first stage has rooms for the Governor, his aide-de-camp, and four officers. Besides these two lumber houses, there are tolerable stables for horses and mules, good roads well bridged, and a channel of mountain water, which the white soldiers, who can work in the sun with the thinnest of caps, have derived from the upper levels. About thirty men were sent here. Their number has varied but little. During the five months from December, 1863, to April, 1864, though there have been sporadic local cases of simple intermittent fever -- March, 1864, shows only one -- and though dangerous diseases have been brought up from the lowlands, not a death has occurred.

Thus, then, the first sanitarium in Western Africa owes its existence to the Spanish Colony, that dates only from the middle of 1859. As far back as 1848, the late Captain Wm. Allen and Dr. Thompson, of the Niger Expedition, proposed a sanitary settlement at Victoria, on the seaboard below the Camaroons Mountain, a site far superior to Fernando Po. Since their time, the measure has been constantly advocated by the late Mr. M. Laird. *Eppur non si muove* Britannia. She allows her „ sentimental squadron „ to droop and to die without opposing the least obstacle between it and climate. A few thousands spent at Camaroons or at Fernando Po would, calculating merely the market value of

seamen's lives, repay themselves in as many years. Yet not a word from the Great Mother!

When I compare St. Louis of Senegal with Sierra Leone, or Lagos with Fernando Po, it is my conviction that a temporary something is going wrong with the popular constitution at home. If not, whence this want of energy, this new-born apathy? Dr. Watson assures us that disease in England has now assumed an asthenic and adynamic type. The French said of us in the Crimea that Jean Boide had shattered his nerves with too much tea. The Registrar-General suggests the filthy malaria of the overcrowded hodiernal English town as the *fomes malorum*. The vulgar opinion is, that since the days of the cholera the Englishman (physical) has become a different being from his prototype of those fighting times when dinner-pills were necessary. And we all know that

*C'est la constipation que rend l'homme rigoureux.*

Whatever the cause may be, an Englishman's lot is at present not enviable, and his children have a Herculean task „cut and dry“ before them.

Nothing can be more genial and healthful than the place where I am writing these lines, the frame or plankhouse built by D. Pellon, of the Woods and Forests, now absent on private affairs in Spain. The aneroid shows 29 instead of 30-1 30-4 inches, and the altimeter does not exceed 800 feet. Yet after sunrise the thermometer (F.) often stands at 68, reddening the hands and cheeks of the white man. We can take exercise mentally and bodily without that burst of perspiration which follows every movement in the lowlands, and we can repose without the sensation which the „Beebee „ in India defined as „feeling like a boiled cabbage.“ The view from the balcony facing north is charming. On the right are the remnants of a palm orchard; to the left, an avenue of bananas leads to a clump of

tropical forest; and on both sides tumbles adown the basaltic rocks and stones a rivulet of pure cold mountain water most delightful of baths over which the birds sing loudly through the livelong day. In front is a narrow ledge of cleared ground bearing rose-trees two years old and fifteen feet high, a pair of coffee shrubs, bowed with scarlet berries, sundry cotton plants, by no means despicable, and a cacao, showing what the island would have been but for the curse of free labour. [x] Beyond the immediate foreground there is a slope, hollowed in the centre, and densely covered with leek-green and yellow-green grasses of the *Holcus* kind now finding favour in England, and even here fragrant, when cut, as northern hay. The drop is sufficiently abrupt below to fall without imperceptible gradation into the rolling plain, thick and dark with domed and white-boled trees, which separate the mountain from the Ethiopic main. The white houses of Sta. Isabel glisten brightly on the marge; beyond it the milky-blue expanse of streaked waters stretches to the bent bow of the horizon; and on the right towers, in solitary majesty, a pyramid of Nature's handiwork, „ Mongo ma Lobah,“ the Mount of Heaven, [xi] now capped with indistinct cloud, then gemmed with snow, [xii] and reflecting from its golden head the gorgeous tropical sunshine; whilst over all of earth and sea and sky there is that halo of atmosphere which is to landscape what the light of youth is to human loveliness.

And as night first glooms in the East, the view borrows fresh beauties from indistinctness. The varied tints make way for the different shades of the same colour that mark the several distances, and hardly can the eye distinguish in the offing land from sea. Broken lines of mist-rack rise amongst the trees of the basal plain, following the course of some streamlet, like a string of giant birds flushed from

their roosts. The moon sleeps sweetly upon the rolling banks of foliage, and from under the shadowing trees issue weird fantastic figures, set off by the emerald light above. In the growing silence the tinkle of the two rivulets becomes an audible bass, the treble being the merry cricket and the frog praying lustily for rain, whilst the palms whisper mysterious things in their hoarse baritone. The stars shine bright, twinkling as if frost were in the air; we have eliminated the thick stratum of atmosphere that overhangs the lowlands, and behind us, in shadowy grandeur, neither blue nor brown nor pink, but with a blending of the three, and sometimes enwrapped in snowy woolpack so dense as to appear solid against the deep azure, the Pico Santa Isabel, the highest crater in the island, rises softly detached from the cirrus-flecked nocturnal sky.

Life, as an American missionary remarked, is somewhat primitive at Buena Vista, but it is not the less pleasant. An hour of work in my garden at sunrise and sunset, when the scenery is equally beautiful, hard reading during the day, and after dark a pipe and a new book of travels, this is the „*fallentis semita vitæ* „ which makes one shudder before plunging once more into the cold and swirling waters of society—of civilization. My „niggers“ are, as Krumen should be, employed all the day long in clearing, cutting, and planting—it is quite the counterpart of a landowner’s existence in the Southern States. Nothing will prevent them calling themselves my „children,“ that is to say, my slaves; and indeed no white man who has lived long in the outer tropics can prevent feeling that he is *pro tempore* the lord, the master, and the proprietor of the black humanity placed under him. It is true that the fellows have no overseer, consequently there is no whip; punishment resolves itself into retrenching rum and tobacco; moreover, they come and go as they please. But if a little „moral influence“ were not applied to their lives, they would be

dozing or quarrelling all day in their quarters, and twanging a native guitar half the night, much to their own discomfort and more to their owner's. Consequently I keep them to their work.

At certain hours the bugle-call from Santa Cecilia intimates that all about me is not savagery. And below where the smoke rises „a-twisten blue“ from the dense plantation of palms, lies a rich study for an ethnologist -- Basile, the Bubé village. No white man has lived long enough amongst this exceptional race of Fernandians to describe them minutely, and, as a rule, they have been grossly and unjustly abused. [\[xiii\]](#) A few lines will show the peculiarities which distinguish them from other African tribes.

The Bubé—who, as may be proved by language, is an aborigine of the mainland—has forgotten his origin, and he wisely gives himself no trouble about it. If you ask him whence he comes, he replies „from his mother“; whither he goes, and he answers „to Drikhatta ra Busala ‘be [\[xiv\]](#) if a bad man,” and „to Lubakko ‘pwa (the sky) if he has been a good Bubé.” He has a conception of and a name for the Creator, Rupe or Erupe, but he does not perplex himself with questions of essence and attribute, personality and visibility. Perhaps in this point too he shows good sense. He is also, you may be sure, not without an evil principle, Busala ‘be, who acts as it were chief of police.

Coming down from the things of heaven to those of earth, the Fernandian is „aristocratic,” an out-and-out conservative; no oldest Tory of the old school can pretend to rival him. But in many points his attachment to ancient ways results not from prejudice, but from a tradition founded upon sound instinct. He will not live near the sea for fear of being kidnapped, also because the over-soft air effeminates his frame. He refuses to build higher up the



mountains than 2000 to 3000 feet, as his staff of life, the palm and the plantain, will not flourish in the raw air and in the rugged ground. He confines himself therefore to the exact zone in which the medical geographer of the present age would place him-above the fatal fever level, and below the line of dysentery and pneumonia. His farm is at a distance from his cottage, to prevent domestic animals finding their way into it; his yam fields, which supply the finest crops, are as pretty and as neatly kept as vineyards in Burgundy, and he makes the best „topi“ or palm toddy in Western Africa. His habitation is a mere shed without walls: he is a Spartan in these matters. Nothing will persuade him to wear, beyond the absolute requirements of decency, any thing warmer than a thin coat of palm oil: near the summit of the mountain, 10,000 feet above sea-level, I have offered him a blanket, and he has preferred the fire. His only remarkable, somewhat „fashionable“. looking article of dress is an extensive wicker hat covered with a monkey skin, but this is useful to prevent tree snakes falling upon his head. He insists upon his wife preserving the same toilette, minus the hat-oh, how wise! If she does not come up to his beau ideal of fidelity, he cuts off, first her left hand, then her right, lastly, her throat; a very just

sequence. [\[xv\]](#) He is not a slave nor will he keep slaves; he holds them to be a vanity, and justly, because he can work for himself. He is no idler; after labouring at his farm, he will toil for days to shoot a monkey, a „philantomba“ (*alias* „fritamba „), or a flying squirrel. Besides being a sportsman, he has his manly games, and I should not advise everyone to tackle him with quarter-staff; his *alpenstock* is a powerful and a well-wielded weapon. Though so highly conservative, he is not, as some might imagine, greatly destitute of intelligence: he pronounces our harsh and difficult English less incorrectly than any West African tribe, including the Sierra Leonite. Brightest of all is his moral

character: you may safely deposit rum and tobacco—that is to say, gold and silver—in his street, and he will pay his debt as surely as the Bank of England. [\[xvi\]](#) And what caps his worldly wisdom, is his perfect and perpetual suspiciousness. He never will tell you his name, he never receives you as a friend, he never trusts you, even when you bring gifts; he will turn out armed if you enter his village at an unseasonable hour, and if you are fond of collecting vocabularies, may the god of speech direct you! The fact is, that the plunderings and the kidnappings of bygone days are burned into his memory: he knows that such things have been, and he knows not when they may again be. So he confines himself to the society of his native hamlet, and he makes no other intimacies, even with the fellowmen whose village smoke he sees curling up from the neighbouring dell. [\[xvii\]](#)

After two years of constant quarrelling the beautiful island and I are now „fast friends.“ It is perhaps as well to“ begin with a little aversion. „

## **CHAPTER II. I DO NOT BECOME „FAST FRIENDS” WITH LAGOS.**

On Nov. 29, 1863, I embarked on board H.M.S.S. Antelope, Lieut.-Commander Allingham. A red ensign at the fore, manned yards, and a salute of 17 guns, banished from my brain all traces of Buena Vista and the Bubé. Our cruise was eventless. We of course fell in with a tornado off Cape Formoso, the gentle projection in the hypothenuse of the Nigerian Delta. The good old iron paddle-wheeler, however, though no „skimmer of the seas,” advanced at ease through the impotent blast. On Dec. 2, we found ourselves rolling in the roads of pestilential Lagos, our lullaby the sullen distant roar, whilst a dusky white gleam smoking over the deadly bar in the darkening horizon threatened us with a disagreeable landing at the last, the youngest, and the most rachitic of Great Britain’s large but now exceedingly neglected family of colonies.

H.M.S.S. Investigator was signalled for on the next day; the Handy being as usual „unhandy” --broken down. The acting commander of the former, Mr. Adlam, kindly gave me an in-passage to ship the presents sent by the Foreign Office for the King of Dahomey.

The town, however, and the townspeople as well, wore a new and greatly improved appearance, the work of the great benefactor of West African cities, „General Conflagration.” Three fires had followed one another in regular succession through November, December, and January, 1863; and the fire god will continue to „rule the roast” till men adopt some more sensible style of roofing

than thatch and „Calabar mats.“There was also a distinct improvement in local morals since the days when the charming English spinster landed here, and was obliged by the excited and *non-culottées* natives to be escorted back to her papa’s ship by two gentlemen with drawn swords.

Nudity has been made penal. Where impaled corpses of men and dogs scandalized eye and nose, and where a foul mass of hovel crowded down to the beach, now runs a broad road, a Marine Parade, the work of the first governor, Mr. Coskry, during his short but useful reign. Finally, Sydney Smith’s highest idea of civil government, a street constable, everywhere gladdens the Britisher’s sight. In France we should have seen the *piou-piou*; in England they prefer the „peeler;” and the peeler-governed scoff and wag the head at the *piou-piou*-ruled, and *vice versa*. I confess to holding that British Prætorian, the policeman, to be like the beefsteak, and like Professor Holloway’s pill--a bore, a world-wide nuisance: the „ meteor flag of England ” never seems to set upon him. Camoëns might have addressed him as another Sebastian:

Thou being dread! upon whose glorious sway  
The orient sun first pours his quick’ning beam,  
And views thee from the heaven’s middle way,  
And lights thee smiling with his latest gleam.

et cetera.

On the other hand, nothing could be worse than the animus between white and black and white-black; it was systematically aggravated by the bad prints of the coast, and by the extra-philanthropic portion of the fourth estate at home. The place is also, I have said, pestilential; out of a grand total of seventy Europeans, not fewer than nine have lately died in thirteen days; others are expected to follow, and no man is safe at Lagos for a week. Breathing such an air, with such an earth below them, with such a sun above

them, and with such waters within them, it is hardly to be wondered at that the Lagoonist's temper is the reverse of mild.

Thus we arrived at an evil hour; all stood in armed peace, alert for war; and the hapless Investigator put the last strain on the back of Patience. Startled by the display of fight, I hastily collected the presents, whilst Mr. John Cruikshank, the Assistant-Surgeon, R.N., detailed on duty to Dahomey, obliged me by laying in a few stores. On December 4th we hurried from the City of Wrath. The bar showed blinders only; we would have crossed it had the breakers risen mountains high.

On Saturday, December 5th, we anchored off notorious Whydah, a few hours too late to catch the last glimpse of the Rattlesnake's top-gear. This was unlucky. Commodore Wilmot, commanding the West Coast of Africa, who, taking the warmest interest in the mission, had adopted every possible measure to forward its success, after vainly awaiting my coming for nearly a fortnight, was compelled by circumstances to steam Northward. Thus it was my fate to miss the only officer on the coast who knew anything about Dahomey, and thus collation of opinion became impossible.



### CHAPTER III. WE ENTER WHYDAH IN STATE.

The necessity of sending on a messenger to the King, who was preparing for his own Customs, and for my reception at Kana, detained H.M.S. Antelope till December 8th, when a special invitation returned to Whydah.

For some days the weather had been too dark to permit a fair view of a country so much extolled by old travellers, and which Captain Thomas Phillips [\[xviii\]](#) has described as the „pleasantest land in Guinea.“ But even under the clearest sky, with the present deadening influences, when the hand of the destroyer has passed over its towns and villages and fields, the traveller must not expect to find, like his brotherhood of the last and even the present century, the „champaigns and small ascending hills beautified with always green shady groves of lime, wild orange, and other trees, and irrigated with divers broad fresh rivers.“ And of the multitude of little villages that belonged to Whydah in the days of her independence, it may be said that their ruins have perished. [\[xix\]](#)

We landed as ceremoniously as I had embarked. The Commodore had dwelt long enough in Africa and amongst the Africans, properly to appreciate the efficacy of „apparatus“ in the case of the first Government mission. Commander Ruxton, R.N., whose gun-vessel, the Pandora, still remained in the roads when H.M.S. Antelope, after firing her salute, departed, kindly accompanied us. After a rough and stormy night we landed, at 10 A.M., in a fine surf-boat belonging to Mr. Dawson, of Cape Coast Castle,

ex-missionary and actual merchant at Whydah; its strong knees and the rising cusps of the stem and stern acting as weather-boards, are required in these heavy seas that dash upon the ill-famed Slavecoast. We remarked a little external bar, separated by a deep longitudinal line, the home of sharks, from the steep sandy beach; it must act as a breakwater when the surf is not over-heavy. We landed amid song and shout, , in the usual way; shunning great waves, we watched a „smooth,“ paddled in violently upon the back of some curling breaker, till the boat's nose was thrown high and dry upon the beach; were snatched out by men, so as not to be washed back by the receding water, and gained *terra firma* without suspicion of a wetting. Such, however, was not the case with our boxes; indeed baggage rarely has such luck. On the beach we were met by the Rev. Peter W. Bernasko, native teacher, and Principal of the Wesleyan Mission, Whydah, and taking refuge from the sun in a hut-shed belonging to Mr. Dawson, the party waited half an hour, till all had formed in marching order.

The Hu-ta, [\[xx\]](#) *praya*, or sea-beach of the „Liverpool of Dahomey,“ is a sand-bank rising some 20 feet above sea level, and bright with the usual salsolaceous plants. There are no dwelling-houses, nor do the white merchants of the upper town often sleep here. Seven several establishments of mat roofs and mud walls (the French being incomparably the best), serve for storing cargo, and for transacting business during the day. There are usually three to four ships rolling in the roads, and the more sanguine declare that the great slave port might, if she pleased, export 10,000 tons of palm oil (£340,000) per annum.

The Whydah escort of twenty men having duly saluted us with muskets, began the march towards their town, shouting and firing, singing and dancing, Our party was headed by a Kruman from Commander Ruxton's ship, carrying the white and red-crossed flag of St. George,