

QUEEN IN SIERRA LEONE.

Britannia came into Freetown harbour - two destroyers and a frigate in escort - The Queen had come to Sierra Leone. There was a salute of 21 guns.

Fishing boats and canoes put out in a sort of gay, impromptu regatta to the royal yacht; the first to say welcome. The official greeting, a little later. More formally, the Governor General, Sir Maurice Dorman, and his wife waited on the quayside.

As Her Majesty came ashore the Prime Minister greeted her, while the 1st Battalion the Royal Sierra Leone Regiment provided the guard of honour. For 150 years this country was under British rule, and now, in its newly won independence, it continues in much of the old tradition. For this regiment, which in the World War fought with gallantry in Burma, the royal visit was to be particularly memorable, the Queen having promised to present it with new colours while she was in the country.

After the inspection the Queen's car led the official procession on the way to Fort Thornton; a royal progress enthusiastically cheered all along the route.

It's an amazing place, this capital of Sierra Leone. For weeks, Freetown has been preparing for the Queen's visit, and going about its bustling business at the same time. About 70,000 people live here; Africans, Asiatics, and a sprinkling of Europeans; and all kinds of languages are heard in the streets.

Nearly everything anyone can want can be bought in the market at Freetown. Africans rescued from slave ships were settled here more than 150 years ago, and the word Free, and the idea of Freedom are cherished; one reason why they have an affection for Britain. We helped their ancestors to win liberation from slavery, we encouraged freedom in trade amongst themselves, and when at last Sierra Leone desired political independence it was willingly granted.

The Queen's visit was the main topic in the market. And then, on the big day, Victoria Park was crowded for Freetown's civic reception to Her Majesty. The Duke changed into civilian clothes for this municipal ceremony. There was nothing military about the proceedings; the chief functionary was the Mayor, and his office is clearly modelled on British lines; an illustration that free institutions will flourish everywhere, given the chance.

Some tribal chiefs were among the persons of importance presented to the Queen.

For two young people it was a day they'll never forget. The little girl presented a bouquet - and very well she carried out her duty; the boy handed a buttonhole to the Duke. A pleasing, informal touch, almost at the beginning of the royal visit to Sierra Leone.