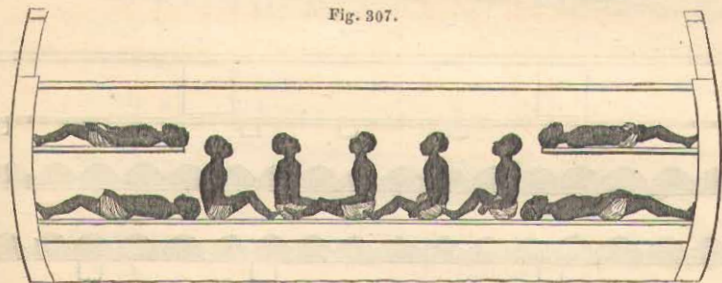


CHAPTER IV.

SLAVE-SHIPS.

842. The following figures shew the position of slaves in the more crowded slave-ships. The accompanying extracts are from Sir Powell Buxton's Report :—

Fig. 307.



843. It might be expedient for vessels sent to capture slavers to be provided with a portable ventilator, which might prove useful in removing the atmosphere before the sailors enter below deck, when it is in an extreme condition, and also when they may have to be conveyed for a considerable distance before they reach the shore.

“ In these ships the negroes are stowed between the decks, which are seldom more than two or three feet, and sometimes not more than eighteen inches in height.

“ In this condition, men, women, and children, perfectly naked, and, in many cases, the women either in a state of pregnancy or carrying their children of from four to twelve months old, are conveyed to their wretched holds. In these dungeons of misery, they are packed together so close, that, in some in-

stances, they are obliged to lie on their sides, and, from the small space between the decks, are unable even to sit erect.

Fig. 307.

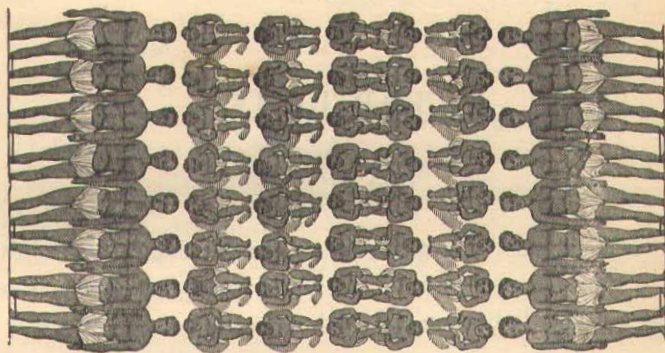
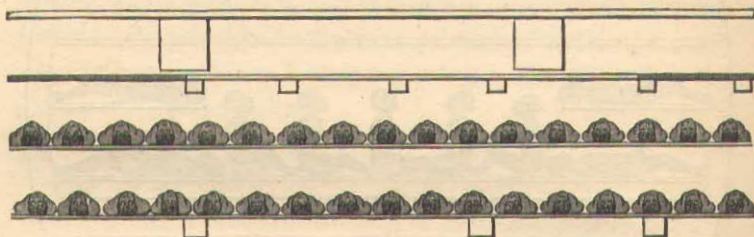


Fig. 308.



“The most vivid idea of this particular may be gathered from the manner in which those who have witnessed the scene describe it. They tell us, that the negroes are packed so close, that it is impossible to move without treading upon them; that in one case, one hundred and thirty-two occupied a space in which there was not room for more than thirty at full length; that they are stowed literally in bulk; that they are packed like bales of goods; that they are packed like herrings in a barrel. The sufferings arising from this source it is impossible to describe, nor can the mortality it occasions be computed.

“Nor is this all. The misery originated by these circumstances is fearfully aggravated by the small quantity of air which can possibly get to the negro-rooms. Most of the ships are in-

deed provided with air-ports. But if the sea is rough, or the rains heavy, these, and every other avenue by which air is admitted, must be closed; and the fresh air being excluded, the slave-holds become intolerably hot, and a dreadful amount of wretchedness ensues.

“By these combined causes, numerous diseases are engendered. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluviæ exhaled from the bodies of these unhappy beings, being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes, which carry off great numbers. Sometimes two-thirds perish. In one instance, fifty-five were carried off in seventeen days; and, in another case, out of a cargo of seven hundred, three hundred and fifty were lost before they reached the place of their destination. The smallpox often breaks out, and is fatal to multitudes. Six hundred, in one vessel, have been destroyed by it; and, on another occasion, a ship which left the shores of Africa with four hundred and thirty-eight slaves, reached its destined port with only seventy. They fell by this disease. The measles sometimes makes a fearful havoc amongst the unfortunate negroes. One case is recorded in which two hundred and fifty-three were victims to it.

“The hold of a slave-ship presents a spectacle of disgusting wretchedness and piteous woe, which cannot be equalled, and completely beggars description. It is often filled with masses of living corruption, and you may sometimes see women in all the pangs and throes of labour bringing forth children, with men dying at their side, and not unfrequently living men chained to those who are dead, the latter often being in a putrid state. Such is the stench which these circumstances of horror combine to produce, that it is hardly possible to bear it for a single moment. Well did Wilberforce observe,—‘That never can so much misery be found condensed into so small a space, as in a slave-ship during the middle passage.’

“But this is not all. The water and provisions of the slaves are kept under them. With the latter they are most scantily supplied, and from the want of the former, they suffer more than from almost any other source. Such, indeed, are their suffer-

ings from thirst, that, in one instance, Dr Walsh narrates a vessel being captured, and the slaves being brought on deck, and water being presented to them, they all rushed like maniacs towards it. No entreaties, or threats, or blows, could restrain them. They shrieked, and struggled, and fought with one another for a drop of the precious liquid, as if they grew rabid at the sight of it.

“The negroes, in a state of desperation, not unfrequently destroy themselves. When they are brought on deck for fresh air, knowing that they are doomed to return to the place of their former miseries, they often, locked in each other’s arms, leap into the sea, and seek, in the embrace of death, the termination of their woes. So customary is this, that slave-ships are generally secured by netting all round the decks. But the suicides bear no comparison, in point of numbers, with the murders. It is computed that no fewer than three thousand slaves are annually thrown overboard. If the captain of the vessel apprehends that his supply of water will not hold out till the end of the voyage, he meets his difficulty by devoting to the waves the surplus of his wretched cargo of human beings, retaining only those for whom he calculates that he has a sufficiency. On one occasion, on this account, one hundred and thirty-two were destroyed.”