

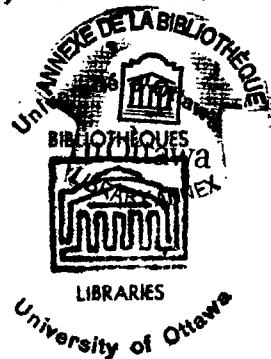
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M.A. (HISTORY)

Parliament's Interest in West Africa, 1713-1785:
A Study Based on Published Parliamentary Records.

by

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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PREFACE

Guinea was the name given by the early European traders to the coastal region of West Africa which extends roughly from Cape Verde on its westernmost point (approximately 15°N) to about 15°S . in Southern Angola. The term also denoted the gulf formed by the great bend of this coast eastwards and then southwards. Loosely applied, the name was used to cover any part of the coast between Cape Verde and Angola. There was a general distinction between Upper and Lower Guinea but in a more limited sense, the name was applied to the upper portion only, from what is now Senegal to Nigeria. Parts of this area were variously called the Gum, Grain, Gold, Ivory and Slave coasts according to the type of commerce that prevailed in any one particular area. The name did not come into general use until about the late fifteenth century and it is likely that the term derived from the important trading town or kingdom of the upper Niger basin also designated variously as Ghinea, Genni, Jenne or Djenee dating from the 8th century. It is also possible that the word came from Ghana or Ghanata, the oldest known empire in the Western Sudan. It was the reports of the gold and wealth of this early empire that lured the Europeans to the West African coast.

One other point needs explanation: the dates up to 1752 are left in the Old Style except that the year may be taken to begin on January 1st. After 1752, the dates are cited according to the Gregorian Calendar.

CHAPTER I

THE VALUE OF THE GUINEA TRADE AND THE
ENGLISH CONNECTION WITH IT

The principal incentive to British enterprise in West Africa since the days of the Portuguese explorations till the end of the eighteenth century had been the acquisition of wealth. It was trade that principally attracted Englishmen, as well as other Europeans, to Africa until about 1789, when philanthropic designs began to emerge. Even then, philanthropy was mingled with the desire for commercial gains.

During the great debate which began in 1789 over the abolition of the slave trade, the abolitionists did not simply wish to abolish the trade for the sheer reason of relieving the Africans from the brutalities of the slave traders. The philanthropists hoped to replace "the inhuman and shameful traffic" with "a just and legitimate commerce". In 1791, the House of Commons rejected Wilberforce's bill for the entire abolition of the slave trade within the remains of the British dominions but passed a bill incorporating the Sierra Leone Company.¹ The Company was the instrument by which the humanitarians hoped to implement their views. The commercial interests in their schemes were quite apparent. The value of West Africa depended entirely upon its trade for the belief existed that territories were not worth retaining if nothing commercially was gained from them. Such views were

1 John Debrett, The Parliamentary Register, Vol. XXIX, p. 384.

very extant in the often polemical writings of Malachy Postlethwayt and other eighteenth century English economists. Before however, these views can be analysed and a detailed examination of Parliament's interest in Africa from 1713 onwards is undertaken, it would be useful to explain the terminal dates of this study and to make a few remarks about the image of Africa as it was in the minds of eighteenth century Englishmen.

The period 1713 to 1785 has been chosen for the one general reason that during this period, Parliament was mainly concerned in preserving the slave trade in the hands of British merchants. Particular reasons for choosing these dates are that in 1713, Parliament approved the Assiento clause, extracted from Spain in the Treaty of Utrecht, by which England gained the monopoly of supplying slaves to the Spanish American colonies. Through the acquisition of this monopoly as well as her own already existing large volume in the slave trade, Great Britain superseded France in the African trade and became the leading supplier of slaves to the Caribbean and the American colonies. 1785 is chosen as the concluding date because it marked the beginning of the era of philanthropic thinking which was to transform the attitude of Parliament and the nation towards the slave trade. In contrast to the tacit moral recognition given to the slave trade in 1713, by 1785, a revulsion against it was taking hold of England during which the slave trade became a subject of attack by humanitarians both inside and outside Parliament. This forced the House of Commons to shift its

sentiment on the trade. The dates selected may seem arbitrary but it is evident from the debates in both Houses that after 1785, there was a marked change in Parliament's attitude to the slave trade. The task now was not the preservation of that trade but its ultimate suppression.

Although Englishmen were very loud in their estimates of the place of the African trade in England's commercial greatness, yet they were profoundly ignorant of that continent. The coast of West Africa was familiar to the Portuguese by the late fifteenth century and known to the merchants of other nations by the second half of the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth century an earlier "scramble for Africa" can be said to have taken place. Portuguese, Dutch, French, Swedes, Brandenburgers and the English all rushed to West Africa not for territorial but for commercial profits. Yet more than two centuries' connection with West Africa had not widened their knowledge of areas remote from their trading posts on the coast.

Eighteenth century English maps of Africa always left the interior empty. No inland territorial demarcations were indicated. The omission was due to the fact that almost nothing was known of the interior. Well known rivers of West Africa such as the Senegal, the Gambia, the Sierra Leone and the Volta on the Gold Coast were marked but their sources were not designated. In 1722 for example, Malachy Postlethwayt, the well known pamphleteer on the African trade, published a treatise entitled The National and Private Advantages of

the African Trade considered'. Along with it was a map of West Africa which he engraved as "A New and Correct Map of the Coast of Africa."¹ In 1746, the map was revised yet the centre of West Africa remained blank. Postlethwayt disguised his ignorance of the interior by placing a separate map of the Gold Coast across the centre. On the larger map, one dot represented the whole of Ashanti, another dot, Dahomey. The emptiness of the immediate territories beyond the forts was also concealed by the usual labels "Gum Coast", "Grain Coast", "Ivory Coast", "Gold Coast", "Whyda", "Bennin", "Calabar" and "Angola". Sierra Leone took the place of Portuguese Guinea, Whyda that of Benin and Benin placed where Calabar should have been. The European forts were however, more precisely indicated showing that beyond these forts on the coast Englishmen's knowledge of West Africa as a whole was bleak. Between Calabar and Angola, Postlethwayt did not even attempt to show that the Congo existed. The estuary of the Congo is shown but the river itself was not there.

In 1758, the Annual Register boasted of the capture of Senegal and Gorée from the French after which it went on to inform its readers that "the river Senega, or Senegal, is one of those channels of the river Niger, by which it is supposed to discharge its waters into the Atlantic ocean. The river Niger, according to the best maps, rises in the East of Africa; and after a course of 300 miles, nearly due west,

1 A reproduction of this map is attached to the dissertation at the end.

divides into three branches, the most northernly of which is the Senegal, as above; the middle is the Gambia, or Gambra; and the most southern Rio Grande".¹ Little did the columnist realize that the Niger rose in the west and not the east of Africa. Many in his day imagined that the Niger rose close to the Nile and ran right across the heart of Africa into the Atlantic.² Interestingly, Postlethwayt's "New and Correct Map of the Coast of Africa" which was considered as one of the most authentic maps of West Africa had no trace of the Niger.

At the time that the Committee of the whole House was hearing evidence for and against the abolition of the slave trade at the bar of the House of Commons, many witnesses who came to testify before the Committee, confessed their lack of knowledge of the interior of West Africa. John Barnes, Governor of Senegal from 1763 to 1766, said he had served the Company of Merchants in Africa for thirteen years. Yet he declared he had been little acquainted with the interior of the country.³ Another Governor, Richard Miles, testified that he had served the Company for eighteen and a half years on the Gold Coast. For the first ten years, he commanded most of the smaller forts and during his

1 The Annual Register, Vol. I, (1758), p. 75.

2 Howard, C. and J.H. Plumb, (Edited).
West African Explorers, p. 9.

3 Abridgment of the Minutes of the Evidence taken before a Committee of the Whole House to whom it was referred to Consider of the Slave Trade. No. 1, (1789), pp. 2-7.

last seven years on the Gold Coast he was Governor at Cape Coast Castle. Miles claimed he had travelled to Senegal, Goree, the Gambia and Sierra Leone but admitted he knew nothing about the interior of the Gold Coast. Apart from his trips to the above named places, Miles told the Committee that he was never five miles away from the coast, that his activities were confined only to the coastal area and that the little that he had seen of the Gold Coast was "an impenetrable wood."¹ Their lack of contact with the hinterlands of their trading posts is perhaps more astonishing than the ignorance of writers about the African trade at home.

This lack of knowledge of the inland parts of West Africa raises the wider question as to why nothing had been learnt about the interior for more than two hundred years. Later historians have attributed several factors to this complete ignorance, the unhealthy character of the West African climate which hindered European settlements, hostility of the natives, impenetrable forests, deadly tropical diseases and unnavigable great rivers leading to the interior.² These might well have been obstacles to European penetration into the interior of Africa but they do not fully explain the general lack of enthusiasm to go farther inland. The fact is that the lure of wealth in gold that

1 Abridgment of Minutes of Evidence....., No. 1, (1789), pp. 9-17.

2 See for example, the views of K.G. Davies, The Royal African Company, pp. 1-16. C. Howard and J.H. Plumb, op. cit., pp. 1-25.

led Englishmen to West Africa had failed them. They found no rich gold mines. Instead, they saw an already flourishing trade in slaves carried on by the Portuguese and settled down on the coasts to share in its profits.¹ As England came to acquire a greater share of the trade, its importance in English commerce to the West Indies and the American colonies began to loom in the minds of Englishmen.

From the Restoration in 1660 and throughout the eighteenth century, slave trading formed an integral part of British commercial enterprise in West Africa. In the eighteenth century, the slave trade was considered a necessary factor in building a commercial empire in America and the West Indies.² It meant to individuals and the public alike an additional strength to national wealth through its profits and an augmentation in naval power so that despite the fact that Englishmen's knowledge of West Africa except the coastal regions, was fragmentary the significance of the African trade as one of the mainstays of the British Empire was not disputed.

About 1709, Charles Davenant wrote pamphlets on the African trade. In one^{of} these treatises he stated that the importance of the African trade to Great Britain and her colonies had been "a point so universally

1 For the early part of the European slave trade and the Portuguese and English roles in it, see Basil Davidson's Black Mother: Africa, The Years of Trial, pp. 87-88.

2 James High, "The African Gentlemen, A Chapter in the Slave Trade," Journal of Negro History, Vol. XLIV, No. 1, (Jan., 1959), p. 289.

acknowledged already, that the going about to prove it would be almost as needless as to write elaborate dissertation for proving that the sun, without the interposition of a cloud, must shine in our horizon by twelve o'clock of the day".¹ In other words, the importance of the slave trade to England was so unquestionably taken for granted that it was almost unnecessary to try to argue about it. Davenant was not the only political economist to hold like views.

Malachy Postlethwayt spoke for his generation when he wrote in 1745 that the African trade was the great pillar which supported Britain's commerce with her West Indian and American colonies.² Postlethwayt was by far the most important and enlightened writer on the African trade though he often tended to exaggerate its importance. In his Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, Postlethwayt painted in glowing terms the vast riches of Africa, its excellent climate and its situation for commerce to be "certainly beyond either of the other quarters of the world".³ He estimated the Guinea coast to be a great market

1 C. Davenant, Political and Commercial Works.....relating to the Trade and Revenue of England, the Plantation Trade, the East-India Trade, and African Trade. Vol. V, p. 81.

2 M. Postlethwayt, The African Trade the Great Pillar and Support of the British Plantation Trade in America, extracts of which can be found in English Historical Documents, edited by David C. Douglas, Vol. X, pp. 824-826.

3 Postlethwayt, The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce. Vol. I. No page numbers exist in the 4th edition (1774) used for this study of this two volume work. The exact page cannot here be cited but the above views will be found under the article, "Africa" in the volume given above.

for European manufactured goods, particularly English textiles. In another work, Postlethwayt pointed out that West Africa abounded in various commodities of inestimable value among which were gold, diamonds, gum, dye-woods, bee-wax, and tusks and that if England could only exert herself "to bring a few hundred thousands of [the natives] to cloath with our commodities, and to erect buildings to deck with our funiture, and to live sometning in the European way (...)",¹ she would acquire a more lucrative commerce than the slave trade.

Other political economists were less romantic about the African trade though its significance was not underestimated. Before he died in 1762, Adam Anderson had written: "On the west coast of Africa, our commerce is principally for the slave trade of Guinea and Benin; where, however, we have neither colony nor plantation; but merely a number of inconsiderable forts on its shores, for the protection of our trade with its wretched natives; which indeed would be of little impertance to us, were it not for the great and constant supplies we get from thence of negro slaves for our American plantations, purchased entirely with our British produce and manufactures (...)"² Despite the frivolous

1 Postlethwayt, Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved....., Vol. II, p. 218. The whole title is too long to be given in full.

2 A. Anderson, An Historical and Chronological deduction of the Origin of Commerce from the Earliest Accounts. Vol. I, Introduction, pp. lx-lxi.

remarks, Anderson nevertheless concluded that the African trade was beneficial to Great Britain.

In 1758, when Senegal and Gorée fell to the British, the Annual Register proclaimed that by these conquests, England had wrested from the enemy one of their most valuable branches of commerce.¹ The allusion was to the gum trade of Senegal.

Towards the latter part of the century, the importance and profitability of the African trade was much emphasised. In 1772, when the House of Commons was reviewing the state of the trade, a pamphlet, intended to advise the government, stated: "How vast is the importance of our trade to Africa, which is the first principle and foundation of all the rest; the main spring of the machine, which sets every wheel in motion: a trade which arises almost entirely of ourselves, our exports being chiefly our own manufactures, or such as are purchased with them, and the returns gold, ivory, wax, dyeing woods and negroes the first four articles of home consumption, or manufactured for exporting, the last affording a most prodigious employment to our people, both by sea and land without whom our plantations could not be improved or carried on, nor should we have any shipping passing between colonies, and mother country; whereas by their labours our sugars, tobacco, and numberless other articles are raised, which employ an incredible number

1 The Annual Register, Vol. I, (1758), p. 75.

of ships, and these ships in their turn must employ a much greater number of handicraft trades at home; and the merchandises they bring home and carry out, pay such considerable sums to government, that of them consist the most flourishing branches of revenue; so that both for exports and imports, the improvement of our national revenue, the encouragement of industry at home, the supply of our colonies abroad, and the increase of our navigation, the African trade is so very beneficial to Great Britain, so essentially necessary to the very being of her colonies, that without it neither could we flourish nor they long subsist."¹ John Peter Demarin expressed in an emotional language the sentiment that was to be echoed and exploited in the debate over the abolition of the slave trade. The gist of the argument is quite obvious: the wealth and naval power of England depended largely on the African trade. Viewed in this light, the importance of the Guinea trade to Great Britain became particularly revealing to contemporaries.

Direct trade however, with Africa in the eighteenth century in natural produce was small in volume. Commodities imported directly from West Africa were gold, ivory, gum, bee-wax, diamonds and dye-woods. Exports to West Africa were cotton, linen and woollen cloths,

1 Demarin, John P. A Treatise upon the Trade from Great Britain to Africa; Humbly recommended to the Attention of Government, pp. 4-5. Cited later as Treatise upon the Trade ... to Africa.

gunpowder, shot, iron bars and nails, copper and brass utensils, guns, cowries, beads and spirits. These are by no means all the imports and exports.¹ Gold came mainly from the Gold Coast, gum and bee-wax from The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Senegal and ivory from the Ivory Coast although gold and dye-woods could be obtained in most parts of West Africa.

Between 1701 and 1705, Britain's annual average export values to West Africa stood at £97,000-0-0d. From 1716 to 1720, the figure was £100,000, exceeding export values to the East Indies which amounted to £87,000. In 1725, average values were £190,000 compared with £113,000 to the East Indies. Apart from a few periods of decline, between 1711 to 1715 and 1741 to 1745, the figures rose steadily until they reached £775,000 in the period 1771-75, £790,000 in the years 1786 to 1790 and £965,000 from 1798 to 1800.² Import values were less spectacular, beginning with £19,000 from 1701 to 1705, £55,000 between 1736 and 1740, £100,000 from 1786 to 1790 and declined to £72,000 from 1796 to 1800.³ In 1765, exports of printed cotton and linen cloth to Africa and the

1 The reader is advised to refer to Mrs. Elizabeth B. Schumpeter's English Overseas Trade Statistics, 1697-1808 for more items of imports and exports.

2 ibid., p. 17. During these years export values to West Africa were more than those to France, Flanders, Spain and Portugal, particularly from 1796 to 1800. (Table V).

3 ibid., p. 18 (Table VI).

East Indies stood at 76,820 yards, 42,487 yards in 1775 and 111,480 yards in 1785.¹ In 1795, the amount of exports in cotton and linen cloth to Africa and the East Indies was £11,425 while that to the West Indies was £85,929.² Samples of exports and imports could be multiplied but it will be seen from the above statistics that the average annual values to and from West Africa were never beyond a million pounds despite marked increases in certain years. The balance was however, made up indirectly by large shipments of slaves to the Plantations.

Historians of the slave trade have not been able to ascertain the exact number of slaves delivered to the West Indies nor will that number ever be established. According however, to figures compiled from the records of the Royal African Company, that Company had delivered to the British West Indies alone 90,768 slaves between 1673 and 1711. Of these Barbados received 42,111, Jamaica 34,480, Nevis 9,245, Antigua 2,987, St. Christopher 624 and Montserrat 1,321.³ These grand

1 Schumpeter, op. cit., p. 67. (Table XXXVII). Since manufactured cloth was imported from the East Indies, it can be assumed that much of this cloth went to West Africa.

2 ibid., p. 67. (Same Table). When export or import values from the West Indies are linked with those from West Africa, remembering of course the slave population there, the indirect profits from the African trade will appear much greater.

3 K. G. Davies, op. cit., p. 363.

totals do not include slaves delivered by interlopers or those sent to the American colonies. In 1789, Barbados imported 444 slaves; out of these she re-exported 399 to foreign colonies and retained only 45 slaves. Jamaica imported 9,898 slaves, re-exported 2,030 and retained 7,868. In 1791, she imported 15,293 slaves, re-exported 2,915 of them and retained 12,378. For the same year, 9,373 slaves were delivered to the small island of Grenada. Of these, 6,362 were re-exported and 3,011 slaves retained.¹ When it is remembered that the value of a slave was £30 or more, the profits from the slave trade can be visualised even when the cost of insurance, freight, and all other side expenses are taken into account. In 1751, Liverpool despatched 53 ships to West Africa and in 1753, 72 ships. It has been estimated that these ships brought in capital worth £160,792 in 1749-50, £345,546 in 1760 and £571,003 in 1770.² In 1789, 61 ships left Liverpool for West Africa to purchase slaves and in 1790 and 1791, the number had risen to 94 and 97 ships respectively³ while between 1789 and 1791, a total number of 365 registered ships left London, Bristol and Liverpool for West Africa for

1 Debrett, Parl. Register, Vol. XXXI, (1792), p. 254. These figures were presented to the Commons by the Inspector-General of Customs, Thomas Irving, Statistics for the middle years of the 18th Century are not available for citation.

2 Williams, J. B. "The Development of British Trade with West Africa, 1750 to 1850". Political Science Quarterly, Vol. I, No. 2, (June, 1935), p. 194.

3 Parl. Register, Vol. XXXI, p. 253.

the sole purpose of buying slaves.¹ These were years when the slave trade came under heavy attack by moralists and humanitarians but this did not seem to have had the desired effect of discrediting the trade.

Although the Navigation Laws were not binding on the African coast, West Africa fitted in well with British mercantilist conceptions. The objective of the mercantilist ideal was a self-sufficing empire with England producing the manufactured goods while the colonies supplied the necessary raw materials.² Sugar, the principal produce of the West Indies, came to depend entirely on slave labour. The prosperity of the West Indian commerce was therefore considered inseparable from the African trade. It was also claimed that the slave trade prevented a mass exodus of English craftsmen to the West Indies. The African trade as linked with the production of sugar in the West Indian islands, was also regarded essential to England's domestic industries. In one respect, the Guinea trade suited excellently the mercantilist thinking: it provided nothing that could compete with English industries. The East India Company brought into England manufactured silk, cotton and linen goods that rivaled English textiles on the market. The importation of gold and other precious metals from West Africa on the other hand was thought more advantageous than the export of bullion

1 Parl. Register, Vol. XXXI, p. 253.

2 Klaus E. Knorr, British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850.
Chaps. III and IV.

from England by the East India Company. The advantages of the African trade over that of the East India Company may seem debatable but the doubt did not then exist.¹

Prior to the incorporation of the Royal African Company in 1672, English merchants had sponsored intermittent trade ventures to the Guinea coast since 1553.² Through these voyages a somewhat regular trade combined with piratical plunderings was established between England and West Africa. Efforts at founding permanent companies proved abortive. In 1662, the Company of the Royal Adventurers of England trading into Africa was incorporated. This Company was to be the direct predecessor of the Royal African Company. The Royal Adventurers became involved with the Dutch who captured their forts but were relieved by Admiral Holmes in 1664. The Company did not prosper as a whole and was soon out of business but from its ruins rose the Royal African

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- 1 Between 1673 and 1713, the Royal African Company brought into England an aggregate total of 548,327 guineas, 9,801 ounces of gold from 1721 to 1724 from West Africa and #66,308 sterling worth of silver from the West Indies. See Davies, op. cit., p. 360, Appendix II, and p. 345. However, a glance at Mrs. Schumpeter's trade statistics shows that British import values from the East Indies rose steadily from 1700 onwards reaching over #1 million in 1751 and continued so well into the beginning of the 19th Century. See Schumpeter, op. cit., p. 18, Table VI.
 - 2 See Hakluyt's The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, Vol. VI, pp. 124 & ff.

Company incorporated by charter in 1672.¹ With the full backing of the Crown behind it, the Royal African Company quickly rose to a predominant position in the slave trade. "James, for many years the Governor and the largest shareholder in the Royal African Company, was also the Lord High Admiral whose courts chastised those who infringed its privileges."² One ship, the Providence, was captured, tried and condemned as an interloper.³ By these measures, the Crown kept the Company's monopoly intact. The heavy reliance of the Company however, on the Crown made it liable to the political tensions of the day and susceptible to criticisms from the opponents of monopolies. The Company's future prospects were therefore heavily staked on the support from Charles II and James II. The consequence was that when James fled England in 1688, royal support for the Company was suddenly withdrawn. Its exclusive monopoly of the slave trade came under attack and criticism. In

1 For brief summary accounts of the Company of Royal Adventurers, see Davies, op. cit., pp. 38-46. Also W. R. Scott, "The Constitution and Finance of the Royal African Company of England from its Foundation till 1720."

American Historical Review, Vol. VIII, No. 2, (Jan., 1903), pp. 241-259.

2 K. G. Davies, The Royal African Company, p. 103.

3 Donnan, Elizabeth, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America.

Vol. II, pp. 276-277. (Hereafter cited as Documents.) Other ships sent out to ward off interlopers were: the Phoenix (1674), the Hunter (1676), the Norwich (1678), the Orange Tree and the Mordaunt (1684). See Davies, op. cit., p. 115.

1698, the Company lost its monopoly¹ and from then on its prosperity began to decline.

As the Act of 1698 was due to expire in 1711, the directors of the Company made strenuous efforts to regain the monopoly between 1708 and 1712. The prospects of reviving the Company's exclusive privileges raised a storm of protest all over England. Wholesale petitions were sent to Parliament against renewing the Company's monopoly. One of the petitions from the London merchants stated: [the African] "Trade is now in great danger of being lost, by means of the Royal African Company, who do not pay their Debts, nor carry on the Trade, nor support their Settlements, nor protect the separate Traders; and by their present Circumstances they remain only in a Capacity to oppress the Petitioners, and others, and obstruct the Trade in general",² while Edinburgh and Glasgow imagined that to revest a monopoly in the Royal African Company would be "contrary to the Articles of Union". Even the butchers, bakers, brewers, rope-makers and dyers of London, the black smiths of

1 Statutes at Large, Privy Council Series, edited by Henry Woodfall and William Strahan; Vol. III, Cap. XXVI, 9 and 10th William III, pp. 710-11. (Cited later as Statutes at Large) The attack on monopolies was not restricted to that of the Royal African Company. In 1689, the Merchant Adventurers lost their monopoly and in 1699 commerce with Russia and Newfoundland was thrown open to all British subjects. See T.S. Ashton, An Economic History of England: The 18th Century, p. 130.

2 Journals of the House of Commons, Vol. XVI, p. 235. (Cited later as Commons Journals or simply C. J.).

Birmingham, shipwrights and owners as well as all those interested in the furnishing of vessels and the merchant corporations of Plymouth, Bristol, Liverpool, Whitehaven, Deptford and Wapping petitioned against the restoration of any monopoly in the African trade.¹

In view of these protests, the House of Commons could not ignore the state of the trade to West Africa. The Board of Trade was instructed to draw up a report on the trade. The Board immediately set itself to the task and conducted an extensive investigation into the affairs of the Royal African Company. The Company's accounts of expenses on its forts, value of stocks, dividends, debts contracted, imports and exports were all examined.² The Board also sent out letters to the Governors of the English colonies strictly requiring them to submit evidence and accounts on the state of the slave trade.³ When the report finally came before the Commons, it charged the Company with falsification of accounts. It also recommended that no joint stock company be formed and that the African trade should remain free and

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XVI, pp. 77, 135 for Edinburgh and Glasgow. For other petitions see pp. 71, 75, 77, 83, 86, 259-60, 261, 267, 269, passim.

2 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 22-24, 25-43.

3 ibid., pp. 44-46. For replies, see pp. 46-48.

open.¹

To implement the Board's recommendations, the Commons in March 1708, adopted the following two resolutions in Committee: first, "That the Trade to Africa is very advantageous to Great Britain, and necessary to the Plantations thereunto belonging" and secondly, "That the Trade ought to be free to all her Majesty's Subjects, in a regulated Company, under such Rules and Provisions, as may be for the Preservation of the said Trade, and maintaining such Forts and Castles, as are necessary for that Purpose".² Yet a bill brought in at the request of the House to effect these resolutions was postponed at least seven times and eventually lost in committee.³

Outside Parliament, the storm had not subsided. "By more petitions to Parliament and to the Queen, by arguments before the Board of Trade, by broadsides, and by pamphlets, the battle over monopoly raged."⁴ Charles Davenant wrote pamphlets defending the Company from the attacks of other pamphleteers.⁵ The controversy went on for about half a dozen

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 54, 67, 50-68.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XVI, p. 160.

3 ibid., pp. 203-04.

4 Donnan, Documents, II, p. 22 (Footnote).

5 Davenant, Works, Vol. V was devoted almost entirely to the controversy and defence of the Company. Davenant was then Inspector-General of the Customs. He had been appointed to that office in 1704. I owe this reference to Prof. T. S. Ashton. See his introduction to Mrs. Schumpeter's English Overseas Trade Statistics, 1697-1808, p. 2.

years. The directors of the Company accused the separate traders of conspiring with their officers and agents on the African coast to defraud the Company. The separate traders argued that forts and castles were unnecessary to protect the slave trade from rival nations and submitted a comprehensive scheme for reorganizing the trade.¹ This state of affairs continued throughout 1710 and 1711. In 1712, the House of Commons was again forced to act as a mediator in the dispute. Resolutions were passed that the African trade be free and open to all British subjects; that it was necessary to maintain forts in West Africa to ward off rivals; that the colonies ought to be supplied with sufficient numbers of slaves at reasonable rates and that alliances should be concluded with the native chiefs to ensure a constant provision of slaves.² A "Bill for establishing the Trade to Africa in a regulated Company" was introduced.³ It went as far as the third reading and was then defeated.⁴ At the same time both Houses passed a bill to enable the proprietors of the Company to settle satisfactorily their accounts and debts with their

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XVI, pp. 319-320.

2 ibid., Vol. XVII, p. 164.

3 ibid., p. 174.

4 In 1709, 1710 and 1711 further extensive investigations were conducted by the Board of Trade on the African trade and its views presented to Parliament. The Commons passed similar resolutions but nothing resulted from them. See Donnan, Documents, II, pp. 109-146. Also Commons Journals, XVI, pp. 549-51, 552, 589, 601, 627, 691 and passim.

creditors.¹ By adopting the role of a moderator in the controversy over the Company's monopoly, Parliament had committed itself to intervene, though not unnecessarily, in the affairs of the Royal African Company. It is with these future interventions that the next chapters will be concerned.

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XVII, pp. 252, 257.

CHAPTER II

PARLIAMENT AND THE ROYAL AFRICAN
COMPANY IN ITS LAST YEARS, 1713-1750

On November 26th, 1741, the Gentlemen's Magazine reported:

"This Day was held a General Court of the Royal African Company of England when the Sub-Governor acquainted the Court, that they were call'd together in order to lay before them the present Situation of the Company's Affairs; which having been done, he submitted the following proposals to their Consideration, which being read, were unanimously agreed to".¹ The proposals were: 1) that the then present capital stock of the Company which consisted of 4,000 shares including trust stock, should be increased to any number not exceeding 20,000 shares; 2) that any number of the trust and newly created shares not exceeding 17,000, be vested in the name of such trustees as the Court of Assistants should think fit; 3) that the Court of Assistants be empowered to sell and dispose of the 17,000 shares to be created at such times and proportions as the Court would deem best at the rate of £10 per share; 4) the Court of Assistants was instructed to make an application to the Crown for more financial support and 5) "That it be left to the Court of Assistants either to chuse a Committee of seven Persons for the management of the

1 The Gentlemen's Magazine, Vol. XI, (Nov., 1741),
p. 607.

Company's Affairs, or to revive the four usual standing Committees".¹ By this scheme, the Company hoped to obtain £175,000 which would enable the proprietors to pay off their debts. The annual grants from Parliament would then be used to extend the trade into the interior parts of West Africa. Although the scheme came to nothing, it was symptomatic of the many vain attempts of the Royal African Company to rehabilitate its financial embarrassments in its last years.

Between 1713 and 1730, Parliament had not actively intervened in the affairs of the Company. There was no manifest concern or anxiety in the Company's management. In 1713, Parliament approved the Assiento contract in the Treaty of Utrecht by which England would supply the Spanish American colonies with slaves.² The contract was criticised not so much for its intent but for the alleged personal and private commercial gains behind it.³ Having no slave trading posts of her own on the West African coast, Spain used the assiento as the means to stock her colonies

1 Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. XI, (Nov., 1741), p. 607

2 At least 4,800 slaves were to be supplied each year by England to Spanish America. See Articles V and VII of the Treaty of Utrecht in Reports from Committees of the House of Commons Reprinted by Order of the House, Vol. I. pp. 46-47.

3 "Report from the Committee of Secrecy, appointed to examine the several Books and Papers, relating to the Negotiations of Peace and Commerce, between England and France" in Reports, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 6. The assiento was a contract granted by Spain to individual merchants or foreign companies as a sole right to supplying slaves to Spanish America.

with negro slaves. The "Assientists", as those who obtained this privilege were called, bought the necessary slaves from places such as Barbados, Jamaica, Curacao or elsewhere in the West Indies. In time however, Jamaica became the chief source of supply. The contract made in 1713 between England and Spain was soon assigned to the newly formed South Sea Company.¹ This was not the first time that Englishmen were to supply the Spanish colonies with slaves but it was the first time that Parliament was concerned in a formal contract for that purpose. A flourishing trade existed between Jamaica and Spanish America, from which England derived great profits.² The writer of a tract The Assiento Contract consider'd ..., stated that the English trade with the Spaniards from Jamaica had been very considerable. He estimated that "there [had] been received of them in Gold and Silver and the Produce of New Spain, £200,000 or £250,000 Yearly (...)"³ It seems therefore that Parliament saw beyond Jamaica vast opportunities of commercial enterprise in the Spanish colonies. Apart from selling slaves as well as manufactured English cloth to the Spanish colonies, England would obtain through the

1 For details see E. Donnan, "The Early Days of the South Sea Company", Journal of Economic and Business History, Vol. II, No. 3, (May, 1930), pp. 419-450.

2 Curtis Nettels, "England and the Spanish-American Trade, 1680-1715", Journal of Modern History, Vol. III, No. 1, (March, 1931), pp. 1-32.

3 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 151.

Spanish trade with Jamaica silver coin, a commodity considered of immense value.

A more immediate reason was that Parliament wanted to exclude the French entirely from the African trade. The French had held the Assiento from Spain since 1701. To meet a possible French rivalry in the African and the Spanish-American trade, Parliament incorporated the South Sea Company in 1711. That Company was intended to exist side by side with the Royal African Company to crowd out all other European nations in the slave trade. In November, 1713, the Board of Trade suggested to Lord Bolingbroke that the Portuguese be asked to allow English traders a free access to Brazil to sell slaves. Bolingbroke wrote back to the Board asking for more information on the subject. The Board summoned representatives of the Royal African Company for a conference with the separate traders on the scheme. Upon hearing the proposals, the Company's representatives objected to the plan saying that to supply slaves to Brazil would mean an increase in their prices in the Plantations and a decrease of prices in Brazil. It would also prevent the English from selling slaves to the Portuguese at a fifty per cent rate over the normal prices in West Africa. The separate traders though differing with the Company, disagreed among themselves. Some like William Heysham and Colonel Cleland - agents for Barbados - expressed their belief that an extension of the British slave trade to Brazil would be injurious to the Plantations. Others such as a certain Mr. Kent, argued that if the Portuguese did not buy slaves from the English, they

would obtain them from the Dutch, the French and the Brandenburgers in any case. England could just as well sell slaves to Brazil. If the English could achieve a monopoly of the whole slave trade, then they might succeed in shutting off the Portuguese supply of slaves to the Spanish colonies. Kent believed dearer slaves to be advantageous to the planters because, were they cheap, the French would afford to buy more, improve their sugar plantations in the West Indies and thus undersell the British in the sugar trade. One more delegate, Richard Harris, thought it would do no harm to furnish Brazil with slaves since every healthy slave sold there brought in £50 or more to the British trader.¹

After listening to the various arguments, the Board concluded that "Upon the whole, it being consider'd that the African trade is shared by so many several nations, the more persons are engag'd in supplying the Brazils with negro's, The cheaper will negro's and their labour be, and consequently their sugar-works better supported, these gentlemen all unanimously agreed that our carrying negro's to the Brazils would be prejudicial to the British Plantations in America".² Even if a positive conclusion had been arrived at, it is doubtful whether the Portuguese on their part would have allowed British traders to transport

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 171-173.

2 ibid., p. 173.

slaves directly and freely to Brazil.

In the same year, (1713) the Royal African Company again petitioned for a renewal of its monopoly. The petition once more aroused the opposition of the separate traders. Petition after petition flowed into Parliament from London, Bristol, Liverpool and smaller towns such as Ashburton and Kingsbridge in Devonshire against the revival of any monopoly in the slave trade. These petitions pointed out that despite former resolutions passed by the House to leave the African trade free and open, the Royal African Company had attempted to obstruct independent traders from going off to trade in West Africa.¹ The petitioners asked that on no account should the Company's monopoly be renewed.

The House of Commons immediately responded to their demands. The Commons took the petitions into consideration in a committee of the whole House on 30th April and on May 2nd, the following resolution was reported: "That the Trade to Africa ought to be free and open to all her Majesty's Subjects of Great Britain, and the Plantations, under such proper Regulations as shall subject the Traders to Duties, for maintaining the Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa".² When the resolution was read a second time, a short debate arose upon it. A motion was made that the debate be adjourned. The motion failed to pass and

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XVII, pp. 297-299, 307.

2 ibid., p. 310.

the House ordered a bill to be brought in for that purpose at the end of the debate.

On 6th May, a "Bill for establishing the Trade to Africa, free and open to all her Majesty's Subjects of Great Britain, and the Plantations" was introduced and read the first time. At the several stages of the bill, the directors of the Company, through their lobbyists, endeavoured to impede its progress. Two amendments, one intended to prevent the separate traders from entering the forts without the consent of the Royal African Company, the other, that an allowance be made to the Company on cargo lost or destroyed at any time through or by the separate traders, were proposed on the second reading of the bill. The first amendment was rejected and the second modified and accepted by a vote of 125 to 107.¹ A third amendment offered by the separate traders to the bill read that "the Exclusive Right of trading to Africa, mentioned and intended to be granted by Letters Patents of King Charles the Second to the Royal African Company, is an Invasion on the Freedom of Trade, and of dangerous Consequences to the Commerce of this Kingdom".² This too was negatived by another vote of 132 to 98. In spite of the protests from the Royal African Company and certain West Indian and American planters, the bill passed its third reading on June 8th and was sent up to the Lords. The Lords received the bill on June 9th and read it on the 17th and 23rd of the same month. On 25th June, the Lords

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XVII, p. 389.

2 ibid., p. 389.

"committed" the bill but no more was heard of it.¹ In fact, the loss of this bill had almost set a seal on African affairs in Parliament for the next sixteen years. During these years nothing was discussed in Parliament on the Royal African Company or the South Sea Company in relation to Africa. In 1726 for instance, the Royal African Company petitioned the Board of Trade for financial assistance. The Board referred the petition to Parliament recommending that the forts and castles be taken over by the Crown. If that were not possible, Parliament should impose duties on all ships which traded to West Africa. The revenue so obtained would be employed to maintain the forts.² Parliament took no steps to implement the Board's recommendations. This attitude of indifference on the part of Parliament in the affairs of the Royal African Company continued till 1729 when the state of the African trade and the plight of the Company were again brought to the attention of the House of Commons.

Before then, the Royal African Company's affairs had begun to fall into disarray. In 1722, the Company attempted to reorganize its finances but the steps came to nothing.³ Five years later, the Company took resolutions at a General Court to prevent the separate traders from

1 Journals of the House of Lords, Vol. XIX, pp. 577, 580, 583, 586.

2 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 337-339.

3 Anderson, Origin of Commerce, Vol. III, pp. 134-35.

damaging its trade. At that meeting, the General Court proposed to reduce the Company's nominal stock so that every eight hundred pounds would be deflated to one hundred pounds; that a certain quantity of additional stock be created in its corporate form and sold out to individuals to enable the Company to maintain its trade. These proposals also produced no results.¹ Faced with this inability to recuperate its financial position, the Company had no other alternative but to turn to Parliament for assistance.

In February 1729, the Royal African Company sent a petition to the House of Commons. The petition set out the advantages of the African trade regarding the exports of woollen and cotton goods as well as the supply of slaves to the colonies. It also declared that to secure the African trade for Britain, the Company had built a number of forts and castles on the African coast; that the Company had maintained these forts at its own expense which had "proved a very great and insupportable Burthen upon them". In view of the Company's financial difficulties, the directors requested Parliament to grant them money to help to upkeep the forts and castles.² The petition itself was rejected by a vote of 134 to 90 but the Commons resolved to take the state of the African trade into consideration.

1 Anderson, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 144.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXI, p. 447.

Following this resolution, the Commons on 6th March, 1729, ordered the Company to produce a statement of account of its forts, castles and finances.¹ An attempt to have the names of the Company's proprietors, specifying each man's property, inserted in the accounts failed to pass but instructions went to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations to reproduce a copy of one of their reports drawn up in 1711 on the African trade. That same day, the report was laid before the House.

The report contained accounts and descriptions of each fort and castle on the Gold Coast and the Gambia. Fort James on the Gambia was described as defended by "24 Pieces of large Cannon, Six Twelve Pounders, and Six Twenty-four Pounders".² It also accommodated seventy white men, one hundred castle slaves but at the time the survey was conducted, the fort held only fifty-one white men and forty-one slaves.³

Dixcove, located about eight leagues east of Cape Three Points and built by the Company, was defended by twenty-four cannon. It had lodging rooms, apartments to house a garrison, warehouses and storage rooms. The fort usually could accommodate twenty-one white men and fifty-four castle slaves.

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXI, p. 476.

2 ibid., p. 477.

3 ibid., p. 477.

Cape Coast Castle, described as a square building situated about the middle of the Gold Coast, was according to the report, "fortified with Four large Bastions, and a Platform towards the Sea; has been enlarged with new Buildings, and made more regular, as well as Six times larger, and stronger, by the present Company, with Stone, Brick, Tiles, Lime, and Tarras, etc., and is a Security for all ships in the Road; was many years doing; having Apartments for the Chief Merchants, Factors, Writers, Surgeons, Artificers, and Soldiers, Magazines, Warehouses, Storehouses, Granaries, Guard-rooms, Two large Tanks, or Cisterns, for fresh Water, built with Brick and Tarras sent from England, holding at least 200 Tons; Repositories, to lodge 1,000 Negroes; and Vaults for Rum, etc. Work-houses for Smiths, Armourers, Coopers, and Carpenters: On the Bastions are mounted 30 great Guns, and towards the Sea, on the Platform, 11 Guns, from Eighteen to Thirty-two Pounders, sufficient to protect any ships in the Road".¹ This excerpt is quoted in full in order to demonstrate the type of establishments maintained on the African coast, for similar accounts were given of forts at Sekondi (Succondee), Commenda, Fort Royal, Phipps Tower, Anomabu (Annamaboe), Tantankweri (Tantumquerry), Winneba and Whydah on the Gold Coast. The estimates for maintenance of the Company's officers, agents and forts on the African coast were £25,428 and £14,941 a year. More papers relating to the forts and the list of the proprietors of the Company were presented to

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXI, p. 477.

the Commons on March 10th by Francis Lynn, the Secretary of the Royal African Company at the orders of the House though earlier the Commons had rejected a proposal to have the names of the proprietors inserted in the accounts.

After a due consideration had been given to the report and the state of the Company in a committee of the whole House, the Commons on 26th March, 1730, passed the following resolutions: 1) "That the Trade to Africa ought always to remain free and open to all his Majesty's Subjects".¹ 2) "That the Trade and Navigation to the Coast of Africa ought never to be taxed with any Duties whatsoever, for the Support and Maintenance of any Forts and Settlements there". 3) "That British Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa are necessary to be maintained, as Marks of the Possessions of Great Britain in those Parts" and 4) "That an Allowance ought to be made towards the Support and Maintenance of the said Forts and Settlements".² On 30th April, 1730, while in a committee for supply, the House of Commons passed a further resolution that "a Sum, not exceeding Ten thousand Pounds, be granted to his Majesty, to be applied towards the Maintenance of the British Forts and Settlements, belonging to the Royal African Company of England, on the Coast of Africa".³ With that grant, indifference in the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXI, p. 522.

2 ibid., p. 522; it must be noted however, that "Marks of the Possession of Great Britain in those Parts" referred only to the forts and not territorial sovereignty.

3 ibid., p. 538.

affairs of the Royal African Company had vanished. Prior to this time, Parliament had followed a declared policy of minimum interference in the management of the Company; the House now faced the problem of retrieving the dislocations in the finances of the Royal African Company and became irrevocably involved in its future prospects. Every year, the Company made formal petitions to Parliament for the grant of £10,000. Each year, the House of Commons ordered that the Company produce a statement of accounts of the estimates for every succeeding year and also an account of how the directors had spent the sums voted by Parliament during the previous years.

Although Parliament granted yearly £10,000 for the support of the forts, yet these subsidies did not seem to have had the desired effect of completely stabilizing the financial difficulties of the Royal African Company. Three years after the first of these grants, one reads that the Company was again in difficulties. "At this time", wrote Anderson, "the Royal African Company was in a very bad condition".¹ It continued to lose much of its trade to the separate traders as it had been doing for many years past. In another general meeting, the proprietors resolved to confine themselves to purchasing slaves on the African coast and reselling them to private traders.² Other proposals

1 Anderson, Origin of Commerce, Vol. III, p. 196.

2 ibid., p. 196.

were that the officers and agents of the Company should be allowed to engage in an extensive trade inland for gold, ivory, bee-wax, drugs and dye-woods, or that the salaries and allowances of the officers both at home and abroad be reduced. By these various means of frugality, the Company hoped to retrench its financial difficulties. The proposals did not however, appear to solve its problems and the Company was once more unable to pay its debts. The officers and agents in Africa proposed at their general meeting to create bonds to the value of twenty thousand pounds at four per cent interest to extend the trade inland. Surprisingly, the General Court in England agreed to the proposal. Notwithstanding this, the Company's affairs still continually worsened while the profits of the separate traders increased.¹ This state of affairs did not go unnoticed. As the Company's prosperity waned to a precarious position, Parliament's anxiety over its trading assets increased.

In January 1743, the directors of the Royal African Company declared in their petition to the House of Commons that they had "found, by Experience, that the (...) annual Sum of Ten thousand Pounds has been so far from answering and defraying the necessary Charges and Expenses of the (...) Forts and Settlements, that the Petitioners have totally exhausted even the trading Stock which they were possessed of when the said annual Allowance was first granted; so that they are now

1 Anderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 196-197.

absolutely disabled from maintaining and supporting the said Forts and Settlements any longer with the said annual Allowance of Ten thousand Pounds only".¹ The directors hinted at handing over their forts to the Crown and to be compensated by Parliament. The House of Commons took the hint and immediately ordered the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations to investigate the general state of the African trade.² A select committee was also appointed to examine and report on the Company's accounts of expenditure from 1729 to 1743.³

Pending the presentation of the Select Committee's report, the Accountant-General of the Company, Edward Sparke, drew up a separate report of the Company's accounts intended to be given to the Commissioners for Trade. In it he said that the books containing the accounts from Africa in the Company's possession had not gone beyond December 31st, 1741. The cost of maintaining the forts for the years 1742 and 1743 could not therefore be exactly ascertained. He however, estimated that the expenditure on the forts would amount to £33,905-10-10d in addition to £203,433-5-10d as the expenses from 1730 to 1741. In all, the Company would have spent by the end of 1743 a total amount of £237,338-16-8d.⁴

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 534.

2 ibid., p. 534.

3 ibid., p. 548.

4 ibid., p. 552.

When the report of the Select Committee came before the House, it was concerned mainly with the expenditure of sums granted by Parliament but included investigations into the value of the Company's stocks and the state of its forts. Evidence taken came mostly from Edward Sparke who had served as Accountant to the Royal African Company since 1720 and from October, 1729, as its Accountant-General. By virtue of his office, the management of the Company's accounts in England and abroad came under Sparke's supervision. His duties were not confined to any particular branch but extended to the whole of the Company's finances "so that", as the Select Committee reported, "there could not be any buying, selling, importing, or exporting, paying or receiving Money, or any other Transaction in Trade, abroad or at home, without coming to his Knowledge, and being subject to his Examination and Inspection, either before or after such Transaction is done".¹ Sparke also took cognizance of all books and papers except minutes and letters, relating to accounts before such books received endorsement from the Court of Assistance or any of the Committees of the Company. As it turned out, the Company was on trial for suspicions of embezzlement of parliamentary grants. The Select Committee scrutinized every detail of expenses. The investigation was prompted not by an outburst of petitions from the separate traders and the public but by Parliament's concern in the decline of the Company's assets. The initiative came from

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 663.

the House of Commons and not from the public.

The Select Committee found that the Company had spent over £6,540-4-11d on salaries for governors, agents, soldiers, canoeemen, castle slaves and free black servants, £1,915-4-7d on building materials and ammunition and £2,249-10-11d on quit-rents, dashees and other acknowledgements. The cost of books and canoes in Africa was £371-19-10d and a further sum of £849-2-8d was expended on recruits for the Company in Africa. Expenses on ships and small vessels protecting the forts and castles totalled £1,000 while freight and insurance paid for in England to defray the foregoing charges as well as all other incidental fees amounted to £2,026-12-6d.¹ In 1730, the Company was said to have spent £12,615-2-11d on the forts and outposts alone.

On further examination, Sparke told the Committee that these sums had been compiled from the account books kept by the Company's servants and agents on the African coast and transmitted to the directors at home though sums from the London account books had been partly included. Questioned as to the method of keeping vouchers in Africa, Sparke answered that every person in the Company's service in any place whatsoever, had to keep a true and written account of all receipts and disbursements. At the end of every two months, each agent was obliged to render to the Council at the nearest principal fort, two original

1. Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 663.

accounts signed by himself and attested to be true by another of the Company's servants who was privy to his transactions. The accountant resident at that principal fort examined and made comments on the accounts. These were then laid before the Council which in turn re-examined them. The Council was allowed to make deductions and alterations if that were found necessary. The accounts were then inserted in the General Books and sent to the Company in England where the Accountant-General compared all journals and ledgers with the original vouchers from which the accounts had been compiled. Full and final endorsement of these accounts however, rested with the directors.¹

The manner of verifying these accounts seemed so reassuring that Sparke emphasized before the Committee that "so many several Examinations of the Books and Accounts, made by Persons whose private Interests have no Connection with each other, render it extremely difficult for any of the Company's Servants to embezzle or misapply any of the Effects committed to their Charge, with Impunity, or without being detected!"² After a close examination of each year's expenditure, the Select Committee expressed their satisfaction with Sparke's explanations. In their report to Parliament, the Committee declared: "Upon the Evidence (...) your Committee beg Leave to observe, that they having

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, pp. 663-64.

2 ibid., p. 664.

received already such an Account of the Truth of the Amount of the Charges for each Year of the first Seven Years, [that is from 1730 onwards], and not having any Reason to doubt, that the Amount of the Charges for each of the last Five Years, which do not exceed, but rather fall short of the former Years, have been collected with due Diligence and Care, thought it unnecessary to enter into a particular and minute Examination of the Books, Papers, and Vouchers, so offered to be produced, on behalf of the said Company, by the said Examinant".¹ In the matter of the Company's stocks, the investigation revealed that on December 31st, 1729, the Royal African Company's debts had exceeded its trading stock by a sum of £13,005. In 1733, the debt had increased to £13,535. Although a decline in debt was reported in 1737, it had again risen to £72,640 by the end of December in 1743.²

If the evidence presented to the Committee was not in any way tampered with, it is to be admitted that the reports of naval Captains on the condition of the forts and deficiency of supplies at the castles were incorrect and tendencious, calculated to discredit the Company. One Captain had stated in his despatch to the Admiralty: "They [the Company] have not of late Years been enabled to repair, fortify, and

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 665. Sparke had offered to produce all original vouchers and account books to support his evidence.

2 ibid., p. 666.

supply, their several Forts and Castles upon the Coast of Africa, in a sufficient Manner to serve the said Forts, and the Possession of the Trade on that Coast; so that they are now become very much out of Repair, and not in a proper defensible Condition against any Enemy that may attempt to attack them".¹ In September 1741, Captain Edmund Strange reported that the Gambia had had no supplies for two years yet the Accountant-General produced and presented to the Committee twelve bills of lading with receipts and invoices. The receipts showed that supplies of goods had been despatched to the Gambia at various times. In June, 1739, £2,004-17-9d worth of goods was delivered at James Fort in the Gambia; in May, 1740, £3,294-1-8d worth of supplies was sent out. In June and August, 1741, supplies received in the Gambia amounted to £2,535-10-4d and £2,079-18-5d respectively. In all, £9,914-8-2d worth of goods and supplies were received at James Fort between September, 1739 and August 1741.²

In August, 1742, Captain Charles Wyndham inspected Cape Coast Castle and wrote home that "no Goods were sent to Cape Coast from the Company since August, 1740".³ But, on the contrary, Sparke proved to the Select Committee from books signed by the principal agents at Cape

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 667.

2 ibid., p. 667; the report was dated September 20th, 1741.

3 ibid., p. 667; report dated August 13th, 1742.

Coast and nine original bills of lading, that at the end of June, 1740, there remained at Cape Coast, £4,267-0-3d worth of various merchandises. In July 1740, cargo delivered at Cape Coast amounted to £785-6-8d. In August, 1740, two deliveries were made totalling £2,734-19-1d while bills drawn on the Company added up to £554. In June and July, 1742, £719-5-8d and £2,701-7-11d worth of merchandise were sent to Cape Coast. Taken together, the Company invested £11,761-19-7d in merchandise on Cape Coast.¹

One more report, drawn up by Captain Edward Gregory on June 11th, 1743, stated that the storehouse at Dixcove was quite empty, "having had no Supply from Cape Coast, or from the Royal African Company, for Three Years, (as the Chief told him)".² The remark bracketed by the Captain himself is suggestive that these charges against the Company might have been based on suppositional evidence taken from surreptitious critics at the forts. In the same despatch, Captain Gregory reported that "the People at Cape Coast Castle complain of the Company's not sending out any Goods or Provisions, as they promised; which occasioned them to be in a starving Condition; except only a Ship from Bristol, with £280 worth of Provisions for them and the Out-Forts".³

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 667.

2 ibid., p. 667.

3 ibid., p. 667.

When questioned by the Committee on this report, Sparke explained that it was not the policy of the Company to send supplies directly to any outfort. Goods destined for outposts such as Dixcove were sent to Cape Coast. The Governor at Cape Coast redistributed these goods to the outforts according to their needs. In any case, Sparke proved by the original account books signed by several principal factors and agents at Dixcove that supplies had been received at that fort between 1741 and 1743 to the amount of £983-7-3d.¹ He also produced two bills showing that cargo had been shipped to Cape Coast in May, 1743 amounting to £3,906-14-1d. The report was referred to a committee of the whole House.

On April 24th, 1744, two resolutions were reported: one was, "That the Royal African Company of England do lay before this House, an Estimate of the annual Charges which may be necessary for effectually maintaining and supporting the British Forts and Settlements belonging to the said Company on the Coast of Africa, for the Protection of the Trade of all his Majesty's Subjects there";² the other was that the Company produce an estimate of what sum would be needed to enable it to repair the forts and keep them in a defensible position. The estimates came swiftly from the Company the next day. These were again

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 667.

2 ibid., p. 669.

referred to a committee of the whole House and on 1st May, the House of Commons passed another resolution, "That the Sum of Twenty thousand Pounds be granted to his Majesty, to be applied for the Maintenance of the British Forts and Settlements belonging to the Royal African Company, for the Year 1744".¹ The resolution was unanimously agreed to and the sum granted. At the same time the Commons also resolved to send an address to the King requesting him to instruct the Board of Trade to draw up a report on the general state of the African trade, the condition of the forts and castles and an estimate of what sum was necessary for the upkeep of the forts. The report did come before the House, was considered in a committee of the whole but nothing materially resulted from it.² The inquiry however, had ended in a declaration of confidence in the Royal African Company and more money voted to assist it to maintain its forts. That confidence proved illusionary for the major crisis of the Company was already on the horizon.

In spite of the twenty thousand pounds granted in 1744 for the repair of the forts, the Royal African Company intimated to Parliament in 1745 that it was unable to maintain those same forts. No

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIV, p. 675.

2 ibid., pp. 730-31, 791-97, 846, 884-85.

parliamentary grant was given in that year¹ and the subsidies from Parliament stopped altogether in 1747 after another £10,000 was granted in 1746. As one historian has remarked, the Company was again left to its own resources.²

From 1747 to 1749, the crisis in the finances of the Royal African Company grew more acute. The directors reported to Parliament that the Company no longer possessed any credit³ and that they were unable to pay their creditors. At this critical moment in the Company's history, it was quite clear that co-operation between the shareholders and the directors was needed in order to prevent the Company from an imminent bankruptcy. To do this, the Company's finances had to be re-organized. It was therefore in the interest of the creditors that the Company should be reconstructed even if this meant a considerable sacrifice on their part. Such a scheme was realized belatedly by the creditors in 1750.

In February 1747, the Company petitioned Parliament that it was totally incapable of holding its forts and castles against

1 This fact has not been noticed by both Eveline Martin and John Gray who assumed that Parliament first declined to give further grants in 1747. See Commons Journals, Vol. XXVIII, p. 273.

2 Martin, The British West African Settlements, p. 8.

3 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 286.

encroachments from the French.¹ The petition quickly caught the attention of the merchants from London, Liverpool and Bristol. The London merchants told Parliament that unless proper measures were taken to prevent French rivalry, the African trade would soon be lost to other nations. They reiterated the benefits that Great Britain reaped from the slave trade, requested that Parliament resume the grant of subsidies to the Company and suggested that a joint stock Company be formed to take over the trade.² The merchants from Liverpool and Bristol petitioned against the formation of a joint stock company. They stated that contrary to the pessimism of the London merchants, the African trade, for many years past, had been gradually extended and improved; that the slave trade had never been in a more flourishing state and that far from being lost to other nations, England had driven and excluded the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese from the trade. Their view was that no alterations should be made in the conduct of the slave trade.³

These two petitions evoked a reaction from the creditors of the Royal African Company. The creditors presented their own case to the House of Commons. Their petition recounted the sums invested in the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 526.

2 ibid., p. 565.

3 ibid., p. 597. For other petitions against a joint stock company, see page 604.

Royal African Company observing that if a joint stock company were formed, Parliament should grant them compensation for their investments.¹ The creditors had not yet seen that it was to their interest that the Company should be reconstituted. All that they were interested in was to have the debts owed to them duly and fully paid. The various petitions were referred to a committee of the whole House to be considered together.

As late as December 22nd, 1748, the Royal African Company itself again petitioned Parliament for assistance. The petition outlined the difficulties the Company had ran into, namely, that its debt stood at £100,000. The directors further stated that "their Debts remained unpaid; their Credit is greatly impaired both at home and abroad; and their Forts and Settlements (...) in Danger of going to Decay, and falling into the Hands of foreign Nations, Rivals to the British Trade".² They therefore asked Parliament to "grant such lasting Encouragement to the Petitioners, as may enable them to pay their Debts, and keep and maintain their Forts and Castles in a defensible Condition".³ This announcement from the Company alarmed its creditors and

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 599.

2 ibid., p. 677; Almon, Debates, Vol. XVII, p. 337.

3 ibid., p. 677; also in Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XIV, pp. 564-65 and ff.

strengthened the view expressed by the merchants of London of the precarious situation of the British share of the slave trade. The London merchants declared in a second petition to Parliament that without parliamentary grants, the British forts and castles on the West African coast must either be abandoned or be allowed to fall into the hands of the French.¹

Upon second thoughts, the Liverpool traders, in another petition, advised Parliament that the best protection that could be given to the African trade was to send warships to that coast to keep out the French. Their petition further recommended that although forts and castles were deemed necessary as a protection to the British trade in West Africa, yet they would prove "a Burden and a Nuisance in the Hands of any Joint-stock Company, whose private Interest has, and ever will be, found incompatible with the Interest of the separate and open Traders".² Their scheme of reform was that the Crown should take over the management of the forts. If this could not be done, the control of the castles should be so regulated that no one would acquire more advantages over the other traders.

These petitions aroused the House of Commons from its temporary lethargic attitude to the crisis of the Royal African Company. Two

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, pp. 732-33.

2 ibid., p. 777.

days were spent in a committee of the whole House on all the petitions at the end of which four resolutions were reported. The first three resolutions resummarised former views that the slave trade should remain free and open to all British subjects and that forts and castles were necessary for the protection of the British trade to West Africa. The fourth resolution added that "in Order to carry on the African Trade in the most beneficial Manner to these Kingdoms, all his Majesty's Subjects whatsoever, trading to Africa, be united in an open Company, without any Joint-Stock or Power to trade as a Corporation, under proper Regulations; and that the Forts and Settlements upon the Coast of Africa be put under proper Management and Direction".¹ A bill was ordered to be brought in embodying these resolutions. On 4th May, 1749, a "Bill for extending and improving the Trade to Africa" was introduced and read the first time in the House of Commons.

The preamble of the bill stated that "Whereas the Trade to and from Africa is very advantageous to Great Britain, and necessary for the supplying the Plantations and Colonies thereunto belonging with a sufficient Number of Negroes at reasonable Rates; and for that Purpose the said Trade ought to be free and open to all his Majesty's Subjects"².

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 830.

2 British Sessional Papers, 1731-1800. (Edited by Edgar L. Erickson); vol. II, No. 49, (1749), p. 1. The details of the bill will not be given here as this will form the basis of the next chapter.

In other words, no changes were to be made in the principle of free trade hitherto upheld in the slave trade since 1698.

Before the bill was read the second time, the Royal African Company presented the Commons with a petition setting out its claims to the West African coast. The proprietors asked Parliament not to deprive them of their rights or take away their property without giving them an adequate compensation. This request was followed by another from the Company's creditors. They complained against the management of the Company and offered to surrender their rights "to whomsoever the Wisdom of Parliament should judge fit".¹ Evidently, the creditors expressed approval of the incorporation of a new company to replace the Royal African Company; nothing would be done to impede the progress of the bill through the House provided they received satisfaction for the debts owed to them. The creditors also requested Parliament to order an inquiry into the Company's financial situation. The Commons promptly responded to the creditors' request. The Company was ordered to lay before the House a list of its debts together with the times when the debts had been contracted, the copy of its charter and letters from the creditors advising the directors to surrender the forts to the Crown in or about May, 1748.² These papers were presented to the House

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 862.

2 ibid., p. 862.

on May 22nd, 1749.

On May 30th, all the petitions as well as the papers produced relative to the Company's debts were considered in a committee of the whole House after which a resolution was passed that "a reasonable Compensation be given to the Royal African Company, whenever, they shall be divested of their Charter, Lands, Forts, Castles, Slaves, and all other Effects thereunto belonging; and that such Compensation shall be, in the First place, applied for and towards the Payment of the bona fide Creditors of the said Company".¹ The bill itself was not finally considered until June 6th when it was read the third time, passed and sent to the Lords. In the Lords, objections were raised to the whole scope of the bill that it was dropped after only two days of debate on it.² Matters did not end up there however, for the Lords sent an address to the King, "That He will be graciously pleased to direct the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations to prepare a Scheme, for the better securing, improving, and extending, the Trade to Africa, and to lay the same before both Houses of Parliament at the beginning of the next Session of Parliament (...) and that His Majesty will be pleased to direct the Commissioners for executing the Office of Lord High Admiral

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 882; Almon, Debates, Vol. XVII, p. 341. Also Cobbett's Parl. Hist., Vol. XIV, pp. 567-68.

2 Journals of the House of Lords, Vol. XXVII, p. 364.

of Great Britain to appoint proper Persons, to inspect and examine the State and Condition of the (...) Forts, Castles, and Settlements, and also of the Military Stores, Castle-Slaves, Canoes, and other Vessels belonging to the Royal Africal Company; and to report, with all possible Dispatch, how they find the same".¹

Following this resolution, the Board of Trade was again ordered to investigate the state of the African trade. The Commissioners for Trade and Plantations immediately began their investigations. Letters were sent out mainly to the Royal African Company and the merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool requiring them to submit schemes for the improvement and extension of the British trade to West Africa though all other corporations connected with or interested in the slave trade could also send in their views. The Commissioners for Trade employed at least seven months in assembling their information.

When the report came before the Commons in February, 1750, several schemes were put forward in it as to the most effective method of improving the African trade. In the first place, the Royal African Company itself presented two schemes. One purported to the creation of a joint stock company; the other proposed a regulated company with a moderate joint stock. In the former plan, the directors of the Company indicated they were willing to give up all their trading rights in Africa for a reasonable compensation if subscriptions for a joint

1 Lords Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 364.

stock company could not be procured; that no separate traders could advance any considerable sums of money, at a sudden notice, as in times of war or attacks from pirates, to defend or repair the forts since there would be no joint obligation or any security for reimbursements. An exclusive company could do this; it was therefore best suited to carry on the African trade. Such a company too could compete with rivalry from the Dutch and the French or exclude them from the slave trade altogether. Hence it would be easier for a joint stock company to buy the best kind of slaves at cheaper prices "than a great Variety of British separate Traders bidding upon one another".¹ To render this scheme workable, the directors suggested that fifteen thousand shares be raised at ten pounds a share.

In their second plan, which in fact was to be a reorganization of the Royal African Company, the directors of the Company proposed that the forts and castles should be maintained at all cost. As this could not be done effectually without parliamentary aid, it was pointed out that Parliament should resume the annual grants to any company that might be incorporated but advised that whatever sums were granted would be more usefully disbursed by a joint stock company or a regulated company with a joint stock. A committee of separate traders, it was

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations pursuant to an address of the House of Lords to His Majesty the 8th June, 1749, for the better securing, improving and extending the Trade to Africa. (London, 1750), pp. 7-8.

thought, would be more interested in their own profits than the general welfare of the British colonies. The proposed joint stock company was not to have an exclusive charter. By means of a regulated company with a joint stock, the directors of the Royal African Company hoped to bridge the gap between the Company and the separate traders. The Company, with its agents permanently residing on the African coast, would be able not only to buy slaves and sell them to the separate traders at lower prices, but assist these traders to ship their slaves to the British colonies without undue delay. What the Company proposed to do was to play the role of a middleman between the separate traders and the African middlemen as it had intended to do in 1733 but to eliminate any distrust on the part of the separate traders, the Company wished to keep a true account of the prices of slaves open to their inspection.¹

In these proposals, the Royal African Company did not omit to provide safeguards for itself. To prevent the Company from being obliged to keep a great number of slaves obtained for the separate traders at the forts, the directors insisted that the Company should be allowed to ship a certain number of slaves annually to the colonies after having kept them at least thirty days. This would be a means of establishing a good understanding between the Company and the separate traders, otherwise, the separate traders could refuse to buy slaves from the

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade, pp. 15-16.

Company or blackmail the agents to sell slaves to them at a loss.¹

Finally, the directors suggested that the transactions of this reorganized company should be subject to such parliamentary inquiry, regulations and penalties in regard to the expenditure of the sums granted by Parliament as the House thought best. The Company complained that it had been brought to a "low Situation, while the separate Traders have been raising great Fortunes upon their Ruins".² In spite of all these difficulties which the Royal African Company had to encounter, its debt being about £130,000, the directors still hoped that with a sufficient grant of £20,000 a year, they would yet be able to save and bring the Company back to its former flourishing situation except this time to the benefit of both the Company and the separate traders.

Other schemes submitted by the merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool showed marked divergent views as to the best method of improving the African trade. From London, three separate plans were put forward all of which were in disagreement with one another. One group of merchants favoured a full joint stock company with a large capital to run the slave trade. This group recognized that it was essentially necessary to keep forts on the African coast "not as Marks of Possession only, but in such defensible State and Condition as will procure

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade....., p. 16.

2 ibid., p. 17.

at least an equal, if not a superior Degree of Power with those in the Hands of the British Rivals in that Trade on the same Coast, as it will (...) encourage the Natives to give the British Subjects a Preference in Trade".¹ Freedom of trade however, was to be accorded to the separate traders. These merchants also advocated limitations restraining the directors of the proposed company and their servants from engaging privately in the slave trade or selling slaves to foreign traders. The company was to be prohibited from making pre-contracts in England for the sale of slaves in Africa and the agents were to be bound to give no preference to any ship on the coast but be obliged to serve any ships that arrived first. They also requested that warships should be stationed on the African coast to protect the British traders.

Another section of the merchants of London, while acknowledging that it was absolutely necessary to maintain forts and garrisons in West Africa, nevertheless deprecated the idea of forming a joint stock company to take over the African trade. These merchants recommended that all British subjects should be permitted to trade freely to West Africa and that "an open Company be established, of which every British Subject trading, or intending to trade, to Africa, shall or may become free on Payment of Forty Shillings; which shall be applied to the current

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade....., pp. 29-31.

Expenses of the said Company".¹ Their scheme was closely modelled on the bill of 1749.

A third group from London, that is, the sugar planters, agreed with the Royal African Company that Parliament should give an annual subsidy of £20,000 for the maintenance of the forts. They further proposed that "as the Aid of Parliament is absolutely necessary for that Purpose, the Ends of granting such Aid will be much better answered, by committing that Trust, and the Application of the Money the Parliament shall grant, to an incorporated Body of Men with a Joint-Stock (made answerable, under Penalties, for the due Execution thereof), than to any temporary, mutable, and transient Set of Men whatsoever, who might renounce it [that is the trade] at Pleasure, and who would be answerable each for his own Acts only, and not one for the Acts of another".² The planters thought that the most beneficial method of conducting the slave trade was "by a Company with a joint trading Stock; without any exclusive Privileges, but under such Regulations and Restrictions as will leave the Trade free and open to all His Majesty's Subjects".³

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade, pp. 32-33.

2 ibid., p. 49.

3 ibid., p. 49.

Of all the schemes presented to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, that from the merchants of Bristol though closely modelled also on the bill of 1749, was the only one which ventured to suggest amendments to the bill and added pertinent comments to some obscure meanings of it. The second clause of the bill of 1749 had declared that all British subjects who wished to trade to West Africa would be incorporated as a "Body Corporate and Politick". The traders from Bristol commented that this clause had been construed in a way that could prevent any person or persons not belonging to the proposed company from trading to Africa. These individual traders, in their view, should be allowed to trade to West Africa but not permitted to vote in the elections of the committee-men who were to direct the company. As many other separate traders would rather choose to drop their interests in the trade than be obliged to come into the company, the Bristol merchants argued that the restriction might tend to lessen the trade and by that means destroy, in some measure, the intentions of Parliament in leaving the trade free and open.¹

The other amendments recommended to Parliament through the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations by the merchants of Bristol related to the fourth and fifth clauses of the bill. These two clauses

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade, pp. 37-38.

had placed the direction of the future company in a committee of eight men, four to be chosen from London and two each to be elected from Bristol and Liverpool. The traders from Bristol suggested that the committee consist of nine instead of eight men. Their reason was that this number would enable an equal representation on the committee for all three cities. This equality of representation would serve as a safety valve against the possible combination of any two cities to monopolize the management of the company.¹

Another argument was that the volume of trade from Bristol and Liverpool was greater than that from London. The merchants of Bristol thought that the traders from Bristol and Liverpool ought at least to have an equal number of representatives each on the committee; they also argued that those who had the larger share in the trade and whose interests most immediately depended on its preservation, were more likely to exert themselves in maintaining the forts and castles. As will be seen later, these recommendations were accepted by Parliament and incorporated in the Act of 1750.

The apprehensions of the Bristol merchants were quite understandable. Bristol and Liverpool were probably in no way concerned together in the slave trade. There is all likelihood that the two ports were rivals in the African trade. Yet both of them were in some degree

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade....., p. 38.

connected with the city of London. It could therefore justly be inferred that either city's committeemen would probably contrive to conspire with the four representatives from London to monopolize the direction of the company to the detriment of the other. As the committeemen were, in all probability, to reside in London, it could further be assumed that no ill consequences would be expected from an improbable combination between Bristol and Liverpool against London; the merchants of that city, though being the agents for both Bristol and Liverpool, must be supposed to have had as great an interest in their own welfare in the slave trade and would of course have opposed any schemes proposed by Bristol and Liverpool that tended to the ruin of their fortunes. However, these fears were removed by the limitations placed on the committee of nine when the Company of Merchants trading to Africa was incorporated in 1750.

In contrast to the various schemes submitted to the Board of Trade for the improvement of the African trade, the merchants from Liverpool presented no definite plan at all. Their letter to the Commissioners for Trade was a bitter denunciation of the Royal African Company. It began by charging that the slave trade had never flourished in the hands of the Company in spite of its monopoly and subsequent parliamentary subsidies intended to assist the Company to maintain the trade. The letter went on to show how the separate traders had outbid the Royal African Company in supplying slaves to the colonies. For this reason, the Liverpool merchants opposed the formation

of any company whatsoever to control the slave trade. If Parliament thought it wise to incorporate a company, they would not oppose the idea. The merchants bluntly told the Commissioners, though incorrectly, that the Royal African Company had not been of any service at all to England and that "there is no other Method to be found out for settling this Trade on a proper Foundation, to answer the Purposes of the Publick, to support and enlarge our Plantations, and, in some measure, enable us to vie with other Rival Nations, but that it remain intirely open and free to all his Majesty's Subjects, without any Charge Whatsoever".¹

Despite their opposition to any company rule in Africa, the Liverpool traders nevertheless recommended that the best scheme for preserving the British forts on the African coast was, "That the Government should take them into their own Hands, and support them at a publick Expense, for the impartial and undistinguished Benefit of every Trader (...)

And as we take this to be the only Method of fixing the Forts and Settlements on that Coast, to answer the best Purposes to Trade, and to be useful to the Publick; so we beg Leave further to lay before Your Lordships the bad Consequences of having them in the Hands of any Trading Company: The Experience of former Times shews, that such a Company have always done all in their Power to prevent the Natives from going off to, or trading with, the Ships at Sea, or any one else on

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade, p. 44.

Shore but themselves".¹ Though the usefulness of forts and castles was admitted, they asserted that "in the Hands of a Company they will be (as they hitherto have been) a Burden and Nuisance, and obstruct, rather than serve, our foreign Trade and Navigation".² No evidence or instances were cited to support these allegations. In view of the fact that the trade had been thrown open to all British subjects only since 1698 and that the Royal African Company had indeed rendered useful service to England, the accusations of the Liverpool merchants were unfounded and hence mere sophistry.

Before the various plans submitted were considered by the House of Commons, the Royal African Company petitioned it was unable to hold its forts any longer. The Company now offered to surrender the forts to the Government in exchange for any reasonable compensation.³ This petition touched off another chain of reaction throughout England. A flood of petitions poured into the House of Commons on the state of the African trade. Some urged the establishment of a joint stock company, others denounced the idea. The merchants once again showed that they

1 Papers laid before the Honourable House of Commons by the Commissioners for Trade, p. 45.

2 ibid., p. 46.

3 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 942.
Almon, Debates, Vol. XVIII, p. 99.

could not agree as to the best method of carrying on the slave trade.¹ Faced with these contradictory views, the House of Commons took pains to examine thoroughly the nature of the controversy and disagreements. Seven days were spent in a committee of the whole House on the affairs of the African trade. During the Committee's sittings, evidence was heard at the bar of the House on all proposals to re-establish the trade on a firmer footing. After most of the witnesses as well as the report of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations were examined, the Chairman of the Committee, Robert Hoblyn, reported the Committee's resolutions to the House on March 2nd, 1750. These were identical with those agreed to in the preceding session. It was then ordered that a bill be brought in embodying these resolutions. Rather than draft a new bill, the previous bill with a few modifications, was reintroduced on March 6th. It successfully passed its third reading on March 17th and was sent up to the Lords, where it was passed with some slight amendments and received the royal assent on 12th April, 1750 as the "Act for extending and improving the Trade to Africa".²

1 For the contents of these petitions, see Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, pp. 977, 978, 983-4, 988, 993, 998, passim. Also in Almon, Debates, Vol. XVIII, pp. 100-102 and ff.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXV, p. 1114.
Lords Journals, Vol. XXVII, pp. 443, 460.

By this Act, the Royal African Company was to be divested of its charter and trading assets but the exact date had not been specified. Unlike the bitter attacks on the Company by the separate traders, the House of Commons paid tribute to the Company. In their latest petition to Parliament, the directors of the Company had asked for a compensation of £180,000. This sum was not granted; on the other hand, the Commons passed a resolution that "in Justice and Equity, the Publick was indebted to the Company in a greater Sum than what they now demanded".¹ The Commons went further to say that the laying open of the trade in 1698 had been an injury to the Company since no other assistance was given to it. The House praised the directors of the Company for having weathered immense odds and difficulties to preserve the African trade for Britain. This recognition of the Company's services to the nation did not induce the Committee to grant it any other sums of money. The fate of the Company now hung in the balance. Its dissolution had drawn much closer.

The various financial crises that afflicted the Royal African Company since 1730 had finally convinced Parliament that its replacement by another company was more politic than its maintenance. The Company however, was to exist for a further two years though unsupported by Parliament. Parliament had also realized the full adverse implications of letting the British monopoly of the slave trade fall

1 Almon, Debates, Vol. XVIII, p. 102.

to the French or the Dutch.¹ It was well known, in accordance with the mercantilist conception of the day, that trade was considered by almost every state in Europe as the source of wealth and wealth as the measure of power. Trade was therefore eagerly contested for as territory was in building an empire. As no state thought it was any more secure in a territory than it was able to defend that territory, so it seemed vain for England to think herself entrenched in her monopoly of the slave trade with nothing to protect it but forts kept up as mere marks of possession and managed by an unorganized body of separate individual traders. All agreed it was in the interest of Great Britain that her colonies be supplied with negro slaves equal to their wants. It was also admitted that the more money was employed in this trade, the more slaves would be shipped to the colonies at less exorbitant prices. It was evident to Parliament that the separate traders alone could not achieve these objectives in face of French rivalry. While a joint stock company could meet these wants, Parliament feared a return to trade monopoly that could prejudice the interests of the separate traders. Faced with this dilemma, the best course for Parliament seemed

1 The Dutch were by far the only nation that rivaled the English on the Gold Coast. Their forts were interspersed with those of the Royal African Company on the Gold Coast.

a limited joint stock company with stringent guarantees for the separate traders.¹ Parliament did not adopt this course. Instead, the House decided on an open company in which the separate traders were given a free hand in the slave trade. Through an open company, Parliament hoped to satisfy the desires of the individual traders as well as those of the proposed company; but as events were to show, the House found that it was far easier to accommodate the interests of the company it had created to those of the independent traders than to assuage the appetite of the separate traders even though the company that was incorporated in 1750 was modelled on their wishes.

1 To put forward this view is not to suggest any condonation in the slave trade.

CHAPTER III

THE INCORPORATION OF THE COMPANY OF MERCHANTS
AND FINAL DISSOLUTION OF THE ROYAL AFRICAN
COMPANY, 1750-1752.

The creation of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa was entirely the work of Parliament. The driving force behind the incorporation of the new company to replace the Royal African Company was Parliament's general concern to preserve the African trade for Great Britain. According to the Act of 1750, the new Company's sphere of influence extended from "Port Sallee in South Barbary to the Cape of Good Hope". The area granted to the Company was outwardly very extensive but in effect their trading posts were mainly situated in the Gold Coast and the Gambia. On the Gold Coast, there were eight forts, restricted chiefly to the coastal areas; these were Dixcove, Winneba, Cape Coast, Accra, Whyda, Commenda, Tantankweri (Tantumquerry) and Sekondi (Succondee). On the Gambia, the Company possessed only James Fort. Besides these main forts, the Company had other small trading posts ranging from thatched huts to mud houses. The forts on the Gold Coast were regarded as the most important settlements, the headquarters of the Company's administration on the African coast being at Cape Coast Castle.

The constitution designed for the Company was intended to implement the principle of free and open trade on the West African coast. In this sense, the demands of the separate traders triumphed over those of the monopolists. To ensure this principle, the first clause of the

Act declared that "it shall and may be lawful for all his Majesty's Subjects to trade and traffick to and from any Part or Place in Africa, between the Port of Sallee in South Barbary, and the Cape of Good Hope, when, and at such Times, and in such Manner, and in or with such Quantity of Goods, Wares, or Merchandises, as he or they shall think fit, without any Restraint whatsoever, save as is herein after expressed".¹ The Company itself was established as a "Body Corporate and Politick";² it could sue or be sued but it was prohibited from trading in its corporate form. Clause three for instance, stated: "That it shall not be lawful for the Company, established by this Act, to trade to or from Africa in their corporate or joint Capacity, or to have any joint or transferable Stock, or to borrow, or take up, any Sum or Sums of Money, on their Common Seal".³ In essence, the Company was to be a regulated and not a joint stock company. As a regulated company, the members were to trade either individually or in partnerships with their own capital. They were free to conduct their own businesses as they wished but subject to the general rules laid down by Parliament. One of the general rules of the Company was that its place of trade was limited

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. II, No. 50, 1749/50, p. 2.
Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, 23 Geo. II, C.31, (1750),
p. 268.

2 Sessional Papers, Vol. II, No. 50, 1749/50, p. 2.
Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 268.

3 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

chiefly to West Africa. By the provisions quoted above, the Company, unlike a joint stock company, could not itself engage in trade. It existed mainly to protect the interests of its members in the African trade.

The direction and management of the Company's affairs was placed in a Committee of nine men. This Committee had full powers "to make Orders for the governing, maintaining, preserving, and improving, the Forts and Factories already built, or which hereafter shall be built (...) "¹ within the territorial limits assigned to the Company. The nine members of the Committee were to be elected annually at a general meeting of the Company. As Committee-men, they were forbidden to trade to or from the African coast in a corporate form. Clause nineteen of the Act of 1750 specified that "no Person shall be capable of being chosen, or acting as a Committee-man, above three Years successively; and two or more Persons, who shall be in Copartnership in Trade, shall not be capable to be chosen or act as Committee-men, during the same Time or Year: And the (...) nine Persons, or any of them, shall not, during such Time as they shall be of the said Committee, in any Manner, directly or indirectly, trade jointly, or in Copartnership, to Africa, or lade, or cause to be laden, any Goods or Merchandises on Board the same Ship, in which any of the said nine Committee-men shall, for that

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. II, No. 50, p. 3.
Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

Voyage, have before laden Goods to be carried to any Place in Africa".¹ The Committee was responsible for the appointment of governors, deputy-governors, officers, both civil and military, to the African coast; it could remove or dismiss any of its officers in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Act regarding the conduct of the Company's servants.² The Committee also supervised the shipment of supplies such as clothings, building materials, food and all cargo intended for trade to the West African coast.

To prevent any unnecessary haggling or wrangling between the merchants of London on one hand and those of Liverpool and Bristol on the other, Parliament provided that of the nine members of the Committee, three should be elected from each of these cities. The date on which the elections were to be held was specified as July 3rd for each year.³ The ninth clause stated that if any of these cities defaulted in electing their Committee-men at the time they should have been elected, then the six others duly chosen were to run the Company's affairs until the next annual elections. When the third of July fell on a Sunday, the election of the members of the Committee would be held on Monday, July 4th.

Elaborate regulations were drawn up to safeguard the rights of the separate traders. Membership in the Company was based on a fee of

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 271.

2 Sessional Papers, Vol. II (Bius), No. 50, p. 3
Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

3 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

forty shillings. These fees were payable to the chamberlain of the city of London, the clerk of the merchants's corporation of Bristol and the town clerk of Liverpool.¹ Persons admitted to the membership of the Company were called the "Freemen" of the Company. It was among the freemen that the Committee of nine was chosen. As no proxy votes were allowed, the election of the Committee was determined by the majority votes of those who were actually present at the election.

The burden of restrictions did not so much however, fall on the actual members in the Company but on the Committee of nine. This body bore the brunt of administrative control from Parliament. The freemen of the Company for instance, were authorized to remove any member of the Committee who showed unwillingness to perform his duties.² In respect to parliamentary control, no member of the Committee, in the first place, was eligible for future elections after his three year term of office had expired.³ This device was intended to check the outgoing Committee from manipulating their own subsequent re-election to the Committee. Secondly, the members of the Committee were subject to removal by Parliament for reasons of misconduct or misappropriation of funds. This meant too that Parliament's authority in the Company was supreme. No evidence however, exists in neither the Journals of the House of Commons nor those of the Lords indicating that this power was

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

2 ibid., p. 269.

3 ibid., p. 269.

ever exercised by Parliament. On the contrary, as it will be shown in a later chapter, the Committee enjoyed Parliament's confidence each time its conduct was censured.

Other restraints limiting the role of the Committee were meant to curb any exercise of unbridled monopolistic control of the African trade by the Committee. One of the regulations emphasized that "(...) no Orders or Regulations, to be made by the (...) Committee, shall tend to lay any Restraint whatsoever on the (...) Trade or Traders to and from Africa, contrary to the true Intent and Meaning of this Act".¹ The first meeting of the Committee was scheduled to convene on the first Monday of August, 1750 but after that date, the Committee was then to settle or determine the manner and procedure of its future meetings. No orders of the Committee to which all members did not give their consent were to be valid unless the same orders were re-passed and confirmed at a subsequent meeting. At each meeting, a quorum of five or more present chose a chairman by lot to preside over the meeting. The chairman chosen for that particular meeting had no vote on that day on any business unless there happened to be a tie vote on a question.² In such a case, the chairman had the liberty to vote on the side he judged best to be right. A member who was absent at the

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 269.

2 ibid., p. 269.

time of the choice of the chairman was not permitted to vote on any question before the Committee on that day; he could sit in the meeting and give his opinions concerning all matters discussed as any other member was entitled to do. This exclusion of a member from voting did not nullify any of the decisions taken by the remaining members of the Committee.¹

In addition to the foregoing limitations, the Committee was required to keep "a true and exact list" of the names of the members of the Company, their addresses as well as the places where they had been admitted as freemen. The list was to be published every year at least ten days before the election of the members of the Committee were held in July.² The books and receipts of payment of the Company were to be kept open at all times for inspection by the freemen.

Although the Committee-men were prohibited from trading in partnerships to and from the African coast, they were nevertheless responsible for investing the sums granted by Parliament in purchasing goods normally sent out to West Africa for the maintenance of the forts and castles. In view of this, the Committee was further required to render to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations a "just and perfect Account of all their Transactions once a Year (...)" in which shall be contained an Account of all the Monies received and disbursed by the

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 270.

2 ibid., p. 270-71.

(...) Committee, or their Order".¹ The Committee was also enjoined to produce on demand by the Board of Trade, all their instructions and orders despatched to the officers and agents of the Company either in England or on the African coast. In particular, Parliament directed that "the (...) Committee shall, every Session of Parliament, lay before the Parliament a Copy of such annual Account audited [by the Cursitor Baron of the Exchequer], and of all Orders and Regulations made by them in the Preceding Year, relating to the (...) Forts and Settlements, or the Government of their Officers or Servants employed therein".² This requirement was the culminating point of parliamentary control for like its predecessor, the Royal African Company, the Company of Merchants trading to Africa had to petition the House of Commons each year for an annual allowance of £10,000. The Company was therefore entirely dependent on Parliament for subsidies and every year the Committee had to account to Parliament how sums granted in the previous year had been spent.

On the African coast, the Committee was to see to it that no separate traders were obstructed from trading in the Company's sphere of influence "and that the Forts, Warehouses, and Buildings, already erected, or which shall hereafter be erected, by the (...) Company,

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 271.

2 ibid., pp. 271-72.

shall and may at all Times hereafter be free and open to all his Majesty's Subjects, to be used as Warehouses for depositing Gunpowder, Gold, Elephants Teeth, Wax, Gums and Drugs, and no other Goods".¹ The separate traders could build houses on the coast under the protection of the forts and the Committee was to give assistance to all British subjects who took refuge in the forts in times of danger, shipwreck and attacks from pirates and rivals or enemies.

To a limited degree, the Board of Trade and the Admiralty could exercise some control over the Company but the authority was hardly ever used. The Board of Trade was empowered to investigate any complaints brought up against the Committee. It could even take punitive measures by dismissing any member of the Committee if charges of misconduct were proved against him. The Board frequently received accounts of the Company. These often included reports on the forts and letters from the governors and agents of the Company of Merchants.² In December, 1754, the Committee sent a petition to the Board of Trade requesting a grant of £10,000 to enable the Company to complete the construction of a fort at Anomabu. After considering the petition in its meeting,

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 272.

2 Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, Vol. X, Jan., 1754 to Dec., 1758, pp. 53, 73, 160, passim. (Cited later as Board of Trade Journal).

the Board ordered its secretary to "acquaint the Secretary to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury by letter that as this office is not an office of account, and consequently not authorized or directed to enquire into the expenditure of publick money, the Board cannot take that part of the [petition] into consideration, and as to the utility and expediency of the fort at Annamaboe, their Lordships have already reported their opinion upon it to his Majesty's Secretary of State".¹

This apparent decline of the Board to come to the direct assistance of the Company meant that the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations acted as an advisory and not a policy making body on the affairs of the Company. In September 1755, the Board ordered the Committee of the Company to appear before it to give an account of the defences of the forts.² The Committee informed the Board that "the forts were in general in very indifferent repair"³ and recommended that the only effectual method of defending the forts was by having a superior naval force on the African coast. The Board's inquiries into the defences of the garrisons rose not so much from administrative concern and vigilance in the conduct of the African Committee but from fears of a likely attack from the French on the British trading posts on the West African coast.

1 Board of Trade Journal, Vol. X, p. 88.

2 ibid., p. 174.

3 ibid., p. 175.

In theory, appointment made by the Company's Committee were subject to review by the Commissioners for Trade; in practice however, the Board declined to assume this responsibility. In March 1757 for instance, the Board was acquainted by the Committee of the death of John Apperley, the Company's principal engineer at Anomabu. The Board did not issue orders for his replacement. Instead the Commissioners left the appointment of the new engineer to the Board of Ordnance.¹ About January 1758, the Board of Trade acted as a mediator and adviser to the Company of Merchants in a dispute between the Company and the King of Casinka country in the Gambia. Hostilities were reported to have occurred between the Company's agents and the King of Casinka over the purchase of slaves and the Company's trading rights. The Board examined Captain Barlisle who had witnessed the fighting between the Casinkas and the Company's servants and recommended that "it would be the most advisable to endeavour the putting and end to these disputes by gentle methods and a few presents to the principal people of the country (...) and to endeavour to accommodate the differences which had risen in an amicable way, and pursue such measures as should (...) render that method the most effectual".² Neither the Committee nor the Company's agents were reproved for the incident. Shortly after this

1 Board of Trade Journal, Vol. X, p. 311.

2 ibid., p. 365.

recommendation, the French surrendered their Senegal and Gambian trading posts to England. Rumours quickly spread that Parliament intended to put the administration of these garrisons as well as the direction of the African trade under the Board of Trade. Samuel Touchet, one of the members of the African Committee, appeared before the Board to ascertain the truth of this. Touchet declared diplomatically on behalf of the whole Committee that if Parliament thought that to place the African trade under the control of the Board of Trade was the right course of action, the Company would not oppose the change. The Board assured Touchet that "they considered themselves as unfit and unable to undertake the direction of the affairs and trade of Africa (...)"¹ The period between 1750 and 1758 was the time that the Commissioners for Trade could have exercised a firmer control over the African Committee since the Company had just only been established but they constantly declined to assume any major responsibility in the affairs of the Company. The belief as expounded by some historians that the Board of Trade exerted any effective control over the Company seems too farfetched;² on the contrary, the Board was reluctant and unwilling to commit itself to interventions in the Company's affairs.

1 Board of Trade Journal, Vol. X, pp. 397-98.

2 See for example the views of Eveline Martin: The British West African Settlements, pp. 16-17.

The other government department through which Parliament hoped to restrain the Company of Merchants' activities was the Admiralty. The last six clauses of the Act of 1750 provided that warships be sent out by the Admiralty to the West African coast to keep off French interlopers in the British trading areas; but to prevent the captains of these warships from engaging in the slave trade, it was stipulated that "no Commander or Master of any Ship trading to Africa, shall by Fraud, Force, or Violence, or by any other indirect Practice whatsoever, take on Board, or carry away from the Coast of Africa, any Negro or Native of the said Country, or commit or suffer to be committed, any Violence on any Natives, to the Prejudice of the said Trade; and that every Person so offending, shall, for every such offence, forfeit the Sum of one hundred Pounds of lawful Money of Great Britain".¹ Was Parliament sincere in this declaration or did it mean to throw dust in the eyes of contemporary conscientious objectors to the slave trade? While it might be accepted that the motive behind the declaration was genuine, the possible answer is that Parliament acted in ignorance of the method of obtaining slaves. The fact that most slaves were captured in internecine tribal wars was either still hidden from Parliament or little known. In any event, the absurdity in the clause to the historian of the eighteenth century is quite apparent: the preamble of that very

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 272.

Act stated that slave labour was necessary for the prosperity England's West Indian and American colonies. Yet the clause quoted above prohibited the forceful transportation of Africans upon which the slave trade largely depended to the British colonies across the Atlantic. Each year, captains of warships sent out to West Africa despatched home reports on the forts. The Journals of the House of Commons contain many of these reports. The reports were laid before the Commons in each session of Parliament but until about 1792 no captains or masters of ships were prosecuted for breaches of the clause.¹ This is not to say that no captains of warships were ever engaged privately in the slave trade while they remained on the African coast. The point to be noted here is that although the forts under the management of the Company of Merchants were often inspected by officers sent out from the Admiralty, that department had no real control over the Company. Soldiers in the service of the Company in West Africa were recruited by the Committee and not by the Admiralty. In reality therefore, the Admiralty remained a critic of the fortifications of the castles. Loopholes and weaknesses in their defences were pointed out by the Admiralty through its naval officers but the repair of these forts was the responsibility of the

1 In that year Wilberforce secured the prosecution of Captain John Kimbal for cruelty and murder of slaves. Captain Kimbal was later acquitted. See Parl. Reg., Vol. XXXI, pp. 155-175.

Company and could not even be enforced by the Admiralty.¹ Like the Board of Trade, the Admiralty acted as an advisory body to both Parliament and the Company; it did not seem to have had any direct jurisdiction over the Company or any authority to correct the Committee of nine whose conduct it could enquire into.

The Company, as it was established, was criticised first by Malachy Postlethwayt and later by Adam Smith. Postlethwayt devoted sections of his Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce and the second volume of his Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved to discussing the unwisdom of vesting the African trade in a regulated company. He thought the trade would have been more efficiently conducted if a joint stock company had been formed to control it.² In 1776, Adam Smith criticised the Company's constitution on the grounds that a regulated company was much more unfit to maintain forts and garrisons than a joint stock company because the directors of a regulated company had no particular interest in the general prosperity of the company. The directors of a joint stock company on the other hand, he argued, had no private trade of their own apart from their share of the profits

1 The above observations and discussion of the Admiralty's role in the Company have been based on the various reports sent back to Parliament by commanders of warships either stationed or patrolling the West African coast.

2 See the articles under "Africa" and "French African Trade and Company" in Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, Vol. 1. Also Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved.... Vol. II, chaps. XXIV-XXV.

made on the common stock of the company. Their private interests were inseparable from the general prosperity of the company. In addition, the directors of a joint stock company always had at their disposal a large capital, part of which could be used at any time to repair and maintain their forts whereas on the contrary, the regulated company had no such fund which could be employed for an effectual upkeep of their forts and garrisons.¹

Without delving any deeper into the objections of Smith, one might say in passing that he was essentially right as far as the English African companies were concerned. Both the Royal African Company - that is, in its last years, - and the newly created Company of Merchants having had no common joint stock, were unable to maintain their forts and castles without parliamentary subsidies. Apart from the general concern of preventing the African trade from falling into the hands of the French, Parliament seemed to have had two distinct objectives in view when it incorporated the new company; first to restrain effectively the monopolistic tendencies of syndicates which could easily develop in a regulated company and secondly, to force the Committee as much as possible to give more attention to the maintenance of the forts and castles on the African coast. These two objectives probably accounted

1 Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. (Modern Library Edition), pp. 675-76.

more for the restraints laid on the Company. Its constitution was radically different from that of its predecessor. The Royal African Company had an exclusive privilege to the African trade by charter. That charter had not been confirmed by act of Parliament. In the Company of Merchants, monopolies of any kind were banned. The positions of Governor, Sub-Governor and Deputy-Governor were dropped,¹ and with the hope of obviating through the constitution the danger of any reversion to monopoly trade, Parliament launched the new Company on its commercial life which was to last for at least seventy one years.

The Act of 1750 made no provision for the immediate dissolution of the Royal African Company. Consequently that Company was left in the anomalous position of existing alongside the new Company; it faced a double predicament: dissolution at any moment and a prolongation of its life into the future. This anomaly was bound to create difficulties between the Royal African Company and the Company of Merchants.

One difficulty which soon presented itself was the appointment of officers and agents to the African coast. Having been forced to give up their trading assets to the Company of Merchants, the directors of the Royal African Company were not in a friendly mood to assist the new Company to establish itself. Nothing was said in the Act of altering either the administration or the administrators in Africa.

1 An exception however, was that on the African coast, the principal agents at the forts and castles retained the title of Governors.

Governors, agents and factors in Africa still held commissions issued by the Royal African Company and the directors did not feel obliged to revoke these commissions or recall these officers. They informed Parliament to give the annual grant of ten thousand pounds to the new Company and that they would surrender their charter to Parliament and their "territories" to the Company of Merchants if a compensation were given to them.¹ But they refused to confirm new appointments made by the Committee of the Company of Merchants.² The Committee complained to Parliament about the situation, asked that the House of Commons examine the matter and indicated that "any farther Delay [would] be attended with great Inconvenience and Expense".³ A Select Committee was appointed to resolve the difficulties. On May 21st, 1750, the Committee reported to the Commons that they had managed to get the directors of the Royal African Company and the Committee of the Company of Merchants to settle their differences. This did not really solve the problem and friction continued between the two Companies.

As the Royal African Company had not been legally divested of

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 90.

2 ibid., p. 146. For a summary account of the difficulties involved in the situation, see Eveline Martin's British West African Settlements, pp. 13-14.

3 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 146.

its charter, it continued to send ships to trade on the West African coast. In January 1752, it even applied to Parliament for financial aid declaring that it would now help the Company of Merchants to establish itself. The directors told Parliament that their Governors on the African coast had now been removed and that commissions to the officers of the Company of Merchants had been confirmed.¹ By these intimations the directors hoped to induce Parliament to grant them relief. That petition was to be the last of the Royal African Company's applications to the Commons for financial assistance.

To put an end to the bickerings between the Royal African Company and the Committee of the Company of Merchants, the House of Commons ordered that a bill be brought in for compensating the Royal African Company and to vest the forts solely in the Company of Merchants trading to Africa.

The bill, as introduced and passed, recounted the grant of the charter to the Royal African Company by Charles II, the throwing open of the African trade to all British subjects in 1698 and the failure of the Royal African Company through inadequate capital. The Act of 1750 incorporating the Company of Merchants was recited after which the preamble then declared: "That the Royal African Company of England, from and after the tenth Day of April one thousand seven hundred and fifty-two, shall be, and they are hereby absolutely divested of and from their

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 382.

said Charter, Lands, Forts, Castles, and Military Stores, Canoe Men, Castle Slaves, and all other their Estate, Property and Effects whatsoever; and that all and every the British Forts, Lands, Castles, Settlements and Factories on the Coast of Africa, beginning at Port Sally, and extending from thence to the Cape of Good Hope inclusive, which were granted to the said Company by the said Charter, or which have been since erected or purchased by the said Company (...) shall (...) be vested in, and the same and every of them are and is hereby fully and absolutely vested in (...) The Company of Merchants trading to Africa".¹ The Company's account books, ledgers, goods, correspondence and all contracts concluded with the native princes were to be transferred to the Company of Merchants which was authorized to sell or dispose of them and present the proceeds thereby obtained to Parliament.² The Company of Merchants was however, pronounced "freed and absolutely discharged of and from all Claims and Demands of the (...) Royal African Company of England, and their Creditors, and every of them, and of all and every Person or Persons claiming under them, or any or either of them",³ No further powers were conferred on the Committee of the Company except the privilege to erect courts of judicature for the Company's

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, 25 Geo. II, C. 40, P. 444.

2 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, pp. 445, 447.

3 ibid., p. 444.

servants on the African coast but all jurisdiction was to be subject to revocation by the Crown. In spite of the fact that the defence of the forts had been placed largely in the hands of the Admiralty, a ryder incorporated a further declaration that "it shall and may be lawful to and for the said Company of Merchants, (...) or their Committee for the Time being, by and with the Consent and Approbation of the (...) Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, or the Majority of them, to authorize and impower such Persons, as they shall think fit, at any of the said Forts, Castles, Settlements and Factories, or elsewhere in Africa, to raise, arm, train and muster such Military Forces, as to them shall seem requisite and necessary".¹ To wind up the affairs of the Royal African Company, the House of Commons emphasized that "from and after the said tenth Day of April one thousand seven hundred and fifty-two, the said Royal African Company of England shall cease to be a Corporation, and be incapable of doing or exercising any Corporate act".² For the loss of its charter and property, the Company was to receive a compensation of £112,142-3-3d. This large sum was not accredited solely to the shareholders of the Company; out of it, the Company had to pay off its debts to the creditors about whom more will be said in the next chapter. With the passing of this Act,³ the Royal African Company was

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 444.

2 ibid., p. 446.

3 25 Geo. II, C. 40, (1752).

finally dissolved and the tethered history of its latter years brought to an end while the Company of Merchants now assumed full responsibility over the West African coast.

In retrospective, the Company was loosely knitted together. Its constitution left no room for a more compact organization. The constitution of the Royal African Company had been designed to tighten up effectively a monopoly. No other British subject was allowed to trade to West Africa while the Company dominated the African trade between 1672 and 1698. The Committees of the Company of Merchants did not seem to have offered any real control over the African trade till the Company's dissolution in 1821. They exercised no tangible or visible power over the separate traders. Their activities were closely watched by the separate traders from Bristol and Liverpool and any action which smacked of monopoly on the Committees' part was reported to Parliament. The Committee-men therefore had to confine their own commercial interests within the limits of the Act of 1750. One fact however, was certain. Parliament had an effective control over the Company. "In their control of the Company's income, Parliament had an admirable means of impressing their wishes on the Committee, as it was possible to make any grant subject to what provisions the House chose".¹ How that opportunity was used remains to be seen; but before the relations between the Commons and the Committee of the Company can be discussed, it seems appropriate to examine at this point how the spoils of the Royal African

1 Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Company were divided among its creditors by Parliament.

CHAPTER IV

SETTLING THE CLAIMS OF THE CREDITORS

The machinery of administration devised for the Company of Merchants trading to Africa could only become a reality when that Company assumed full power over the forts. As has been shown in the previous chapter, that assumption of full responsibility was not realized till the Royal African Company had been finally dissolved. One of the major problems which necessitated a delay in the immediate dissolution of the old Company was that as the claims of the creditors of the Royal African Company still remained to be examined, it was not possible to divest the Company at once of its charter and property in Africa. In the Act of 1750, provision was made for the appointment of commissioners to examine the claims of the creditors. The thirty-second clause of the Act stated that "all and every the Creditors of the [Royal African] Company are hereby required on or before the respective Days and Times hereafter limited and appointed for that Purpose, to deliver or cause to be delivered in Writing under their respective Hands, or the Hands of Persons by them respectively authorized unto such Officer or Officers, and such Place within the City of London, as the (...) Commissioners or any two of them shall appoint".¹ The creditors were required to send in just and true accounts of their respective claims together with valid copies

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 272.

of the securities under which the sums were claimable. In England, and Ireland, the creditors were to make their claims on or before 30 August, 1750; for creditors on the African coast or elsewhere in the West Indies and America, their time was extended to the end of December, 1750. The examination of these claims proved long and complicated; the Commissioners could not accomplish their investigations within the time specified in the Act of 1750 and Parliament found it necessary to pass another act extending the time allowed to the examination of the claims.¹ It was not till 1751 that the Commissioners were able to present their findings to the House of Commons.

To prevent the Royal African Company from evading its creditors while the claims were under review, Parliament enacted in the Act of 1750, "That the said Royal African Company, their Directors, Officers and Servants, and every of them, shall, for Space of One Year, (...) be, and they are hereby restrained and disabled from assigning, transferring or disposing of all or any their Military Stores, Ammunition, Slaves, Canoes, Vessels and Things necessary for the Use or Defence of their Forts and Settlements".² On the other hand, Parliament was not unmindful of protecting the Company from malicious law suits. That same clause of the Act also declared that "all Actions, Suits and Process, depending,

1 24 Geo. II, Cap. 49, 1751.

2 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 273.

or which shall be hereafter commenced or prosecuted by any Person or Persons for Recovery of any Debt or Sum of Money due, or pretended to be due, from the said Company, or from any Person or Persons, for or in respect of any debt or debts contracted for or on Behalf of the said Company, shall be, and the same are hereby stayed for the Space of one Year".¹ The directors and agents of the Company were however, strictly required to go before the Commissioners to explain certain accounts on any request from the Commission.

Not unnaturally, creditors of the Company were quick to assert their claims before the Commons. Petitions were sent to the House of Commons reminding the House to do all in its power to assist the creditors to recover their investments.² On April 16th, 1751, for instance, Claude Aubert, an agent for two merchants, John and Anthony Allut, presented a petition to the Commons in which he stated that the Royal African Company owed £2,986-8-9d to John and Anthony Allut "by virtue of a Promisory Note, bearing Date the Second of July 1737, from Messieurs Jeremiah Tinker and John Cope, then Two of the said Company's Chief Agents or Governors at Cape Coast Castle in Africa, to John Peter Gonso-
lin, of Marseilles".³ The Alluts, being overseas, could not present their

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 273.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 96.

3 ibid., p. 171.

case in person to the Commissioners examining the claims of the creditors. Claude Aubert was therefore instructed to forward on their behalf their claims to the House of Commons. On April 22nd, a similar petition from Jonathan Bracebridge on behalf of Henry Turner, a former Governor of the fort at Whydah, was read in the House for claims up to £415 in respect of salaries due to Turner.¹ Two days later, another petition from Alexander Grant and Richard Oswald, two London merchants, was also read in the House of Commons. The petition set out that the two men had bought Bance Island, on the Sierra Leone River, from the Royal African Company and had maintained a fort on it at their own expense since 1748;² that by the act constituting the new Company, all the forts of the former Company were to be handed over to the Committee of the Company of Merchants. The petitioners declared they would be deprived automatically of their fort on the island and asked Parliament to consider their case, examine their claim, and exclude Bance Island from the control of the Company of Merchants. The stories contained in all these petitions were not very exact but they were all referred to a select committee appointed to examine the report of the Commissioners presented to the House of Commons in March 1751. On 21 May, the Select

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 188.

2 ibid., pp. 193-94. Bance Island was originally called Bence Island. After Grant and Oswald bought it, it was for a time called George Island. Bance Island however, persisted and has corrupted into Bunce Island, the present name. See Christopher Fyfe's A History of Sierra Leone, p. 7.

Committee presented to the House a comprehensive review of all claims due to the creditors from the Royal African Company.

In this report, certain persons, taking advantage of the parlous state of the Company, endeavoured to discredit it before the Select Committee. In a report sent back to the Secretary to the Admiralty, Captain Thomas Pye had charged that on bona fide evidence, he had heard "a Gentleman, late one of the Chief Agents at Cape Coast Castle, and esteemed a Man of Veracity, say, That he [could] prove the African Company to be Debtor to the Forts and Settlements near Foursoore thousand Pounds, out of the Monies granted at different times by Parliament for the Maintenance and Support of the said Forts and Settlements".¹ The Select Committee could not let this indictment of the Company pass unnoticed. Captain Pye was called before the Committee and examined on the truth of the accusation. He told the Committee that he had obtained his information from Thomas Chalmer, a former agent of the Royal African Company. On further cross-examination, Chalmer produced a copy of an account book which he claimed to be one of the Company's ledger books; he had based his information to Captain Pye on this account book. Chalmer's copy was dated 1 January, 1736 to 31 December, 1748. The Committee however, found that during the period 1736 to 1748, Whydah was administered separately from Cape Coast Castle. Chalmer knew nothing about

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 245.

the supplies sent out to the fort at Whydah and nothing about what was sent to the Gambia. He could not therefore have had an accurate knowledge of what the Company did not send out to the forts. For this reason, the Committee declared Chalmer's evidence insufficient on which to base an accusation of misappropriation of funds against the Royal African Company. The charge was dismissed.

The Commissioners' report to the House of Commons had also censured the conduct of Charles Hayes, the Deputy-Governor of the Royal African Company. The Commission alleged that Hayes had been guilty of some irregularities in transferring stocks to individual buyers. Two particular instances were cited.

In the first case, Hayes was accused of having had an "interest or concern" in the transfer of stocks in which Henry Parsons, a creditor of the Royal African Company, was involved. About March, 1729, the directors of the Company sold and transferred to Henry Parsons £64,739-11-4 worth of stocks at 40%. The terms of the transaction were that if Parsons failed to fulfil his part of the bargain, the stocks and the money together with the interest were to revert to the Company. Parsons never paid for the stocks and died, owing the Company £800 on an account of £2,000. On 27 November, 1740, John Tysoe, one of Parson's trustees, retransferred to the Company £2,000. This was the £2,000 with a dividend of £200, the two sums being a part of the £64,739-11-4 of stocks transferred to Parsons. Hayes was later censured by the Commissioners examining the claims of the creditors as having manipulated stocks indirectly

for his own business interests.¹

The other instance was that in October 1729, the Court of Assistants of the Company directed Hayes, Sir Bibye Lake and the same Henry Parsons, all three men acting as the trustees, to transfer to Francis Lynn £10,000 worth of trust stock. At the time that the transfer was made, the Company was then in financial difficulties and had in fact applied to Parliament for assistance. The profits to be obtained from the transaction were to be employed in defraying all expenses incurred by the Company on the application for an allowance from Parliament. On this occasion formalities were dispensed with and the Court of Assistants authorized Hayes to transfer the stock without accounting for it or the profits obtained from it. The stock was therefore given to Francis Lynn without a formal account entered to that effect in the Company's ledger books. As the Company was satisfied with his proceedings, Hayes did not think it necessary to keep an account of the sale for a later reference but he remembered that £5,000 was left to the disposal of Henry Parsons, the other £5,000 in his hands.² The Commissioners investigating the claims charged that Hayes, Parsons, Sir Bibye Lake and Francis Lynn had misappropriated the £10,000.

The Commissioners had found it strange that the Company did not approach the executor of Parson's will for the payment of his debt. When examined on this point by the Select Committee, Hayes explained that he

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, pp. 245, 259.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, pp. 245-246.

frequently asked Parsons while he was still alive, to pay and take his stock. Parsons had always answered that he had lost £10,000 by the transaction; he was therefore unable to pay the Company immediately but that he would remit the money as soon as he could do so. As Parson's services to the Company had been considerable, Hayes thought it would be unjust to prosecute him for not paying his debt. At his death, Parson's estate was mortgaged; his stock pawned for money he had borrowed on it. Reports reached Hayes too that the city of London demanded large sums from Parsons for arrears of rent due to the city from the city's markets. Evidently, Parsons had died so greatly in debt that it would have been in vain to approach the executor of his will for the payment of his debt to the Company. The result was that the stock together with the dividend upon it was retransferred to the Company.

After the Select Committee had heard Hayes's explanations, they agreed that "the £5,000 Trust Stock, so transferred to him, was by him disbursed or applied for the service of the Company".¹ The Committee also declared that Hayes had had no "interest" or benefited from the stock transferred to Parsons and that as Parsons had died indebted to the Company, Hayes had acted right in transferring the stock back to the Company.

With regard to the petition of John and Anthony Allut, the Committee examined the Royal African Company's ledger books and found that £3,589-17-11d was due to John Peter Gonsolin from the Company; that

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 245.

£603-9-2d, a part of the above sum, had been paid out to Gonsolin by the Royal African Company, reducing the amount to £2,986-8-9d, the sum mentioned in the petition. On further inquiry however, the Committee learnt too that there had been more deductions from this sum for the value of goods sold to the agents of the two creditors abroad. Slaves were given in exchange for these goods but the number and prices of these slaves were not indicated in the report. The Committee at any rate stated that "the Prices put upon the said Goods, and Slaves [had been] much beyond their current Value".¹ The deductions for these transactions reduced the sum to £1,119-18-3d. Claude Aubert informed the Committee when these further deductions were revealed that he had not been made aware of them but later produced a letter confirming the deductions. The Committee then recommended that no more than £1,119-18-3d should be given to John and Anthony Allut.² Other claims however, did not fare so well.

Jonathan Bracebridge, an executor of the will of Henry Turner, a late Governor of Williams Fort at Whydah, had asked for a sum of £415 alleged to be due to Turner. He had had Turner's will for about a month before the Commissioners closed their investigations. Bracebridge did not present his claims before the Commissioners as he was required to do

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 246.

2 ibid., p. 246.

by the Act of 1750. No reasons for the omission were given neither to the Commission nor to the Select Committee. To his further disadvantage, the Committee found on examining the Company's ledger books that no accounts had been received from Whydah since 1745. Turner's claims with the Company could not have been made up between 1745 and 1750 from the Company's accounts.

In view of the doubtful and questionable nature of the claim, the Committee called upon James Craick, a former principal agent at Cape Coast Castle, to appear before it for interrogation. During his examination, Craick testified that no accounts of expenditure of some goods of the Company had been found since Turner's death. It was therefore almost impossible to determine whether Turner was indebted to the Company or whether it was the Company that owed Turner some money. Since the truth of Jonathan Bracebridge's claim could not be exactly established, it was rejected.

Several other creditors asserted their claims under a sum which amounted to £4,029-3-10d. The Royal African Company had allowed interest on this sum to its creditors but the amount was later turned into principal on bonds and securities. The details of the transaction were not inserted in the report handed over to the Committee but the Committee heard the plea of the creditors not only in regard to this sum but also to their claims of interest in general on all sums lent to the Company. The creditors based their claims on these reasons: that Parliament's grants to the Royal African Company for the upkeep of the forts had induced them to trust and invest in the Company; that by these

investments, they had the same legal right to interest as the Company; and that the forts were worth considerably more than their interest and principal amounted to. The creditors stated furthermore, that they ought to be paid their interest before the proprietors of the Company could have any part of the compensation intended to be given to the Royal African Company as a preliminary to its dissolution.¹ It must be admitted that the reasons on which the creditors based their claims were very lame if not flimsy and unacceptable.

The Committee told the creditors that they - that is the creditors - had never taken any interest on the sums granted by Parliament to the Company; that the value of their securities and their legal right to interest were not to be considered together but separately. In any case, neither the Act for extending and improving the trade to Africa nor that allowing further time to the Commissioners appointed to examine the claims of the creditors directed the Commissioners to determine claims on interest. It seemed therefore that Parliament did not intend that claims on interest should be allowed to the creditors. Although the Committee did not dismiss the possibility of claims on interest, it did not confirm that possibility either. As nothing had been said by Parliament on such claims, the Committee did not attempt to decide between the creditors and the Company. It however, ordered interest rates to be computed on all claims arising under the £4,029-3-10d in case the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, pp. 246-247.

House of Commons should decide to take the matter into consideration.¹

A sum of £37,559-3-3¹/₄d had been considered of a dubious nature by the Commissioners. Some of the claimants under this sum, like William Newland, the Solicitor of the Royal African Company, had later written to the Commissioners withdrawing their claims. Since no real valid reasons were given for the withdrawals, the Commissioners recommended that the whole amount should be disallowed. Not willing to simply waive the sum aside, the Committee asked James Postlethwayt, the Accountant to the Commission and a brother of Malachy Postlethwayt, the skillful pamphleteer on the African trade, if he had any objections to the Commissioners recommendation. Postlethwayt said he had no objections and the sum was thrown out.²

The Company's officers and agents in Africa claimed a sum of £7,381-15-5d for salaries due to them or for goods sold from their own property for the upkeep of the forts. On examining the Company's ledger books, the Committee found that that amount could not be exactly ascertained because no account books had been transmitted to the Company from James Fort in the Gambia since 31 December, 1741. Several agents who forwarded claims under this sum were resident in the Gambia for a considerable number of years. Thomas Boteler, William Husbands and Richard Stockwell, all three being former agents of the Company, demanded payment

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 247.

2 ibid., p. 247.

of their salaries out of that sum. The Committee saw that the three men took to their own account goods belonging to the Company to the value of £1,096-17-9d and gave the Company credit for the sum. But by their contract with the Company, they were prohibited from appropriating any part of the Company goods on their own account. They were also restrained from trading with any goods not carried out to Africa by themselves or sent out to them. Since their account with the Company was still open according to the Company's books and no particulars sent over as yet from the West African coast nor any oaths taken as to the truth of the claims, the Committee set aside their claims for future consideration.¹

One of the Company's agents whose case drew much attention in both Houses was David Crichton. Crichton had been a principal agent at Cape Coast Castle. At the time that the Royal African Company was in fiscal difficulties, Crichton together with another agent, William Stead, had contracted a debt of about £1,000 to maintain the forts in West Africa. When both agents returned to England Crichton was unable to pay his share of the debt. The result was that he was brought before a London magistrate by William Stead, tried and committed to prison. While in prison, Crichton petitioned Parliament for relief when the bill for extending and improving the trade to Africa was going through both Houses in 1750. When the bill was sent to the Lords, that House

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 247.

inserted an amendment that Crichton be released from prison. The amendment was accepted by the Commons and Crichton was let out of prison when the bill became law. He was however, forbidden to leave England within the space of one year.¹ This provision was added so that Crichton would be on hand for further cross-examination for charges that William Stead might bring up against him. His relief featured in the act appointing the Commissioners to examine the claims of the creditors as well as that which finally divested the Royal African Company of its trading assets. During the time the Commissioners were examining the claims, Crichton again petitioned the House for an extension of the period allowed him to remain out of prison as he was normally given a term of one year during which he could not be recommitted to prison without Parliament's consent. His petition was referred to the Select Committee which after considering it, recommended his discharge to the House. At the final settlement of the Company's debts, William Stead was given a sum of £179-0-6d and Crichton ordered freed from any more law suits.²

Other sums owed by the Company to certain creditors were allowed to stand as valid. One of such sums was an amount of £40,785-13-6³/₄d due from the Company on bonds and securities with interest to a number

1 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, pp. 272-73.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 247.

of its creditors.¹ This sum had been paid to the Company partly in hard cash and partly in merchandises, or money deposited with the Company. Part of this money had also been issued by the creditors to pay the Royal African Company's agents and officers abroad. The Committee here again consulted James Postlethwayt regarding the truth of the sum. Postlethwayt told the Committee that it did appear from the account books of the creditors that they had indeed lent or sold goods to the Company amounting to the above sum. He saw no reason why this sum should not be regarded as a genuine claim on the part of the creditors. The Committee concurred with his views and the sum was duly accredited to the debts of the Royal African Company. For similar reasons, other sums up to £9,461-1-2½d, £8,391-15-5d and £8,788-9-8d were accepted as genuine claims by the Committee.²

Not all the claims had something to do with money and a singular case was that of Alexander Grant and Richard Oswald which involved a fort on Bance Island in the Gambia. As stated in their petition to Parliament,³ Grant, Oswald and John Sargent, acting as a firm, had bought this fort from the Royal African Company but what was said in the petition did not appear very consistent with the Committee's

1 For a list of the names of the creditors and sums claimed, see Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, pp. 250-257.

2 ibid., p. 246.

3 See infra, p. 94.

findings. The Committee had examined Richard Spence, the Secretary to the Royal African Company, regarding the circumstances surrounding the sale of this fort by the Company to Grant and Oswald. Spence told the Committee that Bance Island and its fort formerly belonged to the Company but that in 1728, Walter Charles, the Governor of the fort, had arbitrarily ill-treated the Africans who rose up against him, captured the fort and turned him out of the island. The Royal African Company made no attempt to regain the fort for the natives had blown up the magazines and burnt down the houses to ensure that the Company's officers did not return to the island.

In 1744, Captain John Boyce bought the fort for another merchant, George Fryer. Boyce testified before the Select Committee that he paid one hundred pounds to the native chief for the fort. The sum was paid not at once but by instalment with goods and 120 iron bars valued at five shillings a bar and that it took him five years to pay off the whole amount. Boyce declared too that he repaired the fort, rebuilt the magazines, the ramparts and mounted twenty-two guns, ten of which were nine-pounders, the whole work costing him £1,190.¹

At the time that Boyce bought the fort, he omitted to inform the Royal African Company about it. He knew that the fort had been the property of the Company yet he did not attempt to obtain the Company's consent before he purchased it. As he explained to the Committee, he

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 247.

did not think the Company would reoccupy the island. When he first applied to the chief to repurchase the fort, he was refused but later permitted to buy it on a second application. The Committee questioned him as to how he acquired the guns. Boyce replied that the guns belonged to the Royal African Company but that he had found them "in the rubbish". After buying the fort, Boyce did not even inform the Company about the guns as it did not endeavour to reclaim them.¹

Meanwhile, Fryer had found the fort too expensive to maintain; he therefore resold the fort and the island to Richard Oswald. Receipts and other files were produced showing that Oswald was in partnership with Alexander Grant and John Sargent. In September 1748, Fryer sold all his goods, slaves, sloops and boats to Oswald.² In the way the story turned out, Grant and Oswald had bought the fort not from the Royal African Company as they asserted in their petition but directly from George Fryer.

When the Act of 1750 partially liquidated the Royal African Company and created the new Company of Merchants trading to Africa, Richard Spence notified Oswald that Bance Island would be included in the territory and possessions to be surrendered to the new Company. On the other hand, Charles Hayes, the former Deputy-Governor of the Royal

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 247.

2 ibid., p. 248.

African Company, told the Committee he believed the Company never really wanted to reoccupy the fort because it could not maintain it. The Committee of the Company of Merchants at any rate expressed its determination to take over the fort and the island from Grant and Oswald.¹

On 22 and 23 May, 1751, the Commons took into consideration in a committee of the whole House the various recommendations tendered by the Select Committee; no definite decisions were reached in these sittings but on 24 May the House passed resolutions which finally settled the claims of the creditors. A sum of £77,894-15-9d was granted as "a reasonable Compensation, to be applied to the Payment of such of the Creditors of the Royal African Company of England".² John and Anthony Allut received £1,119-18-3d while £23,688-15-5d and £2, 105-12-3d were allotted to creditors who owned African transferable stock as from 31 December, 1748 at ten per cent and from the same date at five per cent respectively. Remuneration was also given to the Commissioners who examined the claims as well as their secretary and accountant. All valid claims were satisfied.³ A bill was then ordered to be brought in to give a legal effect to all compensations granted; the members appointed

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 248.

2 ibid., p. 269.

3 ibid., p. 270. See also the same volume, pp. 250-260 for all other claims.

to bring in the bill were further instructed to insert "a Clause or Clauses for saving the Right of Alexander Grant, and Richard Oswald, and Company, of London, Merchants, to a certain Fort situate in Bance Island, in the River Sierra Leone, on the Coast of Africa, formerly belonging to the Royal African Company of England, and now claimed by, and in the Possession of, the said Alexander Grant, and Richard Oswald, and Company".¹ At the passing of the bill which divested the Royal African Company of its charter, forts and property in 1752, Grant and Oswald were confirmed in their possession of Bance Island.²

On the whole, it can be said that the House of Commons had acted fairly and generously towards the creditors. The investigations into those claims had lasted longer than was expected; the time allowed for that investigation had been extended by an act of Parliament. Every creditor of the Royal African Company had therefore been given an ample opportunity to present his claims to Parliament. Although some claims such as those of the Company's agents had been postponed and settled in 1752, all rightful claims received due satisfaction. In satisfying the creditors, the Commons finally washed off their hands in the affairs of the Royal African Company. Their attention now turned towards the conduct of the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa.

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVI, p. 270.

2 Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 444.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE
ADMINISTRATION OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE
COMPANY OF MERCHANTS TRADING TO AFRICA,
1753-65

The relations between the House of Commons and the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa throughout the first part of the Company's existence, were not those of over-bearing criticisms. The Commons took a considerable interest in the management of the Company. Through the Act of 1750, the Company was made responsible for British interests on the West African coast; it was the only representative of British authority on that coast. Yet when the Government wished to negotiate treaties with the African chiefs, the Captains of His Majesty's ships, and not the resident Governors of the Company, were usually given the honour of representing the Crown.

In January 1752, reports reached London that the French were attempting to build a fort at Anomabu. In February, Commodore Matthew Buckle, Commander of the Assistance, was sent out by the Admiralty to ascertain the truth of the French activities at Anomabu. On his arrival there with his small squadron of three warships and another sloop of war, the Badger, Buckle found three French men-of-war at Anomabu. The French were about to build a fort in order to make a settlement. Buckle ordered them to desist; he informed the French that if his orders were not complied with, he would be obliged to compel them by force to abandon their enterprise and accordingly made preparations for an engagement. The French Commander, after some consideration, submitted and

left the coast. Buckle then completed negotiations with the chiefs at Anomabu and a treaty was signed by which the chiefs promised not to allow the French to build a fort at Anomabu.¹ Again in March 1753, another treaty was concluded between England and the Fantis aimed at preventing the French from procuring any settlement on the Gold Coast. Thomas Melvil, the Company's first Governor to Cape Coast, claimed the credit for the negotiations in his letter to the Committee but Captain George Cockburn of the warship Glory provided the necessary dignity of solemnly assuring the Fantis of British protection.² This practice of by-passing the Company in similar negotiations meant that Parliament intended to take the initiative in political decisions affecting the relations between the Company and the African chiefs.

Consideration of the Committee's annual petitions to the House of Commons for the Company's allowance provided critics in and outside Parliament ready opportunities of expressing their criticisms on the management of the Company. These opportunities were frequently used and the readiness of the Commons to discuss the management of the Company's affairs by the Committee of nine was shown five years after the

1 Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. XXIII, (Dec., 1753), p. 588.
Also in Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 491-492.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 615, Appendix No. 1.
The Fantis occupied the region around Cape Coast.

Company had been incorporated.

Parliament had hoped to satisfy the slave traders - the "African Gentlemen" as they were called - by establishing the Company of Merchants as a regulated Company; but barely three years after the Company came into existence, the conduct of its Committee of nine was attacked by the separate traders from Bristol and Liverpool.

In April 1753, a section of the Bristol separate traders, headed by William Wansey and Thomas Harris, complained to the Committee of the Company of Merchants about "the Inconvenience attending the Trade from the Liberty allowed to the Governor and other Officers upon the Gold Coast of trading in Slaves upon their own Accounts (...)"¹ To support their allegations, the two men called Captains Alexander Graham and James Hamilton to give evidence before the African Committee. James Hamilton was the chief mate of a slave ship, the Polly of Bristol. Hamilton declared to the Committee that on one of his voyages to West Africa, he had hired a factory at Lagoe² from which he could buy slaves. He further testified that Richard Brew, the Company's principal agent at Tantankweri, told him to leave the coast. On his refusal to do so, Brew threatened to raise his prices for slaves so that the natives would not sell slaves to Hamilton. When he still refused to leave, Brew

1. Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 499.

2. Lagoe is now Lagu, situated between Winneba and Tantankweri.

attempted to induce and did prevail in preventing the African middlemen from selling slaves to him; that at Winneba, Young¹, another agent of the Company, refused to give him fresh water. As a result, he, Hamilton, was forced to buy forty gallons of water for fifteen shillings. At Sekondi, John Hippisley, the principal factor there, prevented him from trading with the Africans and threatened to confiscate his goods.² Hamilton's evidence was attested to be true by Alexander Graham who added that he (Graham) had paid higher prices for slaves at Anomabu because the Company's agents had forced up prices at the neighbouring forts. Their evidence turned out to be similar to other charges previously brought up against the Committee by William Brown, the master of a slaver the Bristol.

Brown had stated to the merchants of Bristol that when he was on the African coast, Richard Brew and a certain Withers,³ an agent at Winneba, informed him that they were in partnership in the slave trade with Thomas Melvil, the Governor of Cape Coast Castle; Brown also

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- 1 Young's first name has not been identified.
 - 2 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 502-03. Hippisley was later appointed Governor of Cape Coast Castle in March, 1766. He died soon after his appointment. See W.W. Claridge, A History of the Gold Coast, Vol. II, p. 582.
 - 3 Withers' first name too has not been identified.

reported that William Dacres, the principal factor at Accra, had told him too that Melvil and Young planned to turn Dacres out of Accra for the reason that he would not enter into partnership with them. Rather than join Melvil and Young in private trade, Dacres resigned his post. Brown furthermore declared he could not purchase slaves at any lower price from the Company's servants at the forts and that the Governors and agents intimidated the African middlemen from selling slaves to the separate traders or forced them to raise their prices for slaves they wished to sell to the individual trader. Brown concluded his charges by asserting that the Company's officers used the castles and forts "as repositories for their own market slaves" and that he himself had witnessed slaves lodged in the forts for that purpose.¹

The Committee of the Company of Merchants reacted at once to these charges. In a joint conference with the representatives of the Bristol merchants, the complaints were examined after which the following instructions were drawn up and later sent out to the Governors and agents at the various forts: (1) "That for the future no joint Trade shall be carried on by the Servants of the Company residing at different Forts upon any Pretence whatever".² (2) "That no Servant of the Company do presume to send out any servant or slave up the County or Paths to

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 501-02.

2 ibid., p. 500.

intercept or prevent the Slave Trade from coming freely down to the Shipping". (3) "That none of the Warehouses, Vessels, Canoes or other Craft belonging to the Company shall be made Use of for the Lodgement or Conveyance of any Goods except such as are sent out by the Committee for the Payment of Salaries and the Support of the Forts and Settlements but in such Cases as the Act of Parliament directs". (4) "That no Servants of the Company be permitted to lodge any Slaves in any of the Castles, or to export any Slaves purchased upon their own Accounts from any Part of the Coast". (5) "That the Chief of every out Fort as well as the Governor of Cape Coast Castle be directed not only to prevent every Obstruction to the free Exercise of the Trade of Settlers in their neighbouring Towns but to encourage and protect them as much as possible"; and (6) "That the like Instructions be given them to assist to the utmost the Commanders and Captains of every British ship in the Prosecution of their Trade and in wooding and watering their Ships".¹

The Committee had gone a long way to meet the complaints and desires of the separate traders. Copies of these instructions were transmitted to both the Board of Trade and the merchant organizations of Bristol and Liverpool. In an accompanying letter to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, the Committee observed that a greater part of the complaints against the agents, Governors and officers were personal and

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 500.

not fully proved but the Committeemen indicated that they were ready to submit to the opinions of the Board if that body thought that all the complaints from the Bristol and Liverpool merchants should be met.¹

This remark from the Committee caused another protest from the merchants of Bristol and Liverpool. This time they carried their complaints directly to the Board of Trade.

In a "Memorial" presented to the Board on the basis of the alleged facts of the preceding evidence, the Bristol and Liverpool merchants charged, among other accusations, that the Committee had, contrary to the stipulations of the Act of 1750, refused to lay before the separate traders all resolutions, orders and instructions sent out to the Company's servants; that by allowing the agents and officers to participate in the slave trade, these agents had thereby instead of assisting the free trader, "entered into a joint stock copartnership, and attempted a monopoly more formidable than any could have been at home, as they were on the spot, and had the whole power".² The Commissioners for Trade accordingly heard the matters in dispute between the merchants of Bristol and Liverpool and the Committee. The Commissioners then gave their opinion that the officers and servants employed by the Committee ought not to be permitted to trade in slaves further than the amount of the salaries allowed them according to their contracts with the

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 501.

2 ibid., pp. 503-04.

Committee.

In obedience to the views of the Board, the Committee of the Company of Merchants sent out in November, 1753, additional instructions to Thomas Melvil. In these instructions the Committee censured Richard Brew's conduct on the coast. "Mr. Brew's conduct at Tantum-querry", the Committee wrote, "has been very blameable, it having been insisted upon by several Persons, that he not only bid upon the Ships and private Traders, but publicly declared that they should have no Trade there (...) a Proceeding so contrary to the Orders given to assist the Ships and private Traders, that we direct you to suspend him, and let him know that unless he can prove himself innocent of the Charge laid against him, to the entire Satisfaction of the Committee, he must not expect any future Employ in their Service".¹ Melvil was instructed to let a certain Mr. Farquhar, another factor, take over the command of the fort until Brew had cleared himself of the charges brought up against him. John Hippisley, who was reported to have threatened to whip an African interpreter for selling goods to an English captain in defiance of his orders not to do so, was warned that if another indiscretion happened again on his part, he would be dismissed from the Company's service. With regard to the other charges relating to the advantages the Company's servants were alleged to have had over the separate traders, the Committee warned every Governor, senior officers

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 506.

and factors that "the least Disobedience to these Orders¹ will be punished with immediate Dismission".² Notwithstanding these instructions which went so far as to embrace the wishes of the private traders, the merchants from Bristol and Liverpool were still disgruntled. They clamoured that the Committee paid no attention to the recommendation of the Board of Trade and that the Governors and other officers on the coast had continued to trade in slaves. Their next step was to take their complaints to the House of Commons. They did not have too long a time to wait for such an opportunity.

Owing to the determination of the French to build a fort at Anomabu in 1753, the House of Commons made a special grant of £6,000 in that year to the Company to erect a fort at Anomabu to check the French rivalry. Yet in January 1755, the Committee stated in their annual petition to the Commons that the fort at Anomabu still remained unfinished and that a further larger sum was needed for its completion.³

The Commons reacted at once by demanding that the Committee lay before them a statement of account of the expenses incurred on the fort. Since the dispute between the separate traders and the Committee regarding the irregularities and trade in slaves of the Company's servants had been brought before the Board of Trade, the matter must have attracted Parliament's attention. As a result, the Commons ordered the

1 See infra, pp. 114-15.

2 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 506.

3 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 84.

Committee to produce all the necessary papers pertaining to the allegations of the separate traders, the Committee's correspondence with Thomas Melvil and other agents, the Committeemen's instructions sent out to the Governors and agents in Africa and the recommendations given to the Committee by the Board of Trade.¹ Once again, the Commons had taken the initiative to inquire, on a suspicion of misappropriation of funds granted by Parliament, into the affairs of another African company. The debate of the Company's administration thus began in this way in the House in 1755 continued into 1756 when a select committee was appointed to review its Committee's expenditure. The separate traders took the opportunity to send petitions to the House with demands that the servants of the Company be prohibited from engaging in the slave trade and that no alterations be made in the Act of 1750 which constituted the Company of Merchants.²

The Select Committee began its hearings by summoning several persons to appear before it to give evidence. Among these witnesses were Richard Oswald and John Boyce who had both been formerly involved in the controversy over the possession of Bance Island on the Sierra Leone River, John Roberts, a former Governor of Cape Coast Castle, Arthur Hamilton, a former secretary to the Company at James Fort in the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, pp. 113-14, 128, 155, passim.

2 ibid., pp. 231, 233, 251, 267, passim.

Gambia, William Wansey and William Dacres who had resigned his post at Accra in 1753 rather than engage in the slave trade in partnership with Thomas Melvil.¹ A protracted examination of other witnesses which had begun on the floor of the House in 1755 ended inconclusively before Parliament was prorogued in April of that year. The Select Committee's report did not come before the Commons till May, 1756. Pitt, Charles Townshend, Lord Shelburn, Lord George Sackville and Horace Walpole had all sat on this Select Committee.

The report, as submitted to the House of Commons, dealt mainly with the Company's Committee's financial operations. The Committee found that in various annual accounts sent to Parliament, goods shipped to Anomabu for the construction of the fort at that place never arrived there. For instance, according to an account delivered to Parliament dated January 22nd, 1755, of expenses already incurred in building the fort at Anomabu, it was discovered that on November 8th, 1752, goods were sent out on board a ship called the New Gloucester, which amounted to £1,450-1-3d; but by the annual statement of account given to the House dated April 2nd, 1756, the Committee found that part of these goods intended for Anomabu was disposed of at Cape Coast Castle to the amount of £131-12-5d and yet this sum was still left in the account of

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, pp. 174-75, 186, 246, 268, passim.

April 2nd, 1756 as expenses incurred at Anomabu.¹ In the same statement of account of January 22nd, 1755, it was also noticed that cargo shipped on another vessel, the Robert on October 24th, 1753, amounted to £1,037-12-1d yet a portion of this cargo destined for Anomabu was made use of as follows: ordnance stores intended for Anomabu were diverted to Commenda; the ammunition valued at £427-6-3d; various goods of which the value totalled £168-4-5d were also disposed of at the other forts. Both sums together added up to £595-10-8d. This amount had been entered as expenses arising from the construction of the fort at Anomabu.²

On January 16th, 1754, the African Committee had shipped goods on one frigate, the Medway. The cargo was to be delivered at Anomabu. The cost of the goods was £639-15-11d. Part of this shipment was however, distributed to the other forts and except a sum of ten pounds paid out to Henry Olkers, the assistant engineer at Anomabu as his half a year's salary, the remaining £629-15-11d was charged to the cost of building the fort at Anomabu. On November 12th, 1754, 120,000 bricks intended for the construction of the same fort, were shipped on the Spencer. This shipment together with freight charges amounted to £516. Insurance for this ship and another frigate, the Basnet, also added up to £21-14-8d; but by the Company's account book of April 2nd, 1756, 20,000 of these bricks were used at James Fort in the Gambia. The

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 612.

2 ibid., p. 613.

charges amounted to £88-17-0d. This sum was accredited to the expenses at Anomabu.¹ The Committee found too that in the same account of April 2nd, 1756, credit was given for other sums as follows: £410-17-0d for puncheons and butts; £6-17-0d for freight and ivory; and £27-10-0d for 25,000 tiles taken out of the New Gloucester. These sums were entered as expenses on the fort at Anomabu but not found in the accounts from that fort. These apparent irregular transactions demanded explanations. They also shed a bad light on the conduct of the Company's Committee. The Select Committee therefore ordered the African Committee to explain these irregularities.

Instead of the whole African Committee appearing before the parliamentary Committee, two of the members, Vincent Biscoe and Samuel Touchet, were chosen to represent all the nine Committeemen. In answer to the first transaction, Biscoe explained that the goods had been intended for Anomabu but that by Melvil's letters, it appeared he had indeed distributed some of the goods to the other forts. Biscoe further explained that goods sent out to Africa were normally charged according to the accounts delivered to Parliament but that these supplies were disposed of by the Governor at Cape Coast in respect to the needs of the various forts. Thus, when the reports came in from Cape Coast, it often appeared that any supplies sent out for one fort might be used for

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

another. The accounts were then entered according to the particular service for which they were used and not to where the supplies were first supposed to be sent. At other times, the annual statements of account presented to Parliament were compiled before the Committeemen were made aware of the changes.¹

In regard to the Robert incident, Biscoe explained that the guns had been diverted to Commenda because there was no room for them at Anomabu due to the fact that the fort had not yet been completed. Another reason was that guns were needed at Commenda to defend a landing place which was then disputed between the English and the Dutch. These were probably satisfactory explanations but the Select Committee remained sceptical. When the Committee insisted that the Committeemen must have had reports of the changes in their instructions before sending their final accounts to Parliament in view of letters received in London on the 9th and 10th of July, 1754, from the Captain of the Robert, Biscoe gave a lame excuse that Melvil did not usually send home his accounts through merchant ships but generally waited till a warship arrived on the coast; all accounts and correspondence would then be despatched on these warships. In support of Biscoe's statements, Samuel Touchet told the Committee that Melvil's account did not reach England till the arrival of one warship, the Gosport, in October 1755. The Committeemen,

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

according to him, could not therefore have known how the Robert's cargo had been distributed contrary to their instructions.¹

It would be interesting to trace the movements of the Gosport to prove Touchet's assertions either true or false. Unfortunately this cannot be done in this study as the papers of the Admiralty are not available for incorporation in the present research. On October 30th, 1754, the Gosport was reported to have sailed for Cape Coast Castle to cruise the West African coast.² If this warship did not return to England via the West Indies but directly from West Africa, it is unlikely that the Captain of this ship spent a year on the African coast unless compelling circumstances forced him to remain in Africa for that length of time; warships sent to West Africa normally stayed there for one or two months and in some cases only a few weeks.³ As regards the Medway's cargo, Biscoe admitted that the Clerk to the African Committee had made an error in ascribing the sum of £629-15-11d to the expenses incurred at Anomabu. He declared that the Medway had been sent out to Cape Coast and not to Anomabu and that the above sum was not in the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

2 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, p. 509.

3 This calculation is based on a report of a number of warships which visited the West African coast between 1753 and 1765. On most of these visits, the Captains spent a maximum of two to three months on the African coast. See Commons Journals, Vol. XXIX, pp. 938-39.

original invoice of supplies sent out to Anomabu.¹

According to Biscoe, one method of compiling or verifying the Company's expenditure was to compare the accounts which came in from Africa with the invoices to see if these agreed but not the titles of the different disbursements. Biscoe wished to prove that the sort of goods entered in the invoice for the Medway indicated that these goods were indeed meant to be sent to Cape Coast. But in the account delivered in to Parliament dated January 22nd, 1755, the Medway's cargo still stood charged to the expenses of erecting the fort at Anomabu. A letter from John Apperley, the Company's engineer at Anomabu, expressed his disappointment at the landing of this ship's cargo at Cape Coast. The letter arrived in Dover on October 8th, 1754 and did in fact reach the Company's committee before the annual accounts were sent to Parliament in 1755 and 1756. This indicated that the Medway's cargo was indeed intended to be sent to Anomabu and not to Cape Coast. Caught in their own dubious explanations, Touchet said that the account of January 22nd, 1755 had been extracted from the Company's general annual account and not from the "Invoice Book, which was the Cause of that Mistake not being discovered before that Account was delivered in" to Parliament.² He acknowledged the receipt of Apperley's letter which confirmed the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

landing of the Medway's cargo at Cape Coast but said that Melvil had not sent any particular details as to how the goods had been disposed of.¹ Touchet did state that no steps were taken by the Committee to correct the error in the accounts presented to Parliament in 1755 and 1756.

By the general account of April 2nd, 1756, it appeared that the Committee of the Company of Merchants had received on August 28th, 1755, from a certain A. Leslie £48-16-0d for sixty-one puncheons and from Melvil, £23-5-0d for thirty-one puncheons sent out in the Basnet. It was however, noticed by the Select Committee that six ships, the New Gloucester, the New Parham, the Terrible, the Earl of Halifax, the Albinia and the Dolphin had all been sent out to Africa about the same time. In the annual account of November 29th, 1754, credit was given for the puncheons shipped in the Albinia and the New Gloucester but not for other puncheons sent out in the Terrible and the Earl of Halifax. The Select Committee demanded some explanations for this omission.²

Touchet explained vaguely that the Committee of the Company of Merchants always accounted for public sums as they were received; that the reason why accounts were not given to Parliament in 1755 for a sum of £615 for 220 puncheons sent out in the Terrible and the Earl of Halifax was that the African Committee had not received the parliamentary

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 613.

2 ibid., p. 614.

grant as yet when the annual account to be presented to the House was made up in July 1754 and that he (Touchet) had not known the number of puncheons taken out by the Captains of these ships till November 1754, when the Committee received the Captains' reports from Jamaica. The Select Committee also found that deductions were usually made on accounts of goods sent out to Anomabu for which no separate vouchers were kept. From the sums of the cargo on the Robert for example, £9-11-0d was deducted for the cost of staves, rammers and ladders sent to Commenda; £17-12-6d for "Five pair of Filtering stones" and £60-10-9d deducted for canoe staples. Questioned about these deductions, Touchet simply said that the first sum had been included in the account presented to Parliament. As regards the other amounts, he merely indicated what the articles were intended for but did not state how the money deducted had been accounted.¹

The treaty which Melvil and Captain Cockburn had concluded with the Fantis had cost the Company £2,801-7-11d. The parliamentary Committee wondered how such a large sum could be spent on gifts alone to the Fanti chiefs to induce them to sign the treaty. Touchet explained that presents to the Fanti chiefs had cost Melvil one thousand pounds and that the remaining part of the sum had been spent on procuring gifts for the people of Anomabu in order to pacify them as they continually obstructed the progress of the construction of the fort. He did not however,

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 614.

state what these gifts were or how much each gift cost. Similar reasons were given for other accounts cited earlier.¹

The explanations given by Biscoe and Touchet of the African Committee's financial transactions were so vague and involved that the Select Committee reported sceptically to the House of Commons: "Upon the Whole, your Committee observe, That the Method pursued by the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, in making up their Accounts is as follows: When they send out Stores for the Use of the several Forts on the Coast of Africa, they charge them, in their Accounts, to the Place for which they are particularly designed; but as Mr. Melvil, the Governor of Cape Coast Castle, has the Power to alter the Destination of the Stores as he sees best for the public Service, it is impossible for the Committee to make an exact Charge of what Stores have been applied to any particular Fort, until the Accounts of the Disposition of the Stores are sent from Mr. Melvil to the Committee".² If this opinion did not openly condemn the African Committee it at least left room for a further inquiry and a possible censure of the Committee's administration of the Company's affairs.

The Committeemen's behavior at other times threw suspicion on their conduct of the Company's finances. On July 12th, 1755 for instance, Samuel Poirier, the Secretary to the African Committee, informed the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, pp. 614-15.

2 ibid., p. 615.

Cursitor Baron¹ of the Exchequer, that the Committee was ready to pass on the annual account to Parliament. He asked the Cursitor Baron to appoint the day when the Committee would tender its accounts to the House.

The Cursitor Baron appointed July 25th as the day on which the members of the Committee were to appear before him to take an oath on the truth of their respective accounts. On that day only five members of the Committee attended him. They signed the annual account to be presented to the Commons. As there was no prescribed oath in the Act of 1750 which the Cursitor Baron could administer to the Committee, he devised his own² and made them swear upon it that the account they had presented was in all respects true. He then requested that the remaining four members be informed to come to swear in on the statement of account. The five members replied that this procedure was neither necessary nor right. The Cursitor Baron did not heed their protests but ordered the Committeemen to produce their minute books, bills of sale and lading, invoices or any papers which related to the annual statement of account. The five members declared that they would consider the matter in their next committee meeting.

1 He was the official appointed by the Act of 1750 to audit the Company's accounts before they were sent to Parliament.

2 See Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 616 for his actual wording of the oath.

On the day of the next meeting, the other four members of the Committee attended the Cursitor Baron. When he asked them to swear in on the annual account, they objected violently and declared that the Committee had never before taken an oath on the accounts sent to Parliament. The Cursitor Baron replied that the clause in the Act of 1750 relating to his role in the affairs of the Company required that the whole Committee should take an oath and not a section only as one member could not swear in on behalf of another that the other member's accounts relating to the parliamentary grants were correct. He read the clause to them after which the four Committeemen then took the oath and signed the account. They went away without mentioning the books and papers the Cursitor Baron had asked for.

After the four Committeemen had gone, Samuel Poirier told the Cursitor Baron that he had been ordered by the Committee not to produce the bills, invoices and other papers concerning the Committee's financial operations; that all that the Cursitor Baron could do was to examine these papers and vouchers with the annual account along with the secretary.

It will easily be noticed that these vouchers would be so numerous that the Cursitor Baron could not just glance over them in a cursory manner. As the Auditor of the Company's accounts it was necessary that he should have full knowledge of the Committee's transactions as presented in the annual account. He risked parliamentary censure if he endorsed irregularities in the Committee's accounts.

One wonders why the Committeemen were unwilling to trust the Cursitor Baron with their account books in so far as these related to parliamentary grants. He was required by the Act of 1750 to present to Parliament a separate report of the Company's accounts. He needed therefore experts in accounting to advise and assist him in examining the Committee's finances and in drawing up his own report to the Commons. When the Cursitor Baron told the Committeemen he intended to call in such experts to examine the accounts given to him, he was bluntly informed that "the Committee would not suffer any Person to inspect their Books and Papers, but the Cursitor Baron only".¹ A few weeks of deadlock between the Cursitor Baron and the Committee followed during which he declined to examine the annual account unless the books and papers he demanded were produced while the Committeemen utterly refused to comply with his orders. As the day on which the Committeemen were to forward their financial statement to the Commons drew closer, the Cursitor Baron gave in to the Committee and did all he could to examine the account together with the Committee's secretary.²

When the Select Committee questioned Vincent Biscoe and Samuel Touchet as to the reason why the Committeemen refused to leave their original accounts with the Cursitor Baron, Biscoe answered lamely that he thought it was "very unusual to part with Vouchers of the Disposition

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 616.

2 ibid., pp. 615-617 for the whole incident.

of public Money" and that the Cursitor Baron had offered no guarantee to return the account books and papers to the Committee.¹ From the Cursitor Baron's own report however, it is evident that he wished merely to examine the Committee's original accounts and not to retain these vouchers.

Clearly, the evidence presented to the Commons by the Select Committee was a cautiously condemnatory report of the financial transactions of the Company's Committee. The House reacted to the Committee's findings by sending out investigators from the Ordnance Board to examine the condition of all the forts and particularly the progress of the work done on the fort at Anomabu. In the subsequent report submitted to Parliament, these investigators condemned the state of the forts in general. This led to another extensive inquiry into the Committee's expenditure in 1758. Evidence was received from the Admiralty, the Ordnance Board and the Board of Trade. Several witnesses were also examined at the bar of the House.² The conclusion drawn from this inquiry reversed the implied condemnation of the Company in 1756 and the investigation ended in a triumphant verdict for the Committee. On June 9th, 1758, the Commons declared "that it appears to this House, that the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, have

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVII, p. 615.

2 ibid., Vol. XXVIII, pp. 69-70, 99-101, 179-80, 283, passim.

faithfully discharged the Trust reposed in them".¹ Was this verdict due to the fact that the Commons had become wearied of African affairs or did the House of Commons simply wish to terminate these investigations in order to give more attention to the Seven Years War which was now reaching its peak? No clear-out answers can be given to these questions. In any case, Parliament could not shelve African affairs for in 1758 England had captured the French forts in the Senegal and Goree and had thereby greatly increased her West African interests.

The course of the Seven Years War on the West African coast cannot concern us here, nor the details of the British conquests; that story has been partially told elsewhere.² Although great enthusiasm was manifested in England on the capture of the more important fortress of Louisbourg, Parliament showed some pride in the reduction of these French West African forts and in their replies to the speech from the throne in November 1758, both Lords and Commons congratulated the King on the capture of these forts. Evidently, the House regarded the capitulation of Senegal and Goree as another success of the British arms against the French but what is perhaps significant in relation to this study is that Senegal and Goree attracted the attention of Parliament

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXVIII, p. 289. See also pp. 273-89 for the whole report; and Almon, Debates, Vol. XIX, pp. 219-220.

2 Short accounts of the war are given in E. Martin, op. cit., pp. 57-59; K. Hotblack, Chatham's Colonial Policy, chap. III. B. Williams, The Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham. Vol. I, pp. 300-362, Vol. II, chaps. XVII and XVIII.

because of the gum and the slave trade in these regions.¹ A struggle for power in the Senegal and Goree existed between England and France not so much for the territory but for gum as a valuable object of trade. During the preliminary peace negotiations in 1761, Pitt resolutely opposed the return of either Senegal or Goree to France. The Duke of Choiseul on the other hand was determined not to surrender completely French interests in West Africa. This fact was born out in their correspondence prior to Pitt's resignation in 1762.²

By article seven of the French peace proposals, Choiseul declared that France offered to retain either Senegal or Goree to enable her to obtain slaves for her West Indian islands.³ Pitt replied that "Senegal, with all its rights and dependencies upon the river which bears its name, shall be ceded to Great Britain in the most full and ample

1 Gum is a viscid sap that exudes from the cracks of a certain kind of trees and shrubs; it hardens in drying but is soluble in water. In the Senegal as well as in Northern Ghana, the sap gathers in large lumps on the trees and can thus be easily picked. In the eighteenth century, gum was a valuable article used in the manufacture of linens.

2 See Parl. Hist., Vol. XV, pp. 1018-1072 for their correspondence. See also pp. 931-934 for the replies of the Lords and Commons to the speech from the throne.

3 ibid., p. 1041.

manner; as also the island of Goree, so essentially connected with Senegal".¹ On August 5th, 1761, the French Government sent what amounted to a virtual ultimatum to Pitt indicating that the French were not willing to give up both Senegal and Goree.² To avoid a deadlock in the negotiations, Pitt expressed his willingness to listen to the French proposal by saying that "if the Court of France would suggest any reasonable expedient to provide themselves with negroes, which may not be too detrimental to the interests of the British subjects in Africa, [meaning of course the British traders there] he [would] willingly enter upon a discussion of this subject".³ In view of the fact that Pitt was obstinately opposed to any French foothold in West Africa, one can guess that his proposed "reasonable expedient to provide themselves with negroes" was that the French should arrange to purchase slaves from the Company of Merchants trading to Africa or from other British traders on the African coast. This would enable the English to restrict the supply of slaves to the French sugar islands and increase their own supplies to the British West Indian islands to England's commercial advantage.

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XV, p. 1047.

2 ibid., pp. 1050-1054.

3 ibid., p. 1063.

In the last French proposal given to Pitt through François de Bussy¹ on September 13th, 1761, Choiseul declared in regard to Senegal and Goree that "Although France is sensible how opposite it is to principles of conciliation, that the party which cedes should propose to the party who has conquered, and would maintain the cession of possessions which are not perfectly known, though there is no doubt but that the manner which England requires is liable to innumerable difficulties, nevertheless, the King, to testify his acquiescence in every expedient, which may conciliate the two crowns, is willing to declare to England, that he will guaranty the possession of Senegal and Goree to that crown, provided England, on her part, will guaranty the possession of the Settlements of Anomabu and Akra (Accra), on the coast of Africa".² The French, obviously, were not willing to surrender Senegal and Goree without gaining another foothold elsewhere on the West African coast.

Pitt's basic aim in refusing to part with Senegal and Goree was commercial; he saw France as the chief commercial rival to England and one way to bring that country to her knees was to cut off the supply of slaves to the French West Indian colonies. West Africa therefore held an important place in Pitt's projects for peace as well as in the international diplomatic relations between England and France. Unfortunately, Pitt's determination to keep Senegal and Goree for England

1 Bussy was the French plenipotentiary to the preliminary peace talks in England in 1761.

2 Parl. Hist., Vol. XV, p. 1068.

realized after his resignation from office in 1762.

At the conclusion of peace in 1763, the British Government returned Goree to France. Article ten of the Treaty of Paris stated that "His Britannic Majesty shall restore to France the Island of Goree, in the Condition it was in when conquered: And his Most Christian Majesty cedes, in full Right, and guaranties to the King of Great Britain, the River Senegal, with the Forts and Factories of St. Louis, Podor, and Galam; with all the Rights and Dependencies of the said River Senegal".¹ In the great debate over the Treaty of Paris in the Commons, Pitt and his supporters insisted on the obvious connection of the African trade with that of the British West Indian commerce. British trade to West Africa they argued, would be increased by a larger demand of slaves if France were deprived of her West Indian islands. Pitt spoke strongly against the concessions made to France in West Africa.² On the other hand, Lord North, Henry Fox and the supporters of the peace treaty did not put much emphasis on the African trade. Although they recognized its significance, they nevertheless placed the value of the American colonies above that of the West Indian and the West African trade. Fox argued that having made large demands from France in North America, common sense demanded that concessions should be granted to France

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIX, p. 578; Parl. Hist., Vol. XV, p. 1279.

2 Almon, Debates, Vol. XX, p. 168.

elsewhere.¹ Owing to the fact that France could never be brought to cede all her colonies, it was practical political sense to allow her to retain the island of Goree.

The Treaty of Paris broadly stated that Senegal and its dependencies were ceded to England. Much scope for variant readings was left in the phrase "with all the Rights and Dependencies of the said River Senegal". Neither the French nor the English ever really possessed territories as colonies throughout the eighteenth century in West Africa. The European traders paid quit-rents to African chiefs for the land on which they built their forts and castles. In reality therefore, it was only the French forts that were ceded to England and not the entire territory. Apart from spasmodic assistance given to either the English or the French during the war, the African chiefs kept out of quarrels between the French and the English. The British conquests involved French forts and not French territory since both English and French were the tenants of African chiefs and not their imperial masters.

However, the acquisition of Senegal raised certain problems. Was the Crown to keep this newly acquired territory or place it under the administration of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa?

1 Almon, Debates, Vol. XX, p. 168.

Samuel Touchet and Anthony Bacon, who both later became Members of Parliament for Shaftesbury and Aylesbury respectively, had been the government contractors for fitting out ships for the expedition against the French in Senegal and Goree in 1758.¹ After the peace, Bacon continued to serve as a government contractor in victualling the English forces in the Senegal and the Gambia. Touchet on the other hand, applied to Parliament for a monopoly of the gum trade in Senegal. His application was referred to the Solicitor-General and the Attorney-General who both declared that to grant Touchet a monopoly would be inconsistent with the statute of 1750. As a compensation for his expenses in the expedition to West Africa, Touchet was given a sum of £7,000 but his application for a monopoly of the gum trade was rejected.² As the Government at this time was not planning on retaining Senegal as a Crown colony, the obvious body which could assume immediate responsibility for the new territory was the Committee of the Company of Merchants.

On March 7th, 1764, the Company's Committee petitioned Parliament to have the administration of Senegal added to that of the other

1 For details of Bacon's contracts, see Sir Lewis Namier's article, "Anthony Bacon, M.P., An Eighteenth Century Merchant", in Jour. of Econ. and Business History, Vol. II, No. 1, (Nov. 1929), pp. 20-70.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIX, pp. 957-58, 1033.

forts in West Africa.¹ The petition was considered in a committee of the whole House after which the Commons resolved that the area be given to the Company and further sums granted to the Committee for its maintenance. At the same time, the Commons also passed a resolution that a bill be brought in to that effect.

The "bill for vesting the Fort of Senegal, and its Dependencies, in the Company of Merchants trading to Africa" was introduced in the House of Commons on March 27th, 1764. It swiftly passed the Commons on April 7th. The Lords gave their consent to the bill without amendments on April 16th² and it received the royal assent three days later. The Act declared that "the Fort of Senegal, and its Dependencies, shall be, and the same, and every Part thereof, are hereby declared to be, vested in the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, to be employed at all Times hereafter for the Protection, Encouragement, and Defence of the African Trade, in the same manner, and under the same Regulations, and subject to the same Rules, Orders, Directions, Governments, Limitations, Restrictions, Powers, and Authorities as the other Forts and Settlements on the Coast of Africa are now vested in the said Company".³

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXIX, p. 918.

2 ibid., pp. 1039, 1056. Lords Journals, Vol. XXX, pp. 578, 584.

3 Statutes at Large, 4 Geo. III, Cap. 20, Vol. IX, p. 167.

The Committee was permitted to deduct £400 from the £13,000 in addition to the usual £800 allowed for the salaries of the Company's officers, servants, agents and house rents. An additional sum of £7,000 was granted to the Committee for the upkeep of Senegal on top of the annual allowance which had now been increased from £10,000 to £13,000 in 1761. Parliament made no attempt to supervise the appointment of governors, agents, accountants, soldiers, surgeons and storekeepers to the new territory. This task was left entirely to the Company.

Hardly had the servants of the Company of Merchants established themselves in the Senegal than reports of French aggression in that region and the Gambia reached the Board of Trade. This fear of French aggression led the Board of Trade to hold a series of inquiries into the state of French power in the Gambia and Senegal as well as allegations of depression in the African trade around those regions. The investigations led the Board to believe that the position of the Company of Merchants in Senegal and the Gambia was weak and that the African Committee could not cope up with a powerful French competition. Early in 1765, the Board drew up a report on the African trade.¹ In this report,

1 The full title of this report was: Report to the Crown on the British Establishments on the Coast of Africa by the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, 21 February, 1765. This report has not been available for use in the present study. I have therefore relied on Eveline Martin's account in The British West African Settlements, pp. 63-64 for views expressed in this paragraph.

the Board condemned the ruinous state of the forts on the Gold Coast and the lack of discipline among the garrisons. In regard to Senegal and the Gambia, the Board emphasized the importance of the gum trade to England and the acute French rivalry to the British in this trade. As the Board thought that the Company of Merchants was incapable of withstanding this French competition, it recommended that Senegal and the Gambia be taken away from the administration of the African Committee and placed under the Crown. The Board also suggested that a civil government be established with a military force to protect the trade as well as to check a possible French return to Senegal.

In March, 1765, the House of Commons took the Board's report and suggestions into consideration in a committee of the whole House. Three resolutions were adopted as the outcome of the committee: first, the administration of Senegal and the Gambia were to be revested in the Crown "for the more effectual Protection and Encouragement of the Trade to Africa".¹ Secondly, the gum from Senegal and the Gambia was to be placed on the enumerated list of articles of the Navigation Acts and the revenue obtained was to be employed to meet the expenses of the new administration. And thirdly, the rest of the West African forts were to remain in the management of the Company of Merchants.² The House

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXX, p. 249.

2 ibid., p. 249.

next ordered that a bill be brought in to repeal the Act vesting Senegal in the Company of Merchants "and to vest, as well the said Fort and its Dependencies, as all other the British Forts and Settlements upon the Coast of Africa, lying between the Port of Sallee and Cape Rouge, together with all the Property, Estate, and Effects, of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, in or upon the said Forts and Settlements, and their Dependencies, in His Majesty".¹

Before the bill was introduced, the Commons took pains to estimate the budget of such a civil establishment. At the end of their sittings, a sum of £5,500 was granted "for defraying the Charges of a Civil Establishment, upon that Part of the Coast of Africa, situate between the Port of Sallee in South Barbary, and Cape Rouge, for the Year 1765"² while a further sum of £6,491-17-4d was voted for the expenses of three Companies of Foot to be raised for the new proposed province. The bill itself was introduced on April 26th; it quickly passed both Houses and received the royal assent on May 25th.³ Thus Parliament reversed its former policy of vesting Senegal and the Gambia in the Company of Merchants and placed them directly under a royal government. It was on this basis that the Province of Senegambia was created from

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXX, p. 249.

2 ibid., p. 352.

3 Statutes at Large, 5 Geo. III, Cap. 44, Vol. X, pp. 107-09.

the territory carved out between Cape Blanco and Cape Rouge.

The history of the Province of Senegambia still remains largely to be written. Apart from the short treatments given to it by Eveline Martin and John Gray,¹ no specific detailed study exists of this first experimental British Crown colony in Africa, nor is it proposed to undertake such a task here. Parliament was not directly involved in setting up the civil establishment of Senegambia. All that the House did was to pass the act under which the province was created. The establishment of the civil government was left to the British Government. On the other hand, Parliament provided the yearly funds needed for the upkeep of the province.

The constitution of the province was deliberately modelled on those granted to the British West Indian and American colonies² but with this difference: there was no assembly in Senegambia. The Governor, Council, Chief Justice, Lieutenant-Governor, two Secretaries and Justices of the Peace comprised the main elements of the constitution. Provision was made for a schoolmaster with a salary of fifty pounds a year. There is no evidence in the Journals of both Houses to indicate that Parliament seriously followed up this educational scheme but since

1 See E. Martin, *op. cit.*, chaps. V-VII. Also John M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia*, chaps. XVI-XVIII.

2 Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72 for details of the constitution.

the schoolmaster's salary had always been included in the yearly allowance of £5,500 for the province, it is possible that some form of an educational program must have been started in Senegambia. Neither Eveline Martin nor John Gray gave any attention to this subject in their books.¹

In the Gold Coast, Thomas Thompson, a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, arrived there from New Jersey in 1752 and founded a school at Cape Coast Castle. The school began as the work of an individual missionary and not as the initiative of Parliament. Thompson's school was given support by the Company of Merchants. Pupils were recruited from the sons of Europeans at the forts, castle mulattoes and a few African children. Parliament did not directly provide for the maintenance and growth of this school till about 1821.²

The initiative for the creation of the Province of Senegambia did not come directly from the floor of the House but from the Board of Trade. At any rate, all the seven Members of Parliament appointed to prepare the bill for placing Senegal and the Gambia under a royal administration were members of the Board of Trade.

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- 1 The author hopes to be able to undertake a more detailed study of Senegambia at some future date.
 - 2 For further details of Thompson's school, see Freda Wolfson, Pageant of Ghana, pp. 9-10, 91-92; and Philip Foster, Education and Social Change in Ghana, pp. 44-46, 49-51.

The first parliamentary inquiry into the affairs of the Company of Merchants which lasted from 1753 to 1758 had ended in a triumphant verdict for its Committee of nine. The confidence expressed in that verdict had not however, prevented a sudden partial volte-face in policy after Parliament had placed the administration of the newly acquired territories under the Committee of the Company of Merchants. The alleged reason for this change was fear of French aggression in the Gambia and the Senegal. The African Committee was thought incapable of matching the acute French rivalry in the gum trade of those two regions. But it is possible that Members of Parliament like Anthony Bacon, Samuel Touchet - who was very influential with Charles Townshend-and Peregrine Cust, another former member of the Company's Committee, all of whom had large interests in the gum and slave trade as well as being government contractors for victualling troops in the Senegal and the Gambia, saw that they would increase their own business profits if Senegal and the Gambia were taken away from the control of the Committee of the Company of Merchants. Before he entered Parliament, Touchet, as pointed out earlier, had petitioned for a monopoly of the gum trade but was refused. The Commons' consent in implementing the Board of Trade's recommendations did not reflect any indictment of misconduct on the part of the African Committee. The confidence of the House in the Company's Committee continued unabated till 1772 when cries of monopolistic tendencies in and embezzlement of parliamentary funds by the Committeemen came from the merchants of Bristol and Liverpool and necessitated another parliamentary investigation into the conduct of the Committee of the Company of

Merchants. That story will form the basis of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMMONS AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE COMPANY
OF MERCHANTS, 1770-1785

The fifteen years between 1770 and 1785 formed the most dramatic period in the relations between the House of Commons and the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa. During those years, direct attacks were made on the conduct of the Committee by individuals both inside and outside Parliament.

Owing to the condemnation of the condition of the forts on the Gold Coast by the Board of Trade in 1765, Parliament made a special grant of £7,000 in that year for the erection of a blockhouse at a village called Appolinia to check the Dutch who were about to build a fort there. In 1769, another special grant of £2,000 was given to repair Cape Coast Castle. Further grants totalling £4,400 were again made in 1771 and 1772 for repairs at Cape Coast Castle. In all, the African Committee had received £6,400 in addition to the usual annual allowance of £13,000 to repair Cape Coast Castle alone between 1765 and 1772.¹ Yet in spite of these grants, the Committee petitioned the Commons in 1772 for more sums to repair the forts which still remained "in a very ruinous Condition".² These demands for more grants aroused suspicions from members of Parliament as well as from the separate traders.

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXX, p. 352, vol. XXXIII, p. 326.

2 ibid., Vol. XXXIII, p. 534.

In March 1771, a Select Committee, headed by Peregrine Cust, was appointed to examine the Company's accounts and on April 12th, this Committee presented its findings to the House.¹

The Committee found that by a statement of account delivered to the Commons on February 6th, 1771, there was a balance of £1,471-14-10d unaccounted for. Richard Camplin, the Secretary to the Company's Committee, was questioned about this sum. Camplin told the Committee that a total amount of £15,000 was granted by Parliament in 1769 but that the Company only received £14,609-8-6d. Out of this sum, £14,045-1-11d was invested in goods sent out to Africa; Camplin also declared that out of the £2,000 granted by the Commons for repairing Cape Coast Castle, the African Committee received only £1,947-17-6d. This sum was included in the amount of £14,609-8-6d given to Parliament; the rest of the £62-2-4d was, according to Camplin, spent on fees arising from services rendered to the Company. Camplin informed the Select Committee that no accounts of how the above sum of £14,609-8-6d had been expended in Africa had been received by the Company's Committee.²

To prove that the Committee did not misappropriate funds, Camplin produced extracts of letters of instructions sent out to Governor Gilbert Petrie at Cape Coast. In one of these letters dated November 30th, 1769, the Company's Committee had stated; "We have added some

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 319.

2 ibid., p. 319.

Artificers, and a Quantity of Brick and Timber, in order to repair Cape Coast Castle; the Sum of £2,000 having been granted this Year, to enable us to set about that necessary Work".² A subsequent letter dated March 9th, 1770 read as follows: "The sum of £2,000 having been granted last Year, expressly for the Repair of Cape Coast Castle, you must be very accurate in separating the Accounts of such Repairs from every other Charge whatever".² To these instructions, the Governor and Council at Cape Coast replied that "the Accountant has Orders to be very accurate in separating the Accounts of such Repairs out of the £2,000 granted last Year for the Repairs of Cape Coast Castle, from every other Charge whatever".³ These instructions to the Governor and the Council were motivated by fear of a parliamentary censure in deceptive monetary practices. Evidently, the investigations on irregularities in the Company's Committee's financial transactions between 1753 and 1758 had taken effect.

As to the condition of the forts, the Select Committee found that every fort was either "in a ruinous Condition" or "in Want of Repairs". Regarding Cape Coast Castle in particular, the Committee reported: "The new Building, facing the south or Tabra Rock, is almost finished; the Spur, and Buildings thereon, are almost entirely new, as is also the principal Building, containing the Governor's and Factor's

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 319.

2 ibid., p. 319.

3 ibid., p. 319.

Apartments. Greenhill Point fell to the Ground during Mr. Petrie's Government; which must be rebuilt as soon as possible: Several of the Rooms, next the Town, must also be taken down and rebuilt, it being dangerous to live in them, on account of their crazy Condition".¹ The result of this inquiry was that the Commons granted in April, 1772, another £2,000 for repairing Cape Coast Castle. The Select Committee made no attempt to condemn the conduct of the Company's Committee.

In 1772, however, the principal grievance of the separate traders was directed towards the election of the Committeemen. John Peter Demarin, the author of the pamphlet called A Treatise upon the Trade from Great Britain to Africa, epitomised the discontent of the separate traders when he wrote in respect to the manner of choosing the Committeemen that "designing and interesting persons, who had been chosen, availed themselves of [the opportunity] to make that office perpetual, which the legislature intended to be annual".² It will be recalled that according to the Act of 1750, any person who paid a fee of forty shillings to the Company was entitled to vote in the election of the Committee. The separate traders from Bristol and Liverpool complained that the Committee "made numbers free without their knowledge or expense, many

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 319-320.

2 Treatise upon the Trade to Africa, p. 34.

of the lowest classes of the people, and all of them such as were their friends or dependents".¹ In other words, these forty shilling voters outnumbered the real traders in the African trade at the times of electing the Committeemen.

John Bourke, one of the Committeemen elected in 1772, was said to have "united his interest with French and Beane, two of the persons in the combination, and stood upon that interest, and that of Ross and [James] Mill, the latter of whom has a brother Governor of Cape Coast Castle".² The Committeemen therefore were accused of manipulating their own re-election to the Committee by means of bribery and sudden enfranchisements of several voters.

Nepotism in the appointment of governors and agents abroad was another charge brought up against the Committee. The enemies of the Committee claimed that the Committeemen made their relatives the governors of forts in West Africa; that the Governors at the forts though forbidden to trade in slaves, openly shipped slaves on their own accounts to the West Indies and America under the protection and countenance of the Committee. The old grievance that Governors obstructed and prevented the separate traders from trading on the African coast was revived.

1 Treatise upon the Trade to Africa, p. 34.

2 ibid., p. 34. French's other names were James Bogle; the author has not been able to identify the first names of Beane and Ross.

Demarin for instance, charged that Governors David Mill and Richard Miles not only prevented individual Captains of slave ships from trading on the coast but publicly declared at Cape Coast that they would not permit any captain to purchase "even an ounce of gold".¹ In the eyes of their opponents, the Committeemen were self-chosen, inattentive to the needs of the separate traders and industrious only to raise fortunes for themselves by means of the public funds annually granted to the Company by Parliament for the general advantage of the whole African trade. "In short", wrote Demarin, "the committee have in every particular acted directly contrary to the trust reposed in them, and contrary to the true interest of the nation: and must, if continued, entirely destroy that trade on the Gold Coast, which has been ever judged the most important of any on the whole coast of Africa, and consequently most essentially necessary to the prosperity of the British commerce, and the support of her Colonies".²

In March, 1772, the criticisms of the conduct of the Committeemen were brought to the attention of the Commons through representations made to individual members of Parliament. Sir William Meredith, the member for Liverpool, echoed the complaints of his constituents in the House. Another Select Committee again headed by Peregrine Cust, was appointed to

1 Treatise upon the Trade to Africa, p. 36.

2 ibid., p. 37.

examine the allegations of irregularities in the election of the Committeemen as well as the general affairs of the Company.¹ Leave was also given to Sir William Meredith to bring in a bill for preventing fraudulent admissions of the forty shilling voters into the Company.

Before Meredith introduced his bill, Cust reported the findings of his Committee to the Commons. In this report, inquiries into the relations between the Committeemen and their servants abroad took precedence over financial transactions.

In 1770, the African Committee had sent out large quantities of timber for repairs at Cape Coast Castle in one ship named the Helena. On August 25th, 1770, David Mill, the new Governor at Cape Coast, wrote back to the Committee that all the timber was not needed at Cape Coast. Although the Committee had directed him to use the timber solely for repairing Cape Coast Castle, Mill diverted some of it to the other forts but told the Committee that exact accounts of his transactions would be transmitted to the Company. On October 9th, 1770, Mill again wrote to the Committee that "Part of the Bricklayers, since my coming up here, have been employed about building a new Brick Hospital in the Town for the Sick, which is now very near completed, and which will be of the greatest Utility to the Health of all your Servants residing here".² In

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 534.

2 ibid., p. 588

June, 1771, the Committee sent a stern letter to its enterprising Governor blaming him for disobeying the Company's orders. "You mistake our Orders", the Committeemen wrote to Mill, "with regard to the Helena's Cargo, when you imagine that Cargo was directed by us to be set apart solely for the Repairs of Cape Coast Castle".¹ To set Mill right on this point, the Committee directed his attention to the instructions sent out previously to Governor Petrie.² The Committee strictly instructed Mill to desist from his enterprise of building the hospital and to comply with the Company's orders.

The Select Committee's report made no mention of the charges of corruption that were alleged to prevail in the mode of electing the Company's Committee despite the order from the House to investigate these accusations. Sir William Meredith, the spokesman for the Liverpool merchants in the Commons, introduced his "Bill for regulating the Election of Committee Men, for managing the Affairs of the African Company" on March 30th, 1772. The bill was read the first time and its second reading ordered.³

The preamble of Meredith's bill stated that "several Persons, under Pretence of intending to trade to or from Africa, have been

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 588.

2 See below, pp. 149-150

3 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 635.

admitted to the Freedom of the said Company, and, in Consequence of such Admission, are entitled to vote at the Election of the Committee Men for managing the Affairs of the said Company".¹ Echoeing the complaints of the Bristol and Liverpool merchants, Sir William Meredith accused the Committee of acting contrary to the intention of the Act of 1750; his bill indicted the Committeemen of frequently securing their own election by making use of the votes of large numbers of would be traders in the Company. To remedy these fraudulent practices, Meredith's bill proposed that no persons who had already been admitted to the freedom of the Company should be qualified to vote at the elections of the Committee unless such persons actually possessed "some Share or Shares, of some Ship or Ships, or Cargo on board some Ship or Ships, bound to or from some Port or Place in Africa, situated between Cape Rouge and the Cape of Good Hope".² No person already admitted or who was to be admitted to the Company after the passing of his bill would be qualified to vote until about the elapse of one year between his actual possession of this qualification and the time of his vote. Persons however, with hereditary qualification were excepted from this disability. At the general meeting of the Company for the purpose of electing the Committeemen, a chairman was to be chosen to preside over the election and to decide

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. VI, No. 191, (1772), pp. 1-2.

2 ibid., p. 2.

which votes were valid or which were invalid. Voters were to take a prescribed oath that they indeed had some shares in the Company before they could vote; the right to vote bequeathed to voters either by inheritance or marriage was not exempted from the oath. In the case of the hereditary voters, they were to swear that the inheritance had not been fraudulently transferred to them to enable them to vote and then re-transfer the shares to their rightful owners. Finally, persons with exclusive rights to Bance Island, their agents or assignees were to be excluded entirely from the liberty to vote for any Committeemen.¹

The second reading of the bill was deferred three times while witnesses from London, who had petitioned against the bill were examined. Among these witnesses were John Bourke and John Aird, who were said to have manipulated their own re-election to the Committee, Richard Camplin and Thomas Sylva, the Clerk to the Company.²

Sylva and Camplin testified during the course of their examination at the bar of the House that very few of the voters were actually connected with the African trade. They even disavowed some of the Committeemen by declaring that one of them, a certain Mr. Wilson, had not at any time paid the fee of forty shillings as a member of the Company. James Cleland, Thomas Jones and John Smith, all of whom had been

1 Sessional Papers, (Bills) Vol. VI, No. 191, (1772)
pp. 3-4.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 670-71, 677, 695.

candidates for the Committee in 1772 but failed re-election, charged that there was a combination formed by a few men from London to monopolize the direction of the African trade for their own private purposes.¹

In the subsequent debate which followed after the examination of the witnesses, the conduct of the Committee was censured by several members. Sir William Meredith led the attack on the Committee by reasserting that the Committeemen introduced "spurious votes" at the election. Meredith declared that it was clear, that "so many spurious votes as were admitted at elections, would necessarily take the management of affairs out of the hands of those who were best qualified for conducting, and most affected by the African trade".²

Peregrine Cust, who had interests in the slave trade and had previously headed two select committees to investigate the expenditures of the Company, defended the Committee on the grounds that no alteration had been made in the constitution of the Company since 1750. It was therefore not possible for the merchants from London to monopolize the direction of the Company. Cust concluded that the Act of 1750 had meant to establish the qualification of voters on as wide a basis as possible to elude the possibility of monopolistic tendencies and that combinations in a regulated company were not detrimental to its prosperity.

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XVII, pp. 504-05.

2 ibid., p. 506.

3 ibid., p. 506.

Among the defenders of the Committeemen was Edmund Burke who argued that nothing had been produced during the examination of the witnesses to prove the charges brought up against the Committee. Burke declared that the freemen of the Company, whether spurious or not, should be considered legal voters until it had been proved that they acquired their votes by corrupt means. He concluded that no voter should be deprived of his vote but by a due process of law.¹

On May 15th, the bill, which had been given its second reading May 1st, was reported to the House despite the eloquence of Cust and Burke against it. Two amendments were then made to the bill: one was, "That at the Meetings for Election of Committee Men, the Clerk or Secretary shall keep an Account of the Voters Names (...)" ; the other, that "the Electors shall vote only for the Places from whence they trade".² That same day, a section of the London merchants again presented a petition against the bill to the Commons. The petition expressed their fear that if the bill were allowed to pass in the way it was framed, it would greatly affect, if not totally destroy, the rights of all those interested in the election of such Committeemen.³ The Commons ordered that opinions both against and in favour of the bill be heard at the bar of

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XVII, p. 507.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 764.

3 ibid., p. 764.

the House.

On May 20th, the bill was read the third time and the counsel for the petitions against the bill were allowed to present their views. After the objections to the bill had been heard, the Commons next called in the counsel in favour of the bill but no one appeared to speak on its behalf at the bar of the House.¹ A motion was made to postpone further discussions on the bill for three months and a debate ensued on the motion.

In this debate, Burke once more objected to the bill because he found it an infringement on personal liberty. In his view, the bill would confine the right of election to those who actually engaged in the African trade or intended to trade to Africa. The consequence would be that some voters who had already purchased the right to vote by paying the fee of forty shillings, would be deprived of their votes on mere surmises of corrupt practices in the Committee. The regulations entailed in the bill would also drive away many others who were interested in but not actually concerned in the trade from contributing to the prosperity of that trade. Another reason why Burke defended the Committee of the Company was that the African trade remained free and open; the electors were numerous thus providing little success for overriding bribery and corruption. To restrict the franchise or voters in the African trade

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXIII, p. 776.

would be to establish a basis or create a circumstance susceptible to the formation of a monopoly similar to that in the East India Company and thereby defeat the purpose of the bill.¹ Burke was not alone in defending the Committee; other members, notably Bamber Gascoyne, a member of the Board of Trade, and John Williams, the member for Salkash, also spoke in defence of the Committeemen.²

In answer to Burke's arguments that any new regulations imposed on the Committee would "invade men's legal franchises", Sir William Meredith replied that his bill aimed not at depriving voters of their legal right to vote but to exclude persons who "have fraudently crept into the rights of other men".³ Meredith reiterated his accusations that under the administration of the African Committee, the slave trade on the Gold Coast had declined; that the members of the Committee used the money granted by Parliament to engage in their own private trade instead of employing it to procure gifts to the African chiefs in order to induce them to sell more slaves to the British traders. "Certain it is", said Meredith, "that the present committee-men make a scandalous use of their power. By means of their intelligence and correspondence, and presents made with the public money, their ships are freighted with slaves in a

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XVII, pp. 507-09 for Burke's speech.

2 ibid., p. 510 for the speeches of Gascoyne and Williams.

3 Parl. Hist., Vol. XVII, p. 511.

fortnight or three weeks, while those of others, not less meritorious, are obliged to wait thirteen months upon the coast".¹ Several other members spoke in support of Meredith's accusations declaring that the conduct of the Committee was so scandalous that this had to be remedied. At the end of the debate, the House divided on the motion to postpone the bill for three months; twenty-five members voted for the motion and twenty-three against it. The bill was eventually lost.

It might be pointed out here that Meredith's bill failed to pass not so much on account of Burke's eloquent speeches against it, as Eveline Martin concluded in her study,² but from the fact that no counsel appeared on behalf of the bill when the opportunity was offered. The merchants from Bristol and Liverpool had been loud in their denunciations of the Committeemen but failed to attend the House to present their views in support of the bill. Their failure to appear before the Commons prejudiced the success of the bill. Burke's role in the defeat of the bill has been overrated by Eveline Martin.

Early in 1777, a second bitter attack was again launched on the conduct of the Company's Committee. In January, 1777, the Committee sent a petition to Parliament in which the chronic complaints about the ruinous state of the forts were repeated. The petition also stated that

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XVII, pp. 511-12.

2 See Martin, op. cit., p. 19; and her "The English Establishments on the Gold Coast in the Second half of the Eighteenth Century", in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th Series, Vol. V, (1922), p. 173.

the Company's agents on the African coast had incurred an additional debt of about £8,200 on the upkeep of the forts. The Committee therefore requested that Parliament "grant such Sum for the necessary Support and Maintenance of the said Forts and Settlements, for repaying ~~the~~ Officers and Servants the several Sums of Money advanced by them, and likewise for the Repairs still wanted, as shall seem meet".¹

In view of the regular grants given to the Company for the upkeep of the forts, several members expressed their concern over the Company's expenditures. Lord Nugent for instance, observed that "the present state of the African Company called for particular attention" and that it was certainly "an object worthy of inquiry, to know how the money granted was expended."² Owing to the pressing demands of the American war, the Commons did not immediately follow up Lord Nugent's suggestions but they sent an address to the King asking him to direct the Board of Trade to investigate the activities of the Committeemen as well as the general state of the African trade. In February, the Board received instructions to carry out these investigations.

The Board began its inquiries by sending out questions touching the state of the African trade, the condition of the forts and the

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXVI, p. 94.

2 Parl. Register, Vol. VI, p. 150.

conduct of the Committeemen to the merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool. In the answers sent back to the Board, the London merchants who had supported the Committee in 1772, turned against that body. They charged that the slave trade on the Gold Coast had greatly diminished. The merchants from London now accused the Committee of forming a monopoly with the Company's servants on the African coast to enrich themselves. Among those who signed the "memorial" from London was Anthony Bacon, M.P. for Aylesbury.

The traders from Bristol never lost sight of indicting the Committee since 1753. In their statement to the Board of Trade concerning the Committee's conduct, they declared that "although the (...) Act of the 23rd Geo. II and a subsequent one passed in the 5th of His present Majesty's Reign, lay many Restraints on the said Committee-Men, their Officers and Servants in Africa, to prevent illegal Combinations, and joint Trading to the manifest Prejudice and Ruin of the free and open Trader, that some of them, by Art and Cunning, in the most covert Way, have contrived to evade the said Laws, and even in some Measure to make the Public Money, so liberally granted for the Support and Maintenance of the Forts and Settlements, subservient to their own Purposes of carrying on a joint Trade, and creating the most dangerous Monopoly".²

1 Sessional Papers, Accounts and Papers, Vol. I, No. 9, p. 16.

2 ibid., p. 17.

Henry Garnet, who represented another section of the Bristol merchants, informed the Commissioners for Trade in a letter that "One Complaint seems to be universally admitted as well as grounded, which is, that the Election of the Committee is now in a great measure vested in Persons who are not interested in the Trade, as any Person, on Payment of Forty Shillings, is entitled to vote".¹

To a question put forward by the Board of Trade to the merchants from Liverpool about whether the management and conduct of the Company's agents, servants and officers on the African coast had, in their opinion, been advantageous to the interests of the separate traders, they replied that "the Officers and Servants of the African Company have not done their Duty in this Respect".² In their answer to another question about whether the private traders had received due protection and assistance from the Company's agents and officers, the merchants from Liverpool informed the Board that the Company's agents had been more of disservice than of service to the separate traders. The charges of monopolistic control of the slave trade by the Committee were also repeated to the Commissioners for Trade by the Liverpool merchants.

As in 1749 and 1750, no instances of names of these combinations were ever cited. No particular proofs were given to support the allegations. The Board of Trade however, based its report to the Commons on these assumptions. In April, 1777, the Board presented its report to

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. I, No. 9, p. 19.

2 ibid., p. 20.

the House.¹

The report was in two parts: the first contained the opinion of the Board regarding the charges brought up against the Committeemen; the second dealt with the condition of the forts as well as the expenditures of the Committee. In the first section of their report, the Commissioners for Trade stated that "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 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 been at the same Time been Members of the Committee above mentioned".² The role of the Governors, agents, officers and servants was censured. The Commissioners declared "that the

1 The full title of the report was: Return 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; and what Manner the several Sums of Money, granted by Parliament for Maintaining and Supporting the same, have been applied. (London, 24th April, 1777).

2 Sessional Papers, Vol. I, No. 9, p. 4.

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, effectively exclude the free British Merchant from any Share or Profit in the Trade".¹ The rest of the report then condemned the state of the forts but gave detailed figures of the English establishments on the Gold Coast and the Committee's financial transactions.² Obviously, the report was an unqualified condemnation of the Committee's administration of the Company on the African coast.

In the light of this condemnation, the Committeemen themselves reacted by sending petitions to the House of Commons against the Commissioners' report. On May 23rd, two members of the Company's Committee, John Bourke and John Barnes petitioned the Commons that the charges laid against the Committeemen in the report were unsubstantiated and groundless and were therefore false. Bourke and Barnes stated that they were not aware of any gross abuses in the Committee and that if any other member of the Committee had acted contrary to the intention of the

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. I, No. 9, p. 5.

2 ibid., pp. 33-49

Act of 1750, they were neither privy to such action nor had been acquainted of it. Both men felt their integrity had been injured and asked the Commons to investigate fully into their conduct and accounts.¹ On May 28th, four other members of the Committee, Gregory Olive, John Taylor Vaughan, Arthur Jones and James Bogle French also sent a similar petition to the Commons.²

On the same day that this latter petition was read in the Commons, a stormy debate ensued in the House. The attack on the African Committee was led by Temple Luttrell and Bamber Gascoyne who had spoken in defence of the Committee in 1772. Gascoyne was also a member of the Commissioners for Trade who had drawn up the report.

The main charges brought against the Committee by Temple Luttrell were: that the Committee was a packed body of men who secured their re-election by manipulating the votes of a number of freemen among whom were "members of Parliament, East India directors, not a few tavern-keepers, shoe-makers, butchers, barbers, lamplighters, pastry cooks, persons under age, and persons without any known residence or occupation - a most singular and curious medley of commercial adventurers".³ Luttrell accused the Committee of attempting to form a monopoly maintained on the African coast; the result of these combinations he thought,

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, pp. 233-37 for the whole petition. Also in Commons Journals, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 520-21.

2 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, pp. 245-46.

3 ibid., p. 249.

was a decline in the slave trade and a rise in prices for slaves. He asserted that the sums granted by Parliament were being employed by the Committee to subvert the aims of Parliament and the Act of 1750. "The African Committee", Luttrell cried out in the heat of the debate, "I say, Sir, the African committees have acted contrary to the trust reposed in them, they have been certainly abettors of the guilt, if not principals in it; have misconstrued the import and spirit of the act; they have perverted the true intent of the legislature; have acted diametrically contrary to the real interest of the nation, and nearly annihilated your trade; neither can so destructive a system of folly and mismanagement be too soon abolished".¹ Luttrell suggested that the Act of 1750 should be annulled and a new law enacted reconstituting the Company and its committee; if possible, two companies should be established. Luttrell hoped this policy would arouse a zealous competition between the two companies that would stimulate the slave trade and also serve as a check to monopolistic tendencies in either company. He startled the House by recommending that the Province of Senegambia should be returned to a joint stock company.²

After Luttrell had sat down, two members, Robert Vyner and Bamber Gascoyne, rose and spoke in high terms of commendation "on the

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, pp. 250-251.

2 ibid., p. 252.

foregoing copious and authentic representation of the British trade to Africa".¹ Vyner seconded Luttrell's motion that the Commons should immediately go into a committee to examine the report from the Commissioners for Trade.

When the House resolved itself into a committee, the report was read and reviewed point by point. Witnesses were admitted to testify either in support of the accusations or against them. Among those examined was the Company's Secretary, Richard Camplin, John Bourke and James Mill - another member of the Company's Committee-, Captains John Hyde and Robert Martin, and John Shoolbred, one other slave trader.² During the review of the Commissioners' report and the examination of these witnesses, one is told that "a perpetual scene of attack and defence by the contending parties" was produced.³ The examination of the witnesses continued till 12.45 a.m. when the hearing was adjourned.⁴

On May 30th, the Commons once again sat in a committee of the whole House on the general state of the African trade. The petitions from the members of the Company's Committee were also taken into consideration. At the end of their sittings, Sir Henry Hoghton, the Chairman of the

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, p. 255.

2 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 527-28.

3 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, p. 258.

4 ibid., p. 258.

Committee, reported the resolutions reached in that Committee: first, "That it is the Opinion of this Committee, That the Words following, in the Return from the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, namely, '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' do not relate to any of the Nine Members who constitute the present Committee of Merchants trading to Africa". Secondly, "That (it appearing to this Committee, as well from the Return of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, as from the Evidence produced in support thereof, that several Abuses are alleged to prevail in the Manner of carrying on the Trade of the Gold Coast and Whydah) it is the Opinion of this Committee, That the same may deserve the Attention and future Consideration of Parliament".¹ Once again, the opinion of the majority in the Commons had rallied to the support of the African Committee.

The confidence of the Commons expressed in these resolutions toward the conduct of the Company's Committee did not satisfy Temple Luttrell and on June 2nd he again rose to reassert his accusations against the Committeemen. In his speech, he rebuked in strong language,

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XXXVI, p. 534 for both quotations.

Lord North and his Government for failing to fulfil Parliament's intentions in investigating the general state of the African trade and for deliberately breaking up the Committee of the whole House on that subject in the previous debate.¹ At the end of his speech, Luttrell accused the Ministers and the Committeemen of having made a pact to stifle further public inquiries into the conduct and administration of the Company's Committee.²

Luttrell's intemperate remarks brought Lord North into the debate. He defended his Government and added that since the session was now almost at an end, nothing should be done on the African trade than grant the usual £13,000 to the Company. Lord North, however, promised to introduce a proviso that would ensure that money granted by Parliament would be spent exactly on what the grant was intended for. Burke again spoke against any revisions in the constitution of the Company which he feared might "terminate in government jobs and putting the trade upon a still worse footing than at present".³ As there were less than forty members present in the House, further debate on the African trade was postponed to June 5th.

On June 5th, Lord North moved that the usual annual allowance of £13,000 be granted to the Company but added his proviso that "his

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, p. 258.

2 ibid., p. 259.

3 ibid., p. 260.

Majesty would be pleased to direct, that the said sum be not applied to the discharge of any arrears of the said Company's debts, contracted prior to the 30th December, 1776".¹ The motion was carried in the affirmative without a division. However, this unanimous agreement to the motion did not prevent a debate in the House. Burke could not agree with Luttrell or Gascoyne that the Committeemen or their servants had misappropriated funds granted by Parliament to the Company. Rather than indict the Committeemen for embezzlement of funds, Burke thought they ought to be complimented for their work. "They have exerted such economy", he said, "as this House had not been used to; they have supported eleven forts, ten governors, and the establishments necessary for them (...). With all this, they are not accused of contracting a greater debt in so many years than £16,000".²

Other members were less reticent about the excellent performances of the Committeemen. Bamber Gascoyne denounced the conduct of the Committee while Luttrell again urged the Commons to call another inquiry into the Company's affairs. Luttrell also rebuked the Commissioners for Trade for having wasted the whole session "in a loose inaccurate enquiry into the trade of one part of the coast of Africa only, and then coming with their report so late to the House, that there was no time enough

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, p. 260.

2 ibid., p. 262.

to go thoroughly into the merits of it".¹ The debate ended rather inconclusively and further suggestions for regulating the Company's affairs were shelved for the time being. Surprisingly, Sir William Meredith who had introduced the bill in 1772 to regulate the election of the Committeemen, was now one of the Committee's defendants.

In criticism of the Board of Trade, it is difficult to see why in 1777 such an extensive investigation was conducted by that body. By the twenty-first and the twenty-third clauses of the Act of 1750, the Board of Trade was empowered to remove any member of the Committee if any charges of misconduct were proved against him. In this instance, the Board did not even attempt to interrogate the Committeemen themselves. The Commissioners for Trade examined Richard Camplin, the Committee's Secretary, but told him not to inform his employers about it. If any abuses existed in the financial administration of the Company, which the Board implied there were in its report, then the respective Committeemen involved ought to have been dismissed from office. The matter would have ended there and the Commons would no doubt have approved of their procedure. Such a course of action was not taken; instead, the Commissioners were only content to report to Parliament that the Committeemen formed monopolies to smother the private traders and that the Committee embezzled funds granted by Parliament to the Company. Their

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. VII, p. 261.

report and conclusions seem to have been influenced by either prejudices against the Committeemen or by misinformed facts presented to them by the witnesses they interrogated.

During the next few years, discussions on African matters were rare. Towards 1780, it was quite evident that England was going to lose her American colonies and not a few members in the Commons had visions of improving the African trade to replace British commerce to America. In March 1778 for example, while the Commons were in an acute debate on the state of the nation, Temple Luttrell digressed from his long cumbersome speech to allude to the importance of the African trade: "Improve your (...) oriental and your African trades", Luttrell told the Commons; "the latter may, with proper management, be made absolutely to govern the commerce of America at European markets".¹ Luttrell's interest in African matters was however, soon drowned in his concern over naval affairs, a subject in which he showed considerable knowledge.

At the peace of Versailles in 1783, West Africa again became the object of attention between England and France. Unlike the situation in 1762, France was now in a better position militarily in West Africa. Senegal was recaptured by the French during the American War and the French were now determined not to return it to the British. In the subsequent definitive treaty of peace with France, article nine stated

1 Parl. Reg., Vol. IX, p. 34.

that "The King of Great Britain cedes, in full right, and guarantees to his most Christian Majesty, the river Senegal, and its dependencies, with the forts of St. Louis, Podor, Galam, Arguin, and Portendic; and his Britannic Majesty restores to France the island of Goree, which shall be delivered up in the condition it was in when the conquest of it was made".¹ The French on their part, handed over the Gambia to England. To prevent further bickering between the French and English traders in these regions, both England and France undertook to set up an international commission to determine the spheres of influence in respect to the commercial interests of the two countries. As regards the vital gum trade, the English were allowed to trade freely in the Senegal but they were not to build forts from which they could carry on that trade. Article twelve however, declared that "As to the residue of the coast of Africa, the English and French subjects shall continue to resort thereto, according to the usage which has hitherto prevailed".² Both countries were back to the position they had been in before England created her abortive Province of Senegambia.

In the House of Lords, the cession of Senegal to the French was bitterly criticised; the main criticism was that England had surrendered her monopoly of the gum trade to France.³ In view of the stipulations

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XXIII, p. 1165.

2 ibid., p. 1165.

3 J. Debrett, Parl. Reg., Vol. XI, pp. 58-85.

in the treaty that English traders were free to engage in the gum trade, the criticisms were not quite valid. It is interesting too to note that the opponents of the treaty said nothing about the loss of territory in West Africa but trade.

The last act that the Commons passed in relation to the Company of Merchants before the end of the eighteenth century was in 1783. In that year, complaints again reached the House that the Company's servants on the African coast continued to trade in slaves. As a result, Parliament passed another bill which prohibited the agents of the Company from engaging in the slave trade.¹ That Act did not however, abruptly terminate Parliament's interest in the Company but new ideas were beginning to take hold of individual members as well as the Government.

Between 1779 and 1785, a new project was envisaged for Africa. This new scheme was the result of the crowded jails in England. In February, 1779, a debate arose in the Commons on the possibility of finding a method of easing the situation. Sir Charles Bunbury suggested that male prisoners should be employed as soldiers in the service of the East India Company, to transport them to the West Indies "or to a part of the continent of Africa".² In that debate, other members supported the idea of sending convicts to West Africa.³ No immediate plans

1 Parl. Hist., Vol. XXIII, p. 1027. Lords Journals, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 707, 716-718.

2 Almon, Parl. Reg., Vol. XI, p. 233.

3 ibid., p. 234.

were taken to implement the scheme but the idea lingered on.

In 1782, the British Government sent out 350 convicts to the Gold Coast to serve as soldiers at the forts.¹ Out of that number, twenty convicts were later reported to have turned pirates, eight were still enlisted with the Company of Merchants by 1785, the rest either died or deserted to the Dutch.² The loss of the American colonies closed one haven to which convicts were usually sent. West Africa therefore seemed a potential alternative.

A government inquiry conducted in 1784 on the state of the jails revealed that the prisons were in fact too crowded, particularly Newgate prison. Accordingly, the Government decided to transport one hundred prisoners from Newgate to West Africa. Lemaine Island, (now MacCarthy Island) in the Gambia, was selected as the site for the proposed convict colony. Two hundred prisoners including women actually sentenced to be transported to Africa, were to be shipped to the Gambia. The Government's plan was this: the transports would go up the Gambia River to the island and disembark the convicts "with such a Proportion of Provisions as might be necessary for their Use till they could raise Stock for themselves".³ The convicts were to be supplied with farm implements,

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XL, p. 959.

2 ibid., p. 959.

3 ibid., pp. 955-56.

tools for the construction of houses, merchandises, grain and "a Medicine Chest". But after the prisoners were established on the island, they were to be left entirely to themselves to devise their means of survival. A "Guard Ship" was to be stationed close to the island to prevent the escape of the convicts. Annual transportations were to be made till the number of convict settlers reached four thousand.

John Barnes, one of the African merchants and a former member of the Company's Committee as well as other individuals, claimed the credit of proposing the idea of sending convicts to the Gambia.¹ Parliament's concern in the project was how the Africans would receive or accept a colony of convicts among themselves. In February, 1785, the Government sent a preparatory delegation to the Gambia to negotiate with the African chiefs for the chosen site. The outcome of this mission was that Lemaine Island was bought at the cost of £955-3-0d.² When the scheme was brought to the attention of Parliament for approval, Burke denounced it and added that to transport convicts to the Gambia was to send them to certain death.³ Pitt on the other hand supported the measure but Burke's criticisms of the project led to an extensive examination of the matter by the Commons in a committee of the whole House.

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XI, p. 956. Gray, op. cit., p. 277.

2 Gray, op. cit., p. 278.

3 Parl. Hist., Vol. XXV, p. 431.

The experts called in during the Committee's inquiries expressed their dislike of the scheme. Opposition to the Government's plans came from three main sources: the Committee of the Company of Merchants, the Captains of slave ships and the Commanders of naval ships on the African coast. The Company's Committee opposed the idea of sending convicts to Africa for the reason that it occasioned a "perpetual Commotion among the Natives, and (...) endangered the Safety of the British Forts".¹ The Commanders of naval ships and the Captains of slavers testified against the scheme. The witnesses unanimously condemned the project on account of Africa's "unhealthy Climate". Sir George Young, who had gone up the Gambia River four times, supported the testimony of John Nevan, Thomas Nesbitt, Henry Smeathman and John Boon, all of whom had either lived in or visited the Gambia, with regard to the impossibility of restraining a settlement of convicts without order or a government within the limits assigned to them. When examined as to the practicability of Europeans subsisting within the tropics by farming for themselves, Sir George Young answered that "it had never been attempted, as Death would be the Consequence of their continuing an Hour exposed to the Sun".² As a proof of the unhealthiness of the climate, Young recounted that when he landed once at the French fort of Albreda on the Gambia, "there

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XL, p. 959.

2 ibid., p. 958.

was only One Woman, all the Men, except her Husband, being dead, and he was gone up the Country to trade".¹ He added that while he was still at Albreda, the woman heard that her husband too had died up country "and every White Man that went with him, which was a very common Case, for she had had Five Husbands in Three Years".²

The contradiction in Sir George Young's evidence is very obvious. He first stated that all the men except one, were dead. Next, one is told that several other men had gone up the country with this surviving trader. In any case, it was unlikely that all the French traders died at Albreda while the woman alone survived which indeed would have been a very uncommon case. The witnesses brought all the old prejudices of the unhealthiness of the African climate to bear on the Government's scheme. On the other hand, the project, if carried out as planned, would have been a desperate, cold-blooded experiment of settling convicts in a foreign land. Among the provisions to be furnished to the convicts, no guns or other firearms were mentioned. This was probably caution on the part of the Government to prevent the convicts from overpowering the guard ship or from turning pirates. One difficulty involved in the plan was how to prevent a clash between the settlers and the Africans. There was all the likelihood that the convicts might provoke the Africans and

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XI, p. 958.

2 ibid., p. 958.

ran the risk of retaliation. In such an event, the convict settlement would be destroyed by the African chiefs. Another possible peril was that if many of these convicts escaped or turned pirates, they would constitute a grave danger to European traders in those regions. Commodore Edward Thompson, Commander-in-chief of all the naval ships on the West African coast, informed the Commons Committee that no convict settlement should be established in the Gambia. His reasons were humanitarian but he too perhaps had in mind this dilemma or predicament the Government would be in if these convicts were either furnished with ammunition or left defenceless. Thompson recommended that the convicts be transported to Angola instead of the Gambia.¹

On July 28th, 1785, the Committee reported to the House that "it was their decided opinion, that the Idea of composing an entire Colony of Male and Female Convicts, without any other Government or Control but what they may from Necessity be led to establish for themselves, can answer no good or rational Purpose - That such an Experiment has never been made in the History of Mankind - That the Outcasts of an old Society will not serve as the sole Foundation of a new one, which cannot exist without Justice, without Order and without Subordination".² The Committee recommended that if convicts must be transported to Africa,

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XL, pp. 1162-63.

2 ibid., p. 1162.

they should be sent to Das Voltas in Angola rather than to the Gambia.¹ This second plan for transporting convicts to Africa also fell through and the prisoners were taken to Botany Bay in Australia. West Africa was spared an experiment which might have proved an unhappy experience.

The attacks on the conduct of the Committeemen by their enemies between 1770 and 1777 had failed to achieve any changes in the Company's constitution. The method of electing the Committee of nine remained unaltered. In 1772, Sir William Meredith's bill designed to attain alterations or add further restrictions on the role of the Committeemen failed to pass; a few years later, attacks on similar lines were made on the Company's Committee. These too failed to achieve their desired effect. Throughout these years, the Commons constantly expressed their confidence in the Committee's administration. Until 1785, this parliamentary confidence in the Committeemen's management of the Company's affairs was a decided factor in preventing any disintegration of the Company. The fact was also born out that Parliament's wish was the final authority in the administration of the Company. The debates in the Commons on the Company's affairs had produced a new idea of sending convicts to West Africa. That idea did not materialize but it was indicative of new attitudes that were beginning to besiege Parliament in its relations with West Africa. Discussions on the management of the Company of Merchants were superseded by the debate over the abolition of

1 Commons Journals, Vol. XI, pp. 1163-64.

the slave trade which began in the Commons in 1788.¹ Little attention was therefore paid to the administration of the Company in the last decade of the eighteenth century. The advent of the great anti-slavery movement does not fall within the scope of the present research but forms a separate study. It is therefore appropriate to conclude this study in 1785 for after that date a new epoch was inaugurated in Parliament's interests in West Africa - that of the ultimate abolition of the slave trade and slavery, humanitarian projects, exploration and the aspirations of a potential colonial empire in West Africa.

1 Between 1785 and 1788 no important issue relating to the Company was discussed in either House although petitions against the slave trade were beginning to filter into the Commons.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

AN ANALYSIS OF HOW MATTERS RELATING TO AFRICA WERE
BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF PARLIAMENT AND HOW BOTH
HOUSES HANDLED THESE PROBLEMS

It will have been noticed, throughout the course of this dissertation, that the manner in which matters relating to Africa were brought to the attention of Parliament was usually in the form of petitions. These petitions were commercial in character and came from the management of the African Companies, merchant organizations and individual slave traders. The petitions, if from the Companies, requested financial assistance from Parliament; if the petitions came from the merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool, they either demanded that Parliament keep the African trade free and open to all British subjects or protested strongly certain actions of the Companies. Between 1708 and 1750, Parliament's attention was kept alive in the management of the Royal African Company by floods of petitions that poured into the Commons from the separate traders as well as from organizations of craftsmen such as butchers, blacksmiths, rope-makers and shipwrights. Except a few sections of the London merchants, these petitions were unanimous in protesting against the decision of the Royal African Company to reconstitute itself into a joint stock company; from 1753 to 1772, the petitions took the form of complaints against the liberty granted to the agents of the Company of Merchants to engage in the slave trade and accusations of embezzlement of funds granted by Parliament on the

part of the Company's Committee. Protests against monopolies in the slave trade constantly featured in the petitions from the separate traders.

At other times, African problems were brought to the attention of Parliament through "representations" from the Board of Trade and surveys conducted by the Admiralty and the Ordnance Board. The representations from the Board of Trade were investigations carried out into the affairs of the African Companies and the condition of their forts, either on its own initiative or on requests from the separate traders or on orders from Parliament itself. If the demands from the Companies or the separate traders were of such a nature that the Board could not handle them, as when financial aids were involved, it referred these to Parliament. Complaints of abuses in the slave trade that reached the Board from the Bristol and Liverpool merchants were referred to Parliament. In other instances, the Board made its investigations and then submitted its findings to the Commons. In 1765, the Board conducted extensive inquiries into the position of English commercial power in West Africa and submitted reports of these investigations to Parliament. The result of the Board's inquiries and recommendations had been the creation of the Province of Senegambia in that year. The Admiralty and the Board of Ordnance also sent reports of surveys on the condition of the forts conducted by the naval officers to the House.

Parliament's reaction to these petitions and representations was always immediate and in most cases prompt action was taken. In the

Commons, African matters were usually considered in committees of the whole House. The Commons sent instructions to the Board of Trade to investigate the matters in question or ordered the Companies to lay before them all papers including vouchers and correspondence, relating to the various complaints brought up against them. After an examination of the facts or the evidence of witnesses called before the committees, the Commons then made their views known in resolutions. If this procedure was not immediately followed, the Commons normally appointed select committees to look into whatever allegations were brought up against the African Companies. The select committees would examine the allegations or disputes involved by summoning witnesses before them, hear the evidence, investigate the accounts of the Companies and then submit their findings to the House. The reports of the select committees were re-examined in detail in other committees of the whole House but the resolutions reached in these sittings remained for the most part, those adopted by the select committees. This procedure was followed time and time again throughout Parliament's involvement in the affairs of the Royal African Company between 1713 and 1752 and those of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa from its incorporation in 1750 till its dissolution in 1821.

In the case of the petitions for financial assistance from the Royal African Company and the Company of Merchants, the Commons took these petitions into consideration at the times that estimates for supply were considered in the House. Money was then granted to the Companies for the purposes contained in the petitions. From 1730 to 1785, except

for a brief period between 1747 and 1750, no grants in aid were withheld to the Companies. As a matter of fact, special grants were made by the Commons to the Companies from time to time; in 1744, the Royal African Company received a special grant of £10,000 to repair its forts. Between 1753 and 1773, the Company of Merchants received similar special grants which totalled £25,400 for the repairs of its forts.¹ These grants might not have been too generous but they do indicate that Parliament was greatly interested in keeping British commerce to West Africa on a secure basis.

The evidence in the Lords Journals does not suggest that this Upper House initiated any investigation or legislation of its own concerning African matters before 1785. Problems relating to Africa discussed in the Lords came from the Commons. The Lords passed bills which were sent up to them from the Commons in relation to the African trade. The only serious role which the Lords played in the African Companies' affairs was in 1749 when they disagreed with the Commons on the bill which proposed to eliminate the Royal African Company and to establish the Company of Merchants trading to Africa. On this occasion, the Lords recommended that further investigations be conducted into the difficulties of the Royal African Company before another bill could be passed to settle its financial problems. This step was followed by the Commons and the outcome was that the same bill was re-passed by both Houses with

1 Sessional Papers, Vol. I, No. 9, p. 36.

slight amendments; after that disagreement, the Lords merely gave their consent to other bills passed by the Commons and in most cases without any amendments. Their role in African affairs became almost negligible until the opening of the debate over the abolition of the slave trade.

Parliament's interest in African matters and more especially in those of the Company of Merchants has been assessed by an earlier historian as spasmodic. Eveline Martin wrote that "From time to time Parliament took very considerable interest in the management of the African forts, and was ready to criticise and condemn the Committee for default in duty, but in spite of this there seems hardly adequate ground for saying that the African interest was constantly and carefully watched over by Parliament".¹ And again, "Critical apathy with spasms of reforming zeal would perhaps best describe the attitude of Parliament to the Company during the major part of its existence".² It does not appear from her researches that Miss Martin utilised fully either the Journals of the House of Commons or the Lords' Journals. While there is some truth in the views expressed in these two quotations, a fuller study of the Commons' Journals does show that the opposite was the case. Although it can be said that Parliament was ready to criticise the Company's Committee, the Committee was never in fact condemned by Parliament.

1 Martin, The British West African Settlements, p. 16.

2 ibid., p. 17.

Each time that the Committee came under attack, it received support from the Commons. African affairs were constantly discussed in the Commons and the evidence presented in the present research does point to one conclusion that African interests were in fact zealously watched over by Parliament. Parliament was ready to intercept any French intrusion into British trading interests in West Africa and more particularly on the Gold Coast. On various occasions, as in 1743 and between 1753 and 1777, the Commons took the initiative to investigate the affairs of the African Companies. Even at the height of the Seven Years War and the War of American Independence, the Commons did not neglect African problems and as shown in chapters five and six of this study, extensive inquiries were being conducted by Parliament into the management of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa at these critical periods.

This said, it must be pointed out that Parliament's interest in Africa was certainly not as vast as for instance, in the affairs of the East India Company about which so much has been written. Unlike the East India Company which became very much involved in the local administration and politics in India, neither the Royal African Company nor the Company of Merchants had ambitions for colonial establishments or territorial acquisitions in West Africa. The two Companies' relations with the African chiefs were mainly commercial and bore no characteristics of political control or expansion into the interior of West Africa. The Company of Merchants for example, instructed its Governors and

agents to keep out of squabbles and quarrels between the African chiefs.¹ This policy of non-interference in native problems was maintained throughout the eighteenth century and it was only towards the first decade of the nineteenth century when the Ashantis were beginning to constitute a threat to the safety of the British forts on the coast that the Company allied with the Fanti chiefs to prevent an Ashanti domination over the Fantis.² Parliament's concern in Africa was therefore restricted to watching over the British trade on the coast. Before 1785, Parliament was not concerned in explorations of the interior or in educational schemes in West Africa.

In view of the fact that neither the African Companies nor Parliament wished to annex any territory in West Africa, there seems hardly any grounds to assume that Britain had colonies on the African coast in the eighteenth century apart from the establishment of the experimental crown colony of Senegambia which lasted for only about thirteen years and which was abandoned to the French after the American War of Independence. Following the first major shock to the British Empire in the First World War, the 1920's witnessed the preliminary disintegrations in the imperial

1 Donnan, Documents, Vol. II, pp. 489-491.

2 Claridge, op. cit., I, pp. 237-254. See also William E. Ward's A History of the Gold Coast (Ghana), pp. 146-162.

strata. A considerable interest was awakened in the study of the "Outer Parts" of the Empire. It was not surprising therefore that historians like A.P. Newton and Sir Lewis Namier spoke of the British "West African colonies" in the eighteenth century.¹ In one of her articles, Eveline Martin, who incidently was a student of A.P. Newton, wrote that "Among the many unexplored fields in the history of the Outer Empire, the British Settlements on the West African coast, until the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, have been the most neglected (...) The neglect of the study of the English African establishments during the slave trade period (...) has left a serious gap in the story of the overseas expansion of the Empire".² It is true that much research still remains to be done in Parliament's relations with West Africa in the eighteenth century. Parliament took a keen interest in the management of the forts and in the slave trade as a whole but it is hardly accurate to regard the forts as "settlements" in the form of colonial establishments. English authority on the coast did not extend farther than the walls of the forts and the African Companies had to make regular payments of rent to the African

1 Namier, "Anthony Bacon, M.P., An Eighteenth Century Merchant", in Journal of Economic and Business History, Vol. II, No.1, (Nov., 1929), p. 25. Also James High, "The African Gentlemen, A Chapter in Slave Trade", Journal of Negro History, Vol. XLIV, No. 1, (Jan., 1959), p. 299

2 Martin, "The English Establishments on the Gold Coast in the Second half of the Eighteenth Century", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th Series, Vol. V, (1922), pp. 167-68.

chiefs for the right to hold these forts. The actual area of territory held by the English traders as tenants of the native rulers was not therefore more than a few acres of land.

Conclusions as to the exact place the African forts and their garrisons occupied in the history of the British Empire may be left for a much fuller research. The present study has attempted to show what Parliament was interested in on the African coast and has not dealt with the larger problem of the administration of the forts. The study shows that Parliament's interest in Africa was primarily and mainly commercial and that beyond this, Parliament had no colonial or imperial aims in the eighteenth century. The type of problems that the House discussed concerning West Africa related to matters pertaining to the slave trade and no attempt was made to extend British rule inland or even to exercise any political control over the African chiefs on the coastal areas. The revolt of the American colonies had shut the door to the transportation of convicts to those colonies; a brief interest arose in the Commons of founding penal settlements in West Africa. As shown elsewhere in the thesis, the idea was abandoned after an extensive examination of the matter. With the definite change of attitude that occurred over the moral implications in the slave trade after 1785 and the decision not to found convict colonies in Africa, it can rightly be concluded that the Commons had indeed closed an era in Britain's relations with West Africa, the era of the supremacy of the slave trade.

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Douglas, David C., General Editor, English Historical Documents, Vol. X, (1714-1783), London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957, xxvii-972 p.

This is a comprehensive collection of documents illustrating the main trends in English history during the central years of the eighteenth century.

Fyfe, Christopher, (Ed.), Sierra Leone Inheritance, London, Oxford University Press, 1964, 352 p.

This is a collection of documents illustrating the history of Sierra Leone. The documents include accounts by travellers, traders, missionaries, official reports, extracts from books, pamphlets and newspapers.

Hakluyt, Richard, The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, 12 vols., MacLehose, Glasgow, 1912. Vol. VI used for this study.

This sixth volume of Hakluyt's Voyages contain accounts of the early English voyages to West Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Howard, C. and J.H. Plumb, (Ed.), West African Explorers, London, Oxford University Press, 1951, ix-598 p.

This is another collection of writings, accounts and descriptions by explorers on the West African coast from 1600 to 1914.

Wolfson, Freda, (Ed.), Pageant of Ghana, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, ix-266 p.

An anthology of writings about Ghana from its discovery by the Portuguese in 1471 to the present day. Extracts are drawn from Portuguese, Dutch, French, German and British explorers.

Secondary Sources

Contemporary Works

Anderson, Adam, An Historical and Chronological deduction of the Origin of Commerce from the Earliest Accounts, 4 vols., London, 1764.

Contains some useful references to the state of the Royal African Company in the mid-1740s. The work is largely the history of the commercial interests of the first British Empire.

The Annual Register, Vols. I-XXVIII, 1758-1785.

These volumes have constant references to the African trade.

Davenant, Charles, Political and Commercial Works...relating to the Trade and Revenue of England, the Plantation Trade, the East India Trade, and African Trade, 5 vols., London, 1771.

Volume V of this collected works of Davenant is devoted to the African trade. The main argument is a defence of the monopoly of the Royal African Company and preference for a joint stock company.

Demarin, John P., A treatise upon the Trade from Great Britain to Africa; Humbly Recommended to the Attention of Government, London, 1772, 64 p.

An attempt to justify the slave trade on Christian principles and to show its importance to the prosperity of both England and her colonies.

The Gentleman's Magazine, Vols. I-LV, 1731-1785.

These volumes also have numerous references to the slave trade and the activities of the African Companies.

Postlethwayt, Malachy, The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, 2 vols., 4th edition, London, 1774.

-----, Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved..., 2 vols., London, 1757.

Both works explained the importance of the African trade to Britain. Postlethwayt was more concerned in showing how efficiently the French conducted their trade to Africa under a joint stock company. He too argued for a joint stock company.

Smith, Adam, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, London, 1776, ix-976 p. (Modern Library).

Has a good outline of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa and some criticisms of it.

Later Works

Andrews, Charles M., "Anglo-French Commercial Rivalry, 1700-1750: The Western Phase", American Historical Review, Vol. XX, No. 4, July, 1915, pp. 539-556.

This article shows that the slave trade was the object of intense rivalry among all maritime European powers which possessed tropical colonies. Part II, which deals with the East, is in the same volume, pp. 761-780.

Ashton, T. S., An Economic History of England: The 18th Century, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955, vi-257 p.

The book has a useful chapter on England's overseas trade in the eighteenth century.

Burns, Sir Alan, History of Nigeria, 5th edition, London, Allen and Unwin, 1955, vii-349 p.

Long regarded as the standard general history of Nigeria. It treats very little of the 18th century; the author deals mostly with the British acquisition of Nigeria in the 19th century. The first edition was published in 1929.

Claridge, William Walton, A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti, 2 vols., London, Frank Cass, 1965 reissue.

The book provides an excellent account of the history of the tribes of the Gold Coast (Ghana) from the earliest times, European enterprises, local wars and the consolidation of British rule in the country in the 19th century but treats little of the 18th century. It was first published in 1915.

Crowder, Michael, The Story of Nigeria, London, Faber and Faber, 1962, viii-307 p.

A comprehensive general account of the history of Nigeria from the earliest times to the attainment of independence in 1960. The author has not neglected the influence of traders and missionaries as a factor in Nigeria's history.

Davidson, Basil, Black Mother: Africa, The Years of Trial, London, Gollancz, 1961.

This book treats of the slave trade before the 18th century and is an objective reinterpretation of Africa's past history.

Davies, K. G., The Royal African Company, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1957, ix-390 p.

The book deals with the history of the Company from its foundation in 1672, its prosperity in the earlier years and its difficulties at the turn of the 18th century up to 1711. The account does not go beyond that date.

Donnan, Elizabeth, "The Early Days of the South Sea Company, 1711-1718", Journal of Economic and Business History, Vol. II, No. 3, May, 1930, pp. 419-450.

The article deals with the grant of the assiento to the Company and its relations with the Royal African Company.

Dumbell, S., "The Profits of the Guinea Trade", Economic History (A Supplement to the Economic Journal), Vol., II, January, 1931, pp. 254-257.

An attempt to belittle the profits of the slave trade.

Foster, Philip J., Education and Social Change in Ghana, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, xii-322 p.

This study explores the impact of formal, western-type of education upon traditional social structures in Ghana. It assesses the interrelationships between economic and political change and the introduction of an educational system. The first few chapters have short references to schools established in the 18th century but the main scope of the book is in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Fyfe, Christopher, A History of Sierra Leone, Oxford, 1962, 773 p.

This is an encyclopaedic survey of the history of Sierra Leone. The scope of the book is mainly in the 19th century but it has a good introduction which briefly describes the period from the 15th century to 1787.

Gailey, Harry A. Jr., A History of the Gambia, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, xi-244 p.

The first part of the book deals with the early European contacts with the Gambia which by the 18th century had become a centre for Anglo-French rivalry for gum, ivory, slaves and bee-wax. The second part describes contemporary Gambia. Gailey is critical of the British administration in the Gambia.

Gray, John M., A History of the Gambia, Cambridge, 1940, x-508 p.

The work is concerned mostly with European explorers, traders, and administrators in the Gambia from the 15th century to the creation of a British protectorate in the late 19th century. Gray treats the 18th century more fully, particularly the province of Senegambia.

Hallett, Robin, "The European Approach to the Interior of Africa in the 18th Century", Journal of African History, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1963, pp. 191-206.

A good article showing lack of incentive to explore the interior of Africa due to distorted views of early writers on Africa and the failure to obtain vast riches of gold on the coast.

High, James, "The African Gentlemen, A Chapter in the Slave Trade", Journal of Negro History, Vol. XLIV, No. 1, January, 1959, pp. 285-307.

The author attempts to demonstrate how individual merchants became prosperous through the slave trade. The article itself is incoherent and full of errors.

Hotblack, Kate, Chatham's Colonial Policy: A Study in the Fiscal and Economic Implications of the Colonial Policy of the Elder Pitt, London, Routledge and Sons, 1917, 219 p.

The book has a useful chapter on Pitt's motives for sending an expedition against the French in the Senegal and the Gambia in 1758.

Knorr, Klaus E., British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1964 reissue, xix-429 p.

The study examines the significant basic motives and objectives underlying the establishment of overseas possessions. It was first published in 1944.

Kup, Peter A., A History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787, Cambridge, 1961, xviii-212 p.

Kup deals mainly with the early explorations and the trade on the Sierra Leone coast, life in the European forts, food, clothing and the native administration. The book is based on original sources from archives in Britain, France and Portugal.

Martin, Eveline C., The British West African Settlements, 1750-1821: A Study in Local Administration, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1927, xiv-186 p.

The study deals mainly with the administration of the Company of Merchants on the African coast, the province of Senegambia and the attempt to amalgamate all the British holdings in West Africa in the first decade of the 19th century. The book has been found very helpful for the present study.

-----, "The English Establishments on the Gold Coast in the Second half of the Eighteenth Century", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th Series, Vol. V, 1922, pp. 167-208.

The article raises the question of a joint control of the Company's administration on the coast by Parliament and the Committee of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa.

Martin, Gaston, Histoire de L'Esclavage dans les Colonies Françaises: Les Origines, Paris, Presse Universitaires de France, 1948, 318 p.

A straight forward account of the French share in the slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries.

-----, L'Ere de Négriers, 1714-1774, Paris, 1931, 452 p.

This book treats of the French view of the importance of the slave trade to French commerce and the prosperity of France's West Indian islands.

Namier, Lewis B., "Anthony Bacon, M.P., An Eighteenth Century Merchant", Journal of Economic and Business History, Vol. II, No. 1, November, 1929, pp. 20-70.

This is a biographical sketch of Bacon, his commercial and parliamentary activities; the article is significant for this study in that it shows Bacon as an example of M.P.s who had interests in the slave trade.

Nettels, Curtis, "England and the Spanish-American Trade, 1680-1715", Journal of Modern History, Vol. III, No. 1, March, 1931, pp. 1-32.

The article shows the profits that England derived from supplying slaves to Spanish America.

Parkinson, B. B., R. E. Hyde and S. Marriner, "The Nature and Profitability of the Liverpool Slave Trade", Economic History Review, Second series, Vols. V-VI, 1952-54, pp. 368-377.

The article tries to deny that the slave trade was ever profitable to the Liverpool merchants.

Pitman, Frank Wesley, "Slavery on the British West India Plantations in the Eighteenth Century", Journal of Negro History, Vol. XI, No. 4, October, 1926, pp. 584-668.

Pitman treats slave labour in the plantations and the treatment of the slaves in the West Indies.

Rinchon, P. Dieudonne, Les armements négriers au XVIII^e Siècle d'après la correspondance et la comptabilité des armateurs et des capitaines nantais, Brussels, 1956, 190 p.

The theme of the book is to show how the French, like the English, saw the slave trade as the mainstay of French naval power.

-----, Le Trafic Négrier: L'Organisation Commerciale de la Traite des Noirs, Paris, Vanelshe, 1938, 349 p.

The book treats of the manner of capturing slaves on the African coast, their hardships on the passage to the West Indies and their treatment there.

Root, J. W., "British Trade with West Africa", Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol. I, No. 1, 1901-02, pp. 40-63.

The author sees West Africa as only of commercial value to England.

Rose, John Holland, A. P. Newton, E. A. Benians, General Editors, The Cambridge History of the British Empire, 8 vols., Cambridge, 1929-40.

Vol. I.

Chapter XI, Penson, Lillian M., "The West Indies and Spanish American Trade, 1713-1748", pp. 330-345.

Chapter XV, Martin, Eveline C., "The English Slave Trade and the African Settlements", pp. 437-459.

Vol. II.

Chapter V, Coupland, R., "The Abolition of the Slave Trade", pp. 189-215.

Chapter XVIII, A. P. Newton, "British Enterprise in Tropical Africa, 1783-1870", pp. 635-675.

These are survey articles dealing with British activities on the West African coast; the volumes also have useful bibliographical sources on Africa.

Schumpeter, Elizabeth Boody, English Overseas Trade Statistics, 1697-1808, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, ix-72 p.

The study contains valuable statistics on the net profits of English trade to Africa in the 18th century.

Scott, W. R., "The Constitution and Finance of the Royal African Company of England from its Foundation till 1720", American Historical Review, Vol. VIII, No. 2, January, 1903, pp. 241-259.

As its title implies, the article deals with the constitutional set up and finance of the Royal African Company in its earlier years but the author gives an account of the early abortive attempts to found permanent companies to trade to the West African coast.

Southern, Lady Bella, The Gambia: The Story of the Groundnut Colony, London, Allen and Unwin, 1952, 283 p.

A readable chronicle of the Gambia. Lady Southern describes the Gambia River and gives an insight to the lives and customs of the Gambians and the administration; she has a chapter on James Island and the African Companies but follows closely the accounts given by John Gray in his History of the Gambia.

Ward, William E. F., A History of the Gold Coast, London, Allen and Unwin, 1948, 434 p.

The work traces the history of the Gold Coast (Ghana) from the period before the arrival of the Europeans to the attainment of independence in 1957. Ward describes the early history of the tribes, the rivalry of the Europeans for the trade on the coast, the rise of Ashanti and other states and the gradual consolidation of British authority over the whole country. A standard work but has rather little to say on the 18th century. The revised edition of 1958 is entitled, A History of Ghana.

Williams, Basil, The Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, 2 vols., London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1915.

Both volumes have brief accounts of the British expedition to West Africa against the French in 1758.

Williams, Judith B., "The Development of British Trade with West Africa, 1750 to 1850", Political Science Quarterly, Vol. L, No. 2, June, 1935, pp. 194-213.

The article shows how Englishmen regarded the African trade as important to the well being of England and her colonies.

ABSTRACT OF

PARLIAMENT'S INTEREST IN WEST AFRICA, 1713-1785:

A STUDY BASED ON PUBLISHED PARLIAMENTARY RECORDS.¹

A study of Parliament's interest in Africa in the eighteenth century, before the onset of the anti-slavery issue after 1785, has long been overdue. This thesis initiates such a study by examining the published records of both the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

It was largely through attention given to the affairs of successive British companies trading to Africa that Parliament expressed its interest in West Africa. The Royal African Company, which dominated the slave trade from its incorporation in 1672 up to 1698 when that trade was declared open to all British subjects by Parliament, made strenuous efforts to regain its exclusive monopoly between 1708 and 1750. These attempts were foiled by Parliament but as the Company's affairs worsened, the House of Commons intervened and granted subsidies to aid the Company to maintain its trade. The first of these subsidies was granted in 1730. Prior to 1730, Parliament had followed a policy of minimum interference in the management of the Company. With that grant, indifference in the affairs of the Company vanished and the House became irretrievably involved in the future prospects of the Royal African Company. In spite of

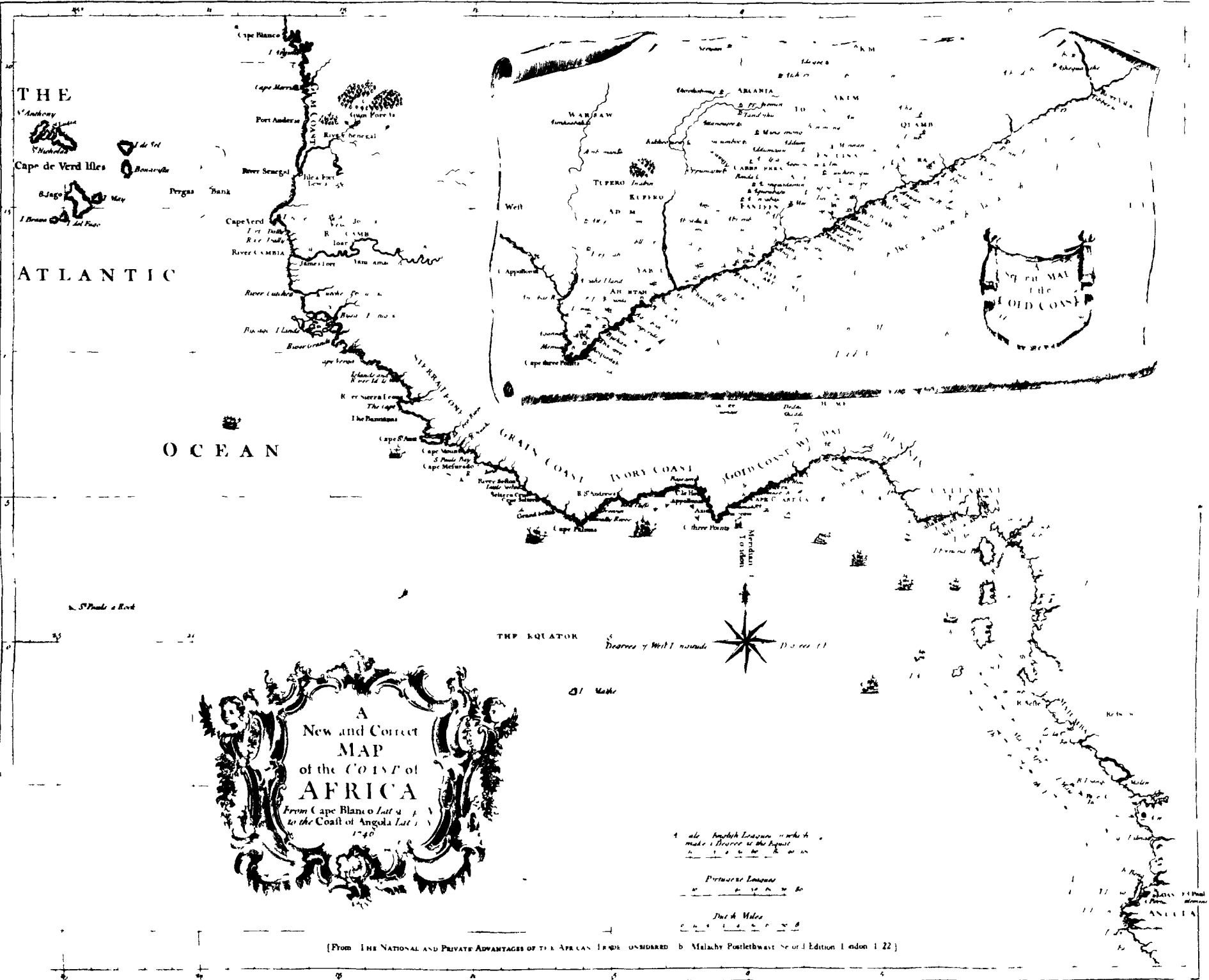
¹ Benedict G. Der, master's thesis presented to the Department of History, University of Ottawa, Ontario, April, 1967, v-207.

these yearly grants, the Royal African Company's affairs still deteriorated. In 1749, the Company's finances came to a severe crisis; the Company was virtually bankrupt. After several investigations conducted by the Commons into its difficulties, the Company was wound up in 1750 and a new company incorporated by the name of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa. Following the precedent set in 1730, Parliament granted annually, sums of money to the new Company from 1750 until 1821 when it was dissolved. The direction of the Company was not Parliament's concern but the Commons took a keen interest in the administration of the Company and the forts built on the West African coast. The expenditure of funds granted to the Company came under the scrutiny of Parliament. The Company's directors had to render statements of accounts to Parliament every year. Frequent investigations were conducted by the Commons into the management of the Company but the House never once condemned its directors for misappropriation of funds.

The thesis has attempted to discover the extent of and bases for Parliament's interests on the African coast, but has not dealt with the wider problem of the administration of the Company of Merchants either in England or on the African coast. The study shows that Parliament's interest in Africa was primarily commercial; beyond that, Parliament had no ulterior colonial or imperial aims as has hitherto been suggested by earlier historians. Parliament was greatly interested in keeping British commerce to West Africa on a secure basis and this explains why the House took such a keen interest in the management of the forts and the

African Companies themselves.

Parliament's concern in Africa was certainly not as vast as, for example, in the affairs of the East India Company. Unlike the East India Company which aspired to territorial acquisitions, the African Companies were not concerned in local politics before 1800. Parliament's involvement in Africa was therefore restricted to watching over the British trade on the coast. Before 1785, the House was not concerned with exploration or philanthropic schemes in West Africa. Between 1780 and 1785, a brief interest arose in the Commons of founding convict settlements in West Africa. The idea did not materialize and the project was abandoned after an extensive inquiry. The type of problems that the House discussed concerning West Africa related to matters pertaining to the slave trade and apart from the establishment of the Province of Senegambia (1765-1778), Parliament made no attempt to extend British rule inland or to exercise any political control over the African chiefs.



A
New and Correct
MAP
of the COAST of
AFRICA
From Cape Blanc Lat 12° N
to the Coast of Angola Lat 17° S
1740

A scale English League = 3 miles
made 1 Degree of the Equator
= 100 120 140 160 180 200

Portuguese League
= 2 1/2 5 7 10 12 15 20

Dutch Miles
= 1 1/2 2 3 4 5 6 8 10

[FROM THE NATIONAL AND PRIVATE ADVANTAGES OF THE AFRICAN TRADE CONSIDERED b. Malachy Postlethwaite Second Edition London 1722]