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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

TRANSMITTING INFORMATION

IN RELATION TO THE

INTRODUCTION OF SLAVES INTO THE UNITED STATES.

JANUARY 7, 1820.

Read, and ordered to lie on the table

WASHINGTON :

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1820.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,

January 6th, 1820.

SIR: In obedience to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 31st December last, requiring the Secretary of the Navy to furnish copies of such communications as he may have received since 1816, and such information as he may possess in relation to the introduction of slaves into the United States, with a statement of the measures adopted to prevent the same; I have the honor to transmit sundry extracts of letters, numbered 1 to 4, inclusively, comprising all the information communicated to this department since 1816, in relation to the introduction of slaves into the United States.

I have the honor to refer the House of Representatives to my report of the 9th of January, 1819, on this subject; and I transmit, herewith, paper marked A, which contains that part of the instructions from this Department to the commanding naval officers in relation to slave vessels.

The public vessels now cruising, have not yet reported their operations, nor is it known that any seizures have been made by them.

I have the honor to be,

With the highest respect,

Sir, your most obdt. servant,

SMITH THOMPSON.

*The Honorable the SPEAKER
of the House of Representatives.*

No. 1.

Extract of a letter from Captain Charles Morris to the Secretary of the Navy, dated

U. S. FRIGATE CONGRESS,
Off the Balize, 10th June, 1817.

“Most of the goods carried to Galveston, are introduced into the United States; the more bulky and least valuable, regularly through the custom house; the more valuable, and the slaves, are smuggled in through the numerous inlets to the westward, where the people are but too much disposed to render them every possible assistance. Several hundred slaves are now at Galveston, and persons have gone from New-Orleans to purchase them. Every exertion will be made to intercept them, but I have little hopes of success.”

No. 2.

Extract of a letter from Lieutenant Commandant John Porter, to the Secretary of the Navy, dated

U. S. BRIG BOXER,
Off the Balize, June 28th, 1817.

“I shall leave this on Monday to cruise off the Sabine River; it is reported that attempts will be made to smuggle slaves into Louisiana, from Galveston, and the natural presumption is, that they will attempt the Sabine or the Atchafalya rivers: the depth of the water off those rivers is very inaccurately represented on the charts, and it will not be in my power to approach nearer the shore than within ten miles of the Sabine, and not nearer than thirty off the Atchafalya. Whatever can be done to prevent their being brought clandestinely into the country, will have to be performed by the boats, which, sir, shall be actively employed the moment we arrive on the ground.”

No. 3

Extract of a letter from Captain John D. Hanley, to the Secretary of the Navy, dated

U. S. SHIP JOHN ADAMS,
Amelia Sound, January 24, 1818.

“I yesterday detained the English brig Neptune, of London, for a violation of the slave act: by her papers it appears that she clear-

ed from Jamaica for this port, with a small quantity of rum, and eight convict slaves, sentenced to transportation for various offences. It is evident that their object was to smuggle them into the State of Georgia, thus making a Botany Bay of the United States. I shall send her to Savannah for trial."

No. 4.

Extract of a letter from Captain John D. Henley, to the Secretary of the Navy, dated

U. S. SHIP JOHN ADAMS,
Cumberland Sound, March 17, 1818.

"It would be gratifying to me to know how far the commissions granted by Aury or McGregor, to vessels evidently commanded and manned by citizens of the United States are to be respected. I have not the smallest doubt, from the situation those pirates have fixed upon for their rendezvous, that the goods found in their prizes will be disposed of principally in the United States, and that the part which may consist of slaves will be smuggled into Georgia, as many of the inhabitants are too much inclined to afford every facility to this species of illicit trade."

A.

Extract from the instructions of the Navy Department to the Commanders of all United States vessels cruising in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, &c.

"You have also enclosed such parts of several acts of Congress, prohibiting the importation of Slaves into any ports or places within the jurisdiction of the United States, as are necessary to point out to you your duty and authority under these laws; and it is expected and required of you by the President, that a strict and vigilant attention be paid to the direction therein contained, that, if possible, this inhuman and disgraceful traffic may be suppressed.

By the act of the 20th of April, 1818, you will perceive, that it is made unlawful to import or bring in any manner whatsoever, into the United States or Territories thereof, from any foreign kingdom, place or country, any negro, mulatto, or person of color, with intent to hold, sell, or dispose of such person as a Slave, or to be held to service.

By this act it is also made unlawful, for any citizen of the United States, or other person, to build, equip, load, fit, or otherwise pre-

pare, any ship or vessel, in any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, or to cause any such ship or vessel to sail from any port or place whatsoever, within the jurisdiction of the United States, for the purpose of procuring, and transporting any such Slaves to any port or place whatever. And any ship or vessel employed in such importation of Slaves, or so built, fitted out, or prepared, is liable to be seized and forfeited. And by the act of the 3d of March, 1819, the President is authorised to employ any of the armed vessels of the United States, to cruise in such places as he may think proper, where he may judge attempts may be made to carry on the Slave trade by citizens, or residents of the United States, in contravention of the acts of Congress prohibiting the same; and to instruct such armed vessels to seize, take, and bring into any port of the United States, to be proceeded against according to law, all ships or vessels of the United States, wheresoever found, which may have taken on board, or which may be intended for the purpose of taking on board, or of transporting, or may have transported, any negro, mulatto, or person of color, in violation of any of the provisions of the act of the 20th April, 1818, above referred to, or in violation of any other act or acts prohibiting the traffic in Slaves."

"You will perceive from the generality of the provisions in these laws, you are authorized to take and bring in all ships or vessels of the United States, which may have been in any manner employed, or intended to be employed, in the Slave trade; or any other vessel offending against the provisions of any of the laws you have enclosed. You will particularly notice the two provisos to the first section of the act of 1819; the first of which, directs in what manner you are to keep and dispose of the Slaves which may be found on board of any ship or vessel seized by you. If brought within the United States, they are to be delivered to the Marshal of the District where brought in, and transmit the evidence of such delivery to this Department. Upon the capture, therefore, of any vessel having Slaves on board, you will immediately proceed to the Island of Sherbro, on the Coast of Africa, and deliver such Slaves to the Agent appointed by the President to receive them pursuant to the provisions of the act, or to any other Agent so appointed, at any other place on the Coast of Africa. The second proviso relates to the disposition of the officers and crews of such vessels so captured by you. Great vigilance will be expected from you, in the safe keeping of all such officers and crews, until they shall be handed over to the civil authority to be proceeded against according to law."

P. S. No provision having as yet been made for the reception of Slaves upon the Coast of Africa, you will for the present, and until ordered otherwise, consider the foregoing orders relative to the disposition of such Slaves as you may capture, so far modified, that you will deliver them on Smith's Island, at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, to such Agent as may be appointed by the President to receive them there."