Charles Dickens' Review of the Official Record of the 1841 Niger Expedition: Abolitionism, Exeter Hall, and the Ambivalent Meaning of "Palaver"

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1. The Niger Expedition

The lost war with America in 1776, according to Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, "precipitated not so much a sea-change in British attitudes to the slave trade, as a converting of already existing qualms into positive action" (358-59). In 1783, the British Quakers presented the first anti-slavery petition to Parliament and in 1787, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in London, which consisted of nine Quakers and three Evangelicals of the Anglican Communion. With their self-sacrifice toward the cause, the House of Commons voted for the gradual abolition of slave trade in 1792 (Furugawa 42, 78).

In 1807, British parliament abolished the slave trade and in 1833 it provided for the emancipation of slaves in its West Indian colonies. The slaves were not completely freed but worked as apprenticed labourers until in 1838, when this system ended. Martin Lynn states in Chapter 6 "British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" of *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III, The Nineteenth Century*, that "Tropical Africa too held an important place in the British government's designs. Here British commercial and political involvement grew markedly in these years. Again British aims centred on the spread of free trade—usually couched in terms of the moral imperatives of the anti-slave trade campaign …" (113). Lynn adds that expeditions to the Niger were encouraged in 1841 and 1857 by the government (113).

Michael Slater, the editor of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, explains that "the 1841 expedition had both a commercial and a missionary purpose and it was fervently sponsored by the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for

Civilisation of Africa, of which Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, a philanthropic brewer, was a leading light" (Dickens, "Review" 108). Andrew Porter, in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, provides details of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, 1st Baronet (1786-1845). Buxton succeeded William Wilberforce as leader of the campaign in the House of Commons for the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1822, and thus was partly responsible for the Abolition Act of 1833 (206).

In 1823 Buxton joined Wilberforce and others in founding the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Porter shows that in 1839 Buxton in his *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* wrote, "Legitimate commerce would put down the Slave Trade, by demonstrating the superior value of man as a labourer on the soil, to man as an object of merchandise" (210). Buxton's book inspired the British government to send an expedition to the Niger River Delta in 1841. Its purpose was to negotiate treaties and consider territory for agricultural and commercial settlements inland. They left Britain in May 1841, but after five weeks, with forty of the 145 white people dead from fever, they retreated. In 1843 the Niger settlement was abandoned, and Buxton was shocked and died in 1845 (Porter 210). In 1848, Captain William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson wrote an official record of the Niger expedition, *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger, in 1841, under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter, R. N.* (hereinafter called *A Narrative*). They finished writing it seven years after their expedition, because "events of the deepest excitement supersede one another so rapidly" (vii).

Charles Dickens (1812-1870), a novelist and journalist in the Victorian age (1837-1901), expressed very grave concern at the Niger expedition in 1841. He read the official record of the expedition, *A Narrative*, and published his review in *The Examiner* on 19 August 1848. Before reading the record, Dickens knew the disastrous result of the Niger expedition through *The Times* and *The Edinburgh Review* (Dickens, "Review" 108).

This paper proves that Dickens was not an anti-abolitionist, even though he criticized the cause of the Niger expedition, but a true abolitionist, who understood the predicaments of the poor people at home as well as the Africans abroad. I will show the details of the official record of the Niger expedition and the history and the criticism of Exeter Hall, one of the strongholds of abolitionism. Then I will examine Dickens' Review of *A Narrative* for clarifying how Dickens analyses the cause and responsibility

of the failure of the expedition. By those procedures, Dickens' desperate attempt to stop reckless expeditions, not worth risking British people's lives, by so-called or pseudo-abolitionists is highlighted.

2. The Official Record of the Niger Expedition in 1841

Let me introduce *A Narrative*, which was a record of the expedition to West Africa in 1841 and something Dickens chose to review for *The Examiner*, a British magazine. *A Narrative* seemed to be just a daily elaborate report of their exploration but actually, it was the uncompromising statement of their abolitionism.

A Narrative was written by Captain William Allen, R. N. and T. R. H. Thomson, M. D., Surgeon, R. N. and published with the sanction of the Colonial Office and the Admiralty in 1848. Captain William Allen was Fellow of the Royal Society and the late commander of HMS *Wilberforce*. T. R. H. Thomson was a Fellow of the Ethnological Society and one of the medical officers of the expedition. It had two volumes, twenty-eight chapters and 1,020 pages. It was dedicated to Prince Albert, president of The Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilization of Africa.

In a journal format, from 12 May to 2 September, *A Narrative* explains their difficult journey through Sierra Leone, Cape Coast, the Nun branch of the Niger to the top of the Niger Delta. The main goals of the Niger Expedition were the abolition of the slave trade, the substitution of free labour for slave labour, the introduction of agricultural cultivation, the abolition of human sacrifices, and the diffusion of Christianity. Three vessels, the *Albert*, the *Wilberforce*, and the *Soudan* were appointed. On the 12th of May 1841 the Expedition steamed away.

A Narrative has many illustrations and small wood engravings to show the lives of the natives in Africa; they include the natives, maps, their instruments, their songs (score), and scenery that might interest readers in both Africa and the Niger expedition. The tribes in West Africa, Grébus and Krumen, had very simple music and "they accompany all their songs with the tom-tom, or, if afloat, by striking the paddle against the gunwale of the canoe or boat" (Vol. I 116). But there were serious diseases, dysentery and fevers which "they attribute to the bad thick water in all their rivers during August, the middle

of their rainy season and the most sickly month" (Vol. I 115-16).

After five weeks in the river, "the fever had been progressing rapidly in all the vessels" (Vol. I 358) and the illustrator stopped drawing. In the appendix *A Narrative* lists the name, the date and the place of the people died of the fever. Also in another appendix, it shows the number of deaths from fever in three vessels, according to their ranks in a diagram. In total, deaths from fever contracted on the coast and in the river reached forty-four, when the ships carried a three hundred and three complement, including forty-four, Krumen (tribal people from the coast of Liberia and Ivory Coast), liberated Africans and other blacks. Among the forty-four dead, only one was black. Forty-three were the officers, white seamen, marines and sappers. For the latter, the climate of Africa was probably unbearable, and calomel or quinine could not help them, when they got sick.

The authors of *A Narrative* revealed the disaster closely and deliberately. In the second volume of the book, on July 4th they visited the graveyard where crew members who died of fever were buried. It was "a spot sacred to the memory of the philanthropist, the man of science, and the 'friends of Africa'" (Vol. II 332).

> Before leaving Fernando Po, we visited for the last time, the small locality appropriated as a burying-ground, where so many of our brave companions had found a last resting-place. . . . On reaching the sequestered spot, we stood once more beside the lofty cotton-tree, at the broad base of which, is the tumulus marking the grave of Richard Lander. (Vol. II 330-31)

Richard Lemon Lander (1804-34) was a British traveller. His explorations to West Africa began with the Scottish explorer Hugh Clapperton in 1823. He went to the River Niger in 1830 and was killed by a native at his third expedition in 1834 (*ODNB* Vol. 32 388-90). Mungo Park (1771-1806) was a pioneer of the explorers to West Africa, and he was among the first to travel to the River Niger. To the explorers, Africa was the vast unknown continent, and they were eager to conquer it (*ODNB* Vol. 42 637-40).

As a result, *A Narrative* became a record of the dead. Without reading the journal entries, the readers could see the list of the crew of three vessels in the appendix of

volume one, which included the people who had died from river fever. Of the three vessels, the *Albert*, whose Captain was H. D. Trotter had twenty victims of river fever. They included two assistant-surgeons. Although a great deal of sorrow and perseverance permeated through the book, the authors ended it by indicating that "the failure will only be the loss of some *few thousands* of English money in a cause in which we have lavished *millions*" (Vol. II 436). This was not a mere sum of money but showed their strong resolution to withstand the disaster, in which they lost their dear forty-four crew, who died of fever and to advance the cause of abolitionism. They stopped lamenting the death of their crew and started to think of another expedition again. Their *Narrative* was the records of their hope to abolish the slave trade in Africa with their unyielding determination.

3. Dickens' Criticism of the Activities at Exeter Hall

In 1848 Dickens wrote a review of *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger, in 1841*. Dickens began his article with a term of reproach: "It might be laid down as a very good general rule of social and political guidance, that whatever Exeter Hall champions, is the thing by no means to be done" (110). Why did he critically mention Exeter Hall at the beginning of his review?

It was Exeter Hall where many abolitionists gathered in the Victorian age. The history of the Hall tells us the movement of the philanthropists, whose activities Dickens questioned, as is discussed later. "Exeter Hall, the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, 1841" engraved by Henry Melville after Thomas Hosmer Shepherd's painting shows the inside the hall, full of men and women, sitting on the stage and standing on the floor. One man is making a speech and people clap their hands cordially. Exeter Hall is the metonymic expression to suggest abolitionism. It is the basis and the starting point of abolitionism. Many people gathered at the hall to promote evangelicalism. By focusing the relationship between the hall and abolitionism, we can appreciate the significance and problems.

Exeter Hall was built on the Strand along the river Thames, in the middle west of London in 1830-31. According to Diarmid A. Finnegan, it opened in 1831 at a cost of £36,000 and the premises included a great hall with an official capacity to seat 3000.

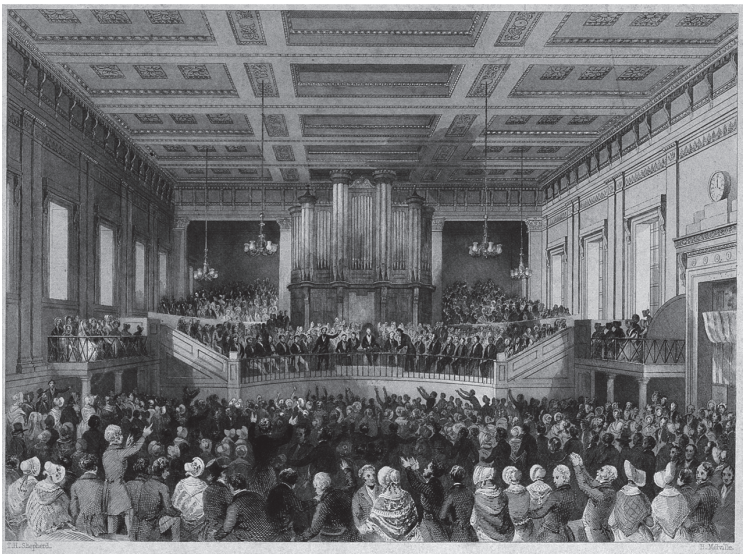

Figure 1. "Exeter Hall, the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, 1841" T. H. Shepherd (https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/)

Religious and scientific meetings and concerts of church music were held there till 1907. The great May meetings of the Evangelicals were also held to promote charitable and missionary endeavour (47). *The OED* (Supplement of 1975) shows that this word first appeared in 1835, when Thomas Moore wrote *The Fudges in England*. It is a novel about the British Fudge family. They visit Paris and there their daughter Biddy falls in love with a young man. She thinks he is the king of Prussia only to find that he is a draper. In 1849 Thomas Carlyle invokes the name of Exeter Hall in his essay, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question." In that essay, Carlyle describes Exeter Hall "monstrosities" and criticizes the philanthropists.

Exeter Hall was known as one of the strongholds of abolitionism. In *Dickens and Empire* Grace Moore writes that "the slave trade in the British colonies had been outlawed in 1807 but the institution of slavery itself did not end until 1833. The British had taken up the cause of universal abolition by 1840 and the first World Anti-Slavery Convention was held at Exeter Hall in London in June 1840" (43). In *Women Against Slavery*, Claire Midgley discusses three new national societies, the African Civilization Society, the British

India Society and the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) and adds that of these only the BFASS survived beyond 1843 and organised the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 with British and American abolitionists at the Hall. Midgley explains:

> The African Civilization Society, founded by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton with the aim of eradicating the foreign slave trade by promoting legitimate commerce, education and Christianity in Africa, was the most aristocratic of the new anti-slavery bodies. It was also the one with the lowest level of formal participation by women: of its 361 initial subscribers only 23 were female, several of these being titled ladies. . . . The African Civilization Society collapsed in 1841, following the disastrous failure of the Niger Expedition, an attempt to establish an inland trading post and model farm in West Africa. (121-22)

In *Dickens and Empire*, Grace Moore describes Exeter Hall as "the headquarters of the British anti-slavery campaign" (44). Dickens attacked Exeter Hall several times in his emancipation debate in his early career. In *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), the narrator describes the town of Muggleton and tells that "the mayor, corporation, and other inhabitants, have presented at divers times, no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of negro slavery abroad" (88). When the Reverend Mr. Stiggins refers to the "exhortations to subscribe to our noble society for providing the infant negroes in the West Indies with flannel waistcoats and moral pocket handkerchiefs"(368), Tony Weller says "wot aggrawates me, Samivel, is to see 'em a wastin' all their time and labour in making clothes for copper-coloured people as don't want 'em, and taking no notice of flesh-coloured Christians as do" (371). Later, Stiggins is kicked and ducked in a horse-trough by Weller. Moore adds that "by the 1850s Dickens's equation of the abolitionist cause with humbug manifested itself in more odious characters like *Bleak House*'s Mrs Pardigle and the Reverend Chadband" (45).

Dickens wrote *Sketches by Boz* in 1833-36. This book is divided into four parts, "Our Parish," "Scenes," "Characters," and "Tales" and there are fifty-six stories in total. In "The Ladies' Societies," the sixth chapter of "Our Parish," Dickens introduces

the societies with membership limited to women. In this chapter, "The ladies' child's examination society" gained a momentary victory, and "the ladies' bible and prayer-book circulation society" held a secret council to beat them:

> A secret council of the distributionists was held that night, with Mrs. Johnson Parker in the chair, to consider of the best means of recovering the ground they had lost in the favour of the parish. What could be done? Another meeting! Alas! who was to attend it? The Missionary would not do twice; and the slaves were emancipated. A bold step must be taken. The parish must be astonished in some way or other; but no one was able to suggest what the step should be. At length, a very old lady was heard to mumble in indistinct tones, "Exeter Hall." (38-39)

The members of ladies' societies are all rivals. They do not cooperate with one another but struggle to command wide popularity. Exeter Hall seems to be their last resort for them when they are in trouble. Dickens' description of Exeter Hall reveals some hint of what people thought about it. Exeter Hall was the place where orators gave their speeches and the audience pretended to understand them. *The OED* also writes that Exeter Hall was "often used allusively to denote a type of evangelicalism."

Dickens criticized Exeter Hall from his early career to his later years. On 30 November 1865 Dickens wrote a letter to W. W. F. de Cerjat and referred to Exeter Hall again. On 11 October 1865 rebellion erupted in Jamaica and about one month later Dickens wrote a letter telling his observation on this revolt. He referred to Exeter Hall again and repeated his argument, "the work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad" (Moore 125). He wrote, "The Jamaican insurrection is another hopeful piece of business. That platform—sympathy with the black—or the native, or the devil—afar off, and that platform indifference to our own countrymen at enormous odds in the midst of bloodshed and savagery, makes me stark wild" (Moore 164). He continued, "So Exeter Hall holds us in mortal submission to missionaries, who (Livingstone always excepted) are perfect nuisances, and leave every place worse than they found it" (Moore 164). What he wrote about Exeter Hall was the same as before and

Dickens denied too much absorption into the people abroad.

Dickens showed the public his critical views about Exeter Hall. Porter explains the official stance on abolitionism, without mentioning Exeter Hall. *The Times* also was critical in a different way. An anonymous contributor to *The Times*, who calls himself POTESTAS, passes judgment on as many people as possible with the title of "The Late Anti-Slavery Meeting at Exeter Hall" on 10 June 1840:

> . . . With the greatest possible feeling of admiration for the sentiments entertained by Mr. Fowell Buxton towards the negro, and also with the greatest respect, I must beg to differ entirely from the mode and system adopted at the late meeting. From the report as printed in all the papers, it appears to me that all that was done at that meeting amounted to nothing. . . . Had any one of them stood up and recommended the cultivation of the soil, he would have done far more good than telling us "that we had by our preventive measures aggravated the horrors of the traffic tenfold." (10 June 1840)

POTESTAS, which means patriarchy in Latin, thinks the first step towards promoting the civilization of the negro, the extinction of the slave traffic, and the introduction of Christianity into Africa must be the cultivation of the soil. People should supply the natives with tools and seeds and instructors to teach them cultivation, not psalm tunes. The result was that the negro continued as idle and barbarous as ever and Christians among them were merely in name. He asks, "What is the use of calling meetings at Exeter Hall to put down the slave trade as long as this injustice to the negro exists!" He finishes his letter to the editor of *The Times* by accusing the mismanagement and jobbing of the Colonial Office.

Dickens and POTESTAS were both severely critical about people connected with Exeter Hall. Those views must constitute a part of the public opinion on the movement of philanthropists or evangelicals of Exeter Hall. Dickens' attitude was clearly shown in his Review of *A Narrative*: "commonsense . . . is a very rare ingredient in any of the varieties of gruel that are made thick and slab by the weird old women who go about, and exceedingly roundabout, on the Exeter Hall platform" (110). This is a bitter reproach to

the people, gathered at Exeter Hall. When Dickens wrote this article on 19 August 1848, he knew that the result of this expedition in 1841 was a grievous disaster. That was the reason why he criticized Exeter Hall severely.

4. Dickens' Review of *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger, in 1841*

Dickens begins his article on the Niger expedition in 1848 by telling the readers of *The Examiner* that "Exeter Hall was hottest on its weakest and most hopeless objects, and in those it failed (of course) most signally" (110). Dickens is against "the exposure of inestimable British lives to certain destruction by an enemy . . . and the enactment of a few broad farces for the entertainment of a King Obi, King Boy, and other such potentates" (110-11). "A few broad farces" is a similar expression to "palaver" which is used by both Captain Allen's *A Narrative* and Dickens' Review. Dickens points out "British credulity in such representations and our perfect impotency in opposition to their climate, their falsehood, and deceit" (111), because he knows British missionaries will be scorned by Africans.

On the 12th of May 1841 the Expedition steamed away to the river Niger from Plymouth Sound. At Sierra Leone, in the middle of June, the interpreters and the Krumen, a seafaring people of the coast of Liberia and Ivory Coast were taken on board. They went to Cape Palmas, made for Cape Coast Castle, and for the Nun branch of the Niger-the Gate of the Cemetery, which was the fatal name called by the sailors after the expedition. They reached the royal residence of King Obi after a fortnight's voyage up the river. When the conference was opened, Captain Trotter explained to Obi that the Queen of Great Britain sent him to enter into treaties with African Chiefs for the abolition of the trade in human beings. Obi replied through his interpreter that he would do away with the slave-trade, if a better traffic could be substituted. Mr. Schön, a missionary, explained to Obi in the Ibu language what the Queen wished. He began to read the address drawn up to show the different tribes the views of the expedition but Obi soon appeared to be tired of a "palaver" (115) which lasted so much longer than those to which he was accustomed. In this scene there were four points of view, Mr.

Schön, King Obi, Captain Allen, and Dickens. First, Mr. Schön used the Ibu language and thought what he said was not a "palaver." Secondly, King Obi thought Mr. Schön was telling a palaver. Thirdly, Captain Allen, looking at them and writing the record, used the word "palaver" to condemn Obi. Captain Allen did not think it was the palaver. Fourthly, Dickens, observing this scene in *A Narrative*, repeats this word "palaver," giving this word some humorous connotation and as a result, he thinks lightly of Mr. Schön:

> It is not difficult to imagine that Obi was "highly amused" with the whole "palaver," except when the recollection of its interposing between him and the present made him restless. For nobody knew better than Obi what a joke it all was, as the result very plainly showed. (116)

A Narrative also described Obi's pleasure when he looked at the presents, and pointed out "his inattention to the rest of the palaver" (116), because of his anxiety to examine them.

As this word "palaver" was used in *A Narrative* five times and Captain Allen chose an illustration of Africans sitting together and conferring entitled "A Palaver" to face

Figure 2. "A Palaver" in *A Narrative*, vol. II, facing the title page.

the title page of Volume II, Dickens added the word in his Review twice to emphasize the word to his readers. There are three positions among the people concerned, that is, a speaker (King Obi), writers (Captain Allen and Thomson), and a reviewer (Dickens).

The OED says the etymology of this word "palaver" is the adaptation of Portuguese *palavra* and it means word, speech, and talk. In Spanish, *palabra*, in Italian, *parola*, in French, *parole*, and in Latin, *parabola*. "Palavra appears to have been used by Portuguese traders on the coast of Africa for a talk or colloquy with the natives (quoted in 1735), to have been there picked up by English sailors (quoted in 1771), and to have passed from nautical slang into colloquial use" (390). The word "palaver" has two meanings and the second one is divided into a, b, c. Meaning 1 is a talk, parley, conference, and discussion. It chiefly applied to conferences with much talk between Africans or other tribespeople and traders or travellers. The first example was in *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the West-Indies* by John Atkins in 1735. Meaning 2 (a) is that "palaver" is applied contemptuously to (what is considered) unnecessary, profuse, or idle talk, or jaw and *The Adventures of Roderick Random* by Tobias George Smollett in 1748 has the first example listed for this usage. Meaning 2 (b) is talk intended to cajole, flatter, or wheedle and the first example is in *Itinerarium* by A. Hamilton in 1744. Meaning 2 (c) is a dispute or contest in West Africa and the first example is in *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* by Francis Moore in 1740. While meaning 1, a parley, is used in *A Narrative*, meanings, 2 (a) idle talk and 2 (b) to flatter are used in Dickens' Review and he intends the word to have a double meaning, in order to change the original intention.

The commissioners of the Niger Expedition crew appointed by her Majesty, for the purpose of carrying out her benevolent intentions for the benefit of Africa, referred to the religion and told Obi that their countrymen would be happy to teach their religion, without which blessing they should not be prosperous as a nation. However, Mr. Schön the "respected" (118) missionary, was ridiculed again by Obi when he was requested to state to Obi the difference between the Christian religion and heathenism. He said, "There is but one God" but Obi answered, "I always understood there were two" (118). Furthermore, Dickens quotes Obi as he concluded the conference by remarking that "The Slave Palaver is all over now, and I do not wish to hear anything more of it" (118). Dickens informs the readers that Obi, one of the falsest rascals in Africa, broke the treaty

and continued slave-dealing vigorously.

Dickens shows Obi was clever enough to understand the inefficiency of a blockade by the English Government to prevent the exportation of slaves and the impossibility of the substitution of a religion. The substitution meant the uprooting of his nation's preconceived ideas, methods, and customs. There was another monarch at another place on the Niger, a certain Attàh of Iddàh, who was also very much amused by the missionary's spectacles, and as a monarch must not smile in public, the fan-bearers found it necessary to hide his face. The missionary was ridiculed again.

By this time the expedition had been in the river five weeks, and Dickens says that the tragedy of the expedition begins:

> . . . fever has appeared on board of all the ships in the river; for the last three days especially, it has progressed with terrible rapidity. On board the *Soudan* only six persons can move about. On board the *Albert* the assistant surgeon lies at the point of death. On board the *Wilberforce* several are nearly at the same pass. Another day, and sixty in all are sick, and thirteen dead. "Nothing but muttering delirium or suppressed groans are heard on every side on board the vessels." Energy of character and strength of hope are lost, even among those not yet attacked. (121)

The *Soudan* came alongside the *Wilberforce* to receive the invalids. The whole of one side of the little vessel was covered with invalids. The *Wilberforce* returned to the sea and the *Alber*t went on up the river alone. The *Soudan* met the *Albert* coming out at the Gate of the Cemetery. Emaciated Captain Trotter was lifted out of his bed to see the *Soudan* again. When the expedition was on the eve of another hopeless attempt to ascend the Niger, it was ordered home.

Dickens again criticizes the philanthropists' vision of the Christianization of Africa and the abolition of the slave trade. He hopes Exeter Hall would not send the expedition in the future, for such means were "useless, futile and wicked" (125). He believes there is a great gulf set between the civilized European and the barbarous African. The African Civilization Society, The Church of England Missionaries, and all other Missionaries were

asked to complete their work at home. Finally Dickens paid his respects to the explorers of Africa and wrote that 'the resting-place of those brave men is sacred, and their history a solemn truth' (126).

When we analyse the word "palaver," which means a parley in *A Narrative* and an idle talk in the Review, we understand Dickens' opinion about missionaries and philanthropists. He takes objection to palaver and the Niger expedition. Dickens wants to tell that "the work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad" (125). He also understands the difficulty of abolitionism, so he later writes "North American Slavery" (1852).

Dickens addresses the problems of poverty at home as well as slavery abroad. In his *Sketches by Boz* (1833-6), the "Parlour Orator" named Mr Rogers, who speaks on public affairs in a public-house, points out "the paradox of the emancipation of black slaves in the colonies when white slavery was still rife in the mother country" (Moore 45). Dickens' opposition to expeditions abroad and his great regard for people at home continued from his early twenties to his later years. Dickens believed "the work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad" (125).

The word "palaver," which Captain Allen uses and Dickens repeats in his Review, has an ambivalent meaning and connotation. Sometimes it means King Obi's ignorance, and sometimes it means Mr Schön's abortive attempt. It is a wavering word. As a notable word in both *A Narrative* and Dickens' Review, the ambivalent meaning of "palavar" emphasizes the emptiness of the expedition and the mission. The relations between "at home" and "abroad" are clear. Even in his twenties, Dickens, a young man, understands the real situation of poor people. He describes in his novels the predicaments of people of the lower class who felt themselves as miserable as the slaves abroad. He could see both worlds, at home and abroad.

Conclusion

This paper examined Dickens' opinion about the abolitionism and Exeter Hall, and the Niger expedition in 1841, written in 1848 in his Review of *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger, in 1841*. Dickens opposes

the expedition abroad, using "palaver" as a key word and criticizes the government for not caring about people at home in the 1840s. We can see his similar attitude in the novels written in his early career in the 1830s. In Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, his first novel published between 1833 and 1836, we see Mr. Rogers in "The Parlour Orator," the fifth chapter of "Characters." Mr. Rogers is a stoutish man of about forty with a face of inflamed appearance. He tells that "ten years ago, I don't believe there was one man . . . who knew he was a slave—and now you all know it, and writhe under it" (238). Dickens also introduces a greengrocer to whom Mr. Rogers (the parlour orator) says, "You are a slave and the most pitiable of all slaves" (238). The greengrocer answers, "Werry hard if I am, for I got no good out of the twenty million that was paid for 'mancipation, anyhow" (238). Mr. Rogers is Charles Dickens himself and a powerful advocate for Dickens' argument. Mr. Rogers symbolises Dickens' attitude toward abolitionism.

Mr. Rogers in *Sketches by Boz* refers to the situation of the West Indies. Towards the end of the slavery there, twenty million pounds were paid to the West Indian planters. Though thousands of lives were saved by the acts of 1807 and 1833, for the abolition of slave trade and slavery, as Colley suggests, "the financial cost of these efforts to Britain in terms of loss of trade, compensation to the West Indian planters and naval patrols must be counted in millions of pounds" (166). Eric Williams illustrates what Colley writes clearly by showing several examples of the West Indian planters who received compensation. For example, Williams writes, "The compensation paid to Gladstone in 1837, in accordance with the Act of 1833, amounted to £85,000 for 2,183 slaves" (71).

Thomas Carlyle also writes about the twenty million pounds:

> Exeter Hall, my philanthropic friends, has had its way in this matter. The twenty millions (Twenty millions of pounds—one hundred millions of dollars,—The sum paid for emancipation.), a mere trifle despatched with a single dash of the pen, are paid; and far over the sea, we have a few black persons rendered extremely "free" indeed. (528)

Dickens and Carlyle are clearly against twenty million pounds, compensation to the West Indian planters, and Williams includes John Gladstone, the father of William Gladstone

and one of the planters.

Both the word "palaver" and the phrase "twenty million pounds" can mean useless effort and vain promises for Africans and the British people, and that is what we see in Dickens' Review of *A Narrative*. Twenty million pounds could not set the slaves completely free. Slavery continued in a different form, apprenticed labour, after the act for the abolition of slavery passed in 1833. Dickens imagines King Obi's position in his Review:

> . . . the substitution of a religion it is utterly impossible he can appreciate or understand, be the mutual interpretation never so exact and never so miraculously free from confusion, for that in which he has been bred, and with which his priest and jugglers subdue his subjects, the entire subversion of his whole barbarous system of trade and revenue–and the uprooting, in a word, of all his, and his nation's, preconceived ideas, methods, and customs. (119)

Dickens describes King Obi as a villain who attracts people, leads the whites around by the nose and as a result, highlights their stupidity. Obi has "foreknowledge of the fate fast closing in" (119) and sees "a picture of the bones of white men bleaching in a pestilential land, and of the timbers of their poor, abandoned, pillaged ships, showing, on the shore, like gigantic skeletons" (119). Dickens shows that Obi's mind's eye is more vivid than that of officers or seamen. Obi says, "Too much palaver, give me the presents and let me go home, and beat my tom-toms all night long, for joy!" (120). The Expedition itself was "palaver" and meaningless, which, through King Obi, readers of Dickens' Review were taught.

The ambivalent meaning of "palaver" also shows the danger of abolitionism because, Patrick Brantlinger indicates (156), it might include the tendency of colonialism in it. Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa were the colonies where abolitionists in the British Empire and the United States of America tried to send the freed slaves. Dickens' negative attitude toward the expedition is apparent in his novel, *Bleak House* in 1852-53 and his article, "North American Slavery" in 1852 reveals his opinion about slavery in America. It is necessary to analyse both works and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher

Stowe to further understand Dickens' thought on abolitionism.

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