

A SLAVE SHIP CAPTAIN REMEMBERS THE MIDDLE PASAGE

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As I am on the chapter of cruelties, let me describe the shipment of cargo of slaves on the Coast and the middle passage.

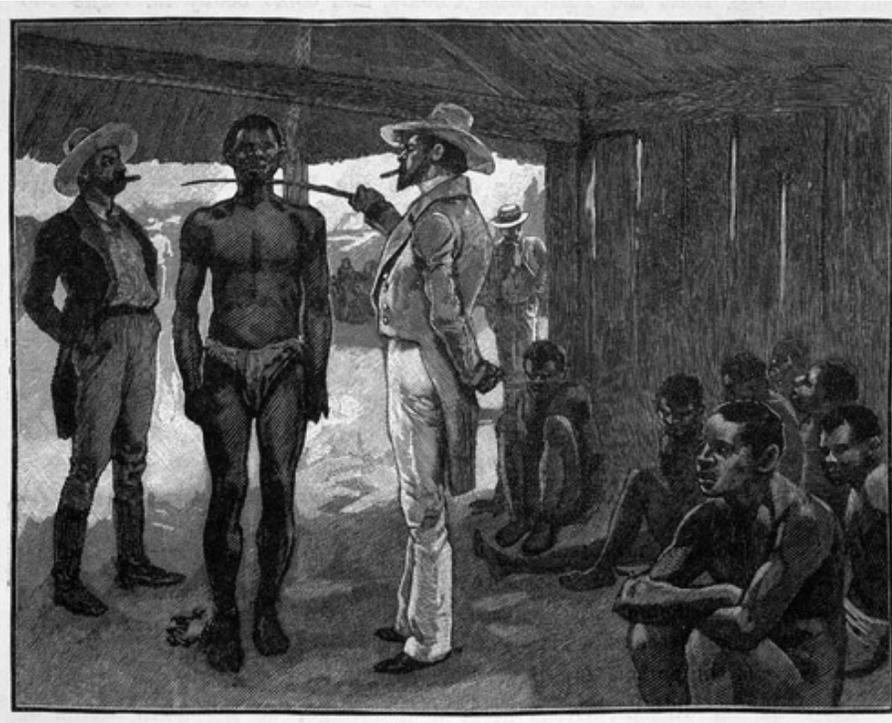
In the first place, the factor [buyer] takes great care in selecting the slaves for shipment. Those whose appearance denotes the least contagious sickness are never shipped. Women in a far state of pregnancy are also reserved; children at the breast are rarely put on board. A few days before the embarkation takes place the heads of every male and female are shaven. They are marked; this is done with a hot pipe sufficiently heated to blister the skin. The object of this disagreeable operation is done only when several persons ship slaves in one vessel. This disgusting duty is one of those forcible cruelties which cannot be avoided. When several proprietors [businessmen] ship in one vessel it is indispensable to mark them, in order that on the arrival the consignees [owners] may know them. Also, when death takes place in the passage, by the mark it is determined whose loss it is, as every Negro thrown over the board during the voyage is registered in the log book. But in explanation for this somewhat brutal act, let me assure the reader that it is ever done as lightly as possible, and just enough for the mark to remain only six months; when and if well done, it leaves the skin as smooth as ever.

The day for shipping having arrived, the slaves are plentifully fed and shipped in canoes to be transported on board. Once alongside, their clothes are taken off and they are shipped on board in perfect nakedness; this done without distinction of sex. This precaution is necessary to keep them from vermin. This is also an unpleasant necessity, and forcibly attended to, as the females part



Iron slave shackles - know to the trade as "bilboes" from the wreck of the English slave ship *Henrietta Marie*. The ship sank in the summer of 1700 thirty-five miles west of Key West, Florida.

with reluctance with the only trifling rag that covers their Black modesty. They are kept in total nudity the whole voyage, cleanliness is preserved with little trouble.



Thirty years ago when the Spanish slave trade was lawful, captains of slaver were somewhat more religious than they are at present. They made their slaves say grace before meals and thanks after, but in our days they have no time. Masters of such a vessel, content themselves with a short sentence and a clapping of hands. This hurrah over, a bucket full of salt water is given to each mess, and they are made to wash their hands. Then a kid [bowl] is placed before them full of either rice, yams or beans, according to what

country they belong, as Negroes in the south do not eat the same food as those from the north. It is the sailor's duty to report when any one of the slaves refuses to eat and, if by the judgment of the officer it is found that stubbornness is the cause of a voluntary abstinence (Negroes often starve themselves to death,) the cat [whip] is applied till a cure is effected. (Here is another instance of those unpleasant necessities resorted to, but only given as a medical treatment.) If the loss of appetite is caused by indisposition [illness], he is singled out for further inspection and a glass bead or button is tied round his neck as a sick list ticket. The feeding over, another bucket of water is given for a second washing, and everyone is then allowed to retire in single file manner to their favorite plank about decks or below. This duty of feeding takes place twice a day, at 10 in the morning and at 4 in the afternoon. Water is also given three times a day, a half pint each time. Pipes and tobacco are also distributed with some economy, as they cannot all be allowed a pipe. Thrice a week their mouth is washed with vinegar, and nearly every morning a dram of spirits [liquor] is given them, both used as a preventative against scurvy.

Every afternoon, wind and weather permitting, they are allowed to sing. Women, men and boys join in chorus in African melodies accompanied by the tam-tam on the tub. Men and women are ever kept separate, but permission is granted to converse together in the daytime. Corporal punishment [whipping] is only inflicted by order of the officers, and then the culprit is made to understand why he is being punished. Once a week the barber goes round with his attendants and scrapes, without the assistance of soap, their wiry chins, free of expense. The fingernails are also cropped every shaving day; in this operation all the penknives and scissors are in requisition.