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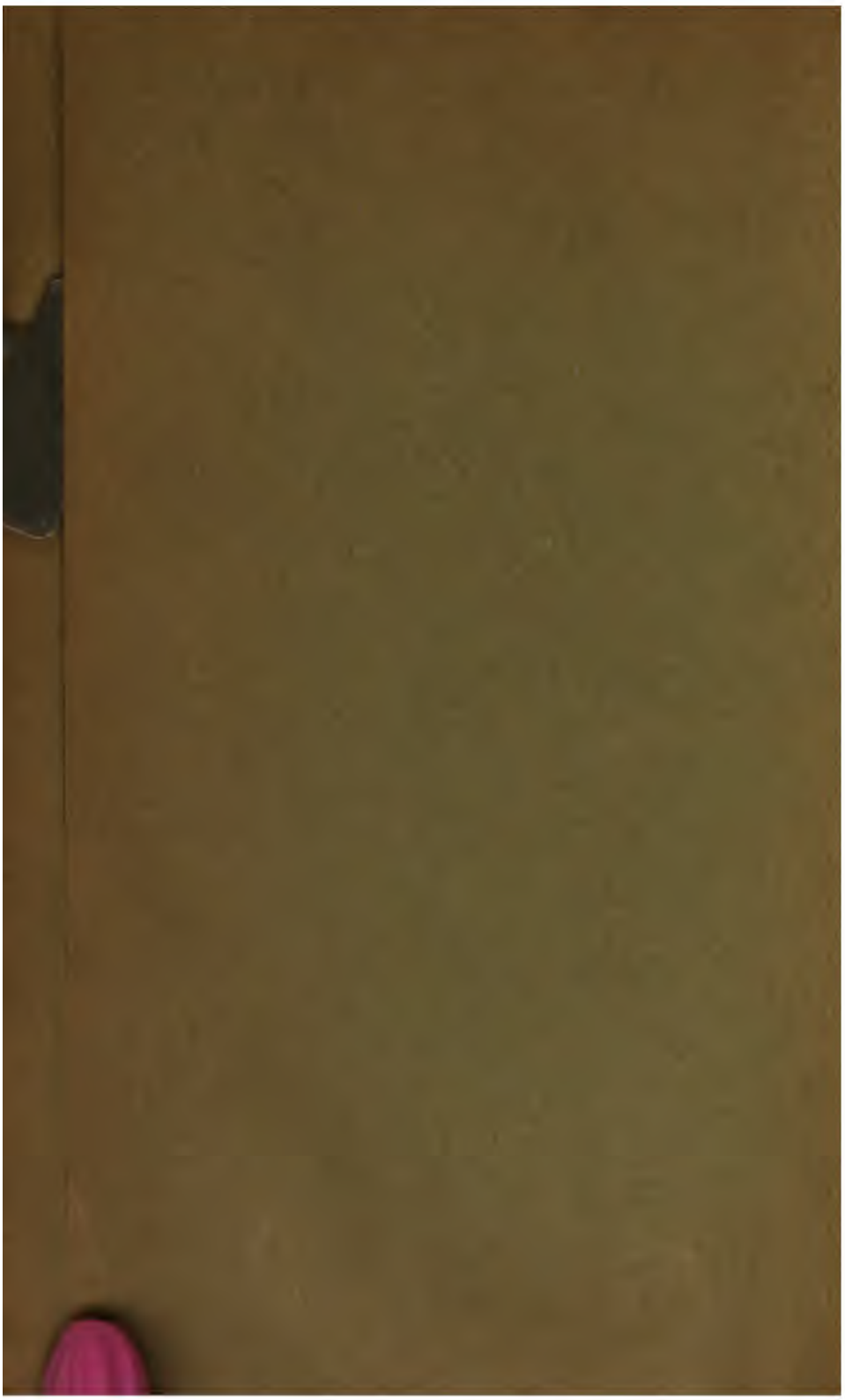
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G. H. PORTAL, ESQ., C.B.

IN ABYSSINIAN COSTUME

MY MISSION TO ABYSSINIA.

BY

GERALD H. PORTAL, C.B.,

H.B.M. AGENT AND CONSUL-GENERAL AT ZANZIBAR.

WITH MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:

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PREFACE.

A PART of the following narrative of our adventures in Abyssinia was written immediately after my return to England in 1888, and was even printed for private circulation among friends. It is at the request of these same friends that I now venture to offer these pages to the public. It has been impossible to avoid being struck by the general ignorance which prevails in England, and indeed, throughout those parts of Europe which I have visited, as to the appearance, manners, customs, and country of the Abyssinians. Those who have studied the map of Africa are aware that Abyssinia is a mountainous country in the heart of which lie the sources of the Blue Nile, and from whose fertile valleys and hill-sides the tropical rains wash down that rich loam which is carried by the Nile and the Atbara through many hundreds of miles of desert to the Mediterranean, and on the regular

supply of which the whole of Egypt depends for its very existence. Those who are at all acquainted with the history of Northern Africa know that the Abyssinians are a race of mountaineers, showing strong signs of semitic origin, and claiming for themselves descent from the Queen of Sheba—claiming, in fact, to be the result of her historical visit to King Solomon. Few people, however, appear to have any idea of the wild and striking beauty of this African Switzerland, and still fewer have much knowledge of the curious habits, customs, and traditions of this most interesting race.

For centuries the Abyssinians have kept their religion intact, when all the nations around them have succumbed to the sword or to the persuasion of Islam. For centuries the great Moslem wave has beaten against the mountain barriers of Abyssinia, but never has it succeeded in breaking into the country. Sturdily, for generation after generation, this hardy Christian nation has repulsed every invasion of the fanatical Mahommedan, and has preserved its own form of Christianity. In the course of the long struggle, Abyssinia has become cut off from the rest of the world, a Christian island set in the midst of a stormy Moslem sea. It is probably for this reason that so little has been known of the country, and it is

this which leads me to hope that some interest may attach to a narrative which tends to throw a little light on the darkness hanging over this corner of Africa.

I do not pretend to offer in the following pages any exhaustive treatise on the history, customs, or religion of the Abyssinians, nor have I dared to attempt any description of the country or its inhabitants, except as we saw them with our own eyes. But in traversing this comparatively unknown land, as we did, almost from end to end, we saw and learnt so much that was new and interesting to ourselves; we found both the country and the people so different, in some respects, from what we had anticipated; that I venture to hope this volume may be of some service to the student of African morals and history.

As regards the simple story of our adventures, I can only hope that my readers may feel even the smallest fraction of the interest which was so thrilling at the time to ourselves. Few men, even among African travellers, have stood face to face with death so often in the course of a few months —from want of water, from the decrees of the highest authorities in the land, and at the hands of unauthorized and over-zealous chiefs—and have lived, absolutely unhurt, to tell the tale.

Finally, I wish to place on record my conviction that we owe our existence to-day in great measure to my good fortune in having with me such companions as Major Beech and Hutchisson. Before their undaunted resolution and cheerful courage every obstacle seemed to vanish; and before many weeks had passed they had inspired our native followers with some of these qualities. With the example before one of their unquestioning obedience and unshaken confidence, it was impossible to feel disheartened, or to "throw up the sponge" even when our fortunes seemed to be at their lowest ebb; and the best wish that I can offer to every traveller, in Africa or in any dangerous and uncivilized country, is that, when the outlook seems blackest, and when he is in the greatest danger of giving way to despair, he may find himself with two such men as Beech and Hutchisson at his back.

G. H. P.

On the Red Sea,
July 20th, 1891.

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MY MISSION TO ABYSSINIA.

INTRODUCTION.

The Mahdi in the Soudan—The Italian Occupation—Reasons for the English Mission.

My friends have asked me to give some account of the adventures of the recent English Mission to the King of Abyssinia, with which I had the honour to be entrusted. As I only propose to write a personal narrative, and not a political treatise, I trust that they will be content with the bare story of our journey to and from the camp of the King, added to a very brief description of the country through which we passed and of the people with whom we came into contact.

It will be remembered that in December, 1883, the receipt of the ghastly news of the total annihilation at Melbeis, in Kordofan, of the ill-fated General Hicks Pasha, of his English officers, and of the Egyptian army of 10,000 men with them,

made it evident that Egypt, in its then disorganized and shattered condition, could no longer entertain the slightest hope of being able successfully to cope in the Soudan itself with the semi-religious, semi-political rebellion led by Mahomet Achmet, the Muté-Mahdi. England had undertaken to help her to hold her frontiers at Wady Halfa and Suakin; more than this it was hopeless, and would indeed have been madness, to attempt. The Egyptian Government, therefore, at the instance of England, came to the determination to abandon the Soudan Provinces, and to direct all its energies to the withdrawal of the garrisons scattered throughout those vast districts. The position of these garrisons was evidently most precarious, but none were in more imminent danger than the unfortunate soldiers quartered at Sanhit, Keren, Galabat, and other fortresses along the Abyssinian frontier, who now found themselves between the triumphant hordes of the Mahdi on the one side and the almost equally savage armies of the Negoos* on the other, despised by both, and without the smallest hope of obtaining quarter from either. There was no chance of succour from Egypt, except such as

* I should here explain that "Negoos" is the title usually given to King Johannis. The word "Negoos" is simply the Abyssinian equivalent for the English word "Emperor."

might be afforded by negotiation and diplomacy; poor Egypt had no army worthy of the name, no officers deserving of confidence, no money, no credit, and no men. Truly the plight of these garrisons was not enviable. To remain at their posts would be to render their reduction by siege, famine, or treachery, merely a question of time, while to sally forth and to endeavour to reach the coast at Massowah would be a confession of weakness which would infallibly cause the whole of the surrounding country to declare for the Mahdi, and would render their escape impossible. There was but one chance of successfully carrying out the evacuation of this part of the Soudan. If the King of Abyssinia, by English influence or by the offer of a suitable reward, could be induced not only to abstain from attacking these Egyptian garrisons, but even to grant them a safe passage through his country, their eventual arrival at Massowah would be not only possible but very probable. It was therefore with this object that Admiral Sir William Hewett, with a large staff of English officers, and accompanied by Mason Bey, an officer who had acquired a large experience of the Soudan and Abyssinia under the late General Gordon, as Egyptian plenipotentiary, proceeded to meet King Johannis at Âdŏwă, now the chief town of Abyssinia, situated about 120 miles to the

south-west of Massowah. Without much difficulty the Negoos was induced to sign a treaty, by virtue of which he promised to allow the Egyptian garrisons on his frontier to retreat peacefully through his dominions, and to give them a safe-conduct as far as the neighbourhood of Massowah. On the other hand, the places evacuated by Egypt on the Abyssinian frontier, the fortresses of Galabat, Amadib, Sanhit, and all the Bogos country were ceded to Abyssinia, together with all the stores, arms, and munitions of war at that time collected in the different arsenals. No mention is made in this treaty of Ailet, Sahati, Wia, or Monkullu, the occupation of which by the Italian troops became subsequently the cause of so much bloodshed and expenditure both of money and life.

The treaty was, in the first instance, loyally carried out on both sides. The Egyptian garrisons arrived in safety at Massowah, and some hundreds of thousands of Remington rifles, and millions of rounds of ammunition were handed over to King Johannis, together with the evacuated positions.

It is unnecessary to recall all the circumstances which led to the occupation of Massowah by the Italian troops, which took place shortly after the signature of this treaty. It is enough to say that

the Egyptians wished to evacuate the place; the Sultan of Turkey, to whom it would naturally revert, was not prepared to take over the charge of it; the English did not want it; and the Italians stepped in. Disputes soon arose between the Italian Governor and the Negoos respecting the taxes levied at Massowah on goods coming from, or imported into, Abyssinia, in the course of which King Johannis complained that the Italians failed in carrying out the provisions of Admiral Hewett's treaty, in virtue of which he claimed that no taxes whatever could be levied on such merchandise. The king, moreover, consistently denied the right of the Italian or of any foreign Government to be at Massowah at all. He maintained that by right of descent Massowah and all the south-western coast of the Red Sea had for centuries belonged to Abyssinia. Tradition lives long in Abyssinia; as far back as the sixteenth century the superior armament and discipline of the Turks had driven the Abyssinians from Zeyla, and later from Massowah, and had added these sea-ports to the possessions of the house of Othman. In 1866, Massowah was transferred to the Khedive of Egypt, in consideration of a substantial increase in the tribute payable by Egypt to the Porte.*

* The tribute paid by Egypt for Massowah amounts to about £16,000 a year.

But during all these 300 years, argued King Johannis, Abyssinia had never given up its claim to the sea-coast; the Turks, and subsequently the Egyptians, had only held these places as they had acquired them—by the power of the sword. If, therefore, urged his Majesty, God's retributory justice, working through the instrumentality of the Mahdi, had now forced the Egyptians to evacuate Massowah and to disgorge their ill-gotten spoils, surely, in common equity, these places should revert to their former and rightful owner! Instead of this, however, Abyssinia was to be asked to stand by and see Massowah and its surrounding district pounced upon by Italy, a power hitherto almost unknown on the Red Sea Littoral, and the nature of whose interests in Massowah, the Soudan, or in Abyssinia, it was no doubt difficult for the mind of an African potentate to understand.

It does not, however, come within my province to discuss either the justice of the Italian occupation of Massowah, nor the wisdom of the various enactments made by the Italian local authorities regarding customs duties, and other restrictions on trade with the interior. It is sufficient to say that the irritation created by these and similar disputes rapidly increased, and reached a dangerous point when the Italians, in order to protect

the caravan road between Massowah and the interior, on which murder and brigandage had become so common as almost to put a stop to all trade, sent a couple of battalions to take possession of the position of Sahati, about ten miles inland from Monkullu, a desolate, barren place, but valuable on account of its commanding the only water to be found for a whole day's journey along the road. At this moment Ras Alula, the Abyssinian chief governing the frontier province of Hamazen and commanding a large army recruited in that province and in Tigré, happened to be engaged in an expedition directed against an army of the late Mahdi concentrated near Kassala. This campaign soon ended in the battle of Kofit, at which the overwhelming numbers of the Abyssinians gained a hardly-won victory, but at the price of an immense loss of life; nor was Ras Alula able completely to accomplish the object of the expedition, *i.e.* the subjection and occupation of Kassala. The Abyssinian troops did indeed enter triumphantly into the town, but it was not considered prudent to remain there, and they were forced to be satisfied with their empty and perhaps doubtful victory, and to return again to the protection of their native mountains.

Smarting from his great loss of men, and from his failure to accomplish the complete destruction

of the dervishes of Kassala, Ras Alula returned to find the Italians in possession of Sahati. He determined to assume the offensive, and in January, 1887, directed an attack against the Italian works. This assault was unsuccessful, but on the following day a small reinforcement of 480 men, which was being sent from Massowah to relieve the garrison of Sahati, was attacked by 10,000 Abyssinians* under the command of Ras Alula himself, and, after a gallant and desperate resistance, was massacred almost to a man. The attack was made at a place called Dogali, where the road to Sahati runs through a barren plain about three quarters of a mile wide, commanded on every side by rocky hills, from which an incessant and well directed fire was poured in upon the little band of Italians. The favourite Abyssinian mode of warfare was well exemplified on that day, for, despite their great superiority in numbers, the Abyssinians never left their cover till hardly an Italian soldier was left alive. One of the very few survivors, an

* Such, at least, was the estimate of the numbers of the Abyssinians made by the few Italian survivors. Ras Alula himself, and subsequently King John, told me that there were not more than 5000 present. It is probable that in the excitement and confusion of the assault, the surviving Italians (who were all seriously wounded) considerably exaggerated the number of their assailants. At the same time Ras Alula, in his report to the King, appears to have multiplied the number of Italians by ten.

Italian officer, said that until there were scarcely thirty Italians still capable of holding a rifle he never even saw a single Abyssinian, but that an incessant hail of bullets was poured down from behind every rock and every tree on the neighbouring hills all around them. At last came the final rush, with its invariable Abyssinian accompaniments of plunder, slaughter of the wounded, and mutilation of the bodies. Two days later the garrison of Sahati was withdrawn to Massowah without meeting with opposition.

This battle, or rather massacre of Dogali, may be looked upon as the beginning of all the Italian troubles on the Red Sea coast, and in what is now called in Italy the colony of Erythrea. Few people could then foresee how far-reaching would be its consequences, or how much it would eventually cost to the already overburdened taxpayers of Italy; but even at the moment it was impossible, while admiring the courage and devotion shown by the Italian soldiers, to avoid criticizing the rashness and over-confidence which allowed this half-battalion to be caught in a veritable rat-trap. It is the old, old story—contempt of a gallant enemy because his skin happens to be chocolate or brown or black, and because his men have not gone through orthodox courses of field-firing, battalion drill, or "autumn manœuvres."

It is to be hoped that we in England have at last learnt the lesson which has been dinned into our heads by the loss during the last half-century of so many thousands of valuable lives and so many millions of pounds sterling; but it would appear to be a law of Nature applicable equally to nations and to individuals, that the youth born in 1870 shall refuse to be guided by the warning experiences of his old mentor, until in his turn he has more or less severely burnt his fingers at the same grate and in the same manner as all those who have gone before him.

The universal cry for vengeance which arose on the news of this massacre reaching Italy, will be remembered by everybody. Preparations were at once made for an expedition on a large scale, which should inflict signal punishment on the Abyssinians; the work of fortifying Massowah and its suburb Monkullu was pushed on, with a view to making these places impregnable to attack by any force without artillery; and measures were taken for the despatch to the Red Sea of some twenty thousand or thirty thousand men. The favourable season was, however, passing, the tropical rains and heat were beginning, and it was decided to take no aggressive action till the following winter. As the summer months went on, the first violence of the outburst began to

subside; the eager, almost hysterical, passion for revenge, so easily aroused in Italy, began to give place to calmer and perhaps more reasonable considerations. Men began to inquire more closely into the matter, and to count the cost; and as they did so, the serious nature of the undertaking which lay before Italy became more and more apparent; a war of revenge could bring but little practical benefit, and would cost many millions of pounds and probably many hundreds of valuable lives; in the meantime Italy's action in Europe would be cramped proportionately to the magnitude of her task in Africa, and in the actual state of European politics it was most desirable, and might at any moment become imperatively necessary, that the hands of Italy should be free.

English influence was supposed, and rightly supposed, to have greater weight with the Negoos than that of any other Power. King Johannis owed not only his throne but life itself to the admirably-conducted expedition of Lord Napier of Magdala in 1868. That expedition had deeply impressed the king and the people of Abyssinia with the determination, honesty, and disinterestedness of a nation who sent a large army through the very heart of a distant and mountainous country, and who, having vanquished all opposition and effected its object—*i.e.* the liberation of

Mr. Rassam and his companions, Consul Cameron, Mr. Stern, and the other "captives"—freed Abyssinia from the bloodthirsty tyranny of the mad King Theodore, placed Prince Kassa of Tigré on the throne, with the name of King Johannis, and then rapidly evacuated the country; paying fair prices for all provisions, for labour, and for information, and finally leaving no trace of a hostile expedition except the existence of a greatly-needed road, which was a very triumph of engineering, from Magdala in the south, to the head of Annesley Bay in the north-east corner of the kingdom. Had this influence been utilized at an earlier stage, there can be no doubt that many of the subsequent difficulties and complications would have been avoided; but unhappily it was not until October, nine months after the massacre of Dogali, that England was asked whether she would use her good offices in the hope of averting a serious and unremunerative war.

It must be remembered that for months past all Italy had been ringing with preparations for the forthcoming campaign; battalion after battalion, and battery after battery, had been shipped from Naples to the Red Sea, while at Massowah itself, and its suburb Monkullu, incessant activity had been displayed in the erection of fortifications, the mounting of guns, and the construction of

huts and camps. In Abyssinia, on the other hand, the king and his chiefs, who were kept well informed of the proceedings of the Italians, had been engaged for months in collecting and mobilizing all the available forces of the nation, and in stimulating the almost fanatical patriotism of the soldiery by promises of the destruction and plunder of the invading white men. Such forces in semi-savage countries, when once roused to great excitement and expectancy of war, cannot be dispersed and sent quietly back to their homes like European troops by the mere issue of an order from a superior authority. To the average Abyssinian soldier a national war represents little if anything more than a freebooting expedition on a large scale. He leaves his village with a good deal of bombast and garrulous anticipation of the booty and trophies which he will bring back. He is not, therefore, willing to submit to be "returned empty," and exposed to the jeers of his friends without having at least tried to flesh his maiden spear in the body of an enemy, or without having had a chance of cutting from his vanquished foe the barbarous and disgusting trophy which afterwards becomes the pride of his household, and on the production of which he will base his hopes of military promotion. On this occasion, too, it must be remembered, the enemy to be despoiled was

not, as usual, the lean and hungry Arab of the desert, but an unknown nation of white men, supposed to be well-furnished with every luxury, and credited with almost unlimited wealth of cloth, cartridges, powder, and guns. It was therefore very evident that any attempt at pacification would have had a far greater chance of success several months previously, before the two great opposing masses had been actually set in motion against each other. Her Majesty's Government were, however, willing to do their utmost to help the Italians, and it was eventually decided that an English mission should be sent to King Johannis to submit to his Majesty certain terms on which Italy would consent to refrain from any act of war.

CHAPTER I.

CAIRO TO MASSOWAH.

Suez—The Voyage—Jeddah—Suakin—Massowah—Difficulties and Suspicions.

On the 17th of October, 1887, her Majesty's Government decided to entrust to me the honour of taking a mission into Abyssinia, to attempt to bring about a pacification between King John* and the Italians, it being impressed upon me at the same time that there was not a moment to be lost, as the favourable season for warlike operations was already commencing, and the Italian Government could not undertake to refrain from acts of overt hostility for more than five weeks, *i.e.* till the end of November, even though I should not have returned by that time. As there was no ship

* Throughout this book, in speaking of the Negoos, I have used indifferently the names "Johannis" and "John." The former is the appellation by which he is universally known in Abyssinia; but my readers are probably more familiar with the name of "John," which has been unanimously bestowed on his Majesty by the English and European Press.

sailing for Massowah before the 21st of October, it would be impossible to arrive there before the 29th or 30th; this would leave me about four weeks in which to equip and organize a caravan, to make the journey to the king wherever he might be, to exchange visits of ceremony and to conduct the negotiations to a conclusion, to make the return journey, and to arrive at the Italian camp. It was easy to see that this would probably be an absolute impossibility; but I was too much delighted with the prospect of the mission and the journey to make any remonstrance, and all that could be done was to hurry on preparations for departure with almost feverish haste and activity.

My first step was to ask permission to take with me Mr. Beech, A.V.S., then serving in the Egyptian army, whom, of all my acquaintances in Egypt, I considered to be the best adapted for the sort of work which lay before us. Throughout our expedition I never ceased to congratulate myself on my good fortune in having secured his invaluable assistance and companionship. I then engaged the services of an interpreter, named Ahmed Fehmy, a most respectable Egyptian of some education, who had lived for two years on the borders of Abyssinia, and said he could both write and speak Amharic fluently. He had accompanied Prince Hassan as interpreter in the

ill-fated Egyptian expedition against Abyssinia in 1876. I also took with me my English servant, named Hutchisson, who volunteered to accompany me in spite of the gloomy picture of the dangers and troubles before us which I drew for his edification, and who, I may at once add, behaved throughout with the greatest pluck, self-possession, and cheerfulness under difficulties.

It had been impressed upon me that the greatest secrecy was to be observed about my mission; except the members of her Majesty's Agency not a soul was to know anything about it. Our preparations were therefore made with much mystery and many precautions: candles, tea, and other stores were purchased in small instalments, and at different shops; the ammunition and tent were supposed to be wanted for a shooting-expedition; and our passages on the steamer from Suez to Massowah were booked in the name of my servant Hutchisson "and three friends."

In three days our preparations were completed as far as was possible in the short time at our disposal, and I left Cairo at six p.m. on the 19th of October for Alexandria, to meet the English mail steamer from Brindisi, which was bringing letters from the Queen and Lord Salisbury, accrediting me to King Johannis, and certain presents for the King and Ras Alula.

The presents for the Negoos consisted of a sword of honour, a Winchester repeating rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition, and a very large and excellent telescope, with its stand, suitable equally for astronomical and terrestrial purposes. For Ras Alula there was another Winchester repeating rifle with ammunition in a handsome case, and for Ras Aria Selassie, the King's son, another sword of honour. In taking over the long wooden tin-lined cases containing these presents from the captain of the P. and O. steamer, the thought struck me that these would indeed be awkward loads for a mule to carry in a mountainous country, but I little foresaw the amount of anxiety, trouble, and imprecations both loud and deep, of which they, especially the telescope, were destined later to be the cause.

Leaving Alexandria by the Indian mail train, I arrived at Suez on the evening of the 20th, where I found Beech, Hutchisson, and Ahmed Fehmy, who had just arrived from Cairo with all the stores and baggage of the expedition. The next day we embarked on board the Egyptian steamship *Narghileh*, a small, dirty, greasy-looking steamer, bound for Jeddah, Suakin, and Massowah, in which we very soon discovered that our travelling companions consisted of cockroaches and other smaller animals innumerable, a flock of sheep, a

few cows, many cocks, hens, turkeys, and geese, a dozen of the evil-looking Greek adventurers who always appear like vultures round a dead carcase whenever there is a possibility of a campaign in North Africa, a discharged convict who was travelling in the first-class saloon, after undergoing one year's imprisonment in Egypt for an offence which would have earned him twenty years' penal servitude in England, and, to crown all, about a hundred Arab pilgrims bound for Mecca, picturesque perhaps at a considerable distance, but on closer inspection decidedly offensive both to the eye and nose; full of fanaticism and vermin, and an all-pervading odour of sanctity.

It was not to be expected that I should be able to embark at Suez without being recognized, and many were the indiscreet questions which I had to parry as best I could as to my destination and the object of my journey; it is to be feared that both Beech and I came well under the definition of diplomatists as "men who were sent to lie abroad for the good of their country."

The *Narghileh* would not have been worthy of Egypt if she had started at the advertised time, so we were not surprised to find ourselves still at Suez at sunset instead of having got under way at mid-day. At last, however, with much creaking and splashing, swearing and shouting, we got clear

of the jetty, and the crazy old tub rolled solemnly down the Gulf of Suez at her extreme speed of five knots an hour.

Next day we touched at the quarantine station of Tor, where it appeared that there was nothing to disembark nor to take on board, but two or three hours were wasted, apparently because the captain wished to have a chat and a friendly cigarette with an acquaintance. From Tor we proceeded in the same stately fashion to Yembo, a small village on the Arabian coast, where one passenger was to be embarked. But here a difficulty arose—Yembo could not be found! The crew of the *Narghileh* consisted apparently of three individuals, who all called themselves captain, a reis, or sort of boatswain, and two or three decrepit old men. Unfortunately none of these appeared to know the way to Yembo. The use of maps or charts was apparently either despised or unknown; such a new-fangled proceeding as taking an observation had probably never been heard of by these worthies; we therefore spent the greater part of the morning of the 24th of October in wandering vaguely up and down looking for a certain opening in the line of coral reefs, which was supposed to be the way in to Yembo. At last, however, we arrived, the solitary passenger was embarked, three or four hours more were wasted in

cigarettes or in thinking of making another start, and we got under way again, this time for Jeddah.

Off Jeddah the following morning the same process of wandering backwards and forwards looking for the way in was repeated, but fortunately at about ten o'clock we met a steamer coming northwards to whom we signalled an inquiry whether she had seen Jeddah anywhere about in this neighbourhood, and finally, thanks to her friendly directions, we triumphantly dropped our anchor in the picturesque harbour, close to a crowd of quaint-looking pearl fishing boats. On inquiry we were told that the ship could not sail till the next morning at the earliest, and although the delay was annoying, I was not sorry to have an opportunity of seeing such a truly Mohammedan town, as yet comparatively unspoilt by the usual influx of Greeks, Maltese, and half-bred Europeans, boasting indeed of little beauty of architecture, but containing many picturesque gables and projecting windows of carved woodwork. By far the most interesting study, however, was the miscellaneous collection of Mussulman humanity which surged through the narrow streets: swaggering Turks from Stamboul rubbed shoulders against yellow-coloured pilgrims from Singapore, dignified and large-turbaned Indians from the Punjab, and

truculent well-armed Afghans; while black fanatics from Darfur and Kordofan scowled upon fat, sleek Ulemas from Morocco. Although almost every second man we met was armed to the teeth with murderous or quaint-looking weapons, I saw but little signs of disorder or violence; there was indeed plenty of noise and shouting, but the crowd was, on the whole, remarkably quiet and well-behaved. I could not help contrasting in my own mind this admixture of Mussulmans from all parts of the world, brought together by religious enthusiasm, with the vast crowds of Christian pilgrims, equally from all parts of the world, which I had seen collected together, some years ago, at Eastertime in Jerusalem, where, to my great disgust, I had been a witness of a regular free fight between the adherents of two Christian sects in the very Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself. So far as concerned dignity, singleness of purpose, and orderly behaviour, the result of the comparison was by no means in favour of the Christians.

Soon after our return on board in the evening Beech complained of feeling unwell, and I was made rather uneasy at finding he had a sharp touch of fever; promptly I administered to him a few of the productions of Mr. Cockle, followed, a couple of hours later, by a strong dose of quinine; he also consented to sleep this night

in the cabin instead of on deck. Next day the fever was still present, so I continued to ply him with quinine, but in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of, my medical treatment, he never shook himself clear of fever till we landed at Massowah.

We arrived without incident at Suakin at three p.m. on the 27th of October, where, by the kindness of the senior naval officer, it was arranged that we should leave the old *Narghileh* and continue our journey to Massowah next morning in H.M.S. *Starling*. Both Beech and I felt that our dinner that night with Colonel Kitchener, the Governor-General of the Red Sea Littoral, and our comfortable night's rest on the verandah of Government House, fully compensated us for all the discomforts of the journey from Suez. Before saying good-bye I got Colonel Kitchener to give me a letter of introduction and recommendation to Ras Alula, with whom he was in occasional correspondence. I did not expect to have to make any use of such a letter, nor did I imagine that it would be of much effect, but I was glad to have some document addressed to the Ras which I should be able to show to any of his lieutenants who might arrest me soon after crossing the frontier.

At seven o'clock next morning we went on

board the *Starling*, as guests of Captain Alfred Paget, and arrived at Massowah, after a delightful passage, at 9.30 the following night (the 29th).

Early on the morning of the 30th, I went to see General Saletta, commanding the Italian garrison; he at once told me he had received instructions to do everything in his power to facilitate my preparations; that although he had not been told the precise object of my journey, yet it was an open secret I was going to make an attempt to bring about some arrangement which would satisfy the honour of Italy, and perhaps save her from an arduous campaign, involving the expenditure of many millions of "lire" and the loss of hundreds of lives. We then had a long conversation on the whole situation, which led me to hope that the Italian Government would, in dictating their terms, show the same foresight and moderation, and take the same wide views of the whole question, as those expressed by this most charming, courteous, and talented of generals.

I then went to see Colonel Vigano, the chief of the staff, and arranged that the next morning I should receive twelve good mules, four horses, and six trustworthy native mule-drivers, two of whom would be capable of guiding us to Ras Alula's head-quarters. I learnt at the same time that King Johannis was still at Dŏbră Tăbôr, near

Lake Tsâna, and that Ras Alula was expected in a day or two to arrive at Gura. As it would be impossible for me to penetrate into the interior, or gain access to the king, without having first come to an understanding with this powerful commander, whose authority throughout the frontier provinces was despotic, I was advised that my best way of travelling would be to go straight to Gura *viâ* the Yangus and Baresa, that road being, I was told, well known and less arduous than the path to Asmara.

All this time I was becoming more and more uneasy at not receiving my final instructions with definite permission to start; telegrams were constantly being exchanged between Her Majesty's Government, Sir E. Baring, and myself, but it was not till late in the afternoon of the 1st of November that the final terms which constituted the Italian "ultimatum" were telegraphed to me, and that I was instructed that I might now start to submit them to King Johannis, "if I thought I could do so with safety." I at once replied that I would start at daybreak next morning. The terms on which the Italian Government would be willing to come to an amicable arrangement with King John, have been published at Rome in a "Green Book," and were to the following effect:—

"1. The King of Abyssinia will express his

great regret for the unjust attack suffered by the Italians last January.

"2. Sǎhâtĭ and Wia will remain definitively Italian territory, with a zone beyond of at least one day's march. Ghinda will become a frontier town of Abyssinia. The valley of Ailet will pass into the possession, or at least under the protection, of Italy. The frontier to be marked by common agreement, and in concert with England, by pillars on the spot.

"3. The King of Abyssinia will recognize the Protectorate of Italy over the Assaorta and the Habab Arabs.

"4. Italy, in accord with England, will occupy the region of Sanhit.

"5. A Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce will be signed between Italy and Abyssinia."

The Italian Government at the same time undertook not to commence any active hostilities before the beginning of December, but as the favourable season was so short they could not undertake to postpone them beyond that date. I was thus given four weeks to make the journey to the King and back, his Majesty being then at Dobra Tabor, near the south-eastern shore of Lake Tsâna.

Exactly twenty-two years and two weeks previously, on the 15th of October, 1865, another English mission, consisting of Mr. Rassam and his

companions, Dr. Blanc and Lieutenant Prideaux, with their native followers, had started from Massowah to make the same journey to King Theodore at Dobra Tabor. The lives of Consul Cameron, the Rev. Mr. Stern, Mr. Rosenthal, and the other "captives," apparently depended on the speed with which they could gain access to the King, and it is needless to say that they strained every nerve for the accomplishment of their task, and yet it was not until the 16th of the following January—just three months from the start—that they first saw the waters of Lake Tsâna from its northern extremity. This reflection was not altogether encouraging for us, nor was it a source of unmitigated satisfaction to recall the fact, that although by superhuman exertions these gentlemen had succeeded in reaching Lake Tsâna in three months, yet that after a lapse of two more years it had taxed all Lord Napier's great ability, and all the energies of a brilliant staff of officers and of an army of 10,000 men, to get them out of Abyssinia again. Moreover, the experiences of the last English mission during its enforced residence in Abyssinia were not calculated to inspire us with any wish to make a prolonged stay in the country. At first received with all the honour and ceremony which befitted the delegates of a great power, Mr. Rassam and his companions soon

found themselves objects of suspicion, and before long were cast, loaded with chains, into the fortress of Magdala, where they spent all the remainder of the anxious, weary months, never free from their chains, never knowing from day to day that the morrow's sun would not shine on their headless trunks outside their prison walls, or on their mangled limbs at the foot of the since famous precipice; their daily food, their liberties, and their lives absolutely dependent on the ever-varying caprices of the mad king of a savage race.

But, although we knew that our return before the time appointed by the Italians for the commencement of hostilities was more than problematical, we were far from wishing to make any objections on that account, and our only thought was to hurry on our necessarily incomplete and hasty preparations with all possible speed.

The promised mules and horses arrived at the appointed time, and I was pleased and satisfied with their sturdy and healthy appearance. The case was different with the six guides and mule-drivers, who were marched up to me under the guard of two Italian soldiers. Two of these worthies were Abyssinian prisoners of war, two were from the Shoho district—a country notorious for its breed of robbers and professional brigands, and the remaining two were evil-looking Arabs belong-

ing to one of the smaller tribes near Massowah. Judging from their appearance, both Beech and I thought that we had never set eyes upon six more arrant blackguards than these men, but as we were informed that no others were obtainable we had to be satisfied with what we could get, and hope for the best. Till late that evening we worked at getting all our stores and the baggage of the caravan on shore from the *Starling*. We then divided it into the requisite number of loads, distributing the weight as equally as was possible under the circumstances. Saddles, bridles, head-stalls, and ropes were inspected and found to be complete, and in short every preparation was made for an early start. Needless to say that in this work we received no assistance whatever from our new men, but I feel bound to add that we owe a heavy debt of gratitude to Captain Alfred Paget and his sailors. Throughout the day, with the thermometer standing at 102° Fahr. in the shade, and about 140° in the sun, Captain Paget and his boat's crew worked on this labour of disinterested kindness with an energy and zeal which caused apparently insurmountable obstacles to vanish as by magic. Indeed, without the aid of their experience, ingenuity and strong arms, it is probable that our preparations for departure might have culminated in a confusion too appalling to contemplate.

CHAPTER II.

THE START.

Monkullu—Interpreter Bruru—Waterless march—Treachery and desertion—Death of Ahmed Fehmy—Sufferings of the party—Return.

At daybreak on the 2nd of November we began to saddle and load the mules, and after half an hour's work we had made three discoveries: first, that Beech, Hutchisson, and I, would have to do the whole of the work ourselves; secondly, that our native guides and muleteers were worse than useless; and, thirdly, that Ahmed Fehmy was both sulky and helpless. Seeing that matters were progressing but slowly, I engaged the services of two sturdy black Somalis from Aden, who offered to accompany me on the expedition, but it was not until 8.45 a.m. that the mules were all loaded, our horses saddled, and everything ready for a start. General Saletta and his staff came to see us off, and after cordial expressions of mutual good wishes, Beech

and I mounted our horses, the word was given, and in five minutes the English Mission had left Massowah, and was slowly winding along the path to Monkullu. It was only to be expected that all sorts of defects in the distribution, adjustment, and balance of the loads, would make themselves apparent as soon as we were actually on the march, and sure enough, during the first hour we were forced to halt nearly a dozen times in consequence of some load slipping, or of some saddle showing signs of galling a mule's back. By degrees things settled themselves into their places, and the stoppages became less frequent; but the utter incapacity and helplessness, whether real or assumed, of the men, and the sulky stupidity of Ahmed Fehmy, gave me some grounds for anxiety, when I contrasted in my mind the level sandy road along which we were now travelling with the black and forbidding mountain ranges which lay before us.

However, every allowance had to be made for the difficulties always attendant on a first start, and in little more than an hour and a half we marched into the Fort of Monkullu, at that time the most advanced point held by the Italian troops. Here I found a telegram for me from General Saletta saying, that Bruru Worke, a young Abyssinian who had been educated for

three years in England, had arrived at Massowah, and wished to accompany me to the King. This youth, who was a brother of King Johannis' own secretary and interpreter, had been born in Bombay, where he spent his childhood and picked up some education and a slight knowledge of English. On the occasion of Admiral Hewett's mission to Adowa, in 1884, his brother and family had rendered good service in the admiral's intercourse with the king, and with their consent young Bruru was taken back to England, where he had received all the advantages of an excellent and liberal education for the last three years in the house of a clergyman in Norfolk. Here he had lived almost as one of the family, and had been treated throughout with nothing but the most indulgent kindness and consideration. Under the Rev. Mr. B——'s guidance he had developed considerable intelligence, had acquired a very fair knowledge of the English language, and had apparently adapted himself thoroughly and even eagerly to English ways of life and to the general principles of modern civilization. I was justified, therefore, in thinking that both on the journey through the country and in our intercourse with the king and his chiefs the services of this youth, who was then nineteen years of age, would be of the greatest value to the mission;

and, on the suggestion being made before we left Cairo that he would like to accompany me into his own country, I had at once entered into telegraphic correspondence with the Foreign Office on the subject, but had scarcely hoped that he would arrive in time to be able to come with me; I was therefore most agreeably surprised to hear of his arrival, and telegraphed back to General Saletta, begging that Bruru Worke might be sent out to Monkullu without a moment's delay.

After being most hospitably entertained for a couple of hours by Colonel Avvogadro and the officers of the garrison, I started the caravan again on their march to a torrent called the Yangus, at a distance of about five hours' journey, where our guides said there was a very good camping-ground for the first night, with plenty of water and firewood. I myself remained at Monkullu to wait for Bruru Worke. At about three o'clock he arrived, dressed up in varnished shoes, white starched shirt, bright satin tie and glittering scarf-pin, and smart clothes, looking better prepared for a stroll from St. James's Street to Hyde Park than for a long journey into the heart of Abyssinia. However, I soon gave him to understand that unless he came with me he would not have another chance, probably for months, of getting into his own country, and that in order to do so he must get

ready to start without a moment's delay, and must join me at the Yangus before midnight. I arranged that two mules should be supplied at once for himself and his baggage, and having convinced him that if he lost no time he would easily be able to rejoin me by nine or ten o'clock that night, I sent him off again to Massowah to collect his effects and to get rid of his Piccadilly clothes.

I should here explain that I was anxious not to remain beyond midnight at the Yangus as the district was a turbulent one, and formed part of the disputed territory between the Italian lines and Ras Alula's country, which was said to be infested by wandering bands of brigands and evil-disposed Arab tribes. At 3.30 I parted with my kind Italian hosts, and amid a shower of good wishes cantered off to overtake the caravan.

After a couple of hours' fast ride under the guidance of two Arabs mounted on camels, over soft shifting sandhills with occasional protruding red rocks, from which the blazing sun was refracted with an intensity which felt as though it would scorch the clothes off one's back and wither the boots from one's feet, I came up at last with the caravan winding slowly—very slowly—through a dense thicket of vicious thorny mimosas; the horses, mules, and men looked tired, parched and covered with dust, and in every mind there

was apparently but one thought—"How much farther to the halting-place?" However, even a hot tropical afternoon must have an end, and at last we arrived without further event at the Yangus just before sunset. As soon as the animals were unsaddled and picketed, I sent the guides to bring water. After some search and a little delay they hesitatingly confessed that they had been mistaken, that there was no water to be found either here or anywhere in the neighbourhood—none in fact nearer than a place called Baresa, at a distance of about five or six hours' march in the direction of Gura. This was indeed a disheartening *finale* to our first day's journey from the Italian lines; in fact, although we were not as yet suffering any actual physical pain beyond a feeling of considerable thirst, hunger, and weariness, yet it was evident that our guides were either ignorant of the country or were purposely misleading us; and although there was no doubt as to the existence of water at Baresa, it would at once become a very serious matter indeed if we were to lose the road thither, or if any mishap or unforeseen impediment were to delay our arrival there. In the meanwhile both the animals and ourselves were already a good deal distressed by this first day's march through the hot and shadeless desert. To make matters worse, it then appeared that all

the water we carried had been drunk or spilled on the road by the men, while, to crown all, Ahmed Fehmy was at this moment discovered in the act of draining the last drop from a private store of water which I was keeping in view of eventualities, and which he not only knew he was not allowed to touch, but the safe-guarding of which was one of his specially appointed duties.

I had previously thought it advisable to march again about midnight, so as to get clear as quickly as possible of this dangerous and disturbed district, but this now became an imperative necessity in order that we might reach water before the heat of the sun should complete the exhaustion of our thirsty mules. I therefore told every one to lie down and have five hours' sleep, while I intended to sit up and keep a look-out for uninvited visitors on the one hand, and for the arrival of Bruru Worke on the other. Hungry and thirsty as they were, Beech and Hutchisson stretched themselves on the sand and were sound asleep in five minutes; Ahmed Fehmy, who had had a good drink, and was therefore able to lay in a liberal supply of solid food as well, soon followed their example; and finally the men, who, as I said above, had drunk their fill and had indeed emptied all the water-skins on the road, after eating and chattering for nearly a couple of hours, also

dropped off one by one, leaving me undisturbed to enjoy the wild beauty of the scene by the light of the full moon.

In spite of fatigue, hunger, and thirst, I felt no temptation whatever to sleep; for, though glad to be at last actually on the march, an uncomfortable suspicion had for some hours been growing in my mind, and was rapidly becoming stronger, as to whether the mule-drivers and guides were really so ignorant and helpless as they appeared to be, or whether *mauvaise volonté*, not to say treachery, had not a good deal to do with the matter. I had not liked their sulky demeanour when remonstrated with occasionally on the road, and still less did I like the way in which they had sat apart conversing earnestly in low tones when the rest of the party had fallen asleep. However, I soon came to the conclusion that there was nothing to be done but to watch them closely, and to act promptly and unsparingly on the slightest overt sign of treachery or hostility.

Slowly the hours passed as I sat or strolled about the little plateau, rifle in hand, eagerly watching the path from Massowah for the expected arrival of Bruru Worke; in the bright moonlight the endless yellow desert on one side looked peaceful and almost beautiful, while above us on the western and southern sides rose range

after range of dark mountains piled one above the other, until they culminated in a last black precipitous wall, which we knew to be the limit of the lofty plateau of Abyssinia, and on the summit of which we could fancy Ras Alula's sentries ever watching like eagles for the expected Italian advance. Midnight at last! and still not a sign of Bruru. I dared not wait any longer. I therefore roused the sleepers, and in another minute we were all hard at work saddling the mules and horses and tying on the loads. That is to say, Beech and Hutchisson did nearly all the work, while the men feebly loafed about and got in the way. At 1 a.m. all was ready; not a sign could be seen of Bruru or of any one coming from the direction of Monkullu, although by the bright moonlight the night was almost as clear as the day, and silently the caravan began to scramble up the rocky torrent bed, along which, according to the guides, lay the road to Baresa. Although the path had seemed difficult, and the halts frequent in the daytime, matters were a hundred times worse now. All through the night our unfortunate mules were clambering over impossible rocks, slipping and sliding down precipitous ravines, forcing their way through dense masses of unyielding mimosa thorns, and climbing range after range of black rocky mountains, on which no beast of burden but



AN ABYSSINIAN CAMP.

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an Abyssinian mule could even obtain a foothold. During all this time, of course, the loads were continually slipping, and had to be tied on again by Beech, Hutchisson, and myself, for the natives either could not or would not give any help, while the mountains seemed to grow steeper, and the country more parched at every moment.

The night was exceptionally hot, the thermometer standing at nearly 100° Fahrenheit the whole time, and as, in order to spare our willing horses, we three Englishmen did nearly all the climbing on foot, we were becoming a good deal exhausted and thoroughly parched by the time the sun rose and found us still scrambling over hot marble and granite rocks. Six o'clock, the hour by which, at the latest, we should have been at Baresa, passed, and we were apparently further than ever from water, but the guides swore by all they held sacred that they knew the way well, and that we were on the right path. Seven, and then eight o'clock; the guides now confessed that at one part of the night they had made a mistake in the road, but that now we were quite close to water, which should be in a plain, visible at a short distance in front of us. At nine we reached this plain, and most unpromising and dry it looked. For another hour we travelled across it, and then the guides began to lead us up the side

of another mountain range. By this time the sun was very powerful, and both our animals and ourselves were much distressed. Though I had not said a word to the others on the subject, I had now but little doubt in my own mind as to the treachery of our guides. I therefore halted the caravan and again severely cross-examined the natives. As the chief guide still swore positively that water was just in front, I decided to try one last chance, and rode on with him alone for about four miles, to a spot which he had pointed out as containing the hoped-for water. Here all doubt as to the man's treachery was set at rest by his making a sudden plunge into a thicket and disappearing from my sight at the very moment when I was actually debating in my own mind whether to tie him to my saddle and to take him back to the others, or whether to shoot him on the spot.

'I now found myself alone in a wide plain, densely covered with mimosa bushes, and surrounded on every side by high, black, and steep mountains, on one of which I had left Beech and the caravan. Of course the first thing to do was to rejoin my people, to tell Beech of this last conclusive proof of the treachery of our guides, and to concert with him as to the measures to be adopted for our own safety. When I left the caravan to ride forward with the guide, I thought

that I should have no difficulty in recognizing the hill, on the summit of which they were halted; it was therefore with no small disgust, on turning to retrace my steps alone, with the knowledge of treachery all round us, that I perceived *five* hills before me, as like each other as a row of Chinamen, each one rising about a thousand feet out of the plain, and all of them equally black, rocky, and precipitous. I vainly tried to follow my own tracks, but on the hard and stony ground my horse's feet had made no impression. I chose what I thought was the most likely of the hills, and began slowly to ascend it, when, luckily, while crossing an open and exposed place, I heard a distant shout, and at length made out a figure standing on the extreme summit of one of the *other* ridges, and making frantic gesticulations. On my nearer approach, this turned out to be Beech, who was wildly waving his coat round and round his head like a flag in the hope of attracting my attention. When at last I rejoined him we were hidden from the rest of the caravan by a corner of the rocks, so I rapidly explained to him the reason of my reappearance without the guide, and then we held a consultation on our very gloomy position.

A *résumé* of the chief factors of the situation was easily made. We were practically without

a guide and without mule-drivers, for after the desertion of the first guide we could no longer trust the others, and expected either that they would try to murder us, or that they would quietly desert, like their leader. We were in a mountainous, pathless, and barren country; it was eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and we had marched without a halt, since midnight, and for six hours the day before, since leaving Monkullu, where the only water we knew of was to be found. True we believed that there was water at Baresa; but were we near Baresa? And if so, was it to the north, south, east, or west of us? We might be ten miles from it in one direction, and we might wander till we died in every other direction without finding anything like water. On the other hand, could we ever find our way back to Monkullu? We had travelled over range after range of black hills, up some torrent beds and down others, over stony ground, where no hoof marks would be left, and through mimosa scrubs where we had scarcely been able to push our way. Meanwhile, the guide who had deserted was a native of this country, and would probably make his way eventually to some settlement, whence he would at once guide a marauding party to this spot, who would make very short work of us, and, having killed the Europeans, would make a prize

of all the caravan. To crown all, the heat was intense, we ourselves were utterly wearied, our mules and horses were apparently exhausted, and we three Europeans, who had not drunk a drop of moisture since we left Monkullu, were already in great pain from the pangs of thirst. There could no longer be any doubt that the contents of our water-bottles and water-skins had on the previous day been wilfully and treacherously wasted and spilled by the natives, as part of a pre-arranged plan.

I did not think it possible that either ourselves or our animals could live through that day and the following night, in that heat, without water. There appeared, therefore, to be only one course which offered any chance of escape, and that but a slight one, namely, to cut off all the loads from the mules, to leave everything on the spot, excepting only the iron box containing the Queen's letters, and to turn back at once and try to make our way to Monkullu.

While we were hastily discussing the situation a shout from Hutchisson attracted our attention, and we turned round just in time to see all our men desert at once and disappear in every direction among the bushes. Luckily for these wretches our carbines were attached to our saddles at some yards distance, otherwise most surely would Beech

and I have made some of them repent their treachery. The two black Somali boys were the only ones who now remained with us.

There was not a moment to be lost; I feared that in any case, even with the best of luck, the chances would be very great indeed against our ever finding the way back to the Italian lines before sunset, and I felt sure that few, if any, of the party could last through another night without water. We therefore hastily cut off all the loads and set the mules free, knowing that they would follow us; we then roused Ahmed Fehmy, who was making himself useful by sitting on a stone and moaning to himself. Having told my little party that there was not the slightest doubt as to our getting back with the greatest ease, but that above all they must keep together, I gave the word to mount our thirsty but plucky horses, and silently we began to follow our tracks back towards Monkullu—and water!

For two or three hours we jogged along silently, each man feeling that he must spare his strength to the utmost; the heat and pitiless glare of the sun were intense, and many an anxious glance did I throw back to see if we were all keeping together. Nothing was said, but we all knew that, in reality, the chances were many against our being able to trace our road back again over the mountains

which we had climbed during the night, even assuming that our strength and that of our horses held out.

At about one o'clock Ahmed Fehmy began to lag behind; we again warned him that the safety of the whole party depended on our keeping together. Our adjurations, requests, or commands had only a temporary effect; again and again he allowed himself to fall half-a-mile behind, and sometimes more; again and again Beech and I rode back to bring him on; three times I solemnly warned him that I would not wait again—that by halting the others while we brought him forward I was imperilling the lives of the whole party. He was, in reality, much the freshest of us all; he had had food and water long after any of us, and he had done none of the severe manual labour with the mule loads which had so exhausted the rest of us. At last I swore to him that I would neither come back again nor wait, that he must keep up with us, or else follow our tracks; but I assured him that in the latter case I would have help sent to him at once from Monkullu, if we ever reached it. He promised to keep up with us, and certainly his horse was the freshest of all; but five minutes later he dropped behind again, got off, and lay down to sleep on the sand,—such at least was the report made to me later on by

Mahomed, the Aden boy, for neither Beech nor I noticed his disappearance till some time later, and Hutchisson was long past noticing anything.

Scarcely half a dozen words were spoken on the subject when this last disappearance was reported to me, which was only when we were joined by Ahmed's riderless horse. Briefly I repeated my orders to the others to keep together, and to push on, ever forward. By the exchange of a look Beech and I saw that neither of us had any doubt as to the fate of our unhappy interpreter, but this was no time for talking or for the exchange of useless verbal speculations. Already our tongues were refusing their wonted office, and the strongest voice that could issue from our cracked, parched throats through our stiff, blackened lips was a husky, strained, sibilant whisper. Had I hesitated for a moment whether to make one more halt, one more effort to bring Ahmed Fehmy along, a single glance at the fixed staring eyes, the pinched, drawn faces, and the bent figures of my remaining followers would have sufficed to convince me that but one order could be given if any of them were to have a chance of seeing to-morrow's sun—"Push on!"

Poor Ahmed Fehmy was never again seen alive. It is to be feared that his death was a painful one, though he probably soon became delirious, if one

may judge from the appearance and position of his body, which was found next day and brought in for burial at Monkullu. His death is attributable solely to want of pluck on his part. He was, or at least appeared to be, much the freshest of the party. He had drunk water plentifully, and had eaten food long since we had; he had not exhausted himself as we had by constantly picking up, tying on, and readjusting loads, by climbing up the hills on foot, by half lifting, half pulling the jaded mules over precipitous and difficult places; his lips were red, ours were black as ink; his voice was full and strong, ours were but a painful and almost inaudible whisper; but he gave way, almost without an effort, to the feeling of weariness, to the intense longing against which we were all struggling with the whole force of our respective natures, to lie down in the sand under the shade of a rock, and to give up the battle. I do not blame the man, although he so nearly jeopardized all our lives. His want of pluck was the fault of his race, not of the individual. His spirit was that of his four thousand compatriots who, at the battle of El-Teb, in January, 1884, although led by an English general whose name stands pre-eminent for gallantry, had preferred to throw down their rifles and to lie with their faces in the sand, suffering themselves to be speared

through the back by a few hundred wild Hadendowa spearmen, rather than make a single effort to save their own or their comrades' lives!

I may here mention that her Majesty's Government, on my return to Egypt some months later, most liberally authorized a sum of £450 to be paid to the family, in consideration of Ahmed Fehmy having met his death while in the English service.

Hour after hour our now diminished party rode silently on under the burning sun, the only living and moving creatures in that vast, scorching and deadly wilderness, our eyes fixed on the ground, looking for every sign which should tell us that we were still on the path which we had followed on our outward march. At times, where the ground was covered with loose rocks and boulders, our direction was almost guesswork, as a whole regiment of cavalry might march over it and leave no tracks. Once, when no trace of our passage had been seen for some distance, on the side of a mountain which was one sheet of black basalt, Beech and I differed in opinion as to whether we were on the right track, and we were seriously discussing the advisability of retracing our steps for some distance in order to try another route, when Hutchisson caught sight of something white fluttering in the rocks at some distance ahead of us; he rode up and triumphantly picked up a

pocket-handkerchief which had fallen from his coat during our march of the previous night!

Once or twice we found that we had gone astray, but we always managed to get on to our old path again before much time had been lost. At about 2.30 p.m. the heat was intense; the black rocks over and between which we were riding reflected the heat of the sun to a painful degree. A small pocket-thermometer showed me that the temperature was 108° in the shade; what it was in the sun I did not inquire. Hutchisson was now so exhausted and in such pain that he could scarcely sit on his horse. I therefore called a halt for six minutes to see if a little rest would do any good. The experiment was a doubtful success, as the difficulty of rousing ourselves at the end of the allotted time was perhaps worse than if we had not dismounted, but the rest was probably good for the horses. Poor Hutchisson was suffering dreadful pain, but he overcame his intense longing to lie down and quietly subside into oblivion, and struggled on with a pluck that is beyond all praise. Beech had a bottle of whisky in his wallet, and we each took one mouthful, spitting most of it out again as it burnt our swollen mouths and tongues.

About this time much of our anxiety about following the right track was relieved by the

intelligence of one of the loose mules, which placidly jogged along in front of us all, with his nose near to the ground and his ears cocked, following our old tracks like a dog on a scent. At a time when our physical and mental powers of endurance were all but exhausted, when our hot and aching eyes could scarcely distinguish the stones on the ground beneath us, when my own eyes were playing me all sorts of tricks, and showing me green grass, waving trees, and sparkling pools of water on every side, this mule, relieved of his load, as though he guessed the failure of the faculties of his human masters, quietly assumed all the responsibility of guiding the party himself, never pushing on too far ahead, and never lagging behind. Instinctively our horses and the other mules acknowledged his leadership, and followed him of their own accord. Without the slightest hesitation we all acknowledged afterwards that to this mule we owed our lives.

About four o'clock we reached our old camping-ground at the Yangus, but shortly afterwards we again had to halt for eight minutes to allow Hutchisson to rest. Both Beech and I began to despair of ever getting him into Monkullu, his pain as he lay upon the ground was evidently very great, and we had the greatest difficulty in getting him on to his horse again. Not only were his lips and

tongue absolutely black and stiffened, as indeed were those of Beech and myself, but he was suffering most violent internal pains, which at times quite doubled him up, but from which we were as yet free. We were both, however, too feeble ourselves to be able to give him much assistance, and he owes his present existence entirely to his determination and indomitable pluck in struggling on. Mahomed, the Aden boy, had now fallen a little way behind, but I had but little anxiety about him, as he was comparatively fresh, and because we had now reached the sandy plains over which the tracks of our horses were clearly marked.

Once more there was a short stoppage as the box containing the letters of the Queen and Lord Salisbury to King Johannis—the only package which we were bringing back with us—fell from the back of the mule on which it had been fastened. Although it fell with a clatter to the ground within three yards of me, my faculties were so deadened that I had noticed nothing, but fortunately Beech was a little less exhausted and saw the accident. The mishap was soon remedied, though I must confess that the box, the rope that tied it on to the saddle, and everything connected with it came in for a good deal of muttered objurgation and anathema for being the cause of delay, and for compelling us to drag our stiffened limbs

out of the saddle. Meanwhile the sun was rapidly approaching the horizon, but such was our confidence in our "pioneer" mule, that we felt no anxiety about finding the road if only our strength and that of our horses held out. Just at sunset I calculated that we were not more than five or six miles from the Italian forts, and, the road being now clear, I squeezed my unfortunate horse into a canter, and went on ahead to get help sent out at once for the Aden boys and Ahmed Fehmy.

On reaching the Italian pickets I was stopped by a sentry, who soon grasped the condition of affairs, although I could not explain much, as my stiff, swollen, and blackened tongue had rather "struck work." He rushed off to get water for Beech and Hutchisson, who, I explained, were not far behind me. Five minutes later I reached a well, from which some kindly soldiers at once produced a bucketful of water for my gallant old horse, and a large cup for myself. It is absolutely impossible to try to explain the joy of that drink. I was at once surrounded by the officers of the garrison, and in less than a quarter of an hour two trustworthy Arab scouts had started on swift camels with water and provisions for the Aden boys and for Ahmed Fehmy. The former of these arrived at Monkullu within an hour; the body of the latter was not found till the next day.

Half an hour later Beech, Hutchisson, and I were all in bed, being cared for and looked after by the Italian commanding officer and the doctor of the garrison, with a kindness which no words can express.

I was very glad to see that Beech and Hutchisson were sound asleep in a very few minutes; and although I myself was too much exhausted, with the anxiety and responsibility as well as with the bodily fatigues of the past three days, to be able to sleep, yet I received considerable refreshment from the unwearied kindness of the Italian doctor, who gave me delicious cold baths and poured iced water over my head at intervals of two hours all through the night. It was however with no great joy, but rather with dismay that at daybreak I contemplated the absolute necessity for starting afresh on a march back to where the luggage had been left. However, there was no choice in the matter; the Queen's letters and all my papers were safe with us, but we knew that a delay of even a few hours might cost us all the rest of our baggage, arms, and presents. Fresh mules, horses, and eight fresh men were soon ready, and with nothing to carry but a few small barrels of water and food for two days, Beech and I started again at a brisk pace at 7.30 a.m., leaving Hutchisson and the Aden boys to rest and recover from

their exhaustion under the care of the garrison doctor.

Nothing worthy of record occurred on this journey; suffice it to say that it was a day of unmitigated misery and weariness; our throats, mouths, and bodies were still parched from the effects of the previous day, but we had given our words of honour to the doctor that we would never during the day drink more than one mouthful at a time, and even that not more frequently than once every five minutes; I had had no sleep for three days and nights, and had not been able to swallow any food; the pitiless sun was still beating down on the burning sand with the same fierceness as on the previous days; and the ranges of frowning black mountains before us seemed to look down threateningly on our crawling caravan, and to warn us against again attempting to violate their dreary and waterless solitude. It was, however, some satisfaction to us when, with the help of the men who had started on camels the night before, we recovered most of our baggage and the presents; but a proof that we had been right in disregarding the doctor's entreaties to wait another day was furnished by the fact that a large quantity of dollars and nearly all the Martini ammunition had already been carried off. There can be no doubt that if we had complied with the prayers of

the doctor and Colonel Avvogadro, and postponed our departure till later, hardly any of our property would have been recovered. The body of poor Ahmed Fehmy was also found, and sent back for burial at Monkullu. As my men were a little nervous and uneasy, owing to the reported presence in our immediate neighbourhood of an armed band of about fifty Arabs of the Assaorta tribe, we marched again an hour after midnight, and returned to Monkullu without difficulty.

The state of my mouth had not yet allowed me to swallow anything more solid than a little thin cold soup and some red wine, and I therefore felt obliged, to my regret, to take a complete rest for twenty-four hours before making a fresh start; but I was well rewarded on rising late the following afternoon, by seeing Beech and Hutchisson eating, drinking, and smoking, and apparently in their usual good health, and by being able myself to swallow a few mouthfuls of solid food. The caravan was then quickly but carefully reorganized; Ahmed Fehmy's place was filled by Bruru Worke, who had rejoined me after a very lame explanation of his non-appearance on the night of the 2nd, and by another young Abyssinian named Ghirghis (the Amharic equivalent of the English name George), a bright-looking youth, who had been educated by the Swedish Protestant Mission

at Massowah. I engaged this youth as second interpreter, for Bruru Worke was only to go with me to King John, and not to return. Our treacherous guides and mule-drivers were replaced by nine fresh men, who all bore good characters, and whose wives and families were left in the hands of the Italian authorities as pledges for their good behaviour. By the evening of the 6th of November everything was ready for a fresh start. In the mean time, information having been received that Ras Alula was about to change his head-quarters from Gura to Asmara, I decided to march this time direct to the latter place through Sahati, Ailet, and Ghinda.

CHAPTER III.

MONKULLU TO ASMARA.

Dogali—The massacre—Ailet—Ghinda—"Tedge," the drink of the aristocracy—A severe climb—A pleasant reception.

At eight o'clock on the morning of the 7th we took a final leave of our kind Italian friends, a few of whom insisted on riding with us as far as Sahati, and once more we crossed the sandy plain beyond the Italian forts, in good spirits, with good animals, and, apparently, a good and willing lot of men.

After a couple of hours' good travelling we found ourselves passing through the now famous plain of Dogali, where the unfortunate Italian half-battalion of 480 men had been annihilated by Ras Alula while on the road from Monkullu to relieve the garrison of Sahati. The place itself consists of a small plain with a circular knoll in its centre about 150 feet high, but commanded on

every side, as was the whole plain, by a complete circle of volcanic hills. The path to Sahati enters this plain by a narrow gorge, passes the knoll, and leaves the plain by another narrow gorge. On the day of the massacre the Abyssinians were lying hidden on all these hills, but made no sign of their existence until the Italians were well within the circle of hills and on the plain. The Italians, with the confidence of inexperience, and with misplaced contempt for the intelligence of their enemy, had no scouts or skirmishers, nor had they taken any steps to ascertain that the hills were unoccupied. Hardly had the head of the Italian column reached the centre of the plain, when the rattle of musketry was heard, and a shower of bullets was thrown among them from the rear. The Italians faced round and answered their unseen enemy with volleys from their Wetterli rifles, but so well were the Abyssinians concealed that there was nothing to fire at except occasional little clouds of smoke, whereas the European soldiers on the bare and open plain offered a mark which could with difficulty be missed. Then was heard another volley, and another shower of bullets from the hills on the right, and yet another from the left, from the front, from the rear—verily the devoted band of Italians were caught in a cruel trap. Their men fell fast; in vain they tried to take

shelter behind the knoll in the midst of the plain. Even there, if screened from one side, they were exposed to the fire from all the other hills. They continued their advance, but the hail of bullets came thicker. Few, very few, were now unhurt, and still nothing to fire at except those puffs of smoke. Ah! how those doomed and desperate men must have longed to see the face of an enemy, to have something tangible before them instead of those incessant puffs of smoke from behind a distant bush or rock, too often followed by a thud, a groan, and the fall of a comrade! What a relief it must have been to the few still surviving, even though they knew it was their death-signal, when at last from every hill, from behind every rock and from every side, there burst forth a cloud of fierce and dusky warriors in red-and-white robes, casting away their guns and rifles, and whirling down to complete their work with sharp spear and glittering sword! It must have been soon over; at the moment of the final attack there were scarce thirty Italians able to wield a rifle. Their fate was never in doubt from the beginning, but they died fighting like men, and left their mark on many a soldier of Ras Alula's army.

Subsequently I met and conversed with a good many of Ras Alula's soldiers who had taken part in this action, or massacre; they all had but one

answer as to the conduct of the Italian troops on that fatal day—"that they fought like real devils till the last man fell!"

About an hour after passing this dismal spot, where a conspicuous white cross had been erected to mark the graves of the Italian soldiers, we arrived at Sahati, a spot of some strategical importance on account of its never-failing supply of water, but desolate, uninhabited, and generally uninviting. Beyond this place the Italian officers could not accompany us, so we rested here for a couple of hours, and then continued our journey alone, over the Ambabu Pass, and then down a short steep declivity on to the plain of Ailet.

We were now well within the country held by the Abyssinians, and we could only hope, on nearing the large village or town in the centre of the plain, that we should not be mistaken for the head of an Italian column, and be received with a volley of musketry. It was not reassuring, when about half a mile distant, to see a great excitement and movement in the village, and then to make out a stream of fugitives—women and children—flying across the sand on the other side. Luckily, however, our pacific gestures and mild demeanour attracted the attention of a stalwart young shepherd, armed with the universal spear and shield.

With the help of the almighty dollar he was soon convinced of the honourable nature of our intentions, and then flew across the plain like a young gazelle, waving his spear to his fellow-townspeople and yelling the comforting word, "Dahhân! dahhân!" (friends! friends!).

The panic in the town was soon allayed; those who had started to fly stopped to gaze, and from the bushes on our left suddenly emerged about thirty or forty Abyssinian soldiers, all armed with Remington rifles, who quietly informed us that they had been running through the woods alongside of us for some distance, prepared to pour a volley into the caravan had our conduct appeared to them in the least degree suspicious or hostile. We thanked these gentlemen for their polite attention, and then rode on to greet the head man of the village. This dignified personage received us well, gave us food and milk, and forage for our beasts, but said that he would not be able to let us proceed on our journey next day, as the soldiers would not allow it. As a good deal of feasting and consequent excitement was going on among the soldiers, who belonged to the army of the great Ras Alula, and who therefore had probably taken part in the massacre of Italians at Dogali, I thought I had better postpone any discussion till the following morning, and we

therefore went quietly to bed—a simple proceeding, which consisted in stretching ourselves on the sand, with a rolled great-coat or a saddle for a pillow.

Ailet is practically an Arab village, although its proximity to the mountains of Tigré has made it for generations, unfortunately for itself, a bone of contention between the Arabs of the plains and the Abyssinians of the hills. It has therefore been the scene of many sanguinary encounters, which have usually afforded to the victor, to whichever side he might belong, an excuse for the loot of the village and the slaughter of many unoffending inhabitants. In spite of these serious disadvantages, the position of the village on the main caravan route from Khartum and Kassala to the sea at Massowah, the fertility, after the rains, of the plain in which it stands, and above all, its vicinity to some hot springs which are supposed to possess great healing qualities, have combined to make Ailet a place of considerable size, and, apparently, of some prosperity. At the time of our visit it was held by a garrison of about two hundred Abyssinian soldiers, who evidently behaved with great *hauteur* and even brutality to the Arab inhabitants, and doubtless took most efficient steps to prevent the latter from becoming too rich and prosperous.

The hot springs are about two miles from the village, and I was sorry that we could not spare time to visit them. Mr. Rassam, in his book on the British Mission of 1865, says that he found their temperature to be 140° Fahrenheit, and the water so pure that he and his companions used it during their stay at Ailet for drinking, after leaving it to cool.

At daybreak the following morning I gave orders for saddling and loading the animals, hoping that the soldiers would let us proceed quietly on our journey, but it soon appeared that matters were not to run so smoothly; a noisy and violent discussion ensued which lasted for over two hours, the soldiers saying that I must remain at Ailet till they could learn Ras Alula's wishes respecting us, while I argued that Ras Alula already knew that I was on the way to visit him, and that he would be very angry with his men if they placed any impediment in my way. Eventually it was decided that I should be allowed to proceed to Ghinda, where there was a large garrison of Abyssinian soldiers, under a powerful chief, on whom should be thrown the responsibility of deciding whether I was to be sent on to Ras Alula or not. About twenty soldiers of the Ailet garrison were told off to accompany us, and at 7.30 a.m. we were slowly wending our way through the mimosa thorns

towards the high mountains which form the western boundary of the Ailet plain.

Throughout the day we were a good deal annoyed by the insolence of our Abyssinian guards, who amused themselves with mocking prophecies as to the fate which awaited us on our arrival at our destination, and who had a disagreeable habit of fingering, and then asking for, everything that struck their fancy, such as our knives, spurs, watches, and even our clothes. At length, however, after an arduous climb up a rocky mountainous road, we arrived at Ghinda soon after four o'clock, and bivouacked on a grassy plain about half a mile below the village, which is perched on the extreme summit of the most inaccessible hill in the neighbourhood. A couple of hours later a crowd of the red-and-white robes in which all Abyssinian soldiers are dressed, was seen descending the hillside in solemn procession, and advancing slowly towards us. A breathless messenger rushed up and warned me that the three great chiefs who commanded the 3000 men of this garrison were coming to pay me a visit. I received the great men as best I could, and offered them seats on the grass or on rocks, while I thanked them for their kindness in thus dropping in to see me at tea-time.

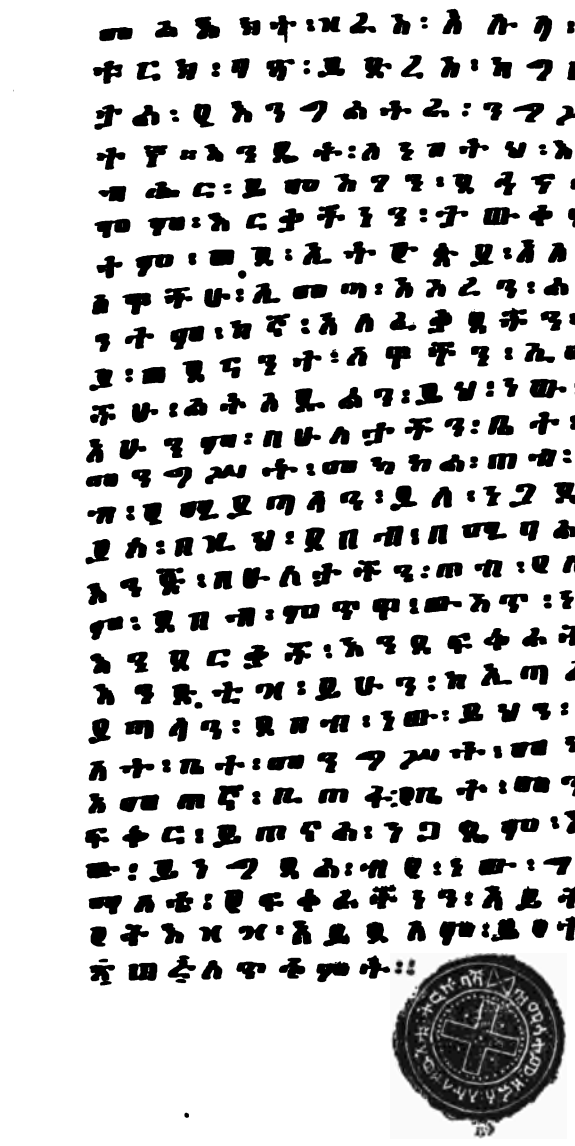
Meanwhile their escort, consisting of about 150

fine men armed with rifles and swords, crowded round in somewhat unpleasant proximity, and proceeded to make a searching examination of our clothes, especially of our boots and spurs, of our cooking pots, carbines, and, in fact, of everything belonging to us. But in spite of our efforts to be agreeable, the conversation between the chiefs and ourselves soon began to languish; I therefore told them outright that I regretted extremely that I should be obliged to tear myself away from this pleasant spot at a very early hour next morning, and to continue my journey to Ras Alula's head-quarters. At the same time, in order to encourage them to see matters in a proper light, Beech occupied himself by offering beakers of raw brandy all round. The chiefs then retired to a little distance to consult upon the important question of whether I was to go or to stay, while the soldiers of their escort remained with us, intensely excited by an air-pillow which Hutchisson was alternately blowing out and emptying for their edification. It was perhaps lucky for us that they did not understand the somewhat disparaging but pithy remarks by which this amusement was accompanied. While the consultation among the chiefs was still proceeding, a messenger suddenly arrived with a letter to me from Ras Alula himself, in answer to my communication from Massowah.

The Ras said that he would receive me at Asmara, and begged me to come on to him at once. So far the letter was civil, but the latter part of it consisted entirely of violent abuse of the Italians, which was less encouraging.

However, the immediate effect of this letter was to convince the chiefs that not only must I be allowed to proceed unmolested, but that I should be treated as an honoured guest. We then said good night, and they departed, followed by their soldiers, with many expressions of good will and friendship. A few minutes later presents arrived, consisting of two sheep, which I did not want, and a most welcome jar of "tedge," a fermented drink greatly prized and drunk in large quantities by the Abyssinian aristocracy.

This tedge, or "mésé," as it is called in some parts of Tigré, when well made, is by no means disagreeable to the European palate, being not unlike new cider; but it varies greatly according to the taste of the chief for whom it is brewed. Its composition is as follows: one part of honey is mixed with about five or six parts of water, and well kneaded about with the hands, until the honey is thoroughly in solution. This mixture is poured into a large but narrow-mouthed earthen jar called a *gumbo*, into which are then put a quantity of the leaves of a bitter herb called *gesho*,



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in appearance not unlike tamarind leaves; sometimes instead of these leaves a smaller quantity of *tsaddoo*, or bitter bark, is used. The mouth of the jar is then covered with a cotton cloth, and the liquid is left to ferment for two or three days. The fermentation begins within a very short time, and is apparently very violent in its action. At the end of three or four days, or even less if the weather is warm, the tedge is ready for drinking, and in a great man's house is usually first poured through a cotton strainer into a large hollow cow-horn or buffalo-horn. This horn is then brought by slaves into the presence of the chief and his honoured guest, and the tedge is again poured into narrow-necked glass flasks like small decanters, holding about a pint, from which it is not very easy to drink gracefully, but which have the advantage of excluding most of the dust and flies. Tedge can, of course, be made sweet or bitter according to taste, by regulating the proportions of honey and of the bitter leaves, while its strength for intoxicating purposes increases in proportion to its bitterness. We noticed during our journey that the bitterness of the tedge varied, as a rule, according to the social standing of our host. Thus, Ras Alula and the king himself liked their tedge very "dry" or even "brut" —too dry, in fact, for our foreign taste; whereas

most of the ordinary chiefs of districts and commanders of divisions gave us a sweeter and, to our taste, more welcome brew. The Abyssinians are not alone in this, as the same remark holds good of the taste for champagne in England, where it is, I conceive, only the upper classes who have any liking for "dry" and "brut" wines. When, in any chief's house or tent in Abyssinia, the slave brings in the jar or horn of tedge, he pours it at once into the narrow-necked flasks, the first of which he then takes to his master, to whom he presents it with both hands and with bowed head; the slave then makes a sort of cup of the palms of his hands, which is invariably filled from the flask by the master, who sees his servant drink these few mouthfuls before he will touch it himself or offer it to a guest. This is a safeguard against poison, but although in many cases it is quite unnecessary, it would be a grave breach of etiquette to omit any part of the ceremony; and to offer a cup of the wine to a stranger without its being previously tasted in his presence would be a *manque de tacte* which might lead to serious complications. The privilege of making tedge is restricted to persons of rank and position, and any common soldier or person of the lower orders convicted of encroaching on the privileges of the aristocracy in Abyssinia would have to pass

through some very unpleasant moments before being considered to have purged his offence. This excellent and sanitary law was made by the late King Theodore, who argued that the chiefs and upper classes could be expected to have self-control and could be trusted not to drink too much of the intoxicating liquor, whereas the lower orders, if allowed to make or drink tedge, would not know when to stop, and would seize every opportunity of getting drunk and of reducing themselves to the level of the beasts whom in many characteristics they already so nearly resemble. Often, on learning the existence of these and similar laws in Abyssinia, I wondered whether the "Acts," "Orders in Council," and "Regulations" evolved from our beloved constitution and our boasted civilization, were so very far superior in common sense to the edicts of this semi-savage potentate in his inaccessible ranges of African mountains.

To return to our caravan, with apologies for this digression, I need only say that after the departure of the Abyssinian soldiers the night was undisturbed save by the incessant howling of jackals and hyænas, with an occasional roar from some larger and more savage animal. The hyænas once or twice caused a little anxiety by wandering about suspiciously near our hobbled

mules, but the impertinence of these beasts is irritating rather than alarming. At six o'clock the next morning I again received the Abyssinian chiefs, whose presence, with their soldiers, so impeded the work of my men, that it was not till eight o'clock that everything was packed on the mules, and that, after a liberal distribution of "backsheesh" to the great men, I was able to make a start along the mountainous and rocky passes leading up to Āsmâră.

As neither ourselves nor our beasts had as yet thoroughly recovered from the effects of our long waterless march of the week before, I consented to halt at 4 p.m. near some water at the foot of the Mahenzie Pass. Here we spent a cold but eventless night, and at daybreak next morning we were toiling painfully up the precipitous sides of the Mahenzie mountain, the last and highest of the great range which separates the Abyssinian plateau from the plains near the sea. The track up the mountain side, though clearly defined, was covered with huge rocks and boulders, over which our horses with their iron shoes could scarcely scramble even without their riders, for it was far too steep for us to think of riding up. The active little mules with their heavy loads had sometimes to be lifted bodily on to some great rock, while the labour of readjusting and tying

on the loads was simply incessant. At eight o'clock we crossed the summit, about eight thousand feet high, and half an hour later we rode into the great permanent camp of Ras Alula's army at Asmara.

I had sent Beech, with the interpreter Bruru, on ahead to announce the approach of the English Mission, but it soon appeared that Ras Alula himself was not here; he was expected to arrive the next day, and in the meanwhile his place was taken by his brother, a gentleman named Kantibwa Kaifa, who said he would be glad to see me at once. I therefore proceeded without delay to pay him a visit. Kantibwa received me sitting on a sort of throne; did not rise when I approached, but somewhat ostentatiously sniffed at a red handkerchief in his hand. He then motioned me to a chair placed several yards away on his left, and proceeded to speak in a condescending way, with his head turned away from me, and still smelling his red rag. It was very evident that he was trying to show off his own importance before the assembled crowd of chiefs and soldiers, and so, not to be outdone in politeness, I pulled out my own pocket-handkerchief, which happened to be a blue one with white spots, and sniffed away at it with all the earnestness and dignity of which I was capable. We were both so busily occupied in

sniffing at our respective bits of silk, he at the red and I at the spotted blue, that the conversation soon began to flag; I therefore cut the interview very short, and told him that I was sorry I could not stop, but that I would go on and meet Ras Alula at Gura. This rather frightened my friend, who then implored me to stay, swearing that the Ras would be here early next morning, and that if I met him on the road I should only have to turn back again with him to Asmara. However, I would not be persuaded, and once more we started along the road to Gura. After half an hour's march we were met by a mounted messenger from the Ras himself, who was ordered to beg me to wait at Asmara, where the great man promised to arrive early next day. This time I allowed my heart to be softened, and we turned back again to Asmara, and pitched our camp on a grassy plain in the centre of the straggling collection of villages which compose this great camp. Late in the evening Kantibwa sent me a small present of bread and a miniature goat, but not the customary jar of tedge, nor any polite message. The nature of this present was intended to show that I was treated with contempt, and was merely allowed to remain at Asmara on sufferance till the great man should come and deal with me summarily.

During the night both my men and ourselves

felt the change of climate severely. Asmara stands about 7600 feet above the sea-level, and a little before daybreak the thermometer marked only 33° Fahrenheit, whereas two days ago we had been gasping with the mercury at about 100° all night, down in the plains.

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS AT ASMARA.

Arrival of Ras Alula—Our reception—His appearance and dwelling—Stormy interviews—We are prisoners—The Ras not allowed to execute us—An Abyssinian tournament.

At ten o'clock in the morning of the 11th of November the beating of tom-toms and the shouts of the populace announced the appproach of the great Ras Alula, and a few minutes later a vast crowd of cavalry and infantry, all dressed in the picturesque white-and-red toga, began to swarm into the plain, and to speed along towards the immense earthen or mud pyramid, on the summit of which are the two large round huts which constitute the Ras's head-quarters, and from whence he looks down on the plain of Asmara like an eagle from his eyrie. No sooner had the chief ascended to his abode than the great mass of armed humanity rapidly dispersed in every direction, and within half an hour the whole plain was dotted as far as the eye could reach, with little tents of coarse

black cloth, interspersed among thousands of hobbled cows, horses, and sheep; while busy women and slaves flew about in every direction, fetching water, hunting for firewood, or tending their masters' horses and mules. Before eleven o'clock an escort of fifty soldiers came to take me to the presence of the Ras, whereupon I arrayed myself, to the wonder and edification of all beholders, in diplomatic uniform, cocked hat and all, and then, accompanied by the interpreter Bruru, and by Major Beech bearing the Winchester rifle in its smart leather case, the procession advanced solemnly through a crowd of gaping brown faces and white robes, till, after a trying climb up the mud pyramid, we were ushered into a large hut, where we suddenly found ourselves in the presence of Ras Alula himself.

The scene was a striking one, and calculated to leave a deep impression on the visitor, especially when that visitor, as in our case, felt that life, liberty, and, what was to us equally important, the accomplishment of our mission, depended on the good will, the good humour, or the mere caprice of the savage warrior before us. Imagine a circular hut, perhaps forty-five feet in diameter, its lofty dome-shaped roof supported by numerous poles, its walls composed of the split trunks of young trees, and its earthen floor covered partly

with skins and partly with rushes. The only light admitted into this rather gloomy apartment came through two open doorways about six feet high and three feet in width. About two feet from the wall, immediately opposite the door by which we entered, was a large divan covered with crimson cotton-cloth; on this sat, in Turkish fashion, *i.e.* with his feet drawn up and crossed under him, a striking-looking man whom we had no difficulty in recognizing at once as the dreaded chief, who by courage, ferocity, unscrupulous cruelty, and considerable military ability, had risen from the ranks of the private soldier to the position of generalissimo of the Abyssinian frontier. He was dressed in a long dark robe of purple silk, with, I think, some gold embroidery-work on it; his head was uncovered save by his own curly but now somewhat grizzled hair, which he wore rather longer than was usual with Abyssinians, and not plaited in rows according to the general custom. His complexion was darker than that of most men of the Tigré mountains, being of a rich chocolate colour; but whatever the colour, the owner of that powerful, cruel, and intelligent face would be bound to make his name known in any country, either as a leader or as a destroyer of men. But although all these details may be afterwards observed and recalled, attention at first was

riveted to one striking peculiarity — a pair of gleaming tawny eyes of a much lighter colour than the skin of the face. To these flashing yellow orbs, whose effect was aided by a brilliant row of white regular teeth, was no doubt due much of the terror with which Ras Alula was generally regarded. I had seen such eyes in the head of a tiger (at the "Zoo." only) and of a leopard, but never in that of a human being. On one side of the Ras, on the divan, lay his curved sword, and within reach of his other hand was a Martini-Henry carbine.

Behind the great man stood two tall half-naked slaves, armed with swords, but whose sole occupation was to wave a couple of large fans gently to and fro, and to preserve their master from the annoyance of any troublesome fly or mosquito. To the left of the divan sat and reclined on the floor about seventy or eighty Abyssinian chiefs of various degrees, all wearing swords, and all clothed in the long picturesque white robe, with its broad red stripe, which is the universal dress of the Abyssinian soldier.

On my approach in the midst of a deep silence, Ras Alula held out his right hand, and grasped mine with a few words of civility, but without rising from his seat; he then motioned to me to sit on a chair placed about four paces from him to the right and in front of him, while the interpreter

Bruru, who on approaching the Ras had prostrated himself flat on his stomach, stood by my side. After the interchange of a few formal greetings, Beech came forward with the Winchester repeating rifle, which we then presented to the Ras, together with 800 rounds of ammunition. The Ras scarcely looked at it, but motioned to a slave to put the case containing it on the ground. I then explained to the Ras that I had important business to transact with the King, and that it was very necessary that I should continue my journey immediately; but he replied that I could not go to-day, and that we should talk of all these matters next day.

This was annoying, as it necessitated a further delay, but on the whole the interview had not been unsatisfactory; the chief's manner was not otherwise than courteous, while his evident intelligence and strength of character made him an object of considerable interest. We then returned to our tent, and shortly afterwards a string of slaves arrived there, bearing presents from the Ras, consisting of two large jars of excellent and most welcome tedge, a cow, a hundred thin flat cakes of brown and black bread, a pot of honey, and a pot of "ghee," or native butter, in appearance and smell very like common train oil.

So far things had gone fairly well, and we fondly hoped that we should continue our journey

on the morrow; but such, alas! was not to be the case, for my second interview, which took place at nine o'clock next morning, was very different from the first. Even before it took place the first mutterings of the storm had made themselves heard; we received an order that we were not to be allowed to camp on the plain any longer, that we must move into a hut which was placed at our disposal, and, moreover, that the move must take place immediately. As a large party of soldiers appeared to be ready, and only too willing, to enforce the mandate in a disagreeable way should we make any objection, I gave the necessary orders to my men under protest, and the tent was struck, the animals caught and loaded, and the whole party moved into a dark circular hut, rather larger than most native huts, built of thick branches, with a thatched roof coming down to about four feet from the ground. The only furniture it contained was a sort of divan, or altar of hard mud, about four feet long by three wide; while nearly half the interior was railed off, and had evidently been till quite recently used as a stable for one or more animals. The hut was surrounded at a distance of about five yards by a high fence of thorns; in the space thus enclosed were crowded my men, mules, and horses, and some of the baggage; while the hut itself was

occupied by Beech, Hutchisson, myself, and the two interpreters, and also, as we soon discovered, by thousands upon thousands of unwelcome and uninvited inhabitants, whose activity and rapacity drove away sleep, made life an intolerable burden, and loaded our consciences with almost as many wicked and bitter words and thoughts as did the subsequent conduct of our arch-enemy, Ras Alula himself.

I must, however, return to my second interview with the Ras in his eyrie, and here I think it will be sufficient simply to quote from the official report on the subject which was submitted to her Majesty's Government in January :—

"At my next interview the following morning "the Ras asked me to tell him what I had come "for, and what was the business I had to do with "the Negoos. I was extremely unwilling to enter "into any political discussion with the Ras, as it "was easy to see that the acceptance by King "John of the Italian terms would involve a "repudiation on the part of his Majesty of any "responsibility for the action of Ras Alula in "regard to the massacre of the Italian half-"battalion at Dogali, and would probably lead to "the downfall of the latter, or at least to his "removal to another province. I therefore "restricted myself to saying that the mission with "which I was intrusted was to the King himself,



HUT IN WHICH MR. PORTAL WAS CONFINED.

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"and I begged the Ras to enable me to accomplish "it quickly. The Ras then said he knew I had "come because of the Italians, and proceeded to "speak with great excitement about the whole "situation, saying that the Italians should come "to Sahati only if he could go as Governor to "Rome; that he had beaten them once, and if "they advanced he would beat them again; that "the sea was the natural frontier of Abyssinia, but "that England, who pretended to be the friend of "the Negoos, had given Massowah to the Italians. "I at once protested strongly against this state- "ment, and added that, in any case, Massowah "would be of no use to Abyssinia, who had no "fleet, and could not hold the place against even "one ship of any European Power, and that surely "it was better for his country that Massowah "should be in the hands of a Great Power who was "willing, and even anxious, to be a friend to "Abyssinia. The conversation continued in this "strain a little longer, the Ras's manner through- "out being most insulting and aggressive: he "addressed me continually as if I were an Italian, "and responsible for all Italian action, and after "being obliged more than once to tell him that I "was sent by the Queen of England alone, and "had nothing to do with Italy, I again asked him "to let me go on and carry out my mission to the

"King. This he flatly refused to do, and said I "must wait at Asmara.

"A guard was then set over me and my people; "we were not allowed to go out except accompanied "by two soldiers; the inhabitants of Asmara were "strictly forbidden to sell us provisions or goods of "any kind whatever; no one was allowed to com- "municate with us either personally or by letter; "visitors who wished to see me were roughly "refused admittance by the soldiers, and their "names were reported to the Ras; in a word, "although nominally we were guests of Ras Alula, "practically we were prisoners during the whole "of our enforced stay in his camp. Every day I "sent to the Ras to ask for guides and permission "to start, but without effect, and on the 15th "November I sent to demand another interview "with him, which he fixed for daybreak next "morning. I accordingly went to him at the "appointed time, but was not received with any "mark of respect; the people who were sitting or "lying about in front of his hut refused to move "out of my way, and it was only when I turned to "go back again that I was begged to go on, and "that a way was cleared for me through the crowd. "I then repeated to the Ras that I was charged to "take a letter, a message, and some presents from "the Queen to the Negoos, and that if the Ras

"did not find it consistent with his duty to let me "go forward, I begged that he would nominate "some trustworthy person who should take charge "of the letter and presents, and that he would let "me return to Massowah to report why I had been "unable to carry out my instructions. The Ras "replied that I should neither go forward nor back "for the present. I asked him whether he would "stop me by force if I were to start to return to "Massowah. He said, yes, that if I started to go "either way he would have me brought back by "his soldiers. Four days later, on the 19th "November, I heard that the Ras had received a "letter from the King about me, and shortly after- "wards he sent for me, and told me that he would "now let me go; but that I must first show him "the Queen's and Lord Salisbury's letters, as he "wished to see whether the seals were genuine. "Although this was somewhat insulting, I saw no "great objection to complying with his request, "and accordingly brought the letters to him. He "merely looked at the seals on her Majesty's "letter, but that from Lord Salisbury he opened "and handed to his interpreter in spite of my "protests. Four hours later he returned the letter "to me, and sent me three soldiers as guides for "the journey. I then lost no time in leaving "Asmara."

Although it will have been seen from the above report that during these ten days of enforced inactivity at Asmara we had really been close prisoners, and thoroughly cut off from all communication with the outer world, yet it must not be imagined that we had been subjected to any active or physical ill-treatment at the hands of the Abyssinian soldiers guarding us, nor had there ever been any stinginess in the supplies of food sent for our consumption. Every morning a string of slaves used to arrive from head-quarters driving a sheep before them and bearing several basketfuls of thin flat circular loaves or "chupatties" of black bread, made, to judge by their taste, principally of fine black sand, mixed with grass stalks; there was always, too, a large jar of tedge, sometimes very good and very palatable, sometimes very bitter, but always preferable to the muddy water which was now our only alternative, our liquor supply consisting of only two bottles of brandy, which I determined to keep solely for medicinal purposes. But, in spite of these delicacies, it was with a feeling of the deepest relief that I at last heard that Ras Alula had received a letter from the King ordering him to let us proceed on our journey unmolested.

For over a week of our captivity, Beech and I had had a cause for grave anxiety, which, though

I did not consider it worthy of mention in the official report, was of some importance to us at the time. We knew that the policy of Ras Alula was that of "war at any price," that any arrangement between Italy and the Negoos would discredit his action at Dogali, that as general commanding the frontier army he instinctively looked upon three white men from the Italian camp with the greatest suspicion, and that he would be only too glad of any good excuse for getting rid of us. But besides this it had come to our knowledge that Ras Alula had sent a strongly worded letter to King John himself, reporting our arrival and the attendant suspicious circumstances, stating his belief that we were Italian spies, adding that even if we were not Italians it made but little difference, as we came from the Italian camp, and as England and Italy were hand in hand in all matters concerning Massowah and Abyssinia. This precious letter ended with an urgent request that his Majesty should authorize him to treat us summarily as enemies or spies, *i.e.* throw us into chains, or execute us without more delay or bother about the matter.

It was therefore a bitter disappointment to Ras Alula when the King's answer arrived, laconically ordering him to let us proceed to his Majesty's camp, where the case would be examined by the

King himself. But, grumble as he might, Ras Alula dared not disobey the King's commands. He assented, therefore, to my request for a final interview, and we took leave of each other, not, it is true, with the best grace in the world; but I could pardon his somewhat brusque, not to say savage, manner, in consideration of his disappointment, and because I felt that this parting was a wrench to his feelings; for he was indeed sorry to let us go, and a man never shows to advantage when his feelings are thus deeply touched.

I should not forget to mention that on one day, the 15th of November, the monotony of our captivity was relieved by permission being accorded to us to witness a gala performance of a national pastime, called, I believe, "Gooks" or "Gûx," which was not unlike an idealized and elaborated form of the Egyptian game of "Jereed," familiar to most visitors to Egypt and travellers on the Nile. But no recollection of the Egyptian game, as played chiefly by young emasculated effendis and by the tall slim black gentlemen who officiate as guardians of the harem, could give the reader any idea of the wildly picturesque and imposing spectacle which we witnessed that day on the plains of Asmara, under the shadow of the great mountain range which divided us so effectually from Massowah, the Italians, and our friends.

A large expanse of level turf, nearly the size of Lord's cricket-ground, of which, indeed, I thought somewhat wistfully on that day, was enclosed and surrounded by a bright-coloured crowd of several thousands of Abyssinians, every man with his spear, sword, and shield, and dressed in the bright white "shamma," with its broad red stripe, which is the distinctive mark of the Abyssinian man-at-arms. Not a few women, too, were present, whose refined features, straight cleanly chiselled noses, haughty lips, and graceful figures, well set off by a free, upright, and dignified carriage, added considerably to the beauty of the scene. In the centre of the open ground were collected two groups of horsemen, about one hundred in each group, and it needed no second glance to show us that among these was to be found all the best of Tigréan and North Abyssinian bravery, chivalry, and aristocracy. Many of these apparently disdained the common red-and-white "shamma" of the army, and appeared in flowing robes of green silk, red silk, yellow silk, or white silk, their saddles covered with velvet or cotton cloth of some bright colour, and liberally ornamented, as were also the bridles and headstalls, with silver and sometimes with gold. Instead of spears every man held in his right hand some half-dozen light wands, about four feet in

length, which were to be hurled as javelins at their pretended enemy. The left hand held the bridle, and on that arm was hung the round Abyssinian shield. But what shields! How the mouth of a collector of trophies would have watered! It appears that the shield is the article of equipment on which the Abyssinian "masher" bestows most attention, and among those before us there was hardly one which was not richly adorned with silver, gold, and copper, wrought by native hands into native designs. A few paces in advance of one of the groups, on a very useful-looking native stallion, sat Ras Alula himself, *primus inter pares*, conspicuous in a robe of purple silk worked with gold embroidery, his shield covered with purple velvet, on which were fixed large gold and silver bosses and *plaques*.

After a short pause, of which advantage was taken by some of the young Abyssinian swells as a good opportunity for showing off their horsemanship by making their steeds caracol and jump about, each of the two central groups wheel about and slowly retire to opposite ends of the ground, where for a few minutes they halt facing each other. Suddenly, Ras Alula, who is with the group of combatants nearest to where we were standing, gives a shout, and, followed by his whole glittering squadron, charges furiously down on the

opposing faction, which stands quietly to await the onslaught. On arriving at about twenty paces from the enemy, the Ras and his squadron wheel sharp round to the right and gallop along the face of the opposing line, hurling at the same time their light reed spears. The enemy is not slow to respond, and, while catching the spears of Ras Alula's party on their shields with wonderful dexterity, return the compliment with energy, until the air is thick with a double shower of missiles flying with considerable force in each direction. Another word of command is given by Ras Alula, and in a second he and his squadron are flying back at full speed to their end of the ground, where a crowd of slaves and attendants hastily give them a fresh supply of wands or spears. Scarcely, however, have they time to turn round again, when with a thundering clatter of hoofs the foe is upon them in their turn, charging along at the fullest speed of their plucky little horses. The next instant the cloud of javelins is hurled and returned. This time the combat is at closer quarters. Barely ten yards separate the assailants, who gallop furiously up and down the defenders' line, from their stationary opponents; at that distance even these light pointless javelins, hurled with the fullest force of a strong man going at great speed, would most decidedly "leave its

mark" on a white man's body. They are nearer to us now, and we can better admire the marvellous agility and dexterity displayed on both sides in catching the javelins on their shields, in avoiding them altogether, and in the management of their horses. Some in galloping along throw themselves flat along their horse's side, holding on by one foot and one arm, while the other arm launched a missile from under the horse's neck; others with their shield arrest the flight of a javelin coming straight at their legs or thighs, or at their horse, while with the wand in their hand they turn aside another which is flying straight at their head or neck. But the opponents' supply of javelins is becoming exhausted, and again the word is given and they are careering madly back to their own corner, followed, after a moment's interval, by Ras Alula and his party in their turn. And so the game goes on for nearly an hour, until both horses and men are somewhat exhausted and the proceedings become "slack," on which Ras Alula quietly gives them to understand that he has had enough of it, and the assembly rapidly disperses.

Nothing struck me so much during this mimic combat as the good temper and light-heartedness shown by the competitors. The blows given and received must often have been pretty sharp ones,

and yet not once was there a voice raised in anger, and though, doubtless, the javelins may sometimes have been hurled somewhat "viciously," yet that would all be perfectly fair game, and never was there the slightest sign of a quarrel or altercation. Who among us can honestly say the same of any keenly contested game or match at polo in which we may have been lucky enough to take part? Has our higher education taught us to take light knocks and jostles, both moral and physical, with the smiling equanimity of Ras Alula's young men? In other words, has civilization taught us to keep our temper much better than a semi-savage Abyssinian?

CHAPTER V.

FROM ASMARA TO "THE KING'S ROAD."

An unpromising start—A new way of preparing beef—Godofelassi—A battle of thunder—Gundet—Free rations for soldiers—Bread (?) and how to make it—A desperate descent—Mountain paths—Dangers of delay—The "King's Road."

It was a little after mid-day on the 19th of November when we marched out of Asmara in the track of our soldier guides. Our destination was uncertain, as the King was on the march from Dobra Tabor, either coming towards Adowa or to Ashangi; it was considered best, therefore, to march to Sōkōtă, a town almost in the centre of Abyssinia, which would not be far from his road whether he was coming north or remaining in the southern part of his dominions. Sokota lies almost due south from Asmara, distant, I calculated, about twelve long days' march; it was therefore with a feeling of surprise, not unmixed with suspicion, that I soon perceived that the three soldiers given to us as guides by Ras Alula were leading us in a

north-westerly direction. It was with considerable annoyance that on arrival, after three hours' march, at a small village, I heard them declare that we must now halt for the night; and it was with real anger that I contemplated them sitting stolidly on a stone in the path and refusing to move a step further, declaring that their orders were to take us by slow and short journeys, "so that we should not be fatigued"! This was too much, so I told them I did not care a fig for their orders, that I intended to march when I liked and to halt when I chose, and that if they refused to come any further I would hire guides from the villages, but that in any case I would proceed. I added, that if I reached the king without them I would make it my first care to report their misconduct, and to see that they were severely punished—probably by the loss of their heads. At the same time I ordered the caravan to proceed, and we rode forward, followed by the now sulky soldiers, who, however, eventually succumbed to a little quiet "blarney," and led us to another village called Calcalti, where we arrived soon after sunset, and which should, according to the Ras's orders, have been our resting-place for the following day.

Thoroughly tired by this march of seven and a half hours, after our enforced inactivity of ten days, no time was lost in unloading the mules, but

no food was procurable in the miserably poor collection of huts of which the village consisted. Water was plentiful, and fortunately one of my men had been detailed to drive a cow with us all day. This cow had been one of the last gifts of our dear friend Ras Alula, but it had become very footsore, and had lagged behind for the last two or three hours. While waiting for its arrival fires were lighted, knives were sharpened, pots were prepared; probably, never was a cow so welcomed as when this one at length limped into camp. In an instant the sturdiest of my men had the beast on the ground, one of them in particular earning the honoured title of the "Chief Butcher" by the alacrity with which he hacked and cut at the poor brute's throat, and exactly forty-one minutes from the time when the animal arrived in camp Beech, Hutchisson, and I, were trying to get our teeth through some well-cooked beefsteaks, while my men were devouring other portions prepared in a way peculiar to themselves. This consisted in cutting from the still quivering carcase long strips of meat not more than one inch wide. As many of these strips as it was thought would be wanted for the evening meal were then impaled on little sharp sticks and slung for a few—very few—moments over the hot embers of a dying fire, after which each man seized his strip, most of which were about

two feet in length, and began munching away at one end of it, continuing to chew with equal perseverance and energy until the whole had disappeared. Having appeased their hunger the men busied themselves about their provisions for the following days, and ere long almost all the flesh of the cow had been cut from the bones and was spread on the turf in many dozens of long narrow strips. No further preparation was necessary; next day these strings of meat were laid across the back of a mule, over the load, and thus fully exposed to the burning sun. If the strips were cut thin enough they soon became dry and would thus last for several days, but any piece which was a little too thick or "lumpy" soon made the neighbourhood of that mule almost unbearable to our European noses. I afterwards noticed that my Arabs, with a highly commendable regard for economy, always chose for immediate consumption those pieces which would be rejected by a Sanitary Inspector as "unfit for human food;" but whether they did so from preference or because they feared that such pieces might take unto themselves legs and walk away, is a question of which I leave the solution to others.

By this time my men were becoming accustomed to each other and to Beech and myself; discipline was severe, but their obedience, as a

rule, was implicit. I was, on the whole, well satisfied with them, and they seemed to have confidence in us. Our spirits were all high at having escaped from Ras Alula's clutches, and at daybreak next morning, when we started along a smiling valley with a fairly good path leading due south towards Godofelassi, both men and mules seemed to be exhilarated by the beauty of the scenery and the freshness of the bright morning air, and the valley re-echoed with songs, laughter, and jests, as we marched along at a pace which thoroughly disgusted our soldier guides, and called forth dismal prophecies from them respecting the imminent death of all our mules and men too if we went on in this fashion.

At mid-day we crossed the Marab river for the first time; here it was a narrow but smooth and deep stream, very different from its appearance a hundred miles further on its course. I called a halt for luncheon in a rich grassy meadow on the bank of the cool and tempting stream, and five minutes later we were all splashing about in the river, enjoying the most delightful bathe I had ever experienced. One hour and a half was the limit of rest which I felt justified in allowing at this refreshing and delightful spot. We had halted at eleven o'clock, at 12.30 we were again in the saddle and on we went at the same swing-

ing pace all through the afternoon, always in the midst of lovely scenery, a rich brilliant valley about three miles wide, shut in on both sides by bold rocky mountains covered with light green bushes, interspersed with the dark bluish-coloured india-rubber and gum trees which were growing in thousands on the hill-sides. A guinea-fowl, a francolin, a partridge, and two grouse, which were kind enough to fall to my gun in the course of the afternoon, removed any cause for anxiety as to our evening meal, while the men still had plenty of last night's cow, cut in thin strips and spread over some of the loads on the backs of the mules to dry in the sun, and already unpleasant to our olfactory nerves.

A little before sunset we arrived at Godofelassi, having passed several picturesque little villages with the names of which it is unnecessary to weary the reader. With the light hearts and good consciences of men who felt that they had done a long day's march of about thirty miles, in a perfect climate and amid magnificent scenery, we pitched our camp, cooked our dinner, made our mules, our men, and ourselves thoroughly comfortable for the night, and then, as Beech and I sat smoking our pipes outside the tent, we were rewarded by being made spectators of one of the grandest dramatic efforts of Nature which it has

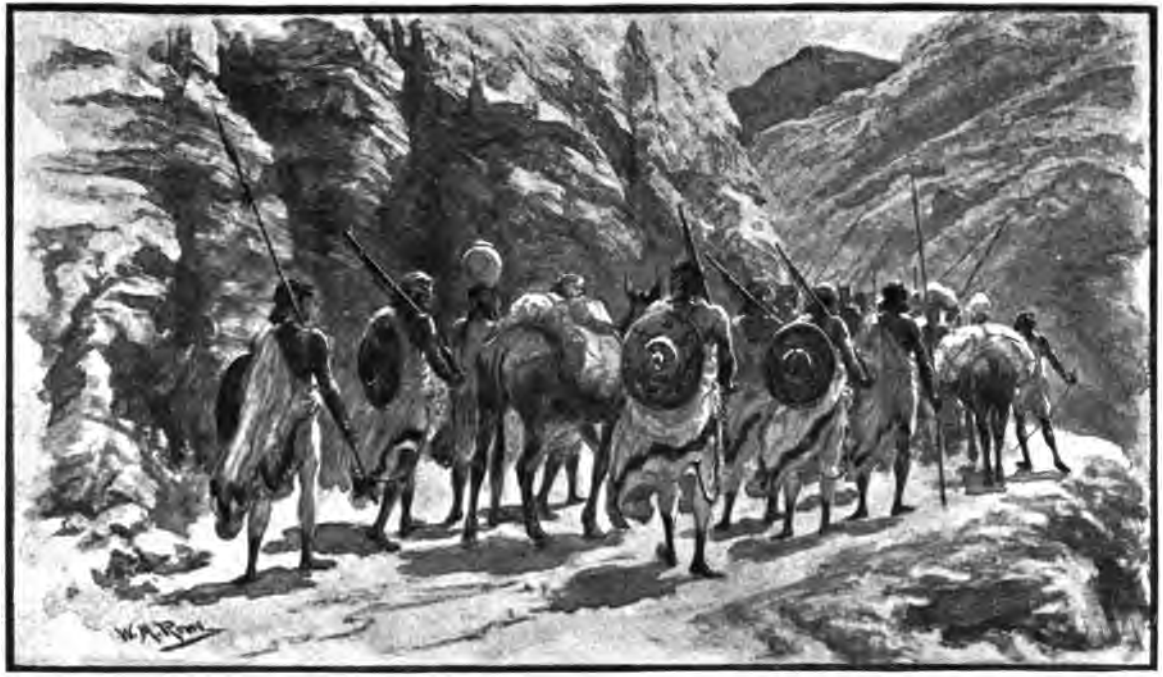
ever been my good fortune to witness either before or since. The plateau of Godofelassi, elevated as it is about 7500 feet above the sea, is in a sort of cup formed by a wall of lofty precipitous mountains which nearly surround the plain, leaving open only the gap through which we had entered. We were almost in the centre of the plain, and the mountain walls were from a mile to two miles distant from our camp: we were therefore admirably placed for witnessing Nature's great melodrama. At about nine o'clock the curtain rose, and the first muttering of a thunderstorm was heard in the hills on our extreme right. Rapidly gaining strength as it rolled forward towards our front, the flashes soon became incessant and the corresponding reports like the firing of many heavy guns. Suddenly, with a crash which must have shaken the hills, this bombardment is answered by another mighty storm on our extreme left, which, firing its heavy artillery with ever-increasing rapidity, bears on along the line of mountains to meet the aggressor. Storm No. 1 apparently calls up its reserves, No. 2 does the same, for as these two original combatants meet with a terrific crash straight before us, two fresh thunder-clouds on the right, and three on the left, are hurrying up with all speed, each firing all its available guns as quickly as possible, and converg-

ing on the centre point, where the two first combatants are flashing and crashing in their death-struggle. Until it eventually joined the great central turmoil each thunder-cloud kept itself perfectly independent and distinct; at one moment we could see seven separate storms banging away simultaneously. The noise was tremendous, the flashes incessant; within the space of one minute by the watch, Beech and I counted seventy-five flashes of lightning; I had been present at the bombardment of Alexandria, in 1882, and had both seen and heard the British combined Channel and Mediterranean fleets pour their shot and shell from big guns and from little guns, into or rather *at* the forts for the space of a whole day; that was indeed a fine sight and made a great noise, both at the time and in the world afterwards, but neither in awful magnificence nor in mere noisiness could that bombardment compare with the thunder-battle which we witnessed during the night of the 20th of November, 1887, on the mountains above Godofelassi. The actual damage done with all the smoke, fire, and noise in these two cases was possibly about equal.

While this panorama was being enacted before and all round us not a drop of rain had fallen where we sat, not a breath of wind had stirred the

embers of the fire; we lay in a dead calm, as though all the forces of Nature were concentrated on the struggle going on before us, utterly neglecting the rest of the world. At length, however, the aerial artillery gradually becomes silent; perhaps, as at Alexandria, the ammunition is exhausted; an interval succeeds of intense, unnatural stillness, and then once more the air is filled with the familiar sounds of an Abyssinian night, the whistle of the great owl, the hiss of the night hawk, the sad wailing cry of the jackal, the weird ghostly laugh of the prowling hyæna, and occasionally a deeper, hoarser sound which invariably produces a general and dead silence for several moments,—the angry roar of a hungry lion.

By six o'clock next morning we were again on the march, and again we swung along at a good three and a half miles an hour along a fairly level track, which however gradually became more and more rocky and mountainous till, in the afternoon, some of our men and our soldier guides began to show signs of fatigue. At 3.30 p.m. we passed through the village of Addi Huala, the scene of a great battle in 1876 between the Abyssinians and the Egyptian forces under the late Prince Hassam, which resulted, as did all their battles, in the total defeat, followed by the usual ghastly massacre and mutilation of the unfortunate Egyptians.



ABYSSINIAN WARRIORS ON THE MARCH.

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

Here our soldier-guides insisted that we must halt, that Gundet was still many hours distant, and that there was no other possible camping-ground or water attainable that evening. To these arguments I turned a deaf ear, my maps showed me that Gundet could not be more than ten miles distant, and, to the astonishment both of the soldiers and of my men, I declared that I knew exactly where Gundet was situated, and that I intended to camp there that night; at the same time I rode forward, ordering my people to follow. I knew that I ran no risk in thus preferring the evidence of the maps to the local knowledge of the guides, as this part of the country had been traversed by several European missions, and was mapped out with very fair accuracy. But what the maps did not tell me was the nature of the country and the state of the road before us, and I nearly repented of my obstinacy when, an hour later, we suddenly found ourselves on the edge of a huge cliff frowning over a vast extent of apparently fertile country lying nearly 2000 feet below us. Down this precipice we had to go somehow; it was a difficult and hazardous business to undertake late in the afternoon with tired and heavily loaded mules, but at length, after much slipping and stumbling, shouting and swearing, we arrived without casualty in the plain below,

and shortly afterwards halted and pitched our camp in a picturesque spot near a stream at the foot of a precipitous conical hill on which is perched the village of Gundet.

I should here explain that nearly all Abyssinian villages are perched like eagles' nests on the extreme summit of the most precipitous hill available, whether because they are thus less liable to the sudden attack of warlike neighbours, or because experience has shown that lions and panthers do not care to climb a precipice in order to get at the cattle, is a matter of surmise which the reader may settle to his own satisfaction.

At Gundet we did not expect to meet with much hospitality: we were now on the direct track from Asmara to the capital, Adowa, and hospitality in villages situated on the main roads in Abyssinia—if such tracks can be called roads—is a lost virtue. The reason is evident; in Abyssinia every soldier of the king who happens to be travelling across the country either on pleasure or business, every messenger of the king, and even the slaves belonging to such soldiers and messengers, have the right to demand a ration of flour or meal and milk in any village in which they pass the night. The rations and lodgings are demanded "in the name of Johannis, king of kings," and woe betide any unfortunate villager who, emboldened

by poverty and distress, shall dare to withhold his last handful of corn from the arrogant soldier. The uniform of the soldier is a sufficient passport, and ensures its wearer ample sufficiency of food, drink, and lodging from end to end of the kingdom. Even if a soldier or messenger is without the regulation "shamma," without arms, and in apparent penury, an oath "by the death of the king," or an asseveration "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," is universally and unhesitatingly accepted as good proof of the accuracy of his statements and of the justice of his claim for board and lodging. It will readily be understood that this system, in a country where no chief even of the smallest degree makes the shortest of journeys unaccompanied by several of his soldiers; where greater chiefs seldom move without an escort and following resembling a small army; and where the large numbers of troops under arms entail the constant hurrying to and fro of innumerable messengers, presses with great severity on villages like Gundet which have the misfortune to be placed on or close to a frequented road.

It was therefore no matter for surprise to find that no supplies were obtainable; but a few grouse and partridges which I had shot on the road were amply sufficient for ourselves, while for the men there was a small skinful of flour which we had

bought at Godofelassi in the early morning. Hutchisson was therefore soon engaged in making a wonderful "stew," in the cooking of which I would back him against any French "chef," but which had the serious drawback of requiring at least two hours' preparation.

The Chief Butcher had no occupation this night, but stood still, and with a sneer on his black countenance watched the proceedings of another man, surnamed the "Chief Baker," who was engaged in making bread in a manner peculiarly his own. His method consisted in heating several round stones about half the size of cricket-balls, while he made the flour into dough, which he rolled out into a flat mass about an inch thick. A red-hot stone was then taken out of the fire and placed on the dough, which was at once rolled up all round the stone till it made a perfect ball. The whole ball was then put bodily into the fire, to be thoroughly baked or burnt outside by the flames or red-hot ashes, and inside by the hot stone. In less than five minutes the bread (!) was ready for consumption. I cannot say that the result was either wholesome or appetizing, but the process was simple, and, in default of any better, we stuck to this way of making bread during the rest of our sojourn in Abyssinia.

A miserably wet night was followed by a lovely

morning, and shortly after daybreak everything was packed and ready for a start. We were now within about thirty-five miles of Adowa, the present capital of Abyssinia, and I wished very much to pass through that town, which lay on our road directly to the south, but the guides utterly refused to go there; they vowed that Ras Alula had given the strictest orders that we were not to be allowed to go to Adowa, and that if we insisted on going that way they would be severely punished, and we should feel the enmity of Ras Alula in a disagreeable way.

It appears that Ras Alula has a quarrel with the Great Chief who rules over Adowa, which is just outside the Ras's province, and therefore, rather than run the risk of getting mixed up in these personal feuds, I consented to turn a little aside and to travel by the less known and more difficult paths across the mountains on the left of the Adowa road. At the same time I gave leave to Bruru Worke to ride on to Adowa to visit his relations who live there, telling him not to remain more than one day, and then to push on and catch us up on the road to Abbi Addy and Sokota. We then left the clearly defined path which leads to Adowa, and journeyed along a stony track, overgrown with bushes and thorns, till, in an hour or two, we found ourselves at the head of a descent

to which our scramble of yesterday was a joke. The horrors of that mountain-side are still vivid in my mind, and, as I look back on it, I distinctly see the depressing picture of my unfortunate caravan. Here a willing mule, caught by its loads being jammed between two rocks; here another, with both its hind legs over the edge of a precipice, and a yelling Arab trying to pull him up again by the bridle; another refusing absolutely to slide down an incline, and listening stolidly alike to the blandishments and the curses of its driver; while on every side boxes were being smashed and packages torn to ribbons by the sharp corners of projecting rocks, the chief sufferer being Hutchisson, who came at the end of the procession picking up most of his kit on the road along which it was being strewn like the "scent" in a paper chase, the valise containing it having been smashed to atoms against a rock; but the animal whose fate was the hardest was the unfortunate mule carrying the King's great telescope, the deal case of which projected a good deal, and continually "hung up" the wretched beast to rocks and thorn trees, or else overbalanced him and sent him rolling down the side of the mountain, until his course was arrested by a friendly obstacle. However, all things must have an end, and at length the whole party was collected in the

plain below, and halted for an inspection of damages. These turned out not to be so very serious after all; so on we went along an open level plain teeming with game, and with the most beautiful and brilliant-coloured birds of every size and kind, from the white vulture overhead to the lovely lyre-bird darting from tree to tree.

At noon we again crossed our former acquaintance, the Marab river, now grown to a more important size; and shortly afterwards it became evident that our guides knew nothing of the road, and that we were aimlessly wandering to and fro. Three times that afternoon we crossed and re-crossed the Marab, on each occasion getting a little more wetted than the time before, till a little before five o'clock we came in sight of a small village on the top of a big hill. Here we halted for the night, and engaged a local guide for the morrow, our soldier-guides having confessed that they were strangers to this part of the country.

Leaving this village—by name Haddish Addi—at daybreak next morning, the 23rd of November, we crossed the Gomgrim river at 9.30 a.m., passed through Addi Mariam at 10.30, halted for an hour in a pleasant meadow near a stream, had a violent altercation with the soldier-guides, who insisted that we should halt for the day at Addi Hepto-maria at 2.30 p.m., and finally compelled them

sulkily to follow us to the Addi or village of Shahagni, where we pitched our camp just before sunset at the foot of a magnificent black mountain, in appearance and shape very like the Matterhorn, called Semayata, the highest peak of the great Debra Sina and Selida ranges.

But, enthusiastic admirers of fine scenery as we were, what chiefly attracted our attention at this moment was the question of food. We soon discovered that, beyond a bowl of sour milk, absolutely nothing in the way of supplies was procurable at this little mountain village. We had seen no game on the road during the latter part of the day, and in the morning, when we were in a richer country and had seen plenty of guinea-fowl, partridges, etc., I had been too proud and had rather pooh-poohed the notion of wasting time over these birds so early in the day, when we should have had to carry them for many hours, during which most of them would probably "go bad" under the tropical sun; the ultimate result of this at a quarter of an hour before sunset being that, although the men still had some flour for themselves, we had nothing but a bag of broken ship's biscuit—hardly a satisfying meal for three hungry men after a long and hot day's march. From force of habit Hutchisson had lighted a fire, and was gazing disconsolately into his empty pots;

Beech and I were getting out the gun and a few cartridges, but with hardly any hope of shooting anything in the fifteen or twenty minutes of daylight that still remained, when some one pointed out a couple of small green birds on the top of a big tree close to us. I thought they were parrots, and at first was unwilling to shoot them, but was soon persuaded, and down they came. Hutchisson seized upon them with delight, and explained that they were not parrots but "green pigeons," which his Indian experience had taught him were excellent food. Two more of these birds were then good enough to come and perch on the same tree; they were promptly shot sitting, followed their companions into the pot, and completed their earthly career by affording us a most excellent though modest repast.

After a wet night, during which terrific thunderstorms had roused the echoes in the mountains all round us, we marched again at daybreak on the 24th, round the base of Semayata, till at nine o'clock we got a magnificent bird's-eye view of Adowa, lying far below in a plain to the west. At mid-day we halted for one hour only in a grassy meadow, through which flowed the Seisa, bright and clear as a Hampshire trout stream. Here I shot a beautifully marked wild goose, about twice the size of an English goose, with

a dark green back, white, red and yellow breast, and red eye.

Although it would have done a world of good to our jaded, heavily-laden, and overworked mules to have been allowed several hours of rest in the rich pasturage of this lovely valley, and although we too were all feeling the effects of the severe marches and mountain-climbing of the last few days after our enforced idleness in captivity at Asmara, yet in my mind was ever present the anxious, almost feverish thought that our march to the king—in fact, my whole mission—was a race against time, that twelve precious days had been lost while we were vainly struggling to free ourselves from the clutches of Ras Alula, and beating our hearts out against the walls of that accursed hut at Asmara, and that but six days remained to us before the fatal date (the 1st of December) on which the Italians had said that they would consider themselves free to commence aggressive operations. News, and especially news of war, flies with almost miraculous rapidity from village to village in Abyssinia, as in all semi-savage countries, and we knew well that should the intelligence, probably exaggerated, of an Italian advance reach the King before our arrival, or during our stay in his camp, our lives and the lives of my native followers would not be worth

five minutes' purchase. To have told the men anything of this sort would have only served to dishearten them, and might even cause them to mutiny and insist on returning at once to the coast; but I have little doubt that some such idea was present in Ras Alula's mind when he told his soldier-guides—as I afterwards discovered he did—that they were to delay our journey by all the means in their power. No rest, therefore, could there be for us in the cool and pleasant valley of the Seisa; no sooner had we overcome the difficulties of crossing the great Semayata mountains than our eyes became riveted on another mighty range, lying due south and straight before us, distant, blue, and forbidding. We might be weary, we might be sick, we might see the ribs of our mules daily defining themselves more and more prominently through the skin, and the men beginning to limp ominously as they toiled along the rocky path, but still, so long as we could move, so long even as we could be carried, our cry must ever be "Push on, get forward."

At one o'clock, therefore, we spring to our feet, the order is given; mules are caught, saddled and loaded in a manner which is a marked and pleasant contrast to the sluggish and half-hearted confusion of the first days, and half an hour later we are striding along the banks of the rippling

stream, Beech and I riding in front with stiffened limbs but light hearts, and waking the echoes of the Abyssinian mountains with many a song and many a chorus, culled with equal temerity from the works of Verdi, Offenbach, and Sullivan, or from the *répertoire* of the London music-halls.

Here and there we pass a solitary Abyssinian shepherd, armed with spear and shield, and standing motionless as a bronze statue on some apparently inaccessible pinnacle of rock. He stares open-mouthed at the string of heavily-laden mules with strange foreign saddles and bridles, and at these curious unknown men in breeches and boots who come riding on mules and singing strange (and no doubt to him uncouth) songs through his country. As we go by there is an exchange of greetings between him and some of my men who know his language, followed perhaps by some good-tempered "chaff" on both sides. If his bump of curiosity is strongly developed, he may perhaps descend from his perch and come up to us to ask our business, origin, and destination; he is then probably offered a chance of earning a handful of cartridges, or even a dollar, by showing us the best road to the next village on our route.

Unfortunately, on this particular afternoon we failed to find any local guide just when he was most needed, and before long I found that our

soldier-guides were gradually leading us in a more and more easterly direction, and at last even north of east, whereas our objective point, viz. a well-marked road leading from Adowa to Abbi-Addy, lay, as we knew, to the south and west. The immediate result of this discovery was the loss of a good deal of time and of our tempers; the soldiers then became mulish, and refused to move at all. Luckily, the country was more or less open and comparatively level, so that I was able to lead the caravan without much difficulty in a south-westerly direction, until at last, with a general shout of joy, we suddenly came upon a broad, clear, and evidently much-used track about ten feet wide, and running almost due north and south. This was the much-talked-of "King's Road," running from Adowa to Abbi-Addy, and thence branching in one direction to Dobra Tabor and on the other side to Ashangi.

Whenever the king comes to visit his capital (Adowa), accompanied, as his Majesty always is, by a good many thousands of soldiers and camp followers, all the larger boulders and the more aggressive thorn bushes are removed from the track prior to his passage. It may therefore be imagined what a luxury this road appeared to us after our recent experiences of rocks, mountains, thorns and pathless scrub. At the same time I

should add that this "King's Road" would not take very high rank among roads in any European country; at no part of it, for example, would it have been possible to drive even the strongest and narrowest of dog-carts with the sturdiest of ponies along it for as much as a mile.

Bravely the men stepped out along this road, with their faces turned due south, past the villages of Abba Grima and Logumti, whose inhabitants turned out with wonder to look at us; under the shadow of a village perched on a lofty precipitous cliff, clustering round a large but low round white edifice, which we were informed was a church founded by a celebrated ecclesiastical dignitary named Tekla Haimanot, who had flourished some centuries before; until at last, as the sun went down, we halted near a village named Gelrot, having marched that day for exactly twelve hours, including only one hour's halt at mid-day. Well had we all, mules and men, earned our food and rest, but alas! all our efforts, all our diplomacy, smooth promises and liberal offers of dollars, of cartridges, of almost anything, only resulted in the production, after nearly two hours' delay, of one small bowl of milk scarcely sufficient to give a good drink to one man. For the mules there was plenty of coarse, dry grass, and for ourselves there was the goose which I had shot in the

morning, but the Arabs, being Mussulmans, would starve rather than touch any of it, and I began to grow a little anxious about them, as for several days past they had had nothing to eat but their heavy indigestible bread, and not only had the journey been long and severe, but there was more work before us, and ever more necessity for haste and forced marches. However, there was no help for it; Beech and I, Hutchisson and Ghirghis, supped off the goose, which, by the same token, was quite excellent; the men luckily found that they still had a little flour, and made themselves some bread, or rather burnt dough, after the manner described above, and in an incredibly short space of time the whole party was sleeping the sleep of the weary.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE KING'S CAMP.

More anxiety about water—A pleasant spot—Abyssinian mode of fishing—Mistaken for devils—Abbi Addy—Markets—Exchange of incivility with a chief—Return of Bruru Worke—Fenaroa—Treatment of sick men—A night march—An uncanny spot—The Âgows—Sokota and sulky chief—Royal Camp at last—The "Balderabba."

JUST as we were about to resume the march at six o'clock the following morning, viz. the 25th of November, 1887, two messengers arrived with a letter for me, and a most welcome present of a cow from the chief man of Adowa, who rejoices in the jaw-breaking name of Betwaded Gebrameskal. This gentleman civilly expressed his regret that I had not passed through Adowa on my journey south, and added that he had sent orders along the road to ensure our being well treated and supplied with provisions as long as we were within the limits of his jurisdiction. This was polite and no doubt well-meant, but it did us little practical

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FACSIMILE LETTER FROM BETWADED GEBRAMESKAL. *To face page* 116.

good, as we were already within fifteen miles of the extremity of his province. However, I wrote a suitable reply, full of compliments and hopes that I should make his acquaintance on my return from the King. This was quickly translated into Amharic by the interpreter, Ghirghis, and the messengers having been made happy by a liberal "backsheesh" of dollars, the order was given to advance, and once more we were travelling due south along a fairly good path.

After only three hours' march we reached a small village, where our soldier-guides said we must stop for the day; they vowed that no more water would be procurable for at least a whole day's march, and that the road became desperately bad. Again I had recourse to the maps, and feeling convinced after a careful study that the Mai (or river) Weri could not be more than about three and a half or four hours distant, I absolutely refused to halt. The guides with equal obstinacy refused to advance, so I left them behind and continued the march without them, feeling tolerably confident that we should not have much difficulty in keeping to the right path, and knowing that the river lay due south of us, running from east to west. I could see, however, that my men, hungry as they were, were a little uneasy at the idea of continuing our march without any guides

at all, and, although there was no sign of disobedience or insubordination, it was considered advisable for Beech and Hutchisson to fall into their allotted places at the end of the caravan to keep the party together, and to prevent straggling, either by persuasion, or, if necessary, by force. After another hour's march the heat became very great, and, although the road was not really very bad, the constant succession of hills and valleys were wearisome and exhausting; our thirst, without being absolutely painful, soon became more acute than was pleasant, and I confess that unwelcome memories of our experiences on the 2nd of November made me keep a very sharp and rather anxious look out for any sign that might denote the proximity of a river.

In two hours we left the hills and began to cross a flat sandy plain, covered with mimosa thorns, where the heat became even more oppressive than before; three and a half hours had elapsed since we parted with the guides, and I had promised water to my men in less than four hours; we had been over six and a half hours on the march, and I was sorry to see that the pace was getting slower and slower, that all conversation among the men had long ceased, and that we were now plodding painfully along in silence. To encourage them I told the men I was abso-

lutely certain that water was now quite close, but at the same time I devoutly hoped that the maps had not made a mistake of ten miles or so in the position of the river. Beech and I then rode ahead to some distance from the party, and at length to our joy and relief we suddenly heard the rushing of water, and found ourselves on the edge of a cliff looking down on a fine clear stream, rushing, tumbling, and foaming over rocks and boulders about fifty feet below us. We soon found a way down to the water, and conveyed the news back to the caravan, taking care to remind them that I had promised water within four hours, and that I had brought them to it in three hours and fifty minutes.

This morning's work had an excellent effect in increasing the confidence of the Arabs in ourselves and in our maps, while the Abyssinian soldier-guides, when eventually they sulkily rejoined us, looked upon our knowledge of this country, which we had never seen before, as bordering on the supernatural. Ten minutes later mules were unloaded, and black men, white men and animals were all rolling, swimming and splashing about in the clear rushing water, to the surprise and apparently the disgust of a staid and elderly Abyssinian priest who was comfortably eating his luncheon on the opposite bank.

As the morning's march had been severe for men and mules, both of whom were looking rather lean and underfed, and were losing their spirits and energy in corresponding ratio to their loss of flesh, we thought it advisable to announce that a rest of two hours would be allowed on the banks of this cool and refreshing stream. While the men, after making and eating their bread, an operation which only took a quarter of an hour, laid themselves down one and all to get some sleep in the shade, and while the mules eagerly browsed on the rich green grass which grew abundantly on the banks, Beech and I wandered up the stream, and agreed that if only it were more accessible to civilization, this would be an almost perfect spot for a country house or shooting lodge. A delightful climate, with exhilarating mountain air, magnificent scenery, with the bold outlines of the Temben range forming a back-ground to woodland glades and clumps of splendid forest trees standing in a park of bright green turf, intersected by the sparkling waters of the Weri river, here rippling quietly over its bed of gravel, there tumbling, foaming, and rushing boisterously over an obstacle of grey granite boulders. How we longed for a trout-rod and a few small flies! We could see that the river was teeming with fish, running to perhaps a pound and a half in weight.

The Abyssinians, we were told, catch immense numbers of these fish in an effective but not very sportsmanlike manner. Their method of proceeding is to dam the river above and below a smooth stretch of water, or a hole in which fish are known to lie, and then to throw into the water a quantity of an acrid milky juice taken from the leaves of the "quolquol" tree, with the result that in a very short space of time all the fish between the dams are seen to float insensible to the surface. We never had an opportunity of witnessing this proceeding ourselves, but the same system appears to have been generally followed throughout Abyssinia in 1843, when Mr. Mansfield Parkyns had frequent opportunities of watching the operation. He adds that "this, though not a sportsmanlike, is certainly a very profitable way of fishing. I remember being astonished at the number caught by a body of men whom we saw fishing in the Mareb." * The "quolquol" tree, from which the poisonous juice is taken, grows in great quantities on the hills of northern Abyssinia, where its dark bluish colour and stiff outline form a startling contrast to the green luxuriance of the woodland districts. It is, as I was subsequently informed, a species of Euphorbia, with soft, thick,

* "Life in Abyssinia," by Mansfield Parkyns, vol. i. chap. 23. London: John Murray. 1853.

and fleshy leaves and branches like a cactus. Both the leaves and branches contain a quantity of sap, like milk, which pours out in a stream on the skin being broken. Passing under a tree of this kind one day, I thoughtlessly broke off a few leaves with my stick, and was at once deluged with a shower of this sticky white gum. Luckily I was not looking upwards at the time, as my men informed me that one drop of this juice falling into my eye would have effectively destroyed its sight. The natives make their grass-plaited baskets quite water-tight by smearing them with the gum of the quolquol.

While the tired caravan were still sleeping, Beech and I were suddenly seized with a desire for cleanliness, and having divested ourselves of our clothes we swam out, each with a cake of soap, to some granite boulders whose heads were visible above the water. In the midst of a luxurious and systematic tubbing, I happened to look up, and the sight which met my eyes almost caused me to roll off my perch into the deep water from laughing. While we had been engaged on our cleansing operations a party of Abyssinian villagers had come to the ford by which we had crossed the river; our own mules and sleeping men were hidden from their view by a clump of bushes, and the only things they could see were

two white and gleaming bodies, without a scrap of clothing, sitting on rocks in the middle of the river and going through frantic contortions and scrubbings and splashings. Verily, thought the natives, the shapes are the shapes of men, but what man who respects himself spends his day sitting on a granite rock half in and half out of water, and above all, what man has ever been seen whose skin is of a shining white instead of a rich chocolate colour? There was but one possible solution; these figures in mid-river were devils or genii, or at all events something uncanny, and it would be madness to attempt to cross the river in their vicinity. We could easily guess that this was the conclusion to which they had come, as they stood on the bank gazing with their eyes starting out of their heads and their mouths wide open, and we could not resist encouraging the idea by redoubling our scrubbing and splashing. However, time was passing, and at last we had to slip into the water, swim ashore to the opposite bank from the natives, dress, rouse the men, saddle the mules, and resume our journey, leaving the native party on the opposite side to recover from their astonishment at their leisure.

All through that afternoon we were climbing over a succession of lofty hills of the Temben range, till at 6.45 p.m. we camped at the village

of Svandas, to which, as we were very short of provisions, I thought it advisable to ascend, although it is situated on a high precipitous hill, about a mile and a half to the left of the main road. It was quite dark when we reached a suitable camping ground near the village, and one of our mules had to be literally pushed and half carried up the hill, and then fell like a log, apparently dying, when he reached the top; but we were glad to find that plenty of supplies were forthcoming, including good barley for the mules, and flour, tedge, and a sheep for the men and ourselves. With truculent glee the chief butcher prepared for action: with a piece of flat sandstone under his brawny arm he came to borrow Beech's long hunting-knife, which he proceeded to sharpen, sitting as he did so alongside the sheep, his intended victim, which he had tied to the stone on which he sat. In a few minutes that sheep was mutton, and half an hour later the greater part of it was no longer even that. A hearty meal thoroughly restored the somewhat drooping spirits of the men, the oldest of them in particular, who had been rather lame and very despondent all day, now winning the applause of all beholders by the execution of a *pas seul*, which would have done credit to the boards of Drury Lane. This respectable old gentleman indeed "came out" so

strongly on this occasion that he earned the title of the "Grand Old Man," a *sobriquet* which on many subsequent occasions he showed to be well-merited.

Refreshed in mind and body we were off again at daybreak next morning, the sick mule being so far recovered as to be able to keep up with us, though of course unencumbered by saddle or load. Leaving the village of Sarasa to our left three hours later, we descended to a plain intersected in every direction by dry watercourses. At 11.30 a.m. we passed the village of Takherakiro, a wretched place, quite unworthy of the prominence given to it on the map, but which we were told had recently been destroyed by fire. At 12.15 we rode through the large village of Abergullie, which scarcely does credit to its Scotch-sounding name, but the "gillies" of which, to the number of several hundreds, turned out to stare at us and to make remarks on our appearance as we rode past. Twenty minutes later we turned sharp to the left, under some overhanging cliffs, and found ourselves at Abbi Addy, where I decided to halt for the rest of the day, the mules showing some signs of exhaustion from their long marches during the past week. This day being market day at Abbi Addy, hundreds of people were arriving from every part of the

country, bringing their merchandise for disposal, or in many cases only to gossip and to hear the news.

These markets are institutions of some importance in Abyssinia, and form part of a commercial system which proves this country to be far ahead of the neighbouring tribes in the advance towards civilization. Almost the whole of Abyssinia appears to be divided into commercial districts or "arrondissements," in different parts of which markets are held on certain fixed days of the week. No two markets within the district are held on the same day, and the travelling merchant is thereby enabled to buy and sell in several different markets in the course of the week. The days on which the markets are held at different centres were presumably fixed to suit the public convenience, and appear to remain unaltered. At Abbi Addy, for instance, I was informed that the market had been held there every Saturday for several generations, and Mr. Rassam, in 1869, told us of a village whose native name signified "the Thursday market." *

It was a great piece of good fortune to us to have arrived at Abbi Addy on a market day, as I was thereby enabled to buy a plentiful supply of corn, of which we were in sad need both for

* "British Mission to Abyssinia," by Abdul Rassam, vol. i. p. 220. London: John Murray. 1869.

the mules and for the men; and also, what was a matter of vital importance, it gave us an opportunity of exchanging a quantity of silver dollars for the currency of the more uncivilized districts into which we were about to enter. Hitherto, since we had left Massowah, the only coin which we had used had been the old Austrian Maria Theresa dollar, which, curiously enough, is the only coin freely accepted throughout not only the northern Abyssinia, but the whole of the Egyptian Soudan. Thousands of these dollars were, till quite recently, struck every year at Vienna solely for the Soudan trade. I had taken with me several bags full of dollars, all of which, though evidently fresh from the mint, bore the date 1792. Now, however, we were about to enter a country where silver or gold coins of any description would be valueless, and where the only currency consisted of rough bars of salt, about eight to ten inches long and two inches wide. These bars of salt (called "tshô") are brought from mines in the Danakil country, and were sold, when I was at Abbi Addy, at the rate of about eighteen or twenty to the dollar, *i.e.* about twopence each. It is difficult to imagine a more inconvenient and unsuitable form of currency than these bars of salt. In the first place they are extremely brittle, and a piece once

broken or even chipped becomes absolutely valueless for purposes of barter; in the second place they are apt to dissolve, or at all events lose their value, if they get wet from rain or in fording a river—and there are many rivers to ford in that country; and in the third place they are large, heavy, and cumbersome. In fact they possess none of the qualities which are laid down by Adam Smith and Stuart Mill as necessary for a money-token or for a medium of exchange. As we knew that we could not possibly reach the king until after several more days' journey, it was necessary to buy a considerable quantity of this salt, and that meant the addition of at least a mule-load to an already overladen caravan. However, there was no help for it; so a quantity of the "tshô" was bought, and, with a despairing sigh at the thoughts of the lofty and forbidding range of mountains rising before us, about eight pounds was added to the burden of each long-suffering mule. This business being transacted, Beech's long knife was once more lent to the chief butcher, who proceeded without delay to cut the throat of a cow "in the name of Allah"; and, while Hutchisson lit a fire in preparation for that part of the cow which he reserved for ourselves, Beech and I strolled off with a gun, and succeeded in bagging a brace of wild geese and a partridge.

Abbi Addy being the chief town of a district of some importance, and its governor being a man of great authority, I had sent the interpreter, young Ghirghis (Bruru being still absent), to convey my compliments. On my return from shooting I was surprised to see that the governor, Teckla Haimanot by name, had sent me only a very small jar of tedge and a few small pieces of bread. As he was a gentleman of high rank and great riches it was evident that he had done this to show his people that he held us cheaply; it was, in fact, a diguised affront such as all natives love to offer if they think they can do so without its being discovered by the stranger. Several years residence in Egypt had given us some experience in these half-timid, half-impertinent acts of bravado, and we knew that it might react on our future journey were we not to let Teckla Haimanot know that we saw through his little game. In return, therefore, I gave a very meagre "backsheesh" to his messengers, and commissioned them to convey my condolences to their master on the poverty of his province, and to assure him that I would tell the king of the sad state of penury into which his governor had fallen. We hoped, I added, that perhaps his Majesty the Negoos would then give him a richer district to govern. Thinking nothing more of the incident

we had our dinner and were going to bed, when a string of slaves appeared bearing three large jars of tedge, one hundred flat cakes of bread, and a great jar of honey, all with the "best compliments of my best friend Teckla Haimanot." Not to be outdone in politeness, I then showed myself equally liberal with a present of dollars worthy of such a friendship. This is only one instance out of many which could be adduced to show that it is bad policy, as a rule, to pass in silence over the small half-disguised affronts which natives are so fond of offering to strangers, especially to Europeans, out of pure bravado, and only when they think they can do so without being found out.

In the course of the night Bruru Worke, the interpreter, reappeared, tired, sulky, and knowing that he had greatly exceeded the extent of leave I had given him. However, I did not reprove him, but both Beech and I noticed a distinct change in his manner towards us; his visit to his own people seemed to have driven away all the effects of his English education, and he was once more in feeling and sympathy a semi-savage Abyssinian; but it was not till long afterwards that we found out to our cost the full extent of this change in him.

Hearing that the King was still on the road

between Dobra Tabor and Ashangi, we decided to continue our march to Sokota, and at dawn next morning we were again travelling south; in six hours we halted for an hour by the Gueva or Guibbeh river, which we then crossed without difficulty, and proceeded to climb for about 2500 feet over the Teraque Pass, and marched among mountains of granite and marble till sunset, when we camped in a valley among the Abergullie mountains, where there was plenty of grass for the animals, the men having a good supply of food for themselves. Our soldier-guides had again been very obstructive, and had tried to delay us, but they had now a healthy dread of my maps, and their opposition became less determined as they found that it had no effect.

On the 28th we still continued our southerly course over mountains and valleys from sunrise till eleven o'clock, when we descended into a level plain full of game. Here we lost our way, and wandered about for some time looking for a path; Beech and I, who had stopped a little behind to shoot, also lost the caravan, but, after the waste of about an hour, and after much shouting and blowing of horns, and climbing of high rocks to scan the plain, we all got together again, passed through the village of Bellis, where the inhabitants were all busily occupied in burying their late head

man in a corn field, and on over some low but rocky hills whence there was a magnificent view of the snow-capped mountains of Semen, lying west-south-west, and of the Womberat mountains to the south-east.

At 4.30 we arrived at Fenaroa, where I halted, as two of the men were ill. I administered quinine to each of them, but found that one had already been doctored by his comrades, who had "bled" him in a way peculiar to themselves: that is, they had tied cords tightly round both his legs just below the knee, and then proceeded to hack at his calves with their knives, making about fifteen gashes on each leg. Whether it was the result of this treatment or of my quinine I cannot say, but next day this unfortunate man appeared to be seriously ill, and could not walk a yard, though he was able to sit still on a mule all day.

As the guides said we were at some distance from water, and as none had been obtainable for the mules at Fenaroa, I determined to try another night march, and therefore roused the slumbering camp at 2.30 a.m., and marched at three o'clock by the uncertain light of the moon shining fitfully in a somewhat clouded sky. As long as we were in the open country this moonlight march was in every way delightful, but when after an hour or

so we entered a forest, consisting principally of mimosa and "wait-a-bit" thorns through which the light could not penetrate, our clothes, hands and faces suffered severely, and on our arrival, about sunrise, at the banks of the Samri river, a spectator would have imagined not only that we had all been engaged in a desperate combat with an army of cats, but that we had come off second best from the tussle.

Having forded the Samri, we continued to march west and south-west through a magnificent forest of fine timber trees, teeming with game of every sort, till at about nine o'clock we arrived at the banks of the Tsellari river, the largest and most rapid stream we had yet seen. For a great part of the year this river is so swollen by the tropical rains that all communication between the northern and southern parts of Abyssinia is rendered almost impossible. For two hours we travelled along the right bank in a southerly direction, till at eleven o'clock we found a fordable place across which we struggled, the mules being almost carried off their legs by the force of the water.

During our mid-day halt a careful study of the maps convinced me that they could no longer be depended upon now that we had left the track of all former travellers. The position of Fenaroa, the course of the Samri and Tsellari rivers, and,

as far as I could judge, the situation of Sokota, were all wrongly marked, and I was therefore compelled to trust entirely to the good faith of our guides.

All through the afternoon we toiled painfully up a rough torrent bed, passing at about four o'clock through the most weirdly picturesque spot it has ever been my good fortune to see, even in this country of extraordinary scenic effects. This wonderful place, Mai Shegalo by name, reminded us so forcibly of a scene out of "Rip Van Winkle," that neither Beech nor I would have been surprised to see devils and goblins issuing from the fantastic trunks of the enormous trees, or peering at us from the numerous caves and crevices in the rugged and broken cliffs. The scene consisted of a flat space about 200 yards square, completely roofed in by the thick foliage of huge "Shegalo" trees, a kind of fruit-bearing sycamore, and enclosed on every side by rugged precipitous cliffs rising perpendicularly for 200 or 300 feet. Even the powerful tropical sun was unable to throw a ray of light to warm or enliven this gloomy spot, the dramatic effect of which was completed by a small encampment of wild fierce-looking natives of the hills, collected, with their equally wild-looking cattle, round a small pool of water which trickled out of the frowning black precipice. Not

quite liking the looks of these gentry, I shouted to my men to keep well together, but when we heard my words echoed and re-echoed from cliff to cliff till they died away in the mountains thousands of feet above our heads, I think we were all thoroughly persuaded that there was something "uncanny" about the place, and the jaded mules were hurried forward with shouts and blows till at last we emerged again into the cheerful sunlight.

I do not think that either before or since that day, either among the Arabs of the Soudan, or in the wild tribes of Eastern Africa and Somaliland, have I ever seen such utterly wild, savage, and primitive human beings as those who were grouped before us among these thoroughly harmonious surroundings at Mai Shegalo. Having sent Bruru to ask them some simple question about the road, it appeared that they understood not one word either of the Tigré language, nor of Amharic, nor of Arabic. These unkempt, long-haired, gnome-like persons belonged to the curious tribe of Âgows, supposed to be a relic of some previous race of inhabitants. They are, we were told, scattered about in small tribes all over the south and west of Abyssinia, and are found in the greatest numbers near Lake Tsana and the sources of the Blue Nile. So far as we could judge in the hasty

glance we had of them, their chief personal characteristics appeared to be dirt, exceeding even the dirt of an Abyssinian, and a general wildness and uncouthness of appearance. Their dress consisted of a dirty sheet of unbleached native cotton twisted round the waist and thrown over the left shoulder; their arms included a roughly-made spear, about six feet in length, a circular shield, and a crooked double-edged sword bending back almost to a semi-circle, and carried, as is the universal habit in Abyssinia, closely fastened to the right flank.

Just as we left the shadows of this haunted grotto, one of the mules stopped, completely exhausted, and as, even after having been relieved of his load and his saddle, he was still unable to keep up with us, we left him to his fate, which would probably be to fall an easy victim to the first lion or panther which might happen to scent him that evening. At last, after a desperately steep and heart-breaking climb over the neck of Mount Ombeddi, more than 10,000 feet in height, we found a suitable camping ground, and halted, after a long march of fourteen hours, nearly all the way uphill, and over a rough, broken, and sometimes almost impracticable path. That night Beech and I, shivering in "pyjamas," concealed ourselves for nearly an hour under two trees a

little distance from the camp, in hopes of getting a shot at a lion who was grunting and growling quite close to us, but unfortunately the beast saw us before we could see him, and we never got a chance of a fair shot. The two sick men then demanded my attention. I was sorry to be obliged to acknowledge that the doses of quinine last night had not done much good, and therefore varied the treatment this evening, giving Cockle's pills to one of them, and a strong dose of chlorodyne to the other. This turned out more successfully; at all events, neither of them asked for any more medicine.

Next day, the 30th, we continued our march at daybreak, till at two p.m. we arrived at Sokota, which lies in reality about thirty miles to the south-west of the position in which it is marked on the maps. Men and mules being thoroughly tired, I announced that we would rest till the following day, and then went to visit the chief man of the town, who is also ruler of the whole surrounding province.

This gentleman, Dejat Gongool by name, received me without rising from his seat, and was by no means civil, and so, after a short conversation, in the course of which he told me that no Englishman, and only one white man, a priest, had ever been to Sokota, I said good-bye and

returned to camp. Mr. Gongool's idea of European civilization was a little vague, his first remark to me being a question as to whether there were horses and guns in the country from which I came. He was a good deal surprised at hearing that we had these blessings in England, and then asked whether all Englishmen were as big as myself, upon which I gravely assured him that I was considered very small in my own country.

It is a curious fact that on several occasions our size appears to have made a great impression on the Abyssinians, who, though a stalwart, active, and very well-made race, seldom exceed about five feet nine inches in height. Two or three weeks later, when we were unfortunately separated, and Beech was a prisoner in the hands of the Gallas, a similar remark was made to him by his captors. He replied, "I am nothing; you should see my chief" (*i.e.* myself), "and there are many thousands in England as tall as he." This idea was helped too by the fact that Hutchisson is taller than any Abyssinian. I have no doubt that the impression thus inadvertently conveyed of the power and size of the English race was an important factor in obtaining Beech's release from the Gallas, and in extricating us all from several difficult situations. I should here explain that Beech's height is nearly six feet, that I am an

inch or two longer, and that Hutchisson is a little under five feet eleven inches in height.

Hearing that the King would be near Lake Ashangi in three days, I determined to proceed direct to Wofela, on the southern shore of that lake. From Sokota to this place I was informed that there were two roads, one of them, the "King's Road," being smooth and fairly good, but very circuitous; while the other was straight, but more mountainous. After some consultation I elected to go by the "straight" road, which soon turned out to be not only mountainous, but also the most tortuous and erratic that we had yet seen even in Abyssinia. For three days we travelled first south-east, and then north-east, without any particular adventures, but encountering some difficulty in getting supplies and forage, till, on the night of the 3rd of December, we halted about two miles from the King's camp, into which it would have been a dangerous breach of etiquette to arrive so late in the evening. During these three days Ras Alula's soldier-guides had been very troublesome and obstructive, and had on one occasion even incited all the inhabitants of a village to turn out and forcibly prevent our further progress. They had also tried to prevent the country people from selling us any provisions, or, what was still more important, corn for the

mules. Luckily, however, the sight of a bag of shining dollars or a quantity of *tshô* (bars of salt) had a greater effect than even the universal dread of the soldiery.

On halting on the evening of the 3rd, I sent on one of the interpreters and a guide into the King's camp to warn the King and the brother of Ras Alula of my proximity. This latter person, by name Dejat Tesemma, was to be our "Balderabba" or host during our stay in the King's camp.

The office of "Balderabba" is an important institution in Abyssinia, and deserves a few words of explanation. He is a sort of agent or "go-between," appointed to be the means of communication between the host and his guest. Not only the King, but Ras Alula, and indeed most of the less-important governors of provinces, appointed a balderabba for me while I was in their districts, the difference being that while the provincial governor would appoint some one of his own household or servants to this office, the king deputed Dejat or Dejaj Tesemma, the brother of one of the most powerful chiefs of the empire, and himself the leader of 3000 men-at-arms, besides a vast number of slaves, women, and camp-followers. The office is a good deal sought after in the event of the visit of any important or influential person, as, of course, the "Balderabba" expects to receive



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a suitable present in return for his services, and, indeed, would soon find opportunities for making himself disagreeable were it not to be offered to him. It would have been a grave breach of etiquette for me to have attempted to communicate in any way with the king except through my balderabba, and would moreover have been useless to have made any attempt to do so, as any messenger sent by me, except through the good offices of Dejat Tesemma, would certainly have been refused admittance by the guards at the gates of the royal enclosure. But Tesemma was not a mere carrier of messages between the King and myself; on him devolved, vicariously, all the duties of a host. It was his business to see that a sufficient supply of food and tedge for our whole party reached us every day from the royal stores; he it was who, when we were on the march in the King's train, showed me every day the ground on which to pitch our camp, always close to his own; and later on, when things began to go badly with the mission, it was he who became in some sense our gaoler and responsible to the King that we neither escaped nor got killed by the angry soldiery. It was not, however, necessary that he should always be present during my interviews with the King. He arranged the hour and other details of the visit, and came at the appointed time to

accompany me to the head-quarters of the Negoos; but on arrival at the door of the audience chamber his duty was over, unless specially invited by his Majesty to take part in the conference.

I may say at once that throughout our enforced sojourn in the camp of the king, Dejat Tesemma, in all his communications with us, as well as in his actions, was dignified, courteous, and friendly. As a host he was thoughtful and liberal (though at the king's expense); as our gaoler he showed a good deal of delicacy and tact, never, even when the whole camp expected us momentarily to be condemned to death, disturbing our privacy with guards or soldiers, and never in conversation making the smallest change in the dignified but kindly courtesy of his manner. I have reason to believe that he was one of those who, at a great council of chiefs, voted in favour of our immediate execution; but he cannot be blamed for that, as he acted honestly for what he thought was the good of his country, and, as it afterwards appeared, was guided by false information sent to head-quarters from the frontier regarding the movements of Italian troops. Great indeed was the contrast between the character of this perfect specimen of "Nature's gentleman" and that of his brother, our arch-enemy, Ras Alula!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE KING'S CAMP.

The King's army—Red pepper—More good wishes from Ras Alula—Interview with King John—Loss of tobacco—Smoking in Abyssinia—Abyssinian ranks and titles—Official negotiations with the King—News from the frontier—Council of chiefs to decide our fate—Travelling in the King's train—Farewell interview, and robes of honour.

At last, at nine o'clock on the morning of the 4th of December, we rode into the camp of the King of the Kings of Ethiopia, and a wonderful sight it was. As far as the eye could reach the plain was thickly dotted with small black tents and with little grass huts; tens of thousands of horses, mules, and cows were grazing on every side, while the whole district seemed to be alive with moving swarms of armed men, and of women and slaves. In the centre of the plain were two large circular white tents, standing in an open space, enclosed by a paling covered with red cotton cloth; these were the head-qarters of the great King Johannis. On arrival in the camp we were met by a mes-

senger, who informed me that to-day being Sunday the king would not see me, but that he would do so at Ashangi, whither he intended to proceed at daybreak next day. We were then conducted to an open space where we were told we might pitch our camp, and soon afterwards arrived a string of slaves bringing the presents of the king, in the shape of bread, tedge, red pepper, and a cow.

The fondness of these people for red pepper and other hot condiments is very remarkable, and would astonish even a seasoned old Indian colonel. The wealthier classes hardly ever eat either their bread or meat without first dipping it thoroughly into a liquid paste made of red pepper with a little salt, worked into a suitable consistency by the addition of tedge, butter, or water. Our tongues and palates are not more delicate than those of most white men, but even when, as was very often the case, we had nothing to eat but the coarsest, dampest, and heaviest of bread, and when any condiment would have been a relief, we were unable, without bringing tears to our eyes, to bear more than the smallest touch of this mixture on each mouthful. The Abyssinians, on the other hand, dip their bread or meat thoroughly into the paste, and swallow it with as much composure and gusto as we in England take bread-sauce on the wing of a partridge. A long course of burning,

extending over many generations, must have made their mouths, tongues, and throats, like leather.

Although immensely relieved at having at last arrived at my destination, I was made a little uncomfortable on hearing from Bruru, whom I had sent to pick up information at the King's head quarters, that a letter had very recently been received by the King from Ras Alula, warning him against me, and saying that English troops were coming to join the Italians in an expedition against Abyssinia, and that my mission was only a pretext for gaining time; Ras Alula therefore urged that I should be treated as an enemy rather than as a friend. This was not very pleasant, as to be "treated as an enemy" in Abyssinia has only one signification—to be got rid of without further delay either by bullet or spear.

In order to avoid the immense crowds which would block the path to Ashangi as soon as the sun rose, we left the camp at Wofela at about 2.30 a.m., and marched steadily round the western shore of the Ashangi Lake till we arrived close to the village of that name. Here we took up our position in a field at a little distance from the road which the King and his army would follow, and then for four hours we watched the quickly-moving stream of humanity, with their thousands of animals pressing along the road to Ashangi, not in

twos or threes, nor even in companies and battalions, but in one interminable unbroken throng. Beech and I made a most careful calculation of the numbers of persons who marched past us that morning, counting first the numbers who passed a certain spot in a minute, and then taking the time in which the whole army passed; at a very low estimate we calculated the numbers to be not less than between 70,000 and 80,000 persons. About the middle of the throng rode the king himself, surrounded by a picked body of cavalry. He was mounted on a handsome mule, and was dressed in the usual Abyssinian red and white "shamma," or toga, a fold of which concealed all the lower part of his face, the only distinguishing mark of royalty being the fact that he kept the rays of the sun from his august head with a red silk umbrella. We afterwards learnt that the greater part of this immense force was composed of the army of Ras Michael, a Galla chieftain, formerly a Mussulman, Mehemet Ali by name, but who had been forcibly persuaded to embrace the Abyssinian Christianity by command of King John at the head of a successful army.

The main body of the king's own army was advancing towards the north-eastern frontier by way of Semen and Adowa, under the command of the king's son, Ras Aria Selassi, there being

with his Majesty only about 5000 picked men as a body guard; but as each of these 5000 men was accompanied by a wife and probably one or two slaves, the number of mouths to feed was out of all proportion to the fighting capabilities of the force.

Hardly had the king entered the large hut reserved for him on the top of a hill at Ashangi than a breathless messenger came to inform me that his Majesty would receive me at once. I had, therefore, to change my clothes, and put on all my diplomatic finery in the middle of a crowd in an open field, modesty causing me to improvise a sort of shelter by making some of my men spread out their togas and other garments all around me; then, accompanied by Bruru the interpreter, and by Beech, and with two or three men bearing the presents, I solemnly rode up to present the Queen's letters to his Majesty Johannis, who calls himself the King of Kings of Ethiopia, and King of Sion. We found this august personage sitting on a dais in a large hut, surrounded by about fifty or sixty Abyssinian chiefs. He was dressed in a white cotton "shamma," a fold of which entirely concealed the lower part of his face, nothing but a pair of shrewd-looking black eyes being visible; on his head was a small gold diadem or coronet, and by his side, on his dais, were his sword and a

carbine, typical emblems of the means by which his authority is maintained. Having solemnly shaken his Majesty's outstretched hand, I made him a polite little speech, expressing the hope of the Queen of England that his health was good, and assuring him that all England took the greatest interest in the welfare of Abyssinia and of its king. I then presented to him the letters from the Queen and from Lord Salisbury, with the translations made by my interpreters; these he handed to his own interpreter for future perusal. Beech then came solemnly forward, and laid at his Majesty's feet the two swords of honour, the Winchester rifle, the merits of which I briefly explained to him, and lastly, the magnificent but complicated telescope, in its handsome mahogany case, which had been the cause of so much anxiety and bad language during our long and arduous journey. I tried to expatiate upon the wonderful virtues of this telescope, and told him that not only could he see things through it at a great distance on the earth, but that it would shew him mountains and all sorts of wonders in the moon and stars. His Majesty did not seem to care so much about this, and asked simply whether it would show him a man plainly before that man got within rifle shot; he was apparently much pleased when I assured him that it would; and I imagine

that he looked forward with pleasure to having the first shot at his enemies.

The interview then came to an end, and I returned to my people, to find that, during our absence, one of the mules, carrying, among other things, the last remnants of our luxuries in the shape of preserved milk, cocoa, and tobacco, had in the meanwhile fallen head over heels with its load down a precipice. Marvellous to relate, the beast was not much the worse, but of course the boxes on its back were reduced to matchwood. The loss of the last remnant of our small stock of tobacco was a terrible misfortune; we had for some time past put ourselves on a strict allowance of four very small pipes a day, but now even that was denied to us, and misery stared us in the face. We despaired of being able to purchase any in Abyssinia, as, by a recent decree, the King, acting under the influence of the priests, had absolutely forbidden the use of tobacco in his country, either for smoking purposes, or for taking as snuff, to which the Abyssinians were much addicted. The punishments for disobedience to this decree were severe but characteristic; any man convicted of smoking was condemned to have his lips cut off, snuff-taking entailed the loss of the nose. We met more than one unfortunate wretch who had recently undergone this brutal punishment, and

whose ghastly nose-less face was a warning to all beholders against becoming a slave to these small vices. Luckily for us, the discipline among the wild Gallas in the camp of Ras Michael was less severe, and two days later we were able to purchase a plentiful supply of coarse yellow native tobacco, which, after all, was not so bad as it looked.

These brutal punishments for a trivial offence will at once strike the reader, as they struck us, as being disproportionately cruel and severe; and the same may, I think, be said of most of the favourite Abyssinian punishments. This country is not yet enjoying the blessings of state prisons, with cells, wards and treadmills. To the Abyssinian authorities a "prisoner" means a man loaded with heavy chains, who for that reason cannot travel from camp to camp, who for the same reason can do little or no work, but who has to be fed and kept alive somehow, and who, above all, monopolises the services of one or two soldiers as his guards who might be far more usefully employed in the army. Moreover, the Abyssinians are a savage race, innately bloodthirsty, and in order to repress crime in such a country justice must be swift and summary. The result is that besides the extreme penalty of death, which may be inflicted in many ways, there are practically but two sorts of punishment, represented by the stick and the knife—

beating and amputation. The first of these is extremely common, from a hundred to four hundred blows may be administered to an unfortunate man for comparatively trifling offences, especially if he happen to be in bad odour with the chieftain who tries the case. The knife is used somewhat more sparingly, as it necessarily deprives the chief of the services of a soldier, but still it is by no means uncommon to see an act of disobedience, of cowardice, of robbery, or of assault, punished by the amputation of the offender's hand or foot, sometimes of both. I am thankful to say that we never witnessed the infliction of any such penalty, but from the numerous descriptions given to us, it appears to be as brutal as can well be imagined. The punishment is usually inflicted on the spot, in the presence of the judge, and as soon as the sentence is pronounced. The condemned member is either chopped off by a blow from a sharp sword, or more scientifically hacked and carved off at the joint with a knife. The hœmorrhage is then arrested either by pressing a red-hot knife-blade against the wound or by plunging the stump into a pot of boiling butter. In cases of murder or manslaughter, whether purely accidental or intentional and premeditated, the life of the culprit is entirely at the disposal of the relatives of the

victim. These may either inflict death on the spot by spear or sword in the presence of the judge, or may give the assassin a reasonable time in which to collect a substantial fine and to buy himself off. It was not at all an uncommon thing for us to be asked occasionally for a dollar or two to help some unfortunate man to make up a certain sum to be paid on a fixed day for the ransom of his life. If the death was evidently inflicted by pure accident, the friends and neighbours will almost always subscribe a sufficient sum to enable the unfortunate man to save his own life.

Ras Alula had the reputation of being exceptionally bloodthirsty in the infliction of punishments on the people of his frontier province; King Johannis was also severe, but whereas Ras Alula was feared and most cordially detested on every side, the King was equally feared, and yet appeared to be loved and respected by his wild subjects to a remarkable degree.

In the afternoon, after my reception by the King, I went to pay a visit to our "Balderabba," or host, Dejat or Dejaj Tesemma, the brother of Ras Alula, who was established in a large tent close to our camp. I was agreeably surprised to find him a pleasant and gentlemanlike individual, very different both in appearance and manner from his powerful and brutal brother at Asmara.

The title of "Dejaj," or "Dejat," confers a considerable rank on its possessor, although it is inferior to the title of "Ras," or Commander-in-chief. The highest title in the Abyssinian Empire next to that of "Negoos" or King, is that of "Wakshem." There are but two Wakshems in Abyssinia, both created by the King, and that number is never exceeded. The two fortunate possessors of the title at the present moment rejoice in the names of Wakshem Boru and Wakshem Gabru, both of them very powerful chieftains, disposing of well-armed and formidable armies. These Wakshems have various privileges not accorded to ordinary mortals; among other things they have the right of sitting to eat at the same little gold table as the King himself. Wakshem Boru, who is the father of my sulky friend Gongool of Sokota, was at this moment with the King; Wakshem Gabru, with his army, was accompanying the King's son, Ras Aria, on the march with the main body of the royal forces *viâ* Semen and Adowa.

Next in order of precedence comes the "Ras," or Commander of an army, he is also as a rule Governor of a province. Then comes the "Dejaj," whose dignity really, like all others in this country, depends on the number of men of whom he can dispose. My friend, Dejaj Tesemma, for instance,

was followed by about 3000 well-armed soldiers, whom he could call his own, though he himself was a "king's-man," and was under the direct orders of his Majesty. Another Dejaj, whose acquaintance I made could boast of barely ten followers. "Basha" is another title very common in Abyssinia, but which conveys no very clear idea of power. I have seen one "Basha" at the head of 1000 stalwart riflemen, while some others exercised a doubtful authority over five or ten half-naked spearmen.

Lastly there comes the "Lij," or "Esquire," who has not as yet by bravery in war or in the chase earned the right to bear any more distinguished title. I say advisedly "bravery in war or in the chase," for there is a regular sliding scale of bravery by which certain distinctions are earned. For instance, the man who slays a lion single-handed, earns the same *kudos* as though he had killed five men in battle; he becomes moreover entitled to wear little gold ornaments in his ears, and on great occasions fastens a strip of the lion's mane round his head. The hunter who alone kills an elephant, acquires equal glory with the conqueror of ten human enemies: he wears a gold ornament on his forehead, and on "full-dress days," a long yellow scarf bound round his head with the ends flying behind. The soldier

who has actually accounted for ten enemies on the battle-field is entitled to rivet a broad silver band round the leathern scabbard of his sword; some brave veterans we saw, who had apparently accounted for about half a company of men, as they had as many as four or five of these silver bands on their scabbards. No doubt, though, two or three elephants would help to bring up the score very quickly, and the lion in these days of fire-arms is no longer the same formidable enemy as when he had to be tackled in hand-to-hand combat and slain with a sword or spear.

Contrary to expectation, I was not summoned by the King next day, the 6th of December, but Beech went, at his Majesty's request, to show some of the people at the court how to work the big telescope. On his arrival at the King's hut he was taken into his Majesty's presence, and was received in the most civil manner, the royal face being now uncovered, though the royal person was still sitting cross-legged on a dais like a life-size statue of Buddha.

It was not till 9 a.m. on the 7th that I was summoned to explain to the King the object of my mission. I went again in all the gold lace and finery that I could put on, and on my arrival at the royal hut all the other occupants were turned out of it except the King's own interpreter,

a brother of my man Bruru, who had been educated at Bombay, and the chief treasurer, an intelligent-looking young man named Marcia. The King uncovered his face, shook hands cordially, and then asked me what was the message which I had brought from Queen Victoria. Although he did not rise from his seat, the King appeared to me to be taller than the majority of Abyssinians, about forty-five years of age, with a thin, intelligent-looking face and keen bright eyes. His complexion was very dark, though not by any means black, the forehead prominent, and nose thin and aquiline. An otherwise good and intellectual face was, however, somewhat marred by a cruel-looking mouth, the thin lips of which were usually parted, disclosing an even row of strong white teeth. The particulars of this interview have been fully published in a Parliamentary paper,* and for the purpose of this narrative it is sufficient to quote *verbatim* from the official report which I addressed to Sir E. Baring on our return.

"On the 7th I went again by appointment to "the King, and found myself alone with His "Majesty, the interpreters, and the Chief of the "Treasury. I then communicated to His Majesty "the document, of which I have the honour to

* "Mr. Portal's Mission to Abyssinia." Blue Book laid before the Houses of Parliament, 1888.

"enclose a copy herewith, and which will, I trust,
"meet with the approval of Her Majesty's Govern-
"ment. I had caused it to be most carefully
"translated under my personal supervision by two
"interpreters, and when I handed it, with the
"translation, to His Majesty, I begged him to
"allow his own interpreter to make a most careful
"comparison between the original and the transla-
"tion. You will observe that in this document
"I was most careful to avoid any expression which
"might be galling to the Abyssinian national
"pride, that I insisted strongly that the sole
"motive of Her Majesty the Queen in sending
"me to Abyssinia was one of friendship for that
"country; and, finally, that I omitted any mention
"of the first of the Italian conditions, which
"insists on a letter being written by the King
"expressing his deep regret for the unjustifiable
"massacre of last January. I felt myself justified
"in doing this, as I was confident that if I could
"persuade the King to accept the remaining
"terms, including the cession of practical advan-
"tages to Italy, there would be little difficulty in
"getting him to write a letter which would
"contain some expression of regret sufficient to
"fulfil the Italian requirements.

"His Majesty read over the translation him-
"self, and then caused his interpreter to read it

"aloud; he then turned to me and said, 'I can do "'nothing of all this. By the Treaty made by "'Admiral Hewett, all the country evacuated by "'the Egyptians on my frontier was ceded to me "'at the instigation of England, and now you come "'to ask me to give it up again.' I ventured to "point out that in Admiral Hewett's Treaty no "mention is made of Sahati or Wia, that His "Majesty had already accepted the occupation by "the Italians of Massowah and Monkullu, and "that Sahati and Wia were necessary for the "protection of that town and of the trade road "to and from the sea. The King replied, 'I did "'not give them Massowah; England gave it to "'the Italians, but I will not give them an inch of "'land. If they cannot live there without Sahati, "'let them go; and as for Senhit, it is mentioned "'in the Treaty, and England cannot ask me to give "'it up.' I explained, as I had explained to Ras "Alula, that England did not give Massowah to "the Italians; but that, at the same time, it was "an advantage to Abyssinia that they should be "there.

"After some more conversation, during which "the King repeated that he would give up nothing, "and would make no Treaty that was not a con-"firmation of that made with Admiral Hewett, I "offered to withdraw altogether the clause about

"Senhit; but His Majesty replied that this made "no difference, as he would grant nothing entail- "ing the cession of an inch of land, that Massowah "itself was his by right, and that he had neither "the intention nor even the power to alienate any "territory which properly belonged to Abyssinia.

"I then remarked that the whole population "of England, of Italy, and, indeed, of all the "civilized world, had been surprised and made "indignant by the news of the massacre at Dogali; "but that it was well known that this action had "not been dictated by His Majesty, and that it "would be with the deepest regret that the Queen, "and the world at large, would learn that he "assumed the responsibility for the massacre of "those 450 men. I even went so far as to hint "that I thought—though I added that I was not "authorised to say so—that if Ras Alula were "appointed to some other province not on the "frontier, some of the difficulties in the way of "peace might, perhaps, be removed. To this the "King answered, 'Why do you speak of 450 men? "'There were 5000 Italians who were beaten by "'5000 Abyssinians.' I replied that perhaps that "may have been the report which reached His "Majesty, but that there was no possible doubt— "and it could easily be proved—that there were "not 500 Italians engaged in the action of that

"day, and that it was a massacre rather that a "fight. His Majesty then continued: 'Ras Alula "'did no wrong; the Italians came into the "'province under his governorship, and he fought "'them, just as you would fight the Abyssinians if "'they came into England.' I said that no nation "in Europe would commit a massacre of that "sort.

"I then reiterated the hope of the Queen that "for the sake of his own country he would consent "to some terms of peace, and I asked if he would "suggest to me what he would accept. He replied "that he would like to have peace; that it was "true that war was a bad thing for his country, "and especially a war against other Christians; "but that he would not give up Sahati, Wia, nor "land of any sort, and that the only Treaty he "would make with Italy would be a confirmation "of the Treaty of 1884.

"Seeing that it was useless to say any more "for the present, I begged His Majesty distinctly "to understand that it was purely out of friendship "to Abyssinia that the Queen had sent me; that "Her Majesty was deeply sorry to see Abyssinia "engaged in a great war with a very powerful "European nation, and wished to do all in her "power to avert it. His Majesty answered that "England was his only friend, and that he was

"the Queen's servant, but that he would have "nothing to say to the Italians so long as they "ask for land; that the Queen had written to tell "him that Italy was very powerful, but that he "was strong also; that the right was on the side "of Abyssinia, and the issue of the war in the "hands of God. He added that he hoped England "would not interfere in the matter any more, but "would leave him to face the Italians alone. The "discussion then ended. His Majesty's manner "had been courteous and dignified throughout, "and in strong contrast to the excited and "agressive tone adopted by Ras Alula at Asmara.

"The next day I was invited to another inter- "view with the King, and had strong hopes of "being able to persuade His Majesty to accept at "least some of the Italian conditions, as I had "discovered that Ras Alula was by no means "in high favour at Court at the present moment; "but just as I was starting to go to the King I "received a visit from his interpreter, who came "with a message from His Majesty to the effect "that he would not see me again; that I had said "I came from the Queen to try to make peace, "but that he had just received a letter from Ras "Alula, saying that the Italians had taken ad- "vantage of this opportunity and were advancing "in force, being already beyond Sahati. The

"King wished to have some explanation of this. "The interpreter added that His Majesty was "very angry, and evidently thought this was a "preconcerted action between England and Italy. "I could not tell then, and indeed, did not know "till long after I had left the King's camp, that "this news was utterly false,* so I merely hastened "to remind the King that I had told both His "Majesty and Ras Alula that my mission was "perfectly independent of the Italians; that I "was sent by the Queen alone, and that the "actions of neither Italy on the one hand, nor of "His Majesty on the other, were in any way "restricted by my presence in Abyssinia, but that "if His Majesty would consent to the conditions "which I submitted to him yesterday, I would "pledge the word of England that the Italians

* Subsequently, I learnt that there had been, after all, some foundation for this report from Ras Alula, which was so nearly fatal to us. A large Italian force had advanced from Monkullu for some distance along the road to Asmara, but had then retired again. It was, however, explained to me that this movement had not been an "advance," but only a "reconnaissance in force." It must be remembered that so far as concerned the agreement with myself, the Italian military authorities were at liberty to commence any offensive operations which might seem good to them. The time during which they had undertaken to hold their hand, in the hope of our return, had expired eight days previously, and we were momentarily expecting to hear of some such advance.

"would at present go no further than the limits "therein laid down. I was, however, told, in "reply, that the Italians had taken aggressive "action, and that it was too late now to talk of "peace.

"The result of this was that, instead of being "allowed to take leave of His Majesty the follow- "ing day, as I had been promised, I was, on one "pretext or another, detained in the King's camp "for nine more days, during the course of which "I was informed that the question of whether I "was to be allowed to go back at all or not was "under discussion by the King and his chief men, "and had not yet been decided.

"Finally, however, I was summoned to the "King's presence on the 16th December, and "received from His Majesty two letters for Her "Majesty the Queen, and a verbal message re- "capitulating the decision which, as reported "above, he had already communicated to me in "conversation. I then took leave of His Majesty, "reiterating the assurances of the continued "friendship of England, and adding that, although "it would be with deep regret that the Queen "would hear of his rejection of any terms of peace, "yet I was sure that if ever His Majesty should "wish for the advice or good offices of Her "Majesty's Government, he would always find

"that England would be ready to prove herself the "best friend to Abyssinia. The Negoos thanked "me, and I retired, leaving his camp near Chelicot "the same day, and arriving at Asmara on the "23rd. Here I was again detained for a day by "Ras Alula, but was allowed to go next day; and "by travelling all night I was able to reach the "Italian positions at Monkullu at daybreak on the "25th December.

"I have already mentioned that one reason for "the refusal of King Johannis to listen to any "terms of peace may be found in the false intel- "ligence sent to him by Ras Alula, but I have not "yet referred to two other circumstances which "rendered my task almost hopeless from the out- "set. One of these is, that the Abyssinians have "as yet had no practical experience of the power "of Italy. Throughout the country the affair of "Dogali and the subsequent withdrawal of the "Italian garrisons from Sahati and Wia, are looked "upon as triumphs of Abyssinian over Italian "arms; the Abyssinians, it must also be recollected, "are inordinately proud of their courage and skill "in warfare, and gain additional confidence from "their immense superiority in point of numbers; "and, since their acquisition, in virtue of Admiral "Hewett's Treaty, of many thousands of Reming- "ton rifles and an enormous supply of ammunition,

"consider themselves almost invincible, and will "continue to do so until they have had a lesson "to the contrary. The only effect produced on "the mind of the Negoos and of his advisers by "the letter of warning sent by the English "Government in last September was a feeling of "irritation against England as well as against "Italy, and a wish to show that their country was "less feeble than it appeared to be considered.

"The second and most important consideration "is, that when I arrived in Abyssinia the whole "country was already under arms; very large "armies were advancing from every direction "towards the north-eastern frontier; the whole "atmosphere in the King's Court, and in the "camp of every Chieftain in Abyssinia, was one of "warlike preparation; and His Majesty the "Negoos, autocratic and greatly respected as he "is, would not only have found the greatest "difficulty in persuading the different leaders— "some of them semi-independent — to submit "quietly to his acceptance of the Italian terms of "peace, but, even had he succeeded in doing so, "he would have found himself face to face with "the far more serious question of what was to be "done with all the vast masses of armed men "which, at his instigation, are now moving through "his country. The great probability is that, if

"the present common object, *i.e.* war with the "Italians, were to be taken away, these undis- "ciplined and half-savage armies, some of them "from the country of the Gallas, from Shoa, and "from the extreme outskirts of Abyssinian depen- "dencies, would refuse to return empty-handed to "their own countries, and Abyssinia would soon "be torn by a series of internecine struggles "between the different Chiefs and Kings, the "result of which it would be impossible to "foresee, but which would constitute a most "serious danger to the dynasty of King Johannis "himself.

"For these reasons I venture to submit my "conviction that at the time when I was sent into "Abyssinia no power short of actual compulsion "could have induced the King to accept the terms "dictated by Italy; that what might have been "possible in August or September last was impos- "sible in December, when the whole of the "immense available forces of the country were "already under arms; and that there now remains "no hope of a satisfactory adjustment of the diffi- "culties between Italy and Abyssinia until the "question of the relative supremacy of these two "nations has been decided by an appeal to the "fortune of war."

Document communicated by Mr. Portal to the King of Abyssinia.

"Her Majesty Queen Victoria, whilst deeply "regretting the massacre of 450 Italians committed "by Ras Alula in January last, is very sorry to see "that her friend, His Majesty King John, is in a "state of war with the King of Italy.

"Being most anxious to avert, if possible, from "Abyssinia, the calamity of such a war, she has "asked the Government of Italy what are the "conditions on which they will live in peace and "friendship with Abyssinia, and cease their pre-"parations for a great war.

"The King of Italy has replied that he is most "willing and anxious to be at peace, and to have "friendship and commerce with Abyssinia, and he "has promised that all preparations for war will "be at once stopped, and that no hostile action "will be committed by Italy if His Majesty King "John will agree to the following conditions:—

"1. That the Protectorate of Italy be recog-"nized over the Assaorta and the Habab tribes of "Arabs.

"2. That Sahati and Wia remain Italian "territory, together with a zone beyond them of "one day's march.

"3. That in order to prevent any further disputes in the future, the frontier of Abyssinia be marked out by pillars erected at regular intervals. The exact line of this frontier will be settled by mutual agreement between the Abyssinians and the Italians, in concert with England, who will watch over the interests of Abyssinia.

"Ghinda will be a frontier town belonging to Abyssinia.

"4. Senhit will be occupied by Italy.

"5. A Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Commerce will be signed between Abyssinia and Italy.

"Queen Victoria most earnestly hopes and confidently trusts that His Majesty King John will, without delay, signify to Her Ambassador his acceptance of these terms, and that His Majesty will thus restore to Abyssinia the blessings of peace, commerce, and prosperity.

"In that case the King of Italy will promise to give up all thoughts of any encroachment on Abyssinian territory, and will do his utmost to encourage all trade and friendship with this country; and, at the same time, the Queen and the Government of England will undertake to use all their influence to ensure the faithful keeping of the Treaty, and will in every way endeavour to promote the welfare and prosperity

"of the dominions of His Majesty the Negoosa
"Negust.

"(Signed) G. H. PORTAL.

"*Ashangi, December 8th*, 1887."

The following are copies of the letters which I was entrusted to present to the Negoos, and translations of His Majesty's reply. I would call especial attention to King John's first letter to the Queen, as being a good specimen of native dignity, and as showing a certain eloquence in its composition which is by no means without force.

LETTERS TAKEN BY MR. PORTAL TO KING JOHANNIS OF ABYSSINIA.

No. 1.—"*The Marquis of Salisbury to the King of Abyssinia.*

"To His Majesty the King of Kings of Ethiopia,
"Johannis.

"BY command of the Queen my most gracious
"Sovereign, I have the honour to introduce to
"your Majesty Mr. Gerald Portal, of Her Majesty's
"Legation at Cairo, who has been intrusted with
"the duty of delivering to your Majesty the letter
"which the Queen has been pleased to address to
"you.

"I doubt not that your Majesty will receive

"Mr. Portal favourably, that you will give entire "credence to all that he shall say to you on behalf "of the Queen and of Her Majesty's Government, "and that your Majesty will enable him to discuss "fully and frankly with your Ministers the matters "alluded to in the Queen's letter.

"Assuring your Majesty of my sincere friend- "ship and esteem, and with my best wishes for "your Majesty's health and happiness, I commend "you to the protection of the Almighty.

"Your sincere Friend,

"(Signed) SALISBURY.

"(L.S. Secretary of State's Seal.)

"*Foreign Office, London,*

"*October* 12, 1887."

No. 2.—"*Her Majesty to the King of Abyssinia.*

"Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United "Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland "Queen, Defender of the Faith, Empress of "India, &c.

"To our Friend the King of Kings of Ethiopia, "Johannis.

"WE trust your Majesty is in good health. "We are, through the mercy of God, quite well.

"Two months ago we sent our greeting to your "Majesty in a letter, and expressed our earnest "desire for your Majesty's health and the peace "and prosperity of your dominions.

"Circumstances have arisen with respect to "certain territories adjacent to your Majesty's "dominions, and which have been under the "government of His Highness the Khedive, "rendering it desirable to enter into fuller com- "munication with your Majesty.

"We have therefore deemed it expedient to "send to your Majesty a trusty official attached "to our Legation at Cairo, Mr. Gerald Portal, "who will deliver this letter.

"Reposing full confidence in his discretion, we "have authorized him to discuss with your "Majesty's Ministers the matters aforesaid, and "other matters concerning which communications "have passed at various times between your "Majesty and ourselves.

"We commend our honoured and trusted mes- "senger to your Majesty's protection and favour, "and assure you of our constant wishes for your "Majesty's health and happiness, and for the "prosperity and welfare of your dominions.

"And so we recommend you to the protection "of the Almighty.

"Given at our Court at Balmoral, this 12th

" day of October, 1887, and in the fifty-first year
" of our reign.

" (Signed) VICTORIA, R. I.

" (L.S. Large signet.)

" (L.S.) (Countersigned) SALISBURY.

" To the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Johannis."

TWO LETTERS FROM KING JOHN OF ABYSSINIA TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, BROUGHT BY MR. PORTAL.

No. 1.

" (King's Seal.)

" (Translation of Seal: King of Kings, John of
" Ethiopia.)

" (Translation.)

" IN the name of God and Jesus Christ, Whose
" mercy is great.

" From him whom God has exalted, John, King
" of Sion, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to our friend,
" great and merciful, Queen Victoria, by the Grace
" of God Queen of Ireland [*sic*] and Empress of
" India, and Defender of the Christian Faith.

" Since I wrote to you, how are you? For
" myself, I and all my kingdom are well by the
" Grace of God and by the intercession of our
" Mother of Sion. May God exalt all the saints.

"I am well. May the mercy of God endure for "ever.

"I have received your letters of the 12th "Thikent and the 16th Hedar, with reference to "making peace with the Italians. To say truth, "I have never done anything, and have never "committed any offence against you, or against "the Turks (*i.e.* Egyptians). When the Treaty "was signed between me and England and Egypt, "it was laid down that no arms were to pass "Massowah except by my permission, but they "have not complied with the Treaty, but have "passed weapons and sold them to the Shohos* "and these have made great disturbances in my "country. As for the complaints they (*i.e.* the "Italians) made that they had been badly treated, "the fault was on their side, and they began the "quarrel by stopping the Abyssinian merchants, "and by occupying Sahati and Wia, and taking "possession of them. Why did they stop the "trade and come into my country? I wrote to "them: 'If you have come with authority from "'the Queen,† show me her signature, or if not, "'leave the country.' And they answered me: "'No, we will not.'

"On account of that they fought with Ras

* Hostile frontier tribes near Massowah.

† In the translation "the King."

"Alula, and many were killed on both sides, "though we had in no way injured them. How "can you say that I shall hand over to them the "country which Jesus Christ gave to me? That "would be as a command to me unjust on your "part. If your wish were to make peace between "us, it should be when they are in their country "and I in mine. But now on both sides the "horses are bridled and the swords are drawn; "my soldiers, in numbers like the sand, are ready "with their spears. The Italians desire war, but "the strength is in Jesus Christ. Let them do "as they will, so long as I live I will not hide "myself from them in a hole.

"*The Town of Ashangi, 24th Hedar*, 1880." *

No. 2.

"*King John of Abyssinia to Her Majesty the "Queen.*

"(King's Seal.)

"(Translation.)

"IN the name of God and of Jesus Christ, "Whose mercy is great.

* The Abyssinians follow the Coptic Calendar. This date is equivalent to the 12th of December, 1887, in the Calendar of Western Europe.

"From him whom God has exalted, John,
"King of Sion, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to our
"dear friend the great and merciful Queen Victoria,
"by the Grace of God Queen of Ireland [*sic*] and
"Empress of India, Defender of the Christian
"Faith.

"Since I wrote to you, how are you? I and
"all my people by the Grace of God are well, may
"His mercy endure for ever.

"I have received your letters of the 12th
"Thikent and the 16th Hedar by the hand of
"your honourable servant Mr. Gerald Portal, and
"I have also received through him two gold-
"mounted swords, one good gun, and one tele-
"scope, which you have sent to me as a sign of
"friendship. I have received these, and I thank
"you very much for them. May God reward you.

"*Ashangi, 28th Hedar*, 1880."

In the course of the weary days of inaction and suspense, during which I was forced to remain in the King's camp, *i.e.* till the 16th of December, I had sent several messages and one letter to the King, urging that I should be allowed to proceed on my journey, as the Queen would be very anxious to hear what answer her friend King Johannis sent to Her Majesty's letter and message, but I was always told in a civil but very firm manner

that my departure was impossible for the moment. As a matter of fact I knew that our fate was the subject of a great discussion by all the chiefs of empire at present with the king, and that the large majority of these chiefs were in favour of following Ras Alula's advice, and "treating us like enemies." It is to the King himself, in opposition to his councillors, that is due the whole credit of having allowed the English Mission to return in safety.

On the receipt of the letter from Ras Alula, mentioned in the official report, the King had broken up his camp at Ashangi, and had continued his march northwards at the rate of about ten to fifteen miles every day; we were forced to follow in his train, camping every evening near the head-quarters of our host or "Balderabba," Dejat Tesemma. A marvellous thing it was to see the endless mass of struggling humanity—soldiers, women, slaves, horses, mules, donkeys, and cattle —crowding along the narrow rocky paths; the soldiers well-fed and swaggering, the slaves half-starved and miserable, the women tired with their heavy loads, but laughing and happy, but of the unfortunate mules, donkeys, and other beasts of burden, about eighty or ninety per cent. were suffering from the most ghastly and revolting sore backs and other maladies, caused chiefly by the

cruel Abyssinian habit of tying on the load without a saddle, and of passing a thin cord or strip of hide round and round the unfortunate animal's back and belly, and drawing this cord as tight as their muscular arms could get it. The result of this system of "tight-lacing" was that in many instances the whole shape of the beast's stomach had been altered, causing horrible disease and ultimately death. I tried on one occasion to explain to an enormous Abyssinian who was urging on a very diminutive donkey with fiendish yells and resounding blows, that his cruel way of tying on the load was very false economy, as it incapacitated the beast from work, and would ultimately kill it long before its natural time. He answered, with a grin, that this method "had been the custom of his fathers, and, therefore, it was good enough for him." It was useless to try to argue with a staunch Conservative like this, so I gave up in despair any attempts to ameliorate the fate of mules and donkeys in Abyssinia.

On the whole, though there were some exceptions, the struggling crowds on the march were remarkably good tempered and light-hearted; we, of course, came in for a good deal of personal comment and "chaff," but laughter was with them always near the surface, and a few opportune presents of cartridges or bars of salt gained us

many a helping hand in the crowd, where a little ill-will might easily have forced some of our mules over a precipice.

Nothing particular need be said of the days on which we travelled in the train of the King; we camped one day at Falak, then crossed the Debar Pass, and were nearly frozen the next night, there being 10° Fahrenheit of frost at a height of about 11,000 feet above the sea. At Debar the only vegetation consisted of giant thistles, many of them as much as fifteen to twenty feet in height, with stems almost like timber trees. From Debar we marched to a most picturesque camp at Beit Mariam, where the King halted for two days; then for two more days we marched across the Aibutto plain, the King never travelling for more than three or four hours a day, till on the 15th we passed close to Antalo and halted at Afgol.

During all this time I hardly allowed a day to pass without making a fresh attempt to induce the King to grant me the requisite permission to leave his camp and to commence my homeward journey with his answer to the Queen, but without effect. The only incident of any interest during this time was, that I was shot at one morning by some casual Abyssinian while I was peacefully sitting on a rock surveying the scene. However, as the bullet only smashed itself against the rock several

feet to my left the matter had no particular importance. I at once ran down the hill to that part of the immense camp from which the shot had come, and at my request was taken before the chief commanding that wing of the army. I stated my complaint, adding that I was sure that the King would be very angry if he heard that any of our party were shot or otherwise molested during our stay in his camp. The chief only answered that if I could point out the man who had fired the shot he would punish him. This it was absolutely impossible for me to do, and as I could not ask for more, the matter was allowed to drop. Apart from this little episode we never met with anything but kindness and civility on every side during our sojourn in this immense moving camp.

I have already said that day after day during this time I had been making fruitless efforts to get permission to leave the camp and to start on our homeward journey. All these attempts had to be made through Dejat Tesemma, our "balderabba," who was invariably courteous, but who gave us clearly to understand that if we attempted to get away he would be under the painful necessity of sending a few hundreds of soldiers after us to bring us back again. To escape by flight was out of the question; there were 300 miles of

mountain and valley between us and the Italian forts, and without a letter or some sort of passport from the King, we should be stopped and very likely maltreated by every local chieftain through whose territory we should have to pass. To all our messages we only received evasive answers: "we were the King's friends and guests, why then were we so anxious to go away?" "to-morrow the King would march further north, this would be our road also," "to-day is Sunday, the King can do no business," "to-day the King is tired" and so on. We almost denuded our caravan of guns, carbines, pistols, knives and cartridges, which we gave away as presents to Tesemma and to officers of the king's *entourage*, hoping thereby to predispose them in our favour. For ten days this was all to no purpose, the fact of the matter being that the King and his council had not yet decided whether we should be allowed to go back at all. All this time we were naturally growing more and more anxious about affairs on the frontier; the only news we had received was Ras Alula's report that the Italians were advancing, and daily we expected to hear of a further invasion of Abyssinian territory and of a battle with Ras Alula's troops; and we had more than a suspicion that the receipt of any such news, whilst we were in the camp, would be the signal

for us to be thrown into chains or more summarily "treated as enemies."

On the 11th of December I had written the following letter to the King, asking him point-blank to let us go.

"*To His Majesty Johannis, King of Zion, King of the Kings of Ethiopia.*"

After the usual greetings, compliments, and inquiries after health, etc.

"Your Majesty, as the mission on which I was "sent by Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain "and Ireland, Empress of India, is now accom-"plished, and as Her Majesty is very anxious to "hear the decision taken by your Majesty, and has "therefore ordered me to return with all possible "speed, I have the honour to request that your "Majesty will now allow me to proceed on my "journey without delay, and will give me guides "to conduct me to the frontier of your Majesty's "dominions.

"I have, etc.

(Signed) "G. H. PORTAL.

"*Camp at Debar,*

"*December* 11, 1887."

Whether this letter had any effect or not I cannot say, but it appears that shortly after its

receipt the King made up his mind to overrule the decision of the rest of his council of chiefs, and to let us go in peace. At the same time, he further determined that as we were not to be treated as spies or enemies, we should receive all the honour due to envoys from a great and friendly Power.

Five more days elapsed, and then at last, on the 16th of December at a place called Afgol, I was summoned to a farewell interview with King Johannis, the particulars of which have already been narrated above in the official report. After a somewhat lengthy but calm and civil political conversation, and after the exchange of many expressions of friendship between England and Abyssinia, from which the King was most careful to exclude Italy, I was asked by the royal treasurer, who appears to combine the functions of prime minister and grand chamberlain, to accompany him to a smaller tent a few yards distant from the big reception marquee.

In this tent I found a complete *toilette* set out for me. I was first asked to take off my uniform coat and to put on a pink silk-embroidered shirt, reaching to my knees; over this was draped a "shamma" of fine gauzy cotton, with a broad band of embroidery round the edges, and then over my shoulders was placed a fine lion's mane as a sort of tippet, the front part being decorated

with gold filigree work, to which the fore-legs were fastened, and hung down in front, while the hind-legs dangled down my back. A long sword, in a velvet and gold scabbard, was then tightly buckled to my *right* hip, a shield covered with silver and gold *plaques* was hung on my left arm, and a long spear placed in that hand; finally, a gold ornament, in the shape of a double triangle, was hung round my neck, and thus attired I entered the presence of the king for the last time. Thanking him for his kind reception of me, and for these presents, I took leave of him and left his tent, finding at the door a new mule with a beautiful Abyssinian saddle, covered with red cloth and embroidery, on which I was expected to mount. This was not easy for me; to begin with, the sword being tightly buckled to my right hip, I was forced to mount in Abyssinian fashion from the off-side. Then my draperies considerably hindered any freedom of knee-action on my part, and the saddle before me was small, with a cantle and pommel nearly a foot high. But the worst of all was the fact that the stirrups were made to receive only the big toe of a bare foot; how, then, was I to get up with my uniform trousers and Wellington boots? However, by dint of great activity even this difficult feat was at length accomplished, and I rode off, the centre of an admiring crowd, back to our own

camp, where my arrival in this guise was the signal for much joy and laughing, as it meant that at last we were really off, and homeward bound.

In half-an-hour everything was packed, mules were loaded, I was again in more comfortable garments, much backsheesh was given, and cheerfully we turned our steps to the north.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN JOURNEY.

Royal palace at Mekelle—*Brundo*—Lord Napier's road—Prisoners again—A critical moment—I send Beech away—Free again at last—Beech's adventures—Near the Shoho country—Arrival at Asmara.

In saying good-bye to me the King had expressed his hope that I would sleep that night at Mekelle, where he has recently built himself a new palace, of which he is very proud, and which is the only two-storeyed building, and, indeed, the only erection showing any attempt of architecture or permanency of construction in Abyssinia. Partly to please his Majesty, and partly because I was also anxious to see this far-famed palace, I had promised compliance with his wishes, and our first day's homeward march, past the village of Chelicot, was therefore a short one. At about 2.30 p.m. we surmounted a ridge of hills from which we looked northward over a wide, partially cultivated plain, dotted here and there with villages, in the centre

of which by far the most conspicuous object was the new palace, built of yellow or reddish stone in a kind of spurious Gothic style, with a quantity of turrets and battlements which looked curiously out of place in the centre of Abyssinia. The building of this palace was the work of an Italian named Naretti, who personally superintended the laying of every stone, and who, with his own hands, cut out and fitted nearly all the joints and the wood work. It is almost needless to say that there is no glass in the windows, nor indeed is any required in that excellent climate. Although there is an upper storey, and although the building is fitted with various cupboards and other European inventions, the use of these luxuries is not appreciated nor understood by King John, who lives in his usual barbaric state in two large rooms on the ground floor.

As soon as we had seen our animals unloaded and turned out to graze, Beech and I walked up to the palace, but on arriving at the central gate we were disagreeably surprised at being met by a pair of truculent-looking Abyssinian soldiers, who shut the door in our faces, and utterly refused to let us enter even the outer courtyard, saying that such were the orders of the chief man of Mekelle. I then sent a polite message to this chief, begging for permission to see the palace,

and asking at the same time for provisions, forage, and a guide; this message was entrusted to Bruru Worke the interpreter, who was to leave us and return to the King the following morning, and I have no doubt that it was owing to the malicious or possibly only the careless way in which he translated the message that I shortly afterwards received an answer to the effect that the guide was not ready and that there were no provisions that could be spared for us. The latter item was a matter of indifference to us, for we soon bought some milk and bread of the villagers, while as regards *pièces de resistance* we were more than amply provided, as, during our enforced stay in the King's camp, his Majesty had made me a present of a cow every day; our appetites, hearty as they were, had been quite unequal to the task of keeping pace with the supplies, and the result was, that I had now a small herd of eight nice little black heifers. One of these I ordered to be killed on the spot, and then succeeded in exchanging the remaining seven for a pretty good mule.

The mention of these cows reminds me that only once during our travels in Abyssinia did we see any instance of the devouring of raw meat, cut from the still quivering carcase of the cow, which has made so much impression on former travellers

in Abyissnia ever since the days of Bruce. The one case we did see can hardly be quoted as typical of the customs of the country, as the individual was a more than half-starved slave, whose eyes almost started out of his head at the sight of a cow being killed by my men, and who, almost before the breath was out of the animal's body, made a rush at it, and began to hack off a piece for himself and to eat it before any of the men could interfere. But although we saw nothing of it, Bruce, Mansfield Parkyns, Mr. Dufton, and Mr. Rassam all speak of the fondness of the Abyssinians for what they call *brundo*, that is, a piece of raw meat cut from the carcase at the very moment when the animal is killed, and eaten, probably with the inevitable red-pepper sauce, before it has had time to grow cold.*

* Mansfield Parkyns ("Life in Abyssinia," ch. xxvii. vol. i.) gives the following description of *brundo* eating in 1843: "The slaughtering of animals in Abyssinia is attended with "a regular ceremony, as in Mohammedan countries. The "animal is thrown down with its head to the east, and the "knife passed across its throat while the words 'in the name "of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' are pronounced by the "butcher. Almost before the death-struggle is over persons "are ready to flay the carcase, and pieces of the raw meat are "cut off and served up before this operation is completed; in "fact, as each part presents itself it is cut off and eaten while "yet warm and quivering. In this state it is considered, and "justly so, to be very superior in taste to what it is when cold. "Raw meat, if kept a little time, gets tough; whereas if eaten "fresh and warm it is far tenderer than the most tender joint

The non-arrival of the guide was a more serious consideration. Before leaving King John's camp, our "Balderabba," Dejat Tesemma, had promised me that at Mekelle a good guide should be provided for us, who would accompany us as far as Asmara, where he would hand us over to the tender mercies of our old friend, Ras Alula. This prospect no doubt had its drawbacks, but even such a guide would be far better than no guide at

"that has been hung a week in England. The taste is, perhaps "from imagination, rather disagreeable at first, but far other- "wise when one gets accustomed to it."

The great pioneer of African travel, Bruce, gives a far more revolting account of an Abyssinian feast in his time; fortunately the habits and customs of the people appear to have changed a good deal since then.

Bruce writes that the butcher "is not so merciful as to aim "at the life, but, on the contrary, to keep the beast alive till "he be totally eaten up. Having satisfied the Mosaical law, "according to his conception, by pouring these six or seven "drops of blood upon the ground, two or more of them set to "work." Then follow most revolting and disgusting details, describing how the flesh is cut from the animal while it is yet alive and devoured greedily, the arteries being avoided in order that it should not die too quickly. "The prodigious noise," says Bruce, "that the animal makes is a signal for the company "to sit down to table."

The Rev. Henry Dufton also narrates how in 1862 he had "seen and often partaken of flesh warm and quivering from the "ox, actually moving in the hand." And again, he was "told "that it was common for shepherds to cut a sheep's tail while "alive and suck the fat out, filling the wound with salt for "another occasion." "A Journey through Abyssinia," by Henry Dufton. Chapman and Hall. 1867.

all, and it was now evident that, unless we consented to wait at Mekelle indefinitely, we should have to continue our journey without one, and to trust to the guidance of such peasants as we might be able to hire in the different districts. There was no help for it, and at daybreak next morning, after making another fruitless attempt to get an officially-accredited guide from the chief man of Mekelle, we resumed our northward march without one.

I did not anticipate much difficulty in finding the way, as this part of the road had been traversed and well described by Mr. Harrison Smith in 1884, and at about eleven o'clock we struck into the still clearly defined road which had been followed by Lord Napier's expedition in 1868. At noon we crossed a clear stream, and halted for an hour at Agulla, the residence of Dejat Tella, the ruler of the province through which our road lay for the next twenty or thirty miles. I had, however, no time to spare to go a mile out of my way to visit this chief, and after forty-five minutes rest we resumed our journey, both men and animals stepping out briskly, till four hours later we crosed the Dongola river, close to the village of Miriam Woggarou, where we saw a curious old church cut out of the living rock, which is reputed in the district to have been made by God Himself.

We hurried on for two hours more without halting, and at length, after a very long day's march, were thankful to camp under a huge "Wurke" tree close to the village of Belessa, having put about thirty-two miles between ourselves and the King's head-quarters, which were to move to Mekelle that day.

My men were all in the highest spirits and the best of health, while the comparative rest of twelve days in the King's camp had enabled the mules to shake off the effects of the outward march. The loads were now very light and easily packed, no animal having to carry more than sixty or seventy pounds; in fact, everything seemed to point to the probability of our being able to make an exceptionally rapid and easy march back to the coast so long as we were allowed to pass unmolested by Ras Alula. Little did any of us that night foresee the complete change in our prospects which was to take place before the sun rose next morning.

Late that night one of the Arabs came and whispered to me that we were being quietly surrounded by a large force of Abyssinians. Beech and I accordingly got up to reconnoitre, and sure enough we soon convinced ourselves that such was the case, as we could see watch fires being lighted at irregular intervals at a distance of about two hundred yards on every side of us, by the glare of

which the dark forms of armed Abyssinians passing to and fro were clearly visible.

Soon after three o'clock I roused the camp and gave orders for everything to be quickly and silently packed on the mules, while a large fire was kindled for the sake of light, the moon having already set. At four o'clock all was ready; Beech, Hutchisson, and I mounted our mules, and I rode a few steps forward while giving the order to march. The words were scarcely out of my mouth when about a dozen Abyssinian soldiers, armed with rifles, suddenly and silently emerged from the outer darkness into the ring of firelight, and, pushing some of my men violently aside, placed themselves near the head of the caravan, declaring that we were not to advance another step.

Calling up the interpreter, young Ghirghis, I protested strongly through him against this action, explaining that we were coming straight from their King, who had received us as friends, that I was carrying his letters back to the Queen of England, and that I could not, therefore, submit to be stopped by any local chief or independent bands of soldiery. While this conversation was taking place the first grey streak of dawn was beginning to make the movements of the soldiers more clear to us, and we could see that they were momentarily increasing in numbers. The fire was

going out, and we were still collected in the shadow of the gigantic tree under which we had passed the night, the Abyssinians being mostly in the clear space just beyond the spreading branches, so that with the increasing light we were able to watch their movements, and to observe that their numbers had now increased to about sixty or seventy armed men.

For a few moments the effect of my little speech was not very clear, the soldiers all fell back a few yards, and I thought that we were to be allowed to proceed in peace. Again, therefore, I rode some paces forward, when I was stopped by a sudden shout from my own men behind me. I halted, and it was then very evident that our enemies were bent on mischief; but even at that moment the wild and dramatic beauty of the scene impressed itself deeply on the memory of Beech and myself. Under the huge black tree, beside the dying but still glowing remains of the fire, were huddled together my ten Arabs and fourteen loaded mules, while Beech, Hutchisson, and I, sat quietly on our respective animals. At about seven or eight yards distance on our right flank was collected a mass of Abyssinian soldiery in their picturesque red and white robes, every man with the right shoulder bare, and every man with his rifle grasped in both hands and ready for

action; the few Abyssinians who had remained on the other side of the big tree were running round with all speed to join their comrades, and to be out of the line of their bullets, should they fire a volley; while on my left, at a distance of about three or four yards, an extremely handsome Abyssinian had thrown himself on the ground, had loaded his rifle, cocked it, and was taking a calm and deliberate aim at myself. So perfectly have this man's features impressed themselves on my memory, that I am confident that I should instantly recognize him were I to meet him to-morrow in Piccadilly, even disfigured by the garments of civilization, or were he to come across me at Zanzibar or in any other part of Africa. Never in Europe or Africa have I seen a more perfect type of masculine beauty or more classical, high-bred features than those which framed the pair of large dark eyes which were steadfastly gazing into mine along the gleaming barrel of a loaded rifle. The proud carriage of the small, well-shaped head, with its close crop of curling hair, the broad forehead, level brows, straight Greek nose, well-cut, defiant mouth and firm chin, all combined to form a model which would have rejoiced the heart of Phidias or Praxiteles.

I cannot pretend that I took a careful note of all these details at that very critical moment, for,



A STARTLING INCIDENT.

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to tell the truth, the feeling that was uppermost in my mind was one of hope that the handsome dark gentleman would not, either voluntarily or involuntarily, press his finger against the trigger of that confounded rifle and send its contents through me. But even without the exercise of voluntary thought, at moments of extreme tension of nerve, every detail of a scene may be so photographed in one's brain that the whole may be reproduced afterwards with even greater accuracy than could be done by a spectator who had been occupied solely in taking careful and voluminous notes.

For a few moments—I don't know how many, they seemed like hours—there was a pause; I sat still on my mule looking down that polished barrel and at the set face behind it, not daring to move my hand forward to seize the revolver whose handle was protruding from one of the wallets of my saddle, lest any such movement on my part should give my enemy an excuse for pulling the trigger. Hurriedly I was trying to make up my mind as to what was to be done, and what were our chances of extricating ourselves from this very awkward "fix," when suddenly the situation changed.

A word of command was given by somebody unseen in the background, and the whole band of

Abyssinians loaded their rifles, and prepared to sweep our little unarmed party off the face of the earth. There did not appear to be the smallest chance of escape for any of us, and I think we had all made up our minds that the end had come. To attempt any resistance was absolutely useless, and would only have hastened the end. There was but one chance left, and that was a very poor one. I told the interpreter to shout as quickly and as loudly as he could for the chief of the Abyssinian party to come and talk to me. To my relief and surprise, after some hesitation, a man slowly came forward from out of the mass of Abyssinians; as he approached us most of his men put up their rifles and covered our party, while my friend lying down close to me was still taking a careful aim at some part of my body. The interpreter told me afterwards that he heard them discussing among themselves which of them was to shoot each member of our party. When the chief got close to me I spoke to him in as loud and as indignant a tone as I could assume, telling the interpreter to do the same in translating my words. I then asked him how he dared to stop us, warning him that we were his King's friends, and that if a hair of the head of any of my men were touched, the King would inflict severe punishment on him and all his party. I continued to

lecture and to swagger in this strain for a little time, and then said I was going to write at once to the King himself, and I defied him to have the audacity to stop my messenger. He appeared to be somewhat impressed by the unexpected tone adopted by us, and said that I might send a letter to the King.

With the assistance of young Ghirghis, the interpreter (who was behaving remarkably well under these trying circumstances), I then wrote a hasty letter to King John, briefly describing the situation, and expressing my surprise that such things should have happened to me after my friendly visit to his Majesty; at the same time begging that a good guide should at once be sent to me, and that the soldiers now surrounding us should have orders to let us proceed on our journey.

This letter I gave to an Abyssinian youth, who had been for about ten days in my service, promising him a large reward if he succeeded in getting to the King, a distance of about thirty-two miles, and in bringing me an answer. Then followed many hours of anxious waiting. We were close prisoners, being still surrounded by soldiers on every side, and it soon became evident that they were beginning to regret their leniency or weakness in not finishing us off in the early

morning; the soldiers continued to prowl about in an insolent and swaggering manner, laughing at, insulting, and even hustling and striking the Arabs, evidently in the hope that some hasty act of retaliation on their part would bring on a row, and furnish a good excuse for a general massacre and pillage of the caravan.

I gave the strictest orders that no one was to speak to or take any notice whatever of the soldiers, but although my men were by this time pretty well disciplined, and on ordinary occasions thoroughly obedient, we could not but fear lest their wild Arab temper should suddenly resent some more than usually aggravating insult or blow, and that an immediate volley, followed by a rush of spearmen, would be the inevitable result.

After about eleven hours of anxious and uncomfortable waiting, still surrounded on every side by Abyssinian pickets, my messenger at length reappeared. At first he vowed that he had been to the King, and that his Majesty had said we might now proceed on our journey; but he was evidently lying, and after a little pressure he confessed that he had been taken only to Dejat Tella, the chief of the district near to whose residence we had passed on the previous day.

This chief had openly told him that it was by his orders that we had been stopped and made prisoners, but that we might now proceed. I also ascertained that several messages had passed between him and the soldiers guarding us, who now, we observed, were a good deal diminished in numbers, and some of whom seemed to be trying to make friends with us. It appeared to both Beech and myself that the chief and his soldiers were becoming a little anxious lest they had got themselves into a scrape by having stopped us in this way, and that they would now rather like to withdraw quietly and let us continue our journey unmolested.

It was, however, evident that not only would it entail a great loss of dignity on my part, were I to abstain from bringing these proceedings to the notice of the highest authority in the land, but that I should thereby incur the risk of a repetition of this sort of thing in every district through which we had to pass. I determined, therefore, to take the decided step of sending Beech himself to the King with my letter, which the Abyssinian youth had brought back with him. I was further strengthened in this resolution—the most hazardous and momentous which I had ever taken in the course of my life—by learning from my young messenger, after much cross-

examination, that the soldiers all round us had told him to swear to me that he had really been to the King, but that we might now proceed in peace. In confessing this to me the poor boy was frightened out of his wits, as the soldiers had vowed that they would tear him to pieces if he told me the truth. It was thus evident that our captors were nervous about their own fate should the King hear of their exploit.

In a few minutes the two strongest and swiftest mules are saddled and bridled, the best of our Arabs, a man named Mohamed Gameel, who spoke Amharic as well as Arabic, has received his orders to accompany Beech; the letter to the King is enclosed in an envelope addressed to Deja Tesemma, our friend and former "Balderabba," in the King's camp, and final instructions are given to Beech that at all hazards he was to get to the head-quarters of the King himself, and to insist on a proper guide being sent to me. One hearty grasp of the hand, a mutual wish for "good luck," and they canter off on the path back to Mekelle, while Hutchisson and I turn back to resume our anxious task of watching and waiting. I had arranged with Beech that if no objection was made to our marching next morning, I would proceed with the caravan to Adegrat, a town about thirty-six or thirty-

eight miles further north, and there wait for him.

All that night Hutchisson and I sat up, rifle in hand, and kept watch alternately; I also kept one of the men constantly on guard, as I feared that as our enemies were now beginning to feel that they had got themselves into a scrape, they might think that the simplest way out of it would be quietly to massacre the whole party and then to say that we had attacked them first. However, the night passed quietly, and a little before daybreak a cautious reconnaissance showed us that the Abyssinian soldiers had disappeared, and that we were free. Hastily we began to load the mules at 4.50 a.m., and had soon turned our backs on the great tree, under whose dense shadow I had spent thirty-six of the most anxious hours I had ever known.

At 9.30 a.m. we passed the pools of Adarbaghi; here I was fortunate enough to engage a peasant as a guide to Adegrat. At eleven o'clock we met the chief man of Adegrat himself, who was travelling southward in state to meet the King. After hearing a rapid explanation of our business and our recent experiences, this gentleman, Shom Sohat by name, showed us every civility, gave us one of his soldiers to guide us to Adegrat, and sent back a messenger ordering his deputy to receive

us well. At mid-day we halted for forty minutes at the pools of Endajesus, whence there was a most magnificent view of the mountains of Temben to the south-west, and of our old acquaintance Mount Semayata, near Adowa, some fifty miles to the north-west. All through that afternoon we sped along at an average rate of over four miles an hour, the men often running and the mules trotting for half a mile at a time. I myself dismounted and led the way on foot, at a pace which I should be sorry to attempt now that I am no longer in that state of perfect training and muscular development to which our life in Abyssinia had brought us. The loads of all the mules were light, and my own riding mule was kept in reserve to carry any of the men who should hang out signals of being weary, footsore, or otherwise unable to keep up with us. But in justice to my men I must say that they did not want any encouragement or inciting to increased speed. It was evident from the way in which they abused any of their number who showed signs of fatigue, that they were just as anxious to get out of the country as we could be. At length, after a march of eleven hours, we reached Adegrat at about 5 p.m., footsore, weary, and anxious about Beech.

Early next morning I wandered off with a pair of Messrs. Callaghan's strongest field glasses, and

scrambled to the top of a high conical hill, from whence I could command a view of the path from Mekelle for many miles. Eagerly throughout the morning I scanned the horizon and swept the country for signs of Beech and Mohamed Gameel, but it was not till three o'clock in the afternoon that my anxiety, now become intense, was relieved by their appearance, on foot, leading their completely exhausted mules, and accompanied by an Abyssinian soldier.

Heartily and thankfully as they were welcomed by the whole party, time was too precious for any delay, and as soon as the animals could be caught and loaded, we were again on the march at 3.45 p.m., intending to rest that night at Fogada, some fourteen miles to the north-west. On the road I heard Beech's report of his adventures since we had parted two days before at Belessa, and I may here say that to his determined perseverance in carrying out his orders, added to the exercise on his part of the greatest tact and forethought, is due the preservation of his life and that of his Arab companion, and possibly, also the safety of the whole party. The narrative of his adventures is best given by the insertion of the report on the subject which he subsequently addressed to me, and which runs as follows:—

"*Veterinary Surgeon J. R. Beech to Mr. Portal.*

"*Cairo, January 8th,* 1888.

"Sir,

"I have the honour to report for your "information that I left Belessa at 5.45 p.m. on "Sunday, the 18th instant, in accordance with "your orders, to carry a letter and inclosure to "Dejaj Tesemma at Mekelle.

"I was accompanied by a mule driver of the "mission, named Mohamed Gameel, who inter- "preted for me from Arabic into Amharic.

"After crossing the plain south of Mariam "Woggarou we met two Abyssinian soldiers who "stopped us and assured me that news had reached "the King of your mission having been stopped "at Belessa, that he was very angry, and that "they had been sent by Dejaj Tesemma (whose "men they professed to be) with a letter to you "and instructions to take the mission safely to "Asmara. They showed me a letter which I "advised them to deliver to you at Belessa, as we "were going to Mekelle. They then tried to lead "my mule back, saying that it was useless to "proceed further, as we should never be allowed "to pass Agola, also inquiring persistently if I had "a letter for the King. This confirmed my sus- "picions as to their motive, and, disengaging the

"mule, I rode on as fast as possible, so as to "pass Agola before being overtaken. However, "being mounted on mules, this was not possible, "and we were soon rejoined by one man, the other "keeping on his road to Belessa. On nearing "Agola, the soldier who was following closed up "to us and entered into conversation, endeavouring "to convince me that Dejaj Tesemma was at the "village, that Dejaj Tella was his brother, and "therefore a brother of Ras Alula. To his pro- "testations no attention was paid, and, finding "himself unable to induce me to enter the village, "he threw out hints of getting assistance to force "us there, at the same time calling loudly. I "therefore affected to believe his tale (knowing "resistance to be useless after the experience of "the morning) and was taken to Dejaj Tella, who "asked me who had brought me from Belessa. "I answered that I had come alone, when he said, "'people cannot travel here without a guide, "without risk of imprisonment,' and generally "assumed a domineering manner and mode of "expressing himself, acknowledging that we had "been stopped by his orders, but without excusing "himself or his action. I then informed him that "you were well aware that his conduct had been "unlawful, and that the King would be very angry "when he heard that his men threatened the

"Queen's messenger with loaded rifles, advising "him at the same time not to inculpate himself "further by detaining me. His manner then "changed, and he resorted to persuasion, politely "assuring me that his sole motive was to save me "fatigue, and that he would send two horsemen "to Mekelle with the message, as the road was "unsafe at night. To this and like propositions "I always replied that my orders were to see "Dejaj Tesemma personally, and regretted not "being able to avail myself of his kindness. After "further conversation, he said, 'I am sorry that I "'cannot let you go,' but on my declaring that "I would not return without delivering my "message, but would wait there until the King "came himself, he agreed to our proceeding in "the morning.

"I then decided to wait until after midnight, "as then the rest of the journey to Mekelle could "be accomplished by daybreak, and conversation "on general subjects was resumed, he continually "inquiring if I had a letter for the King, and I "observed that some of his people were searching "my wallets, but fortunately I had removed the "letter, which was on my person. After this I "was taken to a hut, the habitation of an officer, "to sleep, but as it was full of men, women, and "children, besides some mules and donkeys, I

"determined to sit up, the better to care for the "letter.

"About midnight we made the first attempt to "leave, unsuccessfully, but about 3 a.m. succeeded "in saddling our mules and reaching the track; "here we were stopped and taken back to Tella, "who, after some arguing, let me go, and gave "me a guide to Mekelle. With this man we "reached Mekelle at 8 a.m., but then found that "he had been instructed to conduct us to one of "Tella's officers and his representative at court. "To this I demurred, and declared my intention "of going direct to Dejaj Tesemma, and proceeded "to the palace, as at that hour he is usually in "attendance upon the King. On finding himself "unable to prevent this, our guide ran quickly up "to the outer court of the palace, on entering "which I was quickly surrounded by many people "(probably adherents of Dejaj Tella), who pre-"vented my going further, and tried to obtain "possession of your letter, offering to deliver it "themselves. They pushed me away from the "main entrance to the King's room, but at 11.30 "a.m. I perceived Dejaj Tesemma in court dress "coming out from the King's presence, and, "pushing through the crowd, delivered to him the "letter. He seemed surprised to see me, and "angry at the contents of the letter. The in-

"closure, a letter to the King, he took to His "Majesty at once. On his return he called to "Tella's soldier, and in a loud voice gave him a "message from the King to his master, ordering "him to supply us with a mounted guide to "Asmara, and conveying threats of punishment "should anything befall you, and censure for his "action in stopping you.

"On saying farewell to Dejaj Tesemma, he "informed me that he had just taken leave of the "King, and was leaving for Asmara to join his "brother's army with all his men.

"We left Mekelle at noon, riding straight to "Agola, where we had to wait for Tella's soldier, "whose mule had tired on the road.

"*En route* to Agola, and about half-way between "that place and Mekelle, we overtook Ras Michael, "marching with the rear guard of his army, and "supported on horseback, owing to his obesity, by "two men. He inquired, in Arabic, my business, "appeared indignant when informed, and wished "the mission 'good speed.' But the army in "front was a great obstruction to our progress, as "the head of the column had encamped at Agola "when we reached that place. The bulk of the "men composing this column were Galla horse-"men, armed with lances, some with swords, and "a small proportion of Soudanese riflemen and

"Gallas with old guns; they all appeared equally "savage; their curiosity was embarrassing, and "dislike to Europeans so manifest, that we were "obliged at last to leave the road.

"At sundown Tella's guide arrived and de- "livered his orders, when we at once left Agola "with a mounted man, but when passing the out- "skirts of the army we were seized by a Galla "picket, who dragged us roughly to a tent; after "some talking we were again allowed to go; we "reached and passed Belessa unquestioned, whilst "the moon was still up.

"About 2.30 a.m. the mule ridden by Mohamed "Gameel was completely done up, and we were "forced to halt in a dhurra* field off the road, "where the mules fed for two hours; it was, how- "ever, impossible to sleep, owing to the cold. "We started again by the light of the morning "star, and did not again halt until we reached "your camp at Adegrat at 3 p.m. on the 20th "December.

"I have, etc.,
(Signed) "J. R. W. BEECH."

At seven o'clock we reached Fogada, where the inhabitants were fairly civil. We simply spread

* Maize or Indian corn is commonly known as "dhurra" in Egypt and throughout North-Eastern Africa.

our waterproof sheets on a ploughed field covered with great flints, and slept as soundly as on a feather bed, and started again before daybreak on the morning of the 21st; but on arrival three hours later at the village of Gelleba, the guide, whom Beech had brought at such risk from the King's head quarters, vowed that he was going no further, that he was to hand us over to a new guide at this village, who would conduct us to the next, and so on. Remonstrance was useless, so we had to submit, but we soon found that this system entailed intolerable delay, that we no longer pursued a uniform direction, but that each new guide took us to the village which might be nearest, whether it was on our road or not, and there handed us over to a new man, transmitting to him the official orders of the King. This sort of thing could not be allowed to continue, but it was with the greatest difficulty, that at last, by promises of heavy rewards, I succeeded in engaging an elderly and stolid gentleman, who undertook to guide us all the way to Asmara.

All that day we marched at a good pace along rocky and unfrequented paths over a very mountainous but picturesque and ever-changing country, till at sunset we halted in a plain in a wild desolate district about ten miles to the south of Mount Tedra, a lofty, precipitous, and flat-topped moun-

tain, standing out conspicuously from an immense plain.

During this day's march, to our great distress, our favourite "pioneer" mule, whose sagacity had saved all our lives on that disastrous waterless march from the Barasa district at the commencement of the expedition, now began to show unmistakable signs of great exhaustion and sickness. A frequent "soft" cough told us only too clearly that he was suffering from some disease of the lungs, and that in all probability his days were numbered. With complete rest and good food he might yet recover, but unfortunately those were the very things which we were least able to give. We did what we could for the poor beast; it is needless to say that his willing back was never again burdened with a load, and he just managed four days later to struggle with us back to the Italian camp, where we saw him comfortably established, though, I fear, in a dying condition, in warmer and more luxurious quarters than he had ever been able to enjoy while with me.

The grassy plain in which we bivouacked this night was in the midst of a turbulent district, inhabited partly by Abyssinians and partly by Shoho Arabs, whose reputation was of the very worst, and whose fondness for robbery, pillage, and murder was proverbial throughout the north-east

of Abyssinia, and among the other Arab tribes near the coast of the Red Sea. Even the mighty Ras Alula had on many occasions been unable to resist the sudden raids of these Shohos, who had carried fire and sword into the very heart of his province. My small caravan, if discovered, would have met with but little mercy or consideration at the hands of these gentry, and it behoved us therefore to keep a careful watch that night, and to be prepared to give as warm a reception as possible to any strangers who might appear in our vicinity.

Beech, Hutchisson and I, therefore again divided the night into three watches, one of the Arabs being also on guard at the same time; but such was the beauty of the night in that wild country, under the bright clear southern sky, that it was a pleasure rather than a hardship to forego a large proportion of our hard-earned rest. Beech, indeed, became so interested in astronomical study, and in the contemplation of the beauties of nature by moonlight, that he declined to go to sleep when his two and a half hours of duty were accomplished, and insisted on sitting up and sharing with me a great portion of my watch. It was one of those nights whose intense stillness and calm beauty cannot fail to make a deep impression on the mind of the watcher; the Southern Cross was



GROUP OF SHOHOS. *To face page* 212.

glowing above the bold and rugged outline of a mountain range over which we had passed two days before; the silver light of the setting moon on one side of the heavens was almost rivalled by the calm beams of Venus as she rose in the east; not a breath of wind stirred the leaves on the trees, or rustled the long grass of the plain, and the silence was only broken by the screams of an occasional night-bird of prey, and the dismal howls of the skulking hyænas who were attracted by the scent of the mules to the neighbourhood of our camp. As we sat by the fire, drinking strong tea out of tin mugs, and smoking like a couple of chimneys, our loaded carbines and a few spare cartridges lying within easy reach of our right hands, Beech and I could not avoid contrasting the present stillness and peace with the stormy scenes through which we had so recently passed; and, while we speculated on the fate that might yet be in store for us before we got out of Ras Alula's clutches, we agreed that we should always look back upon these hours of night-watching in Abyssinia as among the pleasantest of our lives.

At last, however, a thin grey streak becomes visible in the east, and at once we set to work to rouse the camp in earnest. Though the night has passed quietly, we are by no means anxious to prolong our stay in this suspected district; more-

over, our mules have had no water since we crossed a stream during the previous afternoon, nor do we know when the next water may be reached; therefore, before the sun has yet appeared above the horizon, we are again *en route*, our venerable but wiry old guide leading the way at a pace that does him great credit. As the rays of the sun become stronger, this worthy old gentleman shelters his bald head beneath a primitive umbrella made of plaited straw; but besides this precaution, although he has not a single hair on his head, he has followed a popular Abyssinian custom, and has smeared his round cranium with a liberal allowance of mutton fat, which melts as the sun gets stronger, and running down over the back of his wrinkled neck keeps the skin soft and moist, and materially diminishes any risk of sunstroke.

It was not till 12.30 p.m. that we at last reached a pool of water, where our thirsty animals were glad to have a drink and an hour's rest; then on we went over a long series of mountains, defiles, and valleys, till we reached Gura at about 5 p.m. I declined to halt here, and sent the caravan forward under Beech's care, with instructions not to halt till they reached Woghartie, while the interpreter and I turned aside to pay a visit to a great chief who was in temporary command of Gura and the surrounding district.

Nothing could be more civil and friendly than the reception given me by this chief, Dejat Asmaha by name; he expressed his earnest hope that a war with Italy might be averted, though he added that if the Italians tried to advance they would all be killed. He gave me some excellent "tedge" to drink, and on my rising to take leave, expressed his regrets that my visit must be so short, and that he could not show me greater hospitality, with a sincerity and a dignity of manner that might with advantage be copied by many a London hostess. It was nine o'clock, pitch dark and raining, when I reached Woghartie, where I found Beech and the caravan in the act of arranging our camp for the night, the whole party being thoroughly weary, very wet, and, consequently, somewhat out of temper.

CHAPTER IX.

FINAL ESCAPE FROM ABYSSINIA.

In Ras Alula's clutches again—Forensic eloquence in Abyssinia—A chilling reception—Ras Alula loses his temper—Out of his clutches at last—Ghinda—Luncheon with a chief—More difficulties and threats—Saved by dollars—The homeward march by night—Uncertainty at Sahati—Monkullu at length—The parting with the men—Back to Suez.

At daybreak next morning, the 23rd, I sent Beech and Ghirghis (the interpreter) on ahead, with instructions to push on as fast as they could to Asmara, and to announce my approach to Ras Alula, while I followed at a more sober pace with the rest of the caravan. Two hours and a half later we arrived at Asmara, and were at once conducted by a party of soldiers to the hut in which we had spent ten such very unpleasant days on our outward journey. I then lost no time in arraying myself in all the finery, lion's skin, and robes of honour, given to me by the King, and thus attired I solemnly rode up to the foot of the huge

mud pyramid on which stands the hut of the great man. My object in thus adorning myself was to show clearly, not only to the Ras himself, but to all his people, that I had been received as a friend by the King, and had been treated with honour; and I fondly hoped that Ras Alula would not now dare to put any further impediments in my way. I found him sitting in judgment outside his hut, surrounded by a great crowd of people, while the plaintiff and defendant in the case which was at that moment being heard were standing in an open space in front of the Ras, both greatly excited, and both talking at once at the top of their voices with much violent and threatening gesticulation.

Although he is apt to be somewhat noisy, the Abyssinian as a rule pleads his cause with a good deal of native eloquence, both of word and of gesture. His voice is not otherwise than musical, and without understanding a word of the language, I have been able—at least, so I fancied—to follow a plaintiff through a speech lasting a quarter of an hour. The modulations of his voice and the eloquence of his restless hands told me that he began by exposing the facts of his case with cold logic, appealing only to the calm sense of justice of his hearers; he then, with broken tones, imploring hands, and glistening eyes, sketched what

I am sure must have been a heart-rending account of the misery wrought by the wicked wiles of the defendant, reminding me vividly of the great speech by Sergeant Buzfuz in the celebrated case of Bardell *v.* Pickwick; next, by a rapid transition, he thundered forth a violent and fluent invective, strengthened and emphasized by a cutting scorn, with the forefinger pointed down at the defendant as to mere dirt; finally, in a brilliant and fervid peroration, he appealed with outstretched arms to the justice, and called down the vengeance, of heaven against his opponent; and then, with a piece of magnificent acting, suddenly brought his speech to an unexpected close, dropping, as he did so, his right hand on to the hilt of his sword; and, facing the defendant with flashing eyes, head thrown back, and one foot slightly advanced in a graceful posture of grand defiance, proclaimed to all the spectators that he was prepared to make good his words *vi et armis* on the spot.

All this Beech and I understood one day without the least difficulty, although neither of us could speak more than half a dozen words of the language. We noticed, too, on more than one occasion, that it was rather a favourite amusement with the Abyssinians to get up mock trials, and to deliver speeches of soul-stirring eloquence containing all the combinations of argument, appeal,

scorn and invective, on the most trivial subjects, usually in these cases ending abruptly with some witticism which provoked a roar of laughter from most of the listeners.

To return to Ras Alula, whom we have left sitting in judgment on the slopes of the steep mud hill on which his head-quarters are perched. There was no question of levity or laughter here. The watchwords of this court of justice would be "solemnity, severity, brutality!"

My arrival was the signal for a dead silence, in the midst of which I stalked through the crowd and shook hands with the great man, many hundreds of pairs of eyes watching intently to see how I would be received. My appearance in the King's robes evidently had a considerable effect on the populace, who at once recognized these marks of royal favour. Ras Alula was not otherwise than civil, though cold in manner, but I was beginning to hope that all was going on smoothly, and that our difficulties were approaching their end, until at last I asked the Ras point blank to give me a guide to take me to the frontier. To my great disappointment, the Ras answered that he could not allow me to go away that day, but that he would see me and hear the result of my mission to the King in the course of the afternoon. There was no help for it; annoying as it was, we had to wait,

and matters looked by no means brighter when I went again at five o'clock in the afternoon to have a talk with Ras Alula. He was sitting on a raised dais in his large reception hut, surrounded by about sixty or seventy people all squatting on the ground. A chair was brought for me, and I established myself at a few paces from the dais and almost opposite the Ras. After a somewhat cold and ceremonious greeting, Ras Alula made but little secret of his surprise (and I may confidently add, his disappointment) at seeing that we had been allowed by the King to leave the country in safety. He asked me if I had repeated to the King all that I had said about the Italians when I was last at Asmara. I replied that certainly I had told the King all that and a great deal more, that I had spoken very openly with His Majesty, and had tried to impress upon him the futility and uselessness of engaging in a desperate war with a foreign people about a desolate and barren tract of land like that about Sahati. I added that the King had listened carefully and courteously to all I had said, and had given me his answer, and that all I had to do now was to take back this answer, together with a couple of letters from King John, to the Queen of England. Ras Alula then insisted on seeing the King's letters, in order to satisfy himself that the seals were genuine, and that I

was not deceiving him. This was insulting on his part, but I had foreseen the probability of his making this demand, and had therefore brought the letters with me. With some protest, therefore, I handed them to the Ras, who made a careful examination of the seals and superscriptions, with the help of his writer or private secretary, for the great man himself is unable either to read or write; he then, with some muttered remark, like the snarl of a wild beast, returned them to me. I repeated my request for a guide to conduct me to the frontier, adding that it should now be clear to him that I must leave the country on the King's business, and as the King's friend. I presumed, therefore, that he would not further interrupt my journey. He replied, "Tell me all that the King said to you, and what are the messages you are taking?" I answered that I did not consider myself at liberty to reveal the King's business, that His Majesty would no doubt in time let him know as much as he wished, and I repeated that the King was anxious for me to take the letters to the English Queen as quickly as possible. During this time Ras Alula's manner had been growing more and more violent and excited; he no longer spoke to me, he shouted and yelled, shaking his hand at me, his eyes flashing, and his features working with excitement and rage. He

then, at the top of his voice, delivered a tirade against the Italians, the English in general, and myself in particular, saying that we English pretended to be the friends of Abyssinia, while we were really her enemies, and friends of the Italians; that I had come upon false pretences and to gain time, while my friends, the Italians, were taking advantage of my mission to complete their preparations and to push their armies forward; and that I was really an enemy, and ought not to be allowed to leave the country. While all this discussion had been going on, I confess that the Ras's insulting words and aggravating manner had succeeded in making me also very angry, and when this last speech was translated to me, I determined not to be outdone, and so I also shouted back at him as loudly and as indignantly as I could, reminding him that the business I had come about was between my Queen and his King, that I could not stop to discuss the question with any one but the King, that I was the King's friend, and had not only his Majesty's permission to leave the country, but had been particularly requested to take the letters to England as quickly as possible. "You," I shouted, "no doubt have the power to stop me by force, but if you do not let me go at once, I tell you that I will not go at all, but will wait here until the King himself arrives, and let

him be judge between us." On this one or two elderly chiefs sitting near the Ras spoke a few words to him in a low tone, whereupon he replied in a somewhat quieter manner: "To-night you shall stay at Asmara, to-morrow morning you may go. I will give you a guide." With this reply I was satisfied, and abruptly rose to conclude the interview.

An hour or so later two chiefs who had been present at this interview came to see me, and told me that Ras Alula had been drunk, that this was now not an unfrequent occurrence with him, but that when he was in that state he was very dangerous.

This interview was of course the subject of a good deal of gossip that night in Asmara, and some account of it evidently reached the ears of my men, for I was sorry to see the air of depression, almost of despair, which soon crept over them. They evidently thought that their chances of getting back to their families at Massowah were most problematical.

Next morning, the 24th, at eight o'clock, I received a message to say that the Ras was ready for me. On arrival I found him much quieter in manner than on the previous evening. After a short and comparativly friendly conversation we shook hands, and I left him, finding the promised

guide ready to start, and a present of a sheep awaiting me at my hut.

At ten o'clock we left Asmara, after a liberal distribution of backsheesh to all who had shown us any friendly disposition, and till three o'clock that afternoon we travelled without halting along the mountainous but familiar road to Ghinda, which, it will be remembered, is the most advanced position held by the Abyssinians in force. We were glad to learn that the principal chief at Ghinda was an old acquaintance of ours, a nephew of Ras Alula, by name Basha Desta, who had shown us more good will and civility on our outward march than we had experienced at the hands of any other Abyssinian. I therefore turned a little aside from the direct path on approaching this place, and rode up a precipitous hill to a collection of huts which, I learnt, constituted the head-quarters of this chief. Desta received me with effusive cordiality, insisted on my sitting down beside him on a raised dais at one end of his hut, while some rather pretty female slaves prepared a large bowl of bread and milk, liberally besprinkled with red pepper, for my refreshment. It would have been very bad manners on my part to have refused to eat with him, and moreover the twenty-five mile ride from Asmara had made me ready to cope with anything in the shape of food

and drink; I therefore thankfully grasped the wooden bowl, and proceeded to ladle its contents into my mouth with my fingers as best I could, while, at a signal from the chief, two slaves held up a large cotton robe before me so as to form a curtain, hiding me from the vulgar gaze of the other occupants of the hut until my hunger was satisfied. This rather graceful custom is common to the upper classes throughout Abyssinia. It is not thought right that servants and dependents or even inferior guests should be able to gaze on the face of their superior while engaged in the inelegant and plebeian action of feeding. Individually, I was on this occasion very glad to be screened off in this way, as my unaccustomed fingers were not very adept in conveying the peppery slosh from the bowl to my mouth, and my awkwardness would doubtless have excited the laughter of the spectators. As soon as I had had enough of the mess, I returned the bowl half-emptied to one of the slaves, who bowed, kissed the edge of my coat, and then set herself to work to finish off the contents, evidently much to her own satisfaction. In the course of conversation Basha Desta informed me that Ghinda was at that moment occupied by three thousand soldiers, all armed with Remington rifles, one thousand of whom were his own personal followers, but that

he had little authority over the remainder. He warned me at the same time that I might still have some difficulty in getting out of the country, as other chiefs knew that Ras Alula was very hostile to the English mission, and they might think they would be pleasing him by opposing our further progress. This increased my anxiety to rejoin my people without further delay, and I therefore lost no further time in taking leave of Basha Desta, giving him, as a parting present, my field-glasses, a pair of Messrs. Callaghan's best, which had done me invaluable service throughout the expedition. These were, in fact, the only things which it was in my power to give. The rapacity and shameless begging of chiefs and various influential people both in the King's camp and at Asmara, had relieved us of nearly all our small properties such as knives, pistols, revolvers, compasses, belts, cartridge-boxes, and even carbines.

On parting from Basha Desta, I scrambled down a rocky path to a grassy meadow below, where I found Beech and the caravan waiting for me, but somewhat uneasy at being surrounded by about one hundred armed Abyssinian soldiers, whose attitude announced that they were not disposed to let us proceed on our journey without some difficulty.

I first asked these soldiers what they wanted, and getting no answer, determined to put them to the test at once, and therefore ordered my men to march, Beech and I riding as usual at their head. We had not gone ten yards when it became evident that our troubles were by no means over yet; the Abyssinians posted themselves in a compact mass before us, and completely barred our further progress, while one of them who seemed to be a man of some consequence, said that we were not to go on, and that if we attempted to do so he was ordered to use force to stop us. I replied that I had seen Basha Desta, and that I had his permission to proceed on our journey. At this the soldiers laughed, and said that they had nothing to do with Basha Desta, that they belonged to another chief who had an equally strong and well-armed following at Ghinda, and who was a friend of Ras Alula. As it was evidently waste of time to argue with these soldiers, who were only obeying the orders of their chief, I told one of them to conduct me to his head-quarters, which, after a short consultation with his comrades, he consented to do.

On my arrival at his hut this chief received me very badly, not rising from his seat, and pretending to ignore my presence altogether. My suspicions as to the reasons for his action were

confirmed by seeing at his right hand a man whom I had noticed in Ras Alula's hut the previous evening, and who had evidently been sent on with secret instructions to prevent us from leaving the country, despite the King's orders to the contrary. Powerful and dreaded as was the name of Ras Alula, I knew that his authority, even in his own province, was inferior to that of King John, and I determined to try to carry off this matter with a high hand.

I opened the proceedings by walking up to the chief and standing in front of him, asking in a loud voice by whose authority he dared to prevent me from continuing my journey in peace, when I not only had the King's permission to leave the country, but was even carrying His Majesty's letters. I then produced the King's letters, and showed him the seals. This appeal to the authority of King John evidently rather frightened the chief, who merely answered that he could not let me go now, but that he would send a messenger to Asmara to ask Ras Alula what should be done with me. I replied, that unless he allowed me to continue my journey at once, I would remain at Ghinda, not only till Ras Alula's answer should be received, but until the arrival of the King himself, who, it was well known, was advancing with his army towards the frontier; King Johannis, I

said, should be the judge between us to decide whether his letters, on matters of the highest importance, were to be stopped in this way by a chief commanding only one thousand men. This threat produced an immediate effect; whether visions of floggings, degradation or decapitation floated before his eyes, I cannot tell, but his manner softened immediately, and when my interpreter had quietly slipped a rouleau of twenty dollars into his willing hand, he not only withdrew all his objections, but said that he would give me an escort to accompany us for four hours' march towards the Italian forts. This was by no means what I wanted, but I dared make no further remarks, and having left the hut as soon as possible, I rejoined my people, and once more ordered the advance.

This time we got along well for nearly a quarter of a mile, when once more we noticed soldiers rushing down the side of a hill, and planting themselves in the path before us with threatening gestures. Taking no notice of them I continued to advance, until several of them proceeded to load their rifles and to present them at our heads, upon which I thought it was time to halt.

It was with a feeling almost of despair, not unmixed with a good deal of bad temper at these apparently endless obstacles, that I asked the

cause of this fresh interruption; my men were in the deepest despondency, and I think we all began to fear that we should never get out of this accursed country. It appeared that our new assailants were the soldiers of yet another chief, and that their object in stopping us was to claim three of my Arabs, who, they said, were Abyssinians, and should not be allowed to leave the country until they had paid a fine of three hundred dollars. This was a disgraceful and barefaced attempt at extortion, and at any other time we should have resisted this ridiculous claim to the utmost, but now we were too sick at heart at these constant interruptions and difficulties to make a very determined opposition, and after a good deal of bargaining, argument, and threat, I settled this claim by an immediate payment of ten dollars to the leader of the party opposing us!

At last we were permitted to resume our march, but were soon overtaken by an unwelcome escort of thirty men of the Ghinda garrison, who informed us that they had orders to accompany us to a place about four hours further on the road to the Italian lines. Much as we should have liked to decline the honour of their company we did not dare to do so, but had to follow in their wake with a most uncomfortable feeling of wonder as to whether these men had orders to dispose of us quietly as

soon as we should be well within the limits of the turbulent lawless district lying between the Italian and Abyssinian armies, in which robbery and murder were at this time the rule rather than the exception, and which was infested by independent scouting parties of Abyssinians on the one hand, by prowling bands of the savage Arab tribes of the neighbourhood on the other, and occasionally by the Italian native irregulars from the camp at Massowah. It was a matter of complete indifference to us which of these different classes of rovers we should come across, should we unfortunately be destined to meet any one in this district. We knew that it would be a question almost of shooting at sight, and that none of these people would have either the time or the inclination to listen to any explanation.

Beech, Hutchisson, and I therefore rode with our rifles on our knees, loaded and ready for immediate action, while our vigilance was stimulated by noticing that when Ghinda had been left a few miles behind us, the Abyssinian soldiers of the escort all looked carefully to the loading of their rifles, while they marched along in single file with more than their ordinary silence, rapidity, and watchfulness. At eight o'clock in the evening we reached the wells of Sabarguma, where I called a halt for dinner and for a rest of three

hours for the sake of the mules, as I intended to march all that night.

We had already been marching, or rather mountain-climbing, ever since we left Asmara at ten o'clock in the morning, but the men were now in such perfect condition, and so great too was their anxiety to get clear of this uncomfortable and unsafe "No-man's-land" lying between the two opposing forces, that they all wished to push on, to keep constantly on the move, and to march if necessary all night and all day without a halt. I quite shared the feelings and the impatience of the men, and determined to test the powers of endurance of men and mules in a last forced march right into the Italian camp.

Hardly had we unloaded the animals and turned them loose to pick a scanty meal from the coarse grass, when down came rain in torrents, extinguishing the fire which had just been lighted, and converting the native bread which was to form our dinner into a sodden mass, which could be conveyed to our mouths by a spoon with much more facility than by our fingers. Hutchisson's noble efforts to make us some hot tea were unavailing against the pitiless storm, and our dinner that night in the pitch darkness was a comfortless one. Equally futile were any attempts to get a little rest, so we wandered about in the

little plain, impatiently looking at our watches, and eventually cutting short the three hours rest promised to the mules, and readjusting the loads at half-past ten.

Another hour's silent march in the darkness, and then, to our relief, the chief of the escort said that he must now return. It was with a feeling of thankfulness that we saw these men turn round, after receiving a liberal present of dollars, and begin to retrace their steps to Ghinda.

We now felt that we had at last severed all connection with Abyssinia, and that we had no longer anything to fear but a meeting with some prowling band of robbers, or with irregular scouting parties.

For the first time since the expedition had started, I now gave arms to my men, distributing among them a quantity of spears and swords, which we had bought as "curios" at various times in the country. This somewhat lessened the feeling of nervousness which the night-march with empty stomachs was evidently causing to spread among them; and then, leaving Hutchisson to ride in the rear and to keep the party together, Beech and I dismounted and walked with loaded rifles at some little distance ahead of the party. Luckily the rain soon ceased, the moon came out, and the path was not difficult to see.

Silently we crept along under the fitful moonlight. All conversation among the men was forbidden, and not a sound was heard but the occasional clatter of a mule's hoof among the loose stones of the path, or a muttered, guttural objurgation in Arabic directed against a lazy mule or a badly balanced and slipping pack. Like a long snake the caravan wound along the narrow path, the rays of the tropical moon being caught and reflected by the burnished blades of spears and swords as by the scales of some gigantic saurian. One or two of the men wounded their naked feet against sharp rocks in the darkness; they were at once mounted on the mules usually ridden by Beech and myself. Hour after hour we marched swiftly and silently forward, straining our eyes and ears at every step. Midnight passed, then one o'clock, and again the sky began to be overcast with black clouds, making it difficult to distinguish the narrow path from the innumerable torrent-beds which crossed it at every angle.

Towards three o'clock in the morning a short gleam of moonlight enabled us to recognize the outlines of the hills above Sahati. This satisfied us that we were on the right path; but now we redoubled our precautions, as it was extremely probable that we should find a party of some kind, probably enemies, encamped for the night in this

place, near the only water in the district. Beech and I therefore advanced cautiously several hundred yards ahead of the caravan, peering into the rocks and bushes on every side, and eventually creeping into the open space near the water, which constitutes the only suitable camping ground, with as much care as is exercised by a successful burglar as he approaches the plate-room. Somewhat to our surprise, and greatly to our relief, we found neither Italian troops, Bashi-Bazouks, Arab robbers, nor Abyssinian scouts in this place; it was absolutely deserted.

We were now only about twelve miles from the Italian camp, and so, not wishing to disturb the head-quarter staff at too early an hour, and partly also because I feared that in the darkness a zealous Italian sentry might mistake us for an Abyssinian party, I ordered another halt for two hours. Throwing ourselves on the swampy ground, we were all asleep in a few minutes, though not before Beech, with a praiseworthy wish to present a creditable appearance on arrival in the Italian camp, had had a bath in the deep but stagnant pool; a noble example which I had neither the energy nor the moral courage to follow, my only answer to his encouragement being an indistinct sound, half grunt and half snore, as I stretched myself more comfortably in the muddy swamp. A little before

daybreak we were again on the march, and at ten minutes to seven on Christmas morning we rode into the Italian lines, to the open-mouthed astonishment of the field-officer of the day, whom we met as he was going his rounds.

After receiving a most kind and cordial welcome from the general commanding the most advanced force, we rode on to Monkullu, where we were soon established in a comfortable hut and enjoying the eager hospitality of our dear old friend, Colonel Avvogadro.

I think that both we and the men felt a little thrill of pardonable pride as we reflected that less than twenty-two hours had elapsed since we had taken leave of Ras Alula, about sixty miles off at Asmara, beyond the black forbidding range of mountains which bounded the western horizon.

A few telegrams announcing our safe return and reporting the political results of the mission were soon despatched, and then, with a feeling almost of sadness, I summoned before me for the last time the men who had travelled with us for so many hundred miles, and who had been our companions in so many awkward and embarrassing situations.

One by one they came forward in answer to their names to receive their money and to say a good-bye to Beech and myself, and I am not

ashamed to confess that as one after another they spontaneously seized and kissed my hands, coat, or any part of my clothing that they could reach, I felt that I was parting with good friends, wild Arabs though they were, whose genuine emotion thus expressed was far more affecting than would be the most *empressé* greeting of European civilization. Glad as we all were to return to comfort and safety, we were honestly sorry to sever all connection with one another. I firmly believe that those men would, without hesitation, have followed Beech and myself through any dangers or into the most distant countries, and would have given implicit obedience even in the most trying circumstances.

To test the extent of their confidence in us I said to them that, though I was going away now, it was possible that I might be back again very soon, and that I might wish to undertake another journey into the heart of Abyssinia; I would take nobody with me who did not wish to come,—would any of them, I asked, volunteer for such another journey with me? Unanimously they shouted that they would all come, while the three older ones, namely, the "Grand Old Man," the "Chief Butcher," and the "Chief Baker," made another plunge and a grab at my hand and recommenced the kissing process with much energy,

evidently forgiving or forgetting the fact that during the last two months Beech and I had on various occasions hurled at their dense but devoted heads every term of abuse, every expletive, and every forcible expression of which we were masters, whether in English or Arabic. However, the best of friends must part, and after a final gurgle, half sob half laugh, from the G. O. M., I dismissed them to their homes, having had the satisfaction of obtaining a promise of employment for them from the Italian military authorities, the man who accompanied Beech on his adventurous solitary ride being of course recommended for especial favours.

For two days we remained in the Italian camp, meeting with the greatest kindness on all sides from the Italian officers, and enjoying the cordial hospitality of General San Marzano, and of our old friend Colonel Avvogadro, till on the evening of the 27th we embarked on board the Italian ship-of-war *Rapido*, which sailed that night for Suez, where we landed ourselves and the little baggage yet remaining to us, on the evening of the last day of 1887.

Thus ended the English Mission to King Johannis of Abyssinia. Into the political effect or the results achieved by that mission, I do not

propose to enter. They must be judged by the light of subsequent events. I will only point out that no collision has as yet taken place between the Abyssinian and Italian armies, and, in common fairness both to ourselves and to those who sent us, I may be allowed to place on record my conviction that had her Majesty's Government not made this effort to bring about the establishment of cordial relations between these two countries, not only would the neighbourhood of Massowah have been the scene of active hostilities, but many hundreds of valuable lives, both European and Abyssinian, would have been wasted in a war, in which even a signal victory could bring but little practical advantage to either of the combatants. The ultimate result of such a war between a civilized and a semi-barbarous nation cannot of course be doubted, but it is to be feared that victory would have been bought at the price of much blood and terrible hardships on both sides.

The merits of the quarrel do not enter into the scope of this narrative, but it is a matter for congratulation that up to the present moment no further bloodshed has taken place, and no one who has once seen the nature of the gorges, ravines, and mountain passes near the Abyssinian frontier, can doubt for a moment that any advance by a civilized army in the face of the hostile Abyssinian

hordes, would be accomplished at the price of a fearful loss of life on both sides.

No one who has had any acquaintance with the Abyssinians can deny their desperate bravery; thieves and liars, brutal, savage, and untrustworthy they are by nature, but these evil national characteristics are to a great extent redeemed by the possession of unbounded courage, by a disregard of death, and by a national pride which leads them to look down with genuine contempt on every human being who has not had the good fortune to be born an Abyssinian.

It may be thought that we ourselves had but little cause to love the Abyssinians as a race; but although no doubt we were at times in somewhat difficult situations, and subjected to certain inconveniences during our journey, yet we met with many little acts of genuine hospitality and kindness in the villages through which we passed, and I do not think that there was one of our party who would not be glad to have another chance of making a visit to the rich valleys and towering mountains which are inhabited by the extraordinarily handsome, active, and chivalrous race of mountaineers at present ruled over by Johannis, King of the Kings of Ethiopia.

POSTSCRIPTUM.

Position of the Abyssinian armies—King John descends into the plains—Neither side will attack—King John and his army retreat—Death of the heir to the throne—Situation on the western frontier—Attack of the dervishes—Death of King John—Civil war—Menelek and Italian Protectorate—Colony of Erythrea—Conclusion.

THIS story would scarcely be complete did I not add a brief summary of the remarkable changes which have taken place in Abyssinia since the return of the last English Mission. Until that time the Italians on the Red Sea Coast had been buying their experience, and struggling, with great pluck and determination, against a disheartening run of ill-luck. But from the moment when, dusty, lean and almost copper-coloured, we rode into the foot of Monkullu, the god of chances appears to have brought all his forces into the field on the side of the Italian Government. It will be remembered that we had left King John and Ras Michael, with their unwieldy mass of fighting-men, slaves, and camp-followers, hurrying up from the south

towards the north-eastern frontier. We had also learnt that the king's only son and heir, Ras Aria Selassie, was converging towards the same point with a still more numerous rabble collected in the central and western provinces. Besides these forces, two large armies, those of Ras Alula and Ras Hogos, had been quartered in the neighbourhood of Asmara and Keren for many months, and had already taxed to the utmost the limited resources of the somewhat poverty-stricken province of the frontier. In an official report, written on board ship during our return journey to Suez, I called attention to this state of things, and ventured to prophecy that "If the proposed concentration "of the Abyssinian forces in the neighbourhood of "Asmara is carried out, the king will be forced to "make up his mind quickly to one of two alter- "natives: either a very large proportion of his "forces must retire again within a few days to "more fertile and more distant provinces in the "interior, or else he must at once descend towards "the Italian positions in the hope of finishing "the campaign by one determined and general "attack."*

Shortly after we left the country, King John and his army appeared on the mountains in the

* See Appendix, pp. 247, 248 (*n.*). Report to Sir E. Baring, January 1, 1888.

neighbourhood of Ghinda, with his base at Asmara. He descended into the plains near Sahati, and tried by every means in his power to tempt the Italian troops to come out and fight him in the open. The Italian general, however, was naturally disinclined to throw away the advantages of his position in order to meet the Abyssinians in a proportion of one to twenty; and, on his side, did his utmost to lure the Abyssinians on to make an attack on his fortified camps and outposts. Each waited for the other to begin. It was a case of

> "Lord Chatham, with his sword drawn
> Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;
> Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em
> Was waiting for the Earl of Chatham."

About a fortnight elapsed while both sides were watching each other in this way, without anything taking place of a more deadly nature than the exchange of a few distant shots between scouting parties. John absolutely declined to attack the forts. Ras Alula's unsuccessful attack on Sahati in the previous spring had taught the Abyssinians that they had no chance of success against the ditches and walls, the heavy artillery and the machine guns, the mines and the wire-entanglements, and the withering rifle-fire of the European troops fighting from behind a parapet in a strong natural position. Then took place the very move-

ment foretold in my official report. King John awoke to the fact that his army was starving. This vast concourse of men had "eaten up" the whole neighbouring country; with no supplies on the spot, and no organized commissariat, John found himself compelled to withdraw his forces to the more fertile districts around Adowa, leaving the Italians unmolested.

About this time a far more disastrous blow was dealt by fate at the fortunes of the Abyssinian monarchy. The startling news was received that the king's only son, Ras Aria Selassie, on whom depended all hopes for a peaceful continuance of the line of the Negoos, had suddenly died, and in a manner which left little room for doubt that he had been poisoned! The homogeneity of Abyssinia now rested solely on the person of King John. So long as he lived Abyssinia would be unanimous, loyal, and strong; but after the removal of the only rightful heir to the throne, it was easy to see that at the very moment of his death would arise half a dozen pretenders to the crown, each great chief aspiring to the sovereignty, and basing his claims solely on the time-honoured principle that "Might is Right."

While these elements of discord were brewing, the final tragedy took place which destroyed, probably for ever, the independence which the

descendants of the Queen of Sheba had successfully guarded for so many centuries.

In order to understand this final act of the drama, it is necessary to leave the Italians for a moment, and to turn our attention to another war which was being waged at the same time on the western frontiers of Abyssinia.

Not long before the despatch of the English Mission to Abyssinia, the eyes of the whole civilized world had been fixed on a distant point in the Soudan, where two gallant Englishmen, General Gordon and Colonel Stewart, were holding the fortress of Khartum against the fanatical, yelling hordes of the Mahdi. The efforts made—too late—by the English Government for their relief, the desperate toil of the long journey up the Nile, the gallant dash across the Bayuda desert by Sir Herbert Stewart and the camel corps, are still fresh in the mind of every Englishman. When it was known that the expedition had failed in its object, that the battles of Abu-Klea and Gubat had been fought in vain, and that the life-blood of Sir Herbert Stewart and of so many of his heroic companions had been poured out on the plain before Metemmeh to no purpose, the English troops returned home again by the way they came, leaving the Mahdi and his followers in undisputed possession of Khartum and all the

surrounding country. All this took place before the events in the neighbourhood of Massowah, which led to the despatch of my mission; but, meanwhile, the Mahdi, either believing honestly in the divinity of his self-imposed task, or simply feeling that it was absolutely necessary for his own existence to continue his career of war, and to keep his fanatical soldiers constantly employed, turned his attention to the Christian country which was threatening his right flank. The white-faced Christians, he proclaimed, had evacuated the Soudan, and had retired beyond the frontiers of distant Egypt; but close at hand were a nation of dark-skinned Christians who must be made to acknowledge the Divine power of the Prophet, or be swept from the face of the earth.

With this object, therefore, an immense army of dervishes was despatched to the western frontier of Abyssinia, and quartered on the district of Galabat. For many months no operations of any importance took place; but at length the arrival of fresh commanders, fresh troops, and more stringent orders from the Mahdi, stimulated the dervishes to renewed efforts, and they succeeded in driving back the Abyssinian army opposed to them.

This happened just after King John and his army had found themselves compelled, by scar[illegible]

of food, to retire from the neighbourhood of the Italian outposts, and while he was casting about for some means of giving employment to his soldiers, lest they should, from want of a common enemy, begin to turn against each other. Here was his opportunity! Without delay he placed himself at the head of a part of his army, and hurried off to reinforce his troops, who were retiring before the dervish invaders. Near the western frontier the opposing armies met. The Mahdists were driven back before the Abyssinians, who, flushed with success, continued to force the Soudanese in the direction of Metemmeh.* The fiercely contested battle appeared to be over, and victory seemed to be assured to the Christian warriors, when it became known that King John was desperately wounded by a dervish bullet! Losing all heart, the Abyssinians threw away the victory which was within their grasp, and hastily retreated into their own country with their dying king. The following morning the news was carried forth that Johannis, Negoosa Negust, King of the Kings of Ethiopia, King of Sion, was dead!

The Abyssinian loss in this battle and in the

* This Metemmeh must not be confused with the town of the same name in front of which Sir Herbert Stewart received his death-wound. That one is on the Nile, this one in Galabat Province.

subsequent retreat was said to have been terrible. The dervishes pressed on, and even forced their way into Goudar, the ancient capital of Abyssinia, and still the head-quarters of the Abyssinian priesthood. Here they are said to have desecrated some of the churches, but this insult appears to have once more stimulated the Abyssinians into united action, and the Mahdists were compelled to retire across the frontier.

The death of King John was the signal for the outbreak of a general civil war. The Italians at Massowah were forgotten; the succession to the throne was at once claimed by three or four powerful rivals, and every chieftain attached himself and his fortunes to the candidate to whom he was most attracted by preference or interest.

The most important of the rival claimants to the throne was Menelek, king of Shoa, an extensive country adjoining the southern borders of Abyssinia proper. Although a vassal of King John, and paying periodically a heavy tribute, Menelek had for a long time been in the pay of the Italian Government. Italy therefore officially supported his candidature, and supplied him liberally with rifles, ammunition, money, and with European advisers. Thus strengthened, Menelek, in spite of his reputation for personal cowardice, advanced northward into Abyssinia, where, after a

couple of years of desultory fighting and skirmishing, promising and bribing, he has had the satisfaction of seeing the more dangerous of his rivals disappear from the scene, and their factions gradually die of exhaustion. He has now succeeded in getting his authority nominally acknowledged by rather more than one half of the country.

Meanwhile the Italian forces were far from idle. Taking advantage of the internal dissensions of the Abyssinians, they were able to advance unopposed to Ghinda, and thence to Asmara, where they have now established a military post, from which their scouting parties have pushed still further into the country. An Italian Protectorate over the whole of Abyssinia has been officially proclaimed, accepted by Menelek, and notified, in accordance with the conditions of the Berlin Act, to the Powers of Europe, who have all signified their acquiescence.

Outside Abyssinia proper a good deal of progress has been made in the work of civilization and colonization. A large tract of country running straight inland from Massowah has been declared an Italian Crown Colony, and is now known, in Italy at least, as the Colony of Erythrea. Massowah itself, which, under the successive rule of the Turks and the Egyptians,

consisted of a miserable collection of wooden huts and mud hovels, impregnated with filth and disease, a fitting harbour of refuge for all the scum of the Soudan, is now a well-built, clean, and well-organized village, where poverty is scarce and crime almost unknown. From Massowah a railway now runs past Monkullu to Sahati, and then on to Ailet and towards Keren, and all through this district any old woman with her umbrella could now travel with greater confidence and safety than would have been possible for a party of a hundred well-armed men when we traversed this road three years ago.

Among other changes, I should not forget to mention that the horrors and dangers of the old mountain-path to Asmara, which so severely tried our strength and our tempers at the outset of our journey, have passed away for ever, their place being taken by a wide and well-constructed road, fit for the passage of cavalry and artillery. From Asmara itself the shadow of Ras Alula has disappeared; men no longer tremble at his name, and the large hut on its lofty earthen pyramid from which he surveyed the plateau as an eagle from its eyrie, and from which passed out so many culprits doomed to flogging, to amputation, or to death, is now perchance the residence of an Italian officer.

Thus has ended the independence of Abyssinia. With the death of King Johannis died also that autonomy which had been the pride of this race for many centuries. Although the benefits of a civilized Protectorate are very evident, it is, I confess, with a feeling almost of sadness that I reflect that since I said farewell to Johannis at Afgol, on December 16, 1887, no other European can ever grasp the hand of an Independent Emperor of Ethiopia.

The question of the wisdom or unwisdom of the whole of the colonial policy of Italy on the western shores of the Red Sea is not one which it behoves me to discuss. In assuming the Protectorate of the whole of Abyssinia, Italy has undertaken a task of great difficulty and responsibility, in the performance of which she may find obstacles placed in her way by nations of Africa and by nations of Europe; but meanwhile we in England can only wish her every success in developing the immense natural resources of that beautiful, fascinating, but wild and unruly country.

APPENDIX.

The following papers have already been published in a Parliamentary blue-book:

"EXTRACT FROM A REPORT RESPECTING THE FORCES OF ABYSSINIA.

"*Mr. Portal to Sir E. Baring.*

"*Cairo, January 1st*, 1888.

"Sir,

"In my despatch of this day's date I mentioned that several great armies were now on their way from the interior to the north-eastern frontier of Abyssinia. I have now the honour to inclose herewith a memorandum, giving the substance of information gathered either from personal observation or from hearsay respecting the actual distribution of the forces of the Abyssinian Empire. The most striking feature about those armies with which I came into personal contact was the very large number of persons on the march. For instance, in Ras Michael's camp there cannot

have been less than 50,000 or 60,000 persons, but as the army is accompanied by great numbers of slaves, cattle drivers, and other non-combatants, I have estimated his army at about 25,000 fighting men. This Ras Michael is an old man, with a great reputation as a soldier; he was originally a Mussulman, and was called Mohamed Ali, but some years ago renounced his religion in favour of Christianity, the King himself being his sponsor. It was probably this circumstance which led to his being erroneously described by Sir W. Hewett as the adopted son of the King. (Admiral Sir W. Hewett to Admiralty, June 22nd, 1884.) Ras Michael's army consists almost exclusively of Galla cavalry from the wild uncivilized tribes of the south, interspersed with a good many negroes from the Soudan. I had several opportunities of studying this force, as on one occasion we rode through Ras Michael's camp, on another his army and camp followers marched past us at a distance of less than half-a-mile, and later still Major Beech rode through the middle of the army while on the march, when he was taking a letter from me to the King.

The only other force which I saw personally was that accompanying the Negoos himself, which I was told consisted only of his guards, the main body of the army having gone by another route

with His Majesty's son, Ras Aria Selassie. These guards, some 5000 men, are nearly all armed with rifles, and are accompanied by a large number of slaves and non-combatants in the proportion of nearly three to one, but many of the slaves and dependents are armed with spears, shields, and swords, and might very possibly take some part in active hostilities with their masters. The men composing these armies are as a rule in the prime of life and remarkably active; by nature they are expert mountaineers, and they are constantly in the habit of practising with their firearms at marks or at wild animals, but are not, I should say, particularly good marksmen. By far the larger proportion of the fire-arms are Remington rifles and carbines, but there are a good many old muskets and antiquated weapons of every kind to be seen in the various armies. Ammunition appears to be cheap and plentiful, and there exists at Adowa an establishment where old cartridge cases can be recapped and reloaded, though the Abyssinians have not yet the power of making new cartridges. Every soldier buys his own ammunition, and is therefore careful to keep the old cases. Powder is also manufactured to a great extent at Adowa, but it is not of a very high quality.

The armies on the march are supplied with provisions as far as possible by the villages in the

districts through which they pass, foraging parties going many miles from the road and bringing back villagers laden with grain, grass, and flour, and driving sheep and cattle before them. It is almost needless to say that no payment is given for these supplies. Besides this, every soldier brings with him from his own village a skin full of flour, and probably some other provisions to support him through the campaign. All the soldiers I saw in the armies on the march appeared always to have plenty to eat, but the slaves, both male and female, were often more than half starved.

In spite, however, of these precautions, it is not difficult to see that the vast bodies of men now moving towards the frontier will not be able to support themselves in that district for more than a very limited number of days. The Province of Asmara is mountainous and of an exceptionally poor soil, and the villages are already greatly impoverished by the exactions made upon them by the armies of Ras Alula and Ras Hogoos, both of which have been for several months quartered on this district.

If, therefore, the proposed concentration of the Abyssinian forces in the neighbourhood of Asmara is carried out, the King will be forced to make up his mind quickly to one of two alternatives: either a very large proportion of his forces

must retire again within a few days to more fertile and more distant provinces in the interior, or else he must at once descend towards the Italian positions in the hope of finishing the campaign by one determined and general attack.

"I have, etc.,

(Signed) "G. H. PORTAL."

Inclosure.

MEMORANDUM.

"*Estimate of the Numbers and Distribution of the Abyssinian Forces at present in the Field.*

"For the sake of convenience, the Abyssinian forces in the field at the time when I left the King's camp at Chelikot, *i.e.* the 16th of December, may be divided into three classes:—

"(A.) Those already quartered on the frontier and watching the Italians;

"(B.) Those advancing towards Gura and Asmara by the straight road from the south *viâ* Ashangi Lake and Adegrat; in other words, the road followed by the English army under Lord Napier in 1868; and

"(C.) Those advancing from the west and south-west *viâ* Semen and Adowa.

"(A.) On the frontier already are:—

"1. Ras Alula, the Governor of the district of Asmara. His army consists of about 16,000 men, nearly all armed with Remington rifles and carbines; but it was explained to me that of his army about one-third are not really the Ras's own men, but are soldiers lent to him by the King, and whom his Majesty could recall at any moment.

"For the greater part of the summer and autumn the army of Ras Alula was massed at Keren, but it is now distributed among several villages throughout the district.

"In this army are included (1) the garrison of Ghinda, 3000 men, all with Remington rifles, and (2) the garrisons of Ailet and a few outlying frontier villages.

"At Ailet there are not more than 200 riflemen.

"2. Ras Hogoos. His army is larger than Ras Alula's, and numbers probably 20,000 men, most of them with fire-arms. They are all encamped at Keren. The Ras Hogoos himself was with Ras Alula at Asmara while I was there.

"(B.) Advancing *viâ* Ashangi and Adegrat:—

"1. His Majesty the King and his guards, about 5000 men, with a large number of partly-armed slaves, camp-followers, and women. They advance at the rate of about ten miles a day, but do not march more than four or five days a week as a

rule. These guards are all armed with Remingtons, Sniders, muskets, or fire-arms of some kind, including a certain number of Wetterly rifles taken from the Italians at Dogali.

"The main body of the King's army is with Ras Aria Selassie, the King's son.

"2. Ras Michael, with some 25,000 Galla cavalry, the great majority armed only with spears, swords, and shields. These men are wild and unruly, and commit many acts of barbarity and ruffianism in passing through the country. A very large number of them have a mule as well as a horse.

"This army is advancing by the same road as the King, but was usually about one day's march in advance of the Negoos. On the 19th December, Ras Michael's army had arrived at Agula.

"3. Ras Hailoo Mariam, Governor of the Province of Wadela. His army I did not see personally; it was described to me as being 'larger than Ras Alula's.' He was expected to come into the King's camp with his army the day that I left his Majesty, *i.e.* the 16th of December.

"Ras Hailoo Mariam is a nephew of the Negoos.

"4. Dejat Meshesha, another nephew of the King, was expected to arrive in the King's camp

with a force of about 5000 men the day that I left it.

"5. King Menelek of Shoa, with an army said to be larger than King John's own forces, is advancing rapidly northwards. King John knows well that Menelek has been on good terms with Italy, but has ordered him to come with his army, threatening to destroy him and his country should he not arrive in time. Although Menelek's army is so large, neither he himself nor his forces appear to be thought very highly of by the soldiers of Tigré or Amhara. On the 16th of December Menelek was said to be already past Yeju, and close to Ashangi Lake, and marching rapidly. As to this army, however, no trustworthy evidence was obtainable.

"(C.) The third and greatest column is advancing from Dobra Tabor and the districts near Lake Tsana *viâ* Semen and Adowa towards the frontier. This column includes:—

"1. The main body of the King's army, under the command of His Majesty's son, Ras Aria Selassie. This is the largest army in Abyssinia (except that of Menelek), and may, I think, be estimated at nearly 40,000 combatants, of whom probably two-thirds have firearms of some kind. They had passed Semen, and were near Adowa in the middle of December.

"2. Wakshem Gabru, the most powerful chief in the Empire, Governor of the Province Begemeder —in which is Dobra Tabor, the King's usual residence. His large army is with that of the King under Ras Aria Selassie, advancing by Semen and Adowa.

"I may here explain that in Abyssinia there are only two men who may bear the title of Wakshem. They are named respectively Wakshem Gabru and Wakshem Boru. These men are superior to any Ras, and when at Court always sit with the King and eat at his table, an honour not granted to any Ras or Dejat.

"3. Wakshem Boru is, I believe, also advancing by the same route, but I could obtain no definite information as to the whereabouts of his army.

"4. Dejat Tesemma, with an army said to be twice the size of that of Ras Alula, is advancing with Ras Aria Selassie by the same route.

"There is one other, and an important army, on the march in Abyssinia, that of Negoos Tekla Haimanot, King of Gojam; but this force, instead of coming to the north-eastern is going to the western frontier, to Metemmeh, where he has been sent to undertake a campaign against the dervishes. King Tekla Haimanot has a great reputation as a soldier, and his men are said to be valuable and dashing soldiers; moreover, his

allegiance to King Johannis is, I am informed, unwilling. It is therefore probable that King Johannis hesitated to trust Tekla Haimanot in a campaign against Italy, and was still more unwilling to leave him to rest in peace in Gojam, when nearly all the remaining forces of Abyssinia were being concentrated in the north, and that it is for this reason that a campaign is to be opened against the Soudanese near Metemmeh.

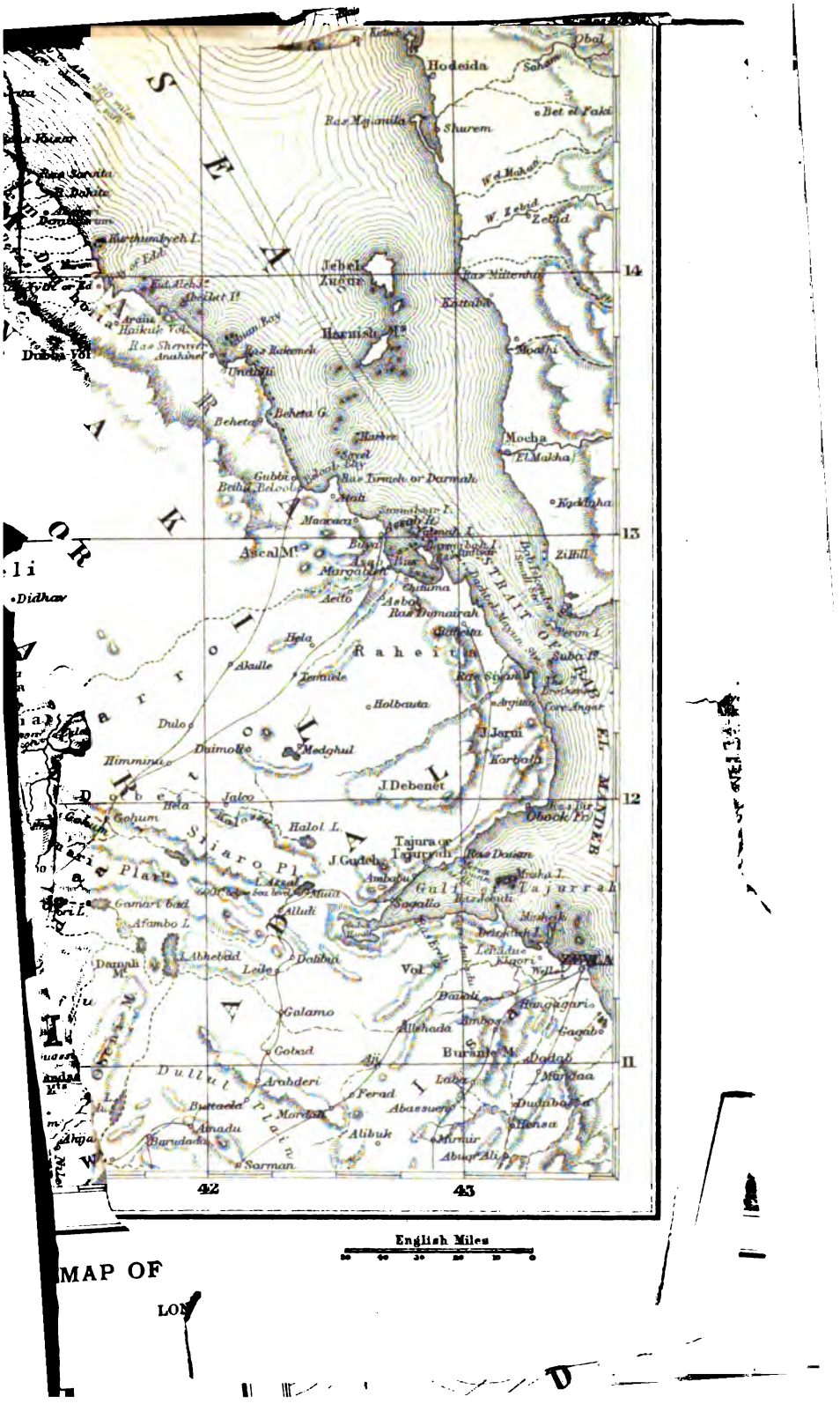
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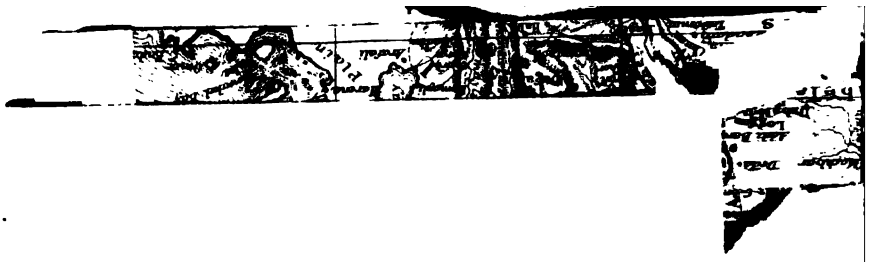
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