

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1993. Vol. 82.

AUGUST, 1934.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL.

THE EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES IN THE BRITISH REALM.

"If all the other crimes which the human race has committed from the Creation down to the present day were added together in one vast aggregate, they could scarcely equal—I am sure they could not exceed—the amount of guilt which has been incurred by mankind in connection with this diabolical traffic."—*Lord Palmerston.*

Just one hundred years ago, on August 1st, 1834, the law to emancipate the slaves throughout the British Dominions came into operation, thanks to the heroic efforts of William Wilberforce, who obtained the abolition of the Slave Trade, and of Thomas Fowell Buxton, his successor as leader of the Anti-Slavery movement in the House of Commons, who carried to a successful conclusion the campaign for emancipation.

To-day it seems incredible that a struggle lasting nearly fifty years should have been necessary to secure the elemental right of freedom to all British subjects, but the public conscience was blunted by the fact that the slave trade was extremely profitable, and that slaves were realisable property, so that their emancipation in the British Dominions was only finally secured by the provision for a gift to slave-owners from the Exchequer of £20,000,000 as compensation.

It must be realised in connection with slavery that there are two aspects, the slave trade—that is traffic in human beings—and domestic slavery.

From first to last the slave trade is characterised by intense cruelty. To take a concrete instance, that of the trade in East Africa, mainly in the hands of Arabs, where even now raids are made into British territory. The procedure adopted by the raiders, at the time when the trade was most active, was to descend upon a peaceful village, seize men, women and children, and after chaining them together to drive them by forced marches down to the coast. Those who survived the journey were, on arrival at the coast, packed into slave dhows under conditions of appalling misery, for transit to the slave markets on the Persian Gulf, and unless these boats were intercepted and captured by British men-of-war patrolling East African waters for this purpose, the captives were, on arrival at their destination, sold into slavery and all the attendant horrors implied in those words.

The rescued captives, after the papers signifying their freedom had been made out by the authorities in Zanzibar, where they were usually landed, were frequently received by the hospital and schools of the Universities' Mission, but even with the greatest care

and kindest treatment a proportion succumbed to the effects of the ordeal through which they had passed. Cowed, emaciated, they could not be revived, and passed away victims of the inhuman slave trade. Thanks to the alertness and activity of the British Navy, the East African traffic in slaves has been mainly suppressed, but it is not even now extinct, for the profits of a successful raid make the attendant risks of capture in British waters worth while.

Domestic slavery belongs to a different category. Under kind ownership a slave may be relatively happy, and care free, but all owners are by no means good masters, and the fundamental wrong done to a slave is that he is deprived of the opportunity of exercising and cultivating his will power and of directing his own life. He is the chattel of another.

The emancipation of the slaves was, however, not the end, but the beginning of the slavery problem. They had to be taught how to exercise their newly-acquired freedom, the dignity of labour, the duty of self-government. There are qualities in the African races which respond to such teaching. There are Africans who to-day are holding responsible positions both in Church and State, who have proved fully competent to do so with honour and efficiency.

Another name for ever honourably associated with the abolition of slavery is that of Abraham Lincoln, when President of the United States of America. The horror of the slave traffic between West Africa and America is well known, and the terrible picture of the suffering entailed by slavery, drawn by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," made an indelible impression, and helped largely in the abolition of slavery in America.

On Tuesday, July 31st, a midnight service of commemoration of the centenary of the emancipation of all slaves within the British realm was held at St. Botolph's Church, Bishopsgate, when Dr. Harold D. Moody, President of the League of Coloured Peoples, told how a hundred years ago that night 700,000 emancipated slaves, on their knees in their churches, accepted the wonderful gift of freedom. It was fitting that the bells should peal at midnight to celebrate the actual moment of emancipation. And yet, though the British Empire is free from the guilt of the slave traffic, all is not well, for Lady Simon, an ardent abolitionist, states that there are at least 5,000,000 persons held to-day as property. To obtain their freedom and so heal what David Livingstone aptly called "the open sore of the world," is an object worthy of every effort on the part of the League of Nations, and by the success of which it could indeed justify its existence.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)