Henty George Alfred

The March to Magdala

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PREFACE

In submitting to the public in a collected form the Letters which have already appeared in the daily press, a Special Correspondent has the option of one of two courses. The one course is, to publish the Letters as nearly as possible as they originally stood, as a journal written from day to day, and from week to week; the other, to recast the whole, to rewrite the Letters, and to give a continuous narrative of the expedition as of a past event. The second of these courses has the advantage of unity of purpose; it will contain fewer errors, fewer mistaken predictions of the probable course of events, and, above all, less of the repetitions which must unavoidably occur in a series of letters. The style, too, will naturally be far smoother and more polished than in the original letters, written as they usually were in haste and under circumstances of great difficulty. But, on the other hand, such a narrative would lose much of the freshness which original letters possess, and it would be deficient in that interest which a knowledge of the hopes and fears, the doubts and anticipations, the plans destined to be frustrated, and the opinions constantly varying with the course of events, must give

to a narrative. The present tense too is far more pleasant and less monotonous than the preterite. I have therefore determined, in submitting my Letters for republication, to adhere as closely as possible to the original form and matter; not hesitating, however, to make many additions, alterations, and excisions, where subsequent information or the course of events have proved my opinions or conclusions to have been erroneous.

The present work does not profess to be a scientific record of the expedition. It gives neither statistics, general orders, nor official documents. This will no doubt be hereafter done by some officer far better qualified for the task than I can be. It is merely the plain narrative of a looker-on, who accompanied the expedition from the commencement of December 1867, when affairs at Zulla were at their worst, to the closing scene at Magdala. At the same time, I have not shrunk from stating my own opinions as to the course of events. A great disaster like that of the complete break-down of the Transport-train at Zulla cannot occur without grievous blame attaching to somebody. I conceive it to be one of the first duties of a correspondent to state fearlessly the persons and the causes which, in his opinion, have brought on a great public disaster. Unpleasant, therefore, though it be to find fault, I have not hesitated to assign the blame where I consider it was due. This I did in the very first letter I wrote from Zulla after landing, before I had gone up to Senafe; and the opinion I then expressed, I now, after months have elapsed, and after hearing the matter discussed in every light, do not hesitate

to reaffirm.

With the exceptions I have alluded to, the Letters are the same in form and substance as when they appeared in the columns of the *Standard*; and although, for the reasons I have given, I am convinced that it is the wisest course to leave them so, yet, remembering as I do the circumstances of haste, fatigue, and difficulty under which they were written, I cannot but feel extreme diffidence in submitting them to the public "with all their errors on their head."

G. A. H.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

The Abyssinian expedition has, from the time it was first determined upon, attracted an amount of attention, not only in Great Britain but throughout the civilised world, altogether disproportionate to the strength of the army employed, or to the extent of the interests at stake. The total force engaged was under, rather than over, 10,000 men; not one-fifth the strength of an army which we might ourselves put into the field for a campaign in India; scarcely a fiftieth of the force at the command of either of the great Continental Powers. It was clearly not the magnitude of the expedition, then, which attracted attention: it was the extraordinary and novel circumstances under which it was undertaken; the almost insurmountable difficulties to be overcome; the unknown nature of the country to be traversed, and the romantic disinterestedness of the motives which led England to embark upon it, which has rendered it one of the most interesting and notable campaigns ever undertaken. Since the expedition of Pizarro and Cortes in the middle ages, no such novel and hazardous expedition is on record. The country itself was like that of the far-famed Prester John – everything about it smacked of the marvellous. It was more mountainous, more inaccessible, more war-loving, more wild than any other country in the world. The king with whom we waged war was a potentate who by his military talents had

raised himself from a comparatively obscure position to the sovereignty of all Abyssinia: he was enlightened beyond his race; patronised strangers, encouraged manufactures, endeavoured in every way to improve the condition of his country, and was yet a bloodthirsty tyrant. The people themselves were a strange race, far more civilised than other African nations, Christians in the midst of a Mahometan and Pagan continent, a mixture of many races – African, Greek, Arab, and Jew. Altogether it was a land of romance. Nor had travellers done much to enlighten us as to the country. Some had described it as fertile in the extreme; others had spoken of it as a land of mountain and defile, where no sustenance could be hoped for for the army. They had united only in prophesying evil things – hunger and thirst, inaccessible mountain and pathless wastes, fever, cholera, small-pox, dysentery, the tetse-fly, tapeworm, and guinea-worm. We were to be consumed with fire; we were to be annihilated with stones rolled upon us when in ravines; we were to be cut off in detail upon our marches; we were to be harassed to death by repeated night and day attacks. All these and many other prophecies were freely uttered, and it really appeared as if our expedition was to partake strongly of the nature of a forlorn-hope. The friends of officers and men said good-bye to them as if they were going to certain death, and insurance-offices doubled and trebled the premium upon their lives. All this assisted to raise the public interest and anxiety to the highest point. It is needless now to say that almost the whole of the adverse predictions

were entirely falsified, and that we have met with no difficulties whatever beyond mountain and ravine, the want of transport, and the scarcity of food.

Generally as the subject is known, it is yet necessary, before commencing the history of the campaign, to say a few words upon the events which preceded and caused it; and as the subject has been exhausted by Dr. Beke in his able work on the Abyssinian captives, I cannot do better than preface my story with a brief epitome of the facts recited in his volume. Dr. Beke was well-acquainted with Mr. Plowden, our late Consul there, and knew thoroughly the whole of the events which led to the captivity of the English party, and he was in intimate communication with their friends here. His statements are supported by numerous official documents; and this volume, in which he now sets forth the state of the case, may be apparently received with confidence as reliable in every particular.

The kingdom of Abyssinia is of extreme antiquity, and was once a great and flourishing empire. It has been ruled by a succession of monarchs claiming direct descent from Menilek, the son of King Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. For the last century the legitimate monarch has had very little power, the real authority being in the hands of the most powerful of the chiefs of the various tribes composing the empire, and who, as in turns they became dominant, assumed the title of ras or vizier, keeping the puppet emperor in a state of honourable captivity, administering affairs and carrying on wars without

the slightest reference to his wishes and opinions. The kingdom of Abyssinia consists of an immense elevated plateau or table-land, of great fertility, and possessing a temperate and agreeable climate. At its north-eastern extremity it approaches very nearly to the sea, the port of Massowah at that point being its natural outlet. Towards the south the table-land trends away from the sea, being separated from it by a wide low-lying plain, inhabited by Mahometan tribes. The religion of the natives of Abyssinia itself has been from very early times Christian, and they possess a native version of the Scriptures which dates from the fourth century of the Christian era. The laws of this singular people are, like our own, founded upon the code of Justinian. The various tribes which form the empire, although acknowledging the supremacy of the emperor, are yet virtually independent, paying a mere nominal tribute, and making war upon and deposing him whenever they feel strong enough to do so. These tribes are very numerous, but the principal may be considered to be those inhabiting Tigre, which is the province nearest to Massowah, and therefore commanding the avenues of approach to the interior; Amhara, the capital, lying to the south of Tigre, Lasta in the centre, and Shoa, Godjam, and Kwara to the west. Of these Tigre is the representative of the ancient kingdom. It is almost entirely surrounded by the river Takkazye, which separates it from the rest of the empire; and its inhabitants speak the language of the ancient Ethiopic, in which is the early version of the Bible. Since the middle of the sixteenth century the Turks

have claimed the entire seaboard, but have only occupied the Sawakin and Massowah.

In the year 1810 the English Government, alarmed at the attempts of the French to obtain a footing in Egypt, dispatched Mr. Salt, afterwards Consul-General in Egypt, to Abyssinia, to open friendly relations with that power; and that gentleman, being unable to penetrate beyond Tigre, the chief of which country was at the time the ras, or most powerful chief in the kingdom, delivered the letter from King George, and the accompanying presents, to that personage. Almost simultaneously, however, the power of the French in the Indian Ocean was annihilated, and a few years afterwards the fall of Napoleon relieving the British Government of all fear of French aggression in the East, the diplomatic relations between England and Tigre came to an end. A constant jealousy and struggle, however, appears to have been maintained between the Protestant and Roman Catholic missions, which were alternately fostered and expelled by the various sovereigns of the country.

In 1847 a British consulate was established, Mr. Plowden being selected for the post. He unfortunately committed the great error of entering into friendly relations with the potentate of Amhara, in place of the independent chief of Tigre, who, possessing the only outlet of communication, rendered an alliance with Amhara completely nugatory to both parties. Mr. Plowden himself, when too late, seems to have discovered that he had committed an error, and wrote to the Earl of Clarendon, who

was then Foreign Secretary, that he feared that little commercial advantage could be obtained. His lordship replied that, having made the treaty and established the consulate, her Majesty's Government were reluctant to renounce all hope of benefit, and begged him to suggest some plan of establishing himself at Massowah or some other seaport, and of keeping up a communication with the interior.

Mr. Plowden in his report gave full details as to the country, and especially the northern portion, into which the Egyptians were constantly making plundering expeditions, carrying off the cattle and inhabitants, and selling the latter as slaves. Consul Plowden wrote strongly to the Egyptian authorities upon their conduct, and in consequence of his representations Lord Clarendon remonstrated energetically with the Viceroy of Egypt upon his aggressions against Abyssinia. While this was going on, a remarkable man had made his appearance. Dedjatj Kassai was chief of one of the Kawra tribes. A man of great ambition and talent, he conceived the design of making himself master of the whole of Abyssinia, and in turn attacked and defeated the neighbouring potentates, and speedily conquered the whole of the country, with the exception only of Tigre, and then assumed the title of the Emperor Theodore. Theodore is described in Mr. Plowden's despatches as a man of good impulses, and a desire to rule well and wisely, but of a violent temper, and an inordinate pride in his kingly dignity and position. With him Mr. Plowden entered into negotiations for a treaty with England,

for the despatch of an embassy to this country, and for the establishment of the British consulate in Abyssinia, with power and jurisdiction in all cases in which a British subject might be interested.

The Emperor objected to the clause conferring jurisdiction on the Consul, but promised to give the matter his earnest attention when he should find time to do so, as he was most favourably disposed towards England. Lord Clarendon highly approved of the course Consul Plowden was pursuing, and stated that the Queen would have much pleasure in receiving, and treating with due honour, the ambassadors whom his Majesty might send to her Court. The ratification of this treaty and the sending the embassy were put off in consequence of the constant wars in which Theodore was engaged with rebellious tribes in various parts of his empire, but he always expressed himself as willing to carry out these engagements as soon as he could find leisure to enable him to do so. In March 1860, Consul Plowden was killed during his journey back to Massowah, from which he had been absent at the Court of Theodore for five years.

Mr. Layard most wrongfully accused Mr. Plowden, in a speech delivered in the House of Commons on June 30th, 1865, of breach of duty. He stated that Consul Plowden, "instead of attending to the object with which he was placed there, that of encouraging commercial intercourse between Great Britain and Abyssinia, plunged into local intrigues… Her Majesty's Government at once sent out instructions for him to return to

his post at Massowah, and no longer to interfere in their local differences." This accusation brought forth an indignant protest upon the part of Consul Plowden's brother. He showed that Mr. Plowden was accredited to Abyssinia, and not to Massowah, which is a Turkish port without trade, and with no British subjects or interests to protect, and only valuable as the means of entry into Abyssinia, and of communication with Europe, and obviously for that reason only made the head-quarters of the consulate. The duties of the Consul were to watch and counteract foreign intrigue, to keep peace between Abyssinia and Egypt, to put down the slave-trade, and to encourage commerce; duties which it is evident he could not perform if remaining at Massowah, separated from the seat of the empire by a hostile tribe. Mr. Plowden pointed out that his brother had commenced his consulship by going into the interior with letters and presents to the reigning potentate, and that he had during his whole term of office remained there with but few intermissions, his last visit there lasting for five years without a break. That during all this time he corresponded regularly with the Foreign Office, who were aware of his movements, and by whose instruction he was guided. Thus Mr. Plowden showed conclusively that the reckless attack which Mr. Layard so chivalrously made, five years after his death, upon an officer who had nobly performed most difficult duties, was altogether without foundation. Upon Consul Plowden's death Captain Cameron was gazetted "her Majesty's Consul in Abyssinia," but it was only on February

9th, 1862, that he arrived at Massowah. His instructions were rather vague, a good deal being necessarily left to his own discretion, but he was generally enjoined to carry on Consul Plowden's policy, to continue the negotiations for the treaty, and for the despatch of an embassy to England. Massowah was of course to be his head-quarters, but no injunctions were given him against going into the interior. On the contrary, he was furnished with letters and presents to the Emperor, to whom Earl Russell introduced him, and requested Theodore's protection and favour in his behalf. Captain Cameron, during the period which elapsed between his appointment and his departure for his post, had been thoroughly instructed in the progress which had been made in the negotiations by Consul Plowden, and had full authority to take them up at the point at which they were at that gentleman's death, and Mr. Stern, the missionary, was requested by Earl Russell himself to remain in London at that time in order to discuss with Captain Cameron the contemplated embassy and other matters. And yet, in the face of this, Mr. Layard ventured to say, in his place in Parliament, on October 31, 1865, when quoting Consul Cameron's despatch on the subject, "Now this was altogether contrary to the instruction he had received." Consul Cameron was received with great state and courtesy by the Emperor Theodore, who again expressed his desire to send an embassy to England. But a day or two after the Consul reached the Abyssinian Court the intelligence arrived that our Consul at Jerusalem, who had been always looked upon, and who had acted

as the protector of the Abyssinian colony there, had received orders from the Foreign Secretary to withdraw that protection, and that consequently their convent had been plundered by the Armenians. This affair of the Jerusalem Abyssinians is told by Dr. Beke with great clearness, but space forbids me here to enter upon it; suffice it that Earl Russell without the smallest cause or pretext withdrew the protection, or rather good offices, which had been extended by Lord Malmesbury to the Abyssinian colony, and which had been one cause of the goodwill with which England was regarded in Abyssinia.

Upon the day after this the Emperor saw Captain Cameron, told him that he had well considered the subject of the treaty, about which there would be no difficulty, and he presented him with a letter which he had written to her Majesty. In this, after many expressions of regard and good wishes, the Emperor expresses his intention of attacking the Turks on account of their constant aggressions upon him, and requests her Majesty to arrange for the safe-conduct of the ambassadors, whom he is prepared to send at once to England. Upon receiving this letter Consul Cameron at once started for the sea-coast. He was, however, stopped upon his way by a rebel chief; but his letters were sent down by a native messenger, and arrived in London the 12th February 1863. Captain Cameron himself, accompanied by the Emperor's representative and a strong escort, proceeded to Bogos, to examine into the truth of the alleged inroads of the Turks or Egyptians, as they are indifferently called, into

that province. Finding that these were still continued, Captain Cameron wrote to Consul-General Colquhoun at Alexandria, begging him to remonstrate with the Egyptian Government. He also wrote to Earl Russell from Bogos, and twice to the Emperor, acquainting him with the steps he was taking for the protection of his subjects, in these respects taking as guide the conduct of his predecessor, Consul Plowden, acting, as the advocate of the cause of the Christian Abyssinians against the Turks, in perfect accord with the representative and favourite of the Emperor, who was his companion. It is therefore clear that there is not the least foundation for Earl Russell's ill-advised allegation, "the chief cause of the Emperor's anger with Consul Cameron was this journey to Bogos." His proceedings, however, incurred the displeasure of both the Egyptian Government and the home authorities. In Mr. Plowden's time Egypt had been in a state of disorganisation, and therefore the British Government had, on receiving their Consul's account of the atrocities executed by the Egyptian troops upon the inhabitants of Bogos, addressed the energetic remonstrances of our Foreign Minister to the Viceroy; but now things were changed. Egypt was compact and strong, and Earl Russell would not for worlds offend so well regulated an ally; therefore a sharp reproof was sent off to Captain Cameron to mind his own business, and to return to Massowah. Such is the effect of a changed state of things, and poor Consul Cameron, by not reflecting on this, was blamed for doing precisely the same for which Consul Plowden had gained much credit.

When Captain Cameron returned to the Court in July, after his lengthened absence, his position was not a pleasant one, for he was still without an answer to the Emperor's letter to the Queen, which had been sent off October 31st of the previous year; he had not, indeed, received as yet an answer to his own despatch enclosing that letter; for owing to delays it had not, as has been said, reached England until February the 12th, and Earl Russell had not thought it of sufficient importance to answer it for more than two months afterwards, and then without making the slightest allusion to the Emperor's letter which it enclosed.

After the Consul had parted with the Emperor's representative at Bogos, he had made a visit into the Egyptian province of Soudan, in accordance with instructions he had received from the Foreign Office, to inquire into the prospects of cotton-growing there, as the subject of Egyptian cotton was then attracting great notice in England. This expedition added to the anger which the Emperor Theodore felt at not having received an answer to his letter to her Majesty. The following conversation took place at his first interview with Captain Cameron, and plainly enough testifies as to the real cause of the Emperor's anger:

"Where have you been since you parted from Samuel at Bogos?"

"Into the frontier provinces of Soudan."

"What for?"

"To see about cotton and trade, and so forth."

"Who told you to go there?"

"The British Government."

"Have you brought me an answer from the Queen of England?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I have not received any communication from the Government upon the subject."

"Why, then, do you come to see me now?"

"I request permission to return to Massowah."

"What for?"

"Because I have been ordered by the Government to go there."

"So," exclaimed the exasperated monarch, "your Queen can give you orders to go and visit my enemies the Turks, and then to return to Massowah; but she cannot send a civil answer to my letter to her. You shall not leave me till that answer comes."

Captain Cameron then, in July 1863, became a prisoner, – not in bonds, indeed, but a prisoner upon parole. In September the answer arrived from the Emperor Napoleon, to whom Theodore had despatched a letter at the same time as to the Queen. This answer gave great offence, as it was written by Marshal O'Neil, and not by the Emperor himself. Its contents, too, were singularly ill-judged, and the missive was torn to pieces before a council of the dignitaries by the Emperor, and trodden under foot. The French Consul and a companion were peremptorily ordered to quit the Abyssinian territory.

In October arrived Earl Russell's answer to Captain Cameron,

but without the slightest allusion to Theodore's letter. Up to this time no cause of dispute whatever had arisen between Messrs. Stern and Rosenthal and the Emperor; but the fury which Theodore felt at the slight so wantonly passed upon him by the British Foreign Secretary now burst upon the heads of the whole of that nation. On October the 15th Captain Cameron's servant, or messenger, was seized and beaten; and in the evening of the same day Mr. Stern's two servants were seized and beaten so cruelly that they both died the same night. Mr. Stern himself, who was standing by at the time, happened, in his horror at the proceeding, to place his hand to his mouth. It was at once said he was biting his thumb at the Emperor, which is considered a threat of revenge; and he was accordingly seized and cruelly beaten, and his life was also for some time despaired of. For some time nothing further took place, and then the Emperor, who desired to justify in some way his fit of rage against a man with whom he had had no dispute or cause of complaint, had all Mr. Stern's and Mr. Rosenthal's books and papers examined and read, this office being performed by a Frenchman named Bardel, who appears throughout to have been a treacherous and bitter enemy of the English party. Enough criminatory matter was found here, in the shape of remarks in their diaries upon the conduct of the Emperor, and they were condemned to death; but this was commuted to imprisonment.

On Nov. 22d a young Irishman named Kearns arrived with another despatch from the Foreign Office, – probably the one

of August 13th, but which contained no allusion whatever to the Emperor's letter. This naturally exasperated Theodore more than ever, and Captain Cameron was now ordered to be chained upon both hands. On the 4th of January Captain Cameron, his attendants, and the missionaries, were all put in fetters, and confined in the common prison. The cause of this fresh proof of the wrath of the King is reported by Mr. Steiger, a member of the Scottish mission, to have been the arrival of the head of the Abyssinian convent at Jerusalem with the news that the British Consul there had declined to interfere in their behalf. Is anything further necessary to establish the fact that the treatment of the unfortunate missionaries was a mere episode incidental to the main question, which was entirely between the Emperor Theodore and the British Government?

As to the long imprisonment, the torture and indignities inflicted upon the captives, they are already well known to the public. Let us now see what steps were taken by the late Government to procure their release.

The news of the imprisonment of Captain Cameron appeared in the Paris and London papers of the 15th of December; but no one could believe it, the favour in which the British Consul stood being a matter of notoriety. Lord Clarendon, however, stated in the House of Lords, in the debate on February 9, 1866, that the news had been received at the early date given of the Consul's detention; but it was only upon March 16, 1864, or three months after it was known at the Foreign Office, that

the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews received and made public the sad intelligence. Mrs. Stern wrote a petition to the Queen, asking her to send a letter under the sign-manual, written by herself to the Emperor. Lord Shaftesbury handed this letter to Earl Russell, adding his own prayer to that of Mrs. Stern's, and requesting him to present the petition to the Queen. On the following day, May 7th, Earl Russell returned the petition, unpresented, to Lord Shaftesbury, saying that "after much deliberation he had come to the conclusion that he ought not to advise the Queen to write to the King of Abyssinia."

So matters might have remained to the present day had not a note which Captain Cameron had written during his captivity been received by his relatives, and by them most indiscreetly published in the papers. In this he said that there was no hope of his release unless an answer was sent to the Emperor's letter. Everyone was filled with indignation at the delay of fourteen months which had taken place in sending an answer to so important a document, and Earl Russell and his colleagues came to the conclusion that after all they ought to advise her Majesty to reply to the letter, which she accordingly did, and towards the end of June the letter was sent off. But so inefficiently was this done, that after it had reached Cairo it was sent back to England to have alterations made in it, and even then it was not perfect, for it was discovered many months afterwards that the royal signet had not been attached, and a fresh letter was accordingly sent out in February or March 1865. The person selected to carry out this

delicate business was a Mr. Rassam, who had acted as paymaster to the men employed by Mr. Layard at Nineveh, and who was instructed to demand the release of Consul Cameron, but that as the other captives were not British subjects, he was not to speak too authoritatively in their behalf. But Mr. Rassam had, Dr. Beke affirms, another and far more delicate mission. "He was to make a good case for the British Government – to remove the blame from their shoulders, even if it were thrown on those of anyone else. It did not matter who might be the scapegoat as long as the Government were exonerated. This is said quite advisedly." Mr. Rassam went to Massowah, where he remained a year doing apparently nothing whatever. Dr. Beke thinks that all along, both in this and in his subsequent conduct, when he went into the interior and saw the Emperor, his conduct was not, to say the least of it, judicious. The release of the prisoners when Mr. Rassam did at last see the Emperor and present the Queen's letter, and their subsequent imprisonment, together with Mr. Rassam, are known to all.

Throughout all the numerous debates in the Houses of Parliament during this period, Earl Russell and Mr. Layard persistently endeavoured to burke all discussion by declaring that it would come to the ears of the Emperor; but when at last the House insisted upon being no longer put off with vague generalities, these two gentlemen, who had so deprecated anything being said which might hurt the feelings of the Emperor Theodore, were now guilty of applying the strongest and most

offensive epithets to him, which, had they come to the knowledge of the Emperor, would have insured the instant execution of his captives. This was, to say the least of it, a strange and peculiar instance of inconsistency upon the part of these thoughtful statesmen. In consequence of these debates in the House, Earl Russell at length found that it was a matter which could no longer be tampered with, and he himself appointed Mr. Palgrave to start for Abyssinia to endeavour to effect the release of the Consul and his companions in captivity. Mr. Rassam, however, prevented anything being done by this gentleman. Nothing, indeed, if Dr. Beke is to be trusted, can be more extraordinary than the conduct of this person. He received the news of his recall while he was, as usual, waiting quietly at Massowah. Instantly he embarked in the steamer which brought the intelligence, steamed to Suez, and from there telegraphed to her Majesty's agent and Consul-General in Egypt that Consul Cameron had been released. This is proved to have been utterly without foundation, but it had the desired effect of putting a stop to Mr. Palgrave's progress, that gentleman having arrived at Cairo, and being upon the point of proceeding up the Nile. Mr. Rassam declined all fellowship with Mr. Palgrave, and refused to agree to the proposition that one should proceed up the Nile and the other *viâ* Massowah. Mr. Rassam then took the presents brought by Mr. Palgrave, and started back for Massowah, from whence he did what there is no apparent reason why he should not have done at first, started for the interior. Mr. Palgrave remained at Cairo to await the result of

Mr. Rassam's mission. There he remained when the news came, in March 1866, that the captives were released, and were on their way to the coast; there he remained until Mr. Flad arrived in Egypt with the news of the detention of Mr. Rassam and the captives; and then, extraordinary to state, when it would seem that he might be of use, he started off by the first steamer to England.

As Dr. Beke says, the whole matter is an enigma which requires solution. This sudden passage of Mr. Rassam to Egypt upon the news of his recall being received by him, the untrue telegram which he sent off from thence, and which put a stop to Mr. Palgrave's expedition – in short, every incident connected with the conduct of Mr. Layard's ex-paymaster requires a most searching investigation.

Such is the account given by Dr. Beke; and as Mr. Layard, although openly attacked, has never disproved a single statement alleged against him, but has contented himself with vehement personal attacks upon Dr. Beke (probably upon the principle of the lawyer – "when you have no case, blackguard your opponent"), it must be assumed that in all material points Dr. Beke's statements are correct.

Such was the state of things when the Conservative Ministry came into power; and after another fruitless effort to ransom the prisoners, war was determined upon as the only resource remaining.

The announcement of the intention of Government was

received with general satisfaction. It was not a war for which any enthusiasm was felt; there was no national glory to be gained, no national advantage; but a national stain was to be wiped off, and a party of our countrymen rescued from a position into which they had fallen by no fault whatever of their own, but by the disgraceful *lâches* of the Government they served; therefore it may be said that England in general, if it did not enter heartily into the war, and winced a little at the thought of the probable enormous expense, yet cordially acquiesced in its necessity. War once determined upon, the columns of the newspapers were inundated with suggestions from everyone who had ever been in Abyssinia, and from a vast number of persons who had not; and these, although they differed upon almost every point, yet agreed upon piling danger upon difficulty, and horror upon horror, until the very air, earth, and water of Abyssinia seemed to swarm with worms and other creeping things. In the mean time the preparations went steadily on. Officers were sent from England to Egypt, Spain, and various parts of the Mediterranean to purchase mules; Woolwich was busied with the preparation of mountain guns; transports were taken up, hospital-ships were fitted out, and large quantities of tents and other stores sent out from the Tower. This was nearly all which England was to contribute, for it was determined that the expedition should be entirely an Indian one, and that Bombay should have the honour as well as the responsibility of all the arrangements.

As soon as orders were received from England to fit out an

expedition with all speed, Sir Seymour FitzGerald, the Governor of Bombay, and Sir Robert Napier, Commander-in-chief of the Bombay army, set to work in earnest. The greatest credit is undoubtedly due to the former for his untiring zeal and earnestness; he was indefatigable: but at the same time I doubt greatly the wisdom of committing the arrangements connected with a great expedition of this sort to a civilian, who necessarily must be unacquainted with the requirements of an army, and who must be entirely guided by the advice of his council. The consequence was that Sir Robert Napier was obliged to consult the Governor on every point, and the Governor again had to consult his own military adviser, an officer necessarily of far less standing than Sir Robert Napier, who was thus liable to be overruled, nominally by the Governor, but in reality by a subordinate officer. Thus, as one instance out of many, Sir Robert Napier's plan for a transport train, which was sent in to the Governor for sanction early in September, was entirely put aside, and the new scheme was not issued by the Governor for two months afterwards; thus Sir Robert, who when he once arrived in Abyssinia was solely responsible, was liable to have the whole of his arrangements destroyed by the break-down of a transport train, with the organisation of which he had nothing whatever to do.

As the present is merely a narrative of the march of the army to Magdala, I must pass cursorily over the preparations in Bombay. I will, however, give a few extracts from the

memoranda issued by Sir Robert Napier, and which will be sufficient to show how accurately he estimated the difficulties of the work to be done, and how thoroughly he thought over every detail.

In his memorandum of August 8th, Sir Robert Napier estimates that he will require 12,000 men, for that 2000 must remain at the port, and at Post No. 1 upon the high land (Senafe); 2000 men at Antalo, or at some similar point in advance; and 2000 men to keep open communication with the advanced column, and to support it if necessary.

In minute of August 31st, he farther develops his plans. He there speaks of Post No. 1 as at Zulla, Post No. 2 as at Senafe, Post No. 3 as at Antalo, which, he says, "will be one of great importance, and should be very strong.""Post No. 4 will probably be not far from Socota, which will also be a very vital point. It is in a difficult and rugged country, and will be our last main base of supplies from which the operating force will be supported." Farther on he says: "It will be necessary to convey to our extreme base, which for convenience I will call Socota, for the force required to hold that mountainous country, and for the corps of operation (probably in all 7000 men), supplies for four months." In the same minute he says: "On advancing from Post No. 2 (Senafe) the leading division will move forward at once to Antalo, and the remainder of the advancing force will take post upon the road to cover the transit of supplies for five months from No. 2 to No. 3, being posted at stations where they may obtain

water and forage, and then supplies will be passed on to the front for 9000 men. From Antalo the same process will be repeated until the supplies for 7000 men shall have been carried to Post No. 4 at Socota. From that point the operative column will act with supplies for one or two months as may be convenient."

These extracts are exceedingly interesting, as they show the original plans of the campaign as laid down by Sir Robert Napier. In the course of the narrative, it will be seen how entirely this plan had to be deviated from, owing to the scarcity of food and forage, and the partial break-down of the transport train; how Post No. 4, described as of "vital" importance, had to be altogether dispensed with; and how, in consequence, the army, when within five or six days of Magdala, were almost destitute of supplies, while their base at Antalo was two hundred miles distant.

On September 12th Sir Robert issued an excellent memorandum on the fitting-up of the ships and the appliances for landing animals, and making many suggestions for the health and comfort of the troops.

In regard to the selection of the troops to form the expedition, Sir Robert himself chose the various regiments. A considerable discussion arose between the different Presidencies, Madras and Bengal naturally wishing to contribute as large a quota as possible. Upon this subject the General wisely said, September 5th: "I consider it especially of advantage to have the native regiments, if possible, of one army, as they work in harmony with

and rely upon each other; if they are of different Presidencies, feelings of great bitterness arise when one or other is left in the rear, and partialities are conjured up as the reason why one or other is not taken to the front."

Considerable correspondence took place in relation to the formation and constitution of the pioneer force, concerning which the General's opinion was overruled by that of his excellency the Governor. The following extract from memorandum of September 8th fully shows this: "I concluded that I should receive some formal and definite information of any change in his excellency's views or plans, and I was therefore not prepared to learn from Colonel Marriott, when the expedition was nearly ready to proceed, that his Excellency had decided to submit entirely to Colonel Merewether the responsible duty of determining finally the point of debarkation, and of converting the reconnoissance into an occupation of the coast by a body of about 1500 men. Of all the various circumstances which may have led his Excellency to this conclusion, I am not fully informed; but I entertain strong objections to the question being left entirely to Colonel Merewether's decision, – he being, in compliance with his Excellency's opinion (expressed in his Excellency's note to Colonel Marriott), in military command of the party, – because, while concurring entirely with his Excellency in his high estimation of that officer, it has seemed to me that Colonel Merewether has strong preconceived opinions in favour of a line of route which from the most recent reports,

especially that of M. Munsinger, appears to me to be one that would be dangerous to the success of the expedition, and that his selection of a point of debarkation will be sensibly influenced by such very strong and sincere opinions." Sir Robert Napier's protest was attended to, and other officers were associated with Colonel Merewether; but this extract is sufficient to show how much was done by the Governor of Bombay without the concurrence or even consultation of Sir Robert Napier.

The general instructions to the pioneer force were precise: they were directed to select a place of landing, and then to inquire about the question of obtaining carriage and supplies from the natives (this last being Colonel Merewether's special duty); and to Colonel Wilkins, R.E., was assigned specially to determine the adaptability of the shore for landing, the erection of piers, floating wharves, and shelter of all kinds; he was also ordered to advise upon the military value of positions selected, and to assist in general reconnoissance. But the point upon which above all others General Napier laid stress was, that the pioneer force should on no account push forward into the high land; he knew that there could be no possible utility in their so doing, and that it would entail a great and unnecessary labour to provision them at a distance from the sea, especially up so difficult a country. Both upon Colonel Merewether and Colonel Phayre did he impress this point. In his letter of the 9th October to the former officer he said, "*It is not at all intended that this force shall take up a position on the high ground*, for which its strength and composition are

unfitted." Farther on he says, "If news is satisfactory, Staveley's brigade will sail, and *upon its arrival* the advance may be made." To Colonel Phayre he was equally explicit. In a letter to him dated 9th October he says, "*It is not of course intended that Colonel Field should move to the high table-land* at Dexan, &c., but merely to take up such position as will cover the dépôt and protect the cattle." And again farther on, "You will understand that it is *not my desire to precipitate a lodgment upon the table-land*, which we should have to maintain too long before advancing."

How these officers carried out the instructions thus clearly and strongly laid down, we shall see hereafter.

It is needless now to enter into any detail of the preparations at Bombay, but it may be said that they were of the most extensive and complete character. Everything which could be thought of was provided for the health and comfort of the troops. Money was lavished like water; but, in the haste and bustle which prevailed, there is no question that the authorities were in many cases grossly imposed upon, and that stores were sent out of quality so utterly bad as to be perfectly useless. I may mention as an example the boots for the drivers of the transport train, which never lasted over a week, and very few of which attained even that comparatively respectable age. As with these, so with many other stores; but it is probable that cases of this sort are inseparable from a hastily-prepared expedition. The stores which were subsequently forwarded were very much better in quality.

After these introductory remarks, I begin my narrative from

the date of my own sailing from Bombay.

THE MARCH TO MAGDALA

On board Transport General Havelock,
December 1st, 1867.

I am happy to say that, speaking personally, the Abyssinian expedition has begun. I am on my way to that cheerful and well-ordered country. Had I known on landing in Bombay that I should be detained there for a month, I should have made myself very comfortable, and should have enjoyed myself exceedingly. But I thought that, although the Commander-in-chief and the main body of the expedition were not sailing for two months, I should do better to push on at once. I accordingly applied for a passage, and was promised one as soon as possible. This phrase, "as soon as possible," in the mouth of an ordinary individual, means something. From an official it means just nothing. It is merely one of those vague ambiguities in which the official mind delights. It is a phrase which admits of no argument whatever.

Day after day passed, and nothing came of it. A steamer or two started, but although we expressed our willingness to sleep on deck, and put up with any accommodation whatever, no room could be found. One of our number, hopeless and disgusted, took passage in the last Peninsular and Oriental steamer, and is probably at the present moment wandering about Aden, praying for a passage across. I thought it better to wait here until I could

be taken direct to our destination. At last came the intelligence that our horses could be put on board a sailing-ship. This was something done, and I felt really thankful when, after a long day's work, I left the ship's side, leaving the horses and their syces on board. Indeed, the servant question is one of the most serious of those which present themselves to the mind of an intending Abyssinian expeditionist. It is not difficult to get one. You only have to speak, to get half-a-dozen servants and syces. But you know, both by the warnings of your friends and by your own instincts, that so many applicants, so many rogues. It is at present the very best profession in Bombay to get hired to a master going to Abyssinia, and to disappear two days before he leaves with his purse and any other portable valuables which may come handy. My first servant, a mild Hindoo of engaging aspect, was seized with a pulmonary affection, while his brother, who was servant to a friend of mine, was at the last moment melted by the tears of an aged and despairing mother, and both left us; but not until some hours after their departure did we find that they had, of course accidentally, carried away with them a considerable amount of specie and small valuables. When at last a servant is obtained who really does mean to go to Abyssinia, there is no little trouble to be gone through with him. He must have a month's, or perhaps two months', pay in advance. He must have an arrangement made for the payment of the greater part of his wages to his family during his absence. He must be provided, at your expense, with warm clothes, boots, blankets, &c.; and all this with the strong chance

of his bolting at the last moment. One of my syces alarmed me greatly by not turning up on the morning when the horses were to be embarked; but he finally appeared upon the landing-stage just as they were being slung into a lighter, three hours after the time named. Whether he or any of the syces finally accompanied the horses I am unable to say, as the ship, instead of sailing that afternoon as positively settled by the authorities, was detained three or four days; and it is very probable that during that time the syces slipped ashore with their warm clothes, advance of wages, &c. This painful question cannot be solved until the ship with the horses arrives at Annesley Bay. Another four or five days passed, and then came the welcome order to go at once on board the General Havelock, which was to start the next day at noon. On board we accordingly went, but found, as we anticipated, that there was no chance of her starting for that day at any rate. The usual conflict of departments was taking place. Some department had ordered a force of twenty European soldiers and fifty Sepoys belonging to the transport train to come on board. This they did. Then came a committee of some other department, and questioned whether the Havelock was fit to carry this force, and whether they had not better be transferred to some other ship. Finding that the men's things were all below, it was determined to leave them as they were. Then the same committee, with a view, I suppose, of making the vessel more comfortable, determined to send three and a half tons of gunpowder on board, and with this intent sent a carpenter in the

course of the afternoon, who took down the only available bath, and prepared to convert the same into a powder-magazine. The next morning the same carpenter came on board and brought some more tools, and then returned to shore. In the afternoon he fetched the tools away. In the mean time one department had sent the water-lighter alongside; but another department had sent no tanks on board to receive it. Presently that department sent some tanks, but as it had not occurred to it to measure the hatchways, the tanks were considerably larger than the opening down which they had to go, so they had to be taken away and a fresh set of tanks brought on board. Then, long after dusk, the water-ship again came alongside, and we took in our water. In the mean time we went ashore to the department which had sent us on board, to ask when it was probable that the Havelock would really sail. We were assured by that department that she had already started, and we had great difficulty in persuading it that she was still at anchor, and likely to remain so. The next morning, the powder not having arrived, and nothing more having been heard either of it or of the carpenter, our captain got up steam and started; and it is by no means improbable that the powder, with one or two committees of departments, are at present cruising about Bombay harbour looking for the Havelock. And yet ours is an absolutely favourable example, for a steamer last week was detained six days after the date of the embarkation of its passengers. And if this confusion exists now, when only one or two vessels are starting a-week,

what a scene of confusion will it be when the main body of the force sails! It always is so, and always will be so, as long as our army is managed by a set of independent departments, who have no concert whatever between them. We have here the quartermaster-general's department, the commissariat, the land-transport, the marine, the adjutant-general's department, the ordnance, and so on *ad infinitum*. Military men are the first and loudest to complain of this multiplication of offices without union or concert, which work together well enough in quiet times, but which in emergencies paralyse each other's efforts, and cause a confusion in exact proportion to their own number. It needs some military reformer of an iron will, and an assured parliamentary support, to put an end to all this, to do away with the independence of the various departments of the service, and to make them all subordinate branches of the adjutant-general's office; so that a general upon service may give his orders to his adjutant-general only, and the latter may instruct the officers of the departments under him as to what should be done. All indents and orders should be given to him alone, and he should be responsible for the working of the several branches. In some respects it turned out to be as well that we had not started at the time named, for at night, when the rations were served out to the troops, it was found that both the porter and arrack, which form a somewhat important part of a soldier's rations, had not been sent on board by the commissariat. Great was the consternation. However, fortunately next day, while departments

were skirmishing over water and water-tanks, and the carpenter was going and coming with his tools, there was time to send to the commissariat, and for them to repair their error.

The General Havelock is a steamer of about 250 tons, and the object of her builders appears to have been to combine the maximum of rolling qualities with the minimum of speed. In calm weather she can steam six and a half knots an hour; in a slight swell she can roll to an angle of thirty-five degrees. Having said this, I have said all that can be said in dispraise of the vessel. She has capital accommodation for a ship of her size, a snug little poop-deck, extremely comfortable seats and chairs, a perfect absence of any smell from the engine-room, and one of the jolliest skippers in existence. So we are very comfortable. We are five in number; three officers of the Land Transport Corps, and two "specials;" and as we get under the awnings on the poop-deck, while a fair breeze is helping us along at the rate of eight knots an hour, we agree that we have all the advantages of keeping a steam-yacht without the expense. The charge Government makes to officers while on board is eight rupees a-day, which is handed over to the captain of the ship, who has to supply everything for that sum. I do not think that the captain of the Havelock will be a gainer by this transaction. We all sleep on deck, not from necessity, for there are plenty of berths below, but partly because the nights on deck are charming, although a little cold, and partly from horror of a species of monster, which appears to me to be as large as cats – but this may

be the effect of imagination and extreme terror – and to run much faster. They have many legs, and horns resembling bullocks'. They are fearless of man, and indeed attack him with ferocity. I call them vampires – their ordinary name is cockroaches. This sleeping on deck is attended with occasional drawbacks. Last night I was awakened by a splash of water on my face. Thinking it was spray, I pulled my rug over my face, but only for an instant, for a rush of water came down upon me as if emptied from a bucket. In an instant everyone was upon his feet, and began dragging his bed over to the leeward side of the ship. But it was no use. The rain tore across the deck as if pumped by a hundred steam fire-engines, and nothing remained for us but to beat a retreat down through the cabin staylight, for to go outside the awning by the ordinary poop-ladder was out of the question. Our first amazement and consternation over, we had a great laugh as we gained the cabin-floor, drenched through, and with our silk sleeping-dresses clinging to us in the most uncomfortable manner. By the time we had changed these the storm was over as suddenly as it had begun, and taking fresh rugs we soon regained our beds, which, turned over, were dry enough on the lower side for all practical purposes.

Over the engine-room is a large bridge-deck, and here are the quarters of the European soldiers, twenty-five in number, while the sepoys occupy the main deck. Both the Europeans and sepoys are volunteers from various regiments into the Land Transport Train. This is a newly-organised corps, and is only formed for

the purposes of the expedition, both officers and men returning at its conclusion to their regiments. It is commanded by Major Warden, and consists of fourteen divisions, each containing two thousand baggage-animals. To look after each of these divisions are a captain and two subalterns, together with thirty-eight men – Europeans and sepoys, who are divided into four classes. When it is remembered that among the two thousand animals are oxen, horses, mules, camels, and elephants, and that there will be an attendant to each two animals, it will be seen that the post of officer in a division of the Land Transport Corps will be by no means a sinecure. His difficulties, too, will be heightened by the fact that the drivers will be men of innumerable nationalities and races – Spaniards and Italians with the mules, Greeks from Smyrna and Beyrout, Egyptians and Nubians, Arabs and Affghans, together with men from all the varied tribes of India. The sepoys who are with us do not appear to me at all the sort of men for the service. They belong entirely to infantry regiments, and are quite unaccustomed to horses. The Hindoo is not naturally a horseman; and to take a number of infantry sepoys and put them on horses, and set them at once to severe work, is an absurdity, which will be speedily demonstrated to be such by the men being knocked up and in hospital by the end of the first week. Only men belonging to the native cavalry should have been allowed to volunteer. It is true that many of the Europeans also belong to line regiments, but the same objection does not hold good to them, for most Englishmen are more or less accustomed

to horses, and if not they soon fall into it.

Annesley Bay, December 4th.

Our voyage has not terminated so uneventfully as it began, and I am no longer writing on board the General Havelock, but on the Salsette, a very fine Peninsular and Oriental steamer, having a portion of the 33d regiment from Kurrachee on board, and having the Indian Chief, with another portion of the same regiment, in tow. This Red-Sea navigation is a most intricate and dangerous business, and this western shore is in particular completely studded with islands and coral-reefs. These islands differ entirely in their character – some are bold rocks rising perpendicularly from the water with rugged peaks and fantastic outlines, and attaining an elevation of two or three hundred feet; others, far more dangerous, are long flat islets, rising only two or three feet above the sea, and imperceptible on a dark night at a distance of fifty yards. Still others, again, most dangerous of all, have not yet attained the dignity even of islets, although millions of little insects work night and day to bring them up to the surface. These are the coral-reefs, which, rising from a depth of many fathoms to within a few feet of the surface, form so many pitfalls to the unsuspecting mariner. The General Havelock was running along the coast with a favourable breeze, and we had been all the morning watching the low shore, with its stunted bushes and the strangely-conical hills which rise from it, bearing a fantastic resemblance to haycocks, and barns, and saddles, and with a mighty range of mountains in the distance. These

mountains had a strange interest to us, for among and over them we have to go. They were our first sight of Abyssinia, and were by no means encouraging as a beginning. In this way we spent the morning, and after lunch were about to resume doing nothing, when we were startled by hearing the man who was standing in the chains heaving the lead, shout out, "Five fathoms!" His call two minutes before had been ten fathoms. The captain shouted "Stop her!""Turn her astern!" and the chief engineer leapt below to see the order carried out. In the momentary pause of the beat of the screw, the leadman's voice called out "Two fathoms!" The screw was reversed, and a rush of yellow foaming water past the side of the ship told us at once that it was at work, and that the sandy bottom was close to her keel. Very gradually we stopped, and were congratulating ourselves on the near shave we had had, when, looking over her side, we saw that, vigorously as the screw was working astern, the ship remained just where she was. The General Havelock was palpably ashore. At first we were disposed to make light of the affair, for, grounding as she did imperceptibly, we imagined that she would get off with little difficulty. Accordingly we first worked ahead, then astern, but with an equal absence of result. The head and stern both swung round, but she was fast amidships, and only moved as on a pivot. The troops were now ordered on deck, and were massed, first aft and then forward; but the General Havelock gave no sign. Then it was resolved to roll her, the men running in a body from side to side. Then we tried to jump her off. The

whole of the Europeans and sepoys were set to jump in time – first on one side, and then on the other. A funnier sight, eighty men, black and white, leaping up and down, and then going from side to side, could not be conceived. Everyone laughed except those who swore when their naked feet were jumped upon by the thick ammunition-boots of some English soldier. Presently the laughter abated, for everyone was getting too hot even to laugh. The scene was strangest at this time, and reminded me, with the leaping figures, the swarthy skins, and the long hair, more of a New Zealand war-dance than anything I had ever seen. Hours passed in experiments of this sort, but still the General Havelock remained immovable, only when the sun went down and the wind rose she rolled almost as heavily as if afloat, and lifted on the waves and fell into her bed with a heavy bump which was very unpleasant. Boats were now lowered and soundings taken, and it was found that the water was deeper on nearly every side than at the exact spot upon which we had struck. Hawsers were got out and the men set to work at the capstan; but the anchors only drew home through the sandy bottom, and brought up branches of white coral. Part of the crew were all this time occupied in shifting the cargo. But in spite of every effort the ship remained perfectly fast. It was evident that she would not move until a portion at least of her cargo was removed from her. While we were debating how this was to be done, for the shore on either side was a good mile distant, the wind fresh, and the boats small, an Arab dhow, which we had observed running down, anchored

about a hundred yards off. The Sheik came on board, and after immense talk agreed to come alongside for three or four hours to take a portion of the cargo and the troops on board, and so to lighten our ship. When the bargain was closed, and the sum to be paid agreed upon, he discovered that there was not water enough for his boat to float alongside. The negotiations thus came to an end, and the Sheik returned to his own craft. Soon after another and larger dhow came up and anchored at a short distance. We sent off to see if he could help us, but it seemed that he had no less than seventy-two camels on board bound for Annesley Bay. How the poor brutes could have been stowed in a boat which did not look large enough to hold twenty at the very most, I cannot imagine, and they had come in that state all the way from Aden. About an hour after we had got ashore, a large steamer, which we knew by her number to be the Salsette, with a ship in tow, had passed at a distance of about three miles, and to her we signalled for assistance. She, however, passed on, and anchored with her consort under the lee of an island, and about six miles off. We had given up all hopes of aid from her, and had begun as a last resource to throw our coal overboard, when at nine o'clock in the evening we saw a boat approaching with a lug-sail. When she came alongside she turned out to belong to the Salsette, which had most fortunately orders to anchor at the spot where we had seen her. We found, on conversation with the officer who had come on board, that, loaded with troops as she was, it would not be safe for her to come within towing distance of us, and

therefore that she must leave us to our fate, especially as we did not appear to be in any immediate danger. They kindly offered, however, to take my fellow-correspondent and myself on board, an offer which we gratefully accepted, as it was quite possible that we might not be off for another week. When we arrived on board the Salsette we were received with the greatest kindness, and before starting in the morning had the satisfaction of seeing the signal flying from the Havelock of "We are afloat."

Relieved from all anxiety on account of our late shipmates, our servants, and our luggage, we enjoyed the run to Annesley Bay exceedingly. It is an immense bay, and, indeed, a finer harbour, once in, could hardly be imagined. The entrance, however, is intricate and dangerous. Long shoals extend for miles near its mouth, and there are several islands within the bay itself. All eyes, or rather all telescopes, were directed towards the spot which was to be our destination. My glass, one by Salomans, is a wonderful instrument for its size, and is indeed far better than any I have tried it against since I left England. My first impressions of our landing-place are, I confess, anything but pleasing. A mist hangs over the land, which excludes a view of the hills, or, indeed, of anything except the foreshore. This is a dead flat, covered with low bushes. The town consists of about fifty tents and marbuees, a large skeleton of a wooden storehouse, piles of hay and grain-bags, hundreds of baggage-animals, with a throng of natives wandering about. There is but one pier, and this is still in course of construction. In the harbour are anchored a

dozen or so of transports and a few native dhows. Some of these dhows are occupied in transporting forage and stores from the ships to shore; and as they cannot themselves approach within a distance of a couple of hundred yards of the shore, long lines of natives transport the goods upon their heads to land. One ship is unloading mules; this she accomplishes by lowering them on to a raft, upon which they are towed with ropes to within a short distance of the shore, when the horses are pushed or persuaded to alight and walk. The Havelock came in just before sunset, about two hours after ourselves. I have not yet been ashore. The Beloochees, who arrived yesterday in the Asia and the Peckforten Castle, are landing to-day.

Annesley Bay, December 6th.

I had not intended to write again until the time of the departure of the next mail, as my last letter went off only yesterday morning; but two companies of the 33d regiment are to land this afternoon and to start at midnight, and as this is the first body of European troops who have landed, I think it as well to accompany them to Senafe, sixty miles distant, where Colonels Merewether and Phayre have gone up with the pioneer force. They will not advance beyond this point for some time, and I shall therefore, when I have seen the passes, return, after a few days' stay there, to this place, which is at present the main point of interest. I should not move from it, indeed, were it not that there is some doubt whether the King of Tigré will permit us to pass. He is at present stationed near the head of the pass with a body of

7000 men, but I fancy his only object in this is to make us buy his friendship at as high a rate as possible. If he really means mischief it will be a very serious matter indeed; for, although we should of course scatter his forces easily enough, it would give us such an enormous line of march to be guarded that it would be impossible to move a step until we had completely subdued Tigré. I sincerely hope that this will not be the case. But another week or two will show; and in the mean time, as I shall have plenty of opportunities of writing on the subject, I must return to my present topic, which is the state of things at the landing-place here. It is not, as I said in my last, a cheerful place to look at from on board ship, but it is very far worse on landing. The pier is nearly finished, and is a very creditable piece of work indeed. It is of stone, and about 300 yards long, and is wide enough for a double line of rails. One line is already laid down, and saves an immensity of labour; for the goods are landed from the native boats, which bring them from the ship's side, are put on to the trucks, and are run straight into the commissariat yard, which is fifty yards only from the end of the pier. Before this pier was finished everything had to be carried on shore upon the heads of the natives; and as a boat cannot approach within 300 yards of shore, owing to the shallow water, it may be imagined how slowly the work of debarcation went on. The pier is ridiculously insufficient for the purpose. Even now the ships are lying in the harbour for days, waiting for means of landing their goods, although lines of natives still supplement the pier, and pass bales

of goods through the water on their heads. When the whole expedition is here there will be a complete dead-lock, unless a very great increase of landing accommodation is afforded. The commissariat yard is piled with enormous quantities of pressed hay, Indian and English, grain, rice, &c. They are well arranged, and in such weather as we have at present there is no fear of their taking damage from being exposed to the air, especially as the precaution has been taken to have trusses of pressed hay laid down as a foundation for the piles of grain-bags. The commissariat yard is distinguished by the fact that here only do we see women – bright-coloured, picturesquely-clad creatures, a hundred of whom have been sent across from India to serve as grinders of corn. Beside the commissariat tents are a few others belonging to the other departments, and these, with a large unfinished wooden storehouse, at which a dozen Chinese carpenters are at work, constitute the camp at the landing-place. But this is only a small portion of the whole, the main camp being a mile and a half inland; and, indeed, there are half-a-dozen small camps, a cluster of tents scattered within the circle of a mile.

The reason why the main camp was fixed at such an inconvenient distance from the landing-place was, that water was at first obtainable from wells sunk there. But this supply has ceased some time, and it would be better to concentrate the offices of the departments near the landing-place, and that every soul whose presence down here is not an absolute necessity should be sent up to Koomaylo, which is fourteen miles inland,

and which is the first place at which water can be obtained. As it is, all living things, man and beast, have to depend for their supply of water upon the ships. Every steamer in harbour is at work night and day condensing water, the average expense being twopence-halfpenny a gallon for the coal only. The result is of course an enormous expense to the public, and very great suffering among the animals.

Leaving the camp, I proceeded to the watering-place, and here my senses of sight and smell were offended as they have not been since the days of the Crimea. Dead mules and camels and oxen lay everywhere upon the shore, and within a short distance of it. Here and there were heaps of ashes and charred bones, where an attempt had been made to burn the carcasses. Others, more lately dead, were surrounded by vultures, who, gorged with flesh, hardly made an effort to rise as we approached. One ox had fallen only a few minutes before we reached it, and several vultures were already eying it, walking round at a respectful distance, and evidently not quite assured that the animal was dead. Here and there half-starved mules wandered about, their heads down, their ears drooping, and their eyes glazing with approaching death. Some would stagger down to the sea-side, and taste again and again the salt water; many of them, half-maddened by thirst, would drink copiously, and either drop dead where they stood, or crawl away to die in the low scrub.

More miserable still was the appearance of the camels. Several native boats were unloading them at a distance of two or three

hundred yards from shore. The water was not more than three or four feet deep; but when the poor beasts were turned into it most of them lay down, with only their heads above water, and positively refused to make an effort to walk to land. Some never were able to make the effort, and their bodies drifted here and there in the smooth water. Some of the camels had got within fifty yards of shore, and then had lain down, looking, with their short bodies and long necks, like gigantic water-fowl. Those who had been driven ashore were in little better plight. Their bones seemed on the very point of starting through their skin, and they lay as if dead upon the sand, uttering feebly the almost human moaning and complainings peculiar to the camel. Others had recovered a little. These were endeavouring to browse the scanty leaves on the bushes around. Some of these camels have been twenty days on the voyage, and during this time have been crowded together like sheep in a pen, with next to nothing either to eat or drink during the whole time. The wonder is that any of them survived it. Government suffers no loss by the death of these unfortunates, as a contractor agreed to deliver them here in a fair condition, and only those who survive the voyage, and recover something of their former strength, are accepted and paid for. At least, this is one version of the story. The other is, that they are consigned to the Land Transport Corps. That body, however, receive no intimation of their coming, and boatload after boatload of camels arrive, and wander away from the beach to die for want of the water within their reach. At a mile from

the landing-place the scene is painful in the extreme. Camels and mules wander about in hundreds without masters, without anything. Here they strive for a few days' existence by plucking scanty shoots; here they sicken and die. The scenes were frightful everywhere, but were worst of all at the watering-troughs. These were miserably-contrived things. Only ten or a dozen animals could approach at once; they were so unevenly placed, that when one end was full to overflowing there was not an inch of water at the other; and beside this, at a time when water was worth its weight in gold, they leaked badly. They were only supplied with water for an hour or so in the morning, and for a similar time in the evening; and in consequence the scene was painful in the extreme. There was a guard to preserve order, but order could not have been kept by ten times as many men. There were hundreds of transport animals, with one driver to each five or six of them. What could one driver do with six half-mad animals? They struggled, they bit, they kicked, they fought like wild-beasts for a drink of the precious water for which they were dying. Besides these led animals were numerous stragglers, which, having broken their head-ropes, had gone out into the plain to seek a living on their own account. For these there was no water; they had no requisition pinned to their ears, and as they failed thus scandalously to comply with the regulations laid down by the authorities, the authorities determined that they should have no water. They were beaten off. Most of them, after a repulse or two, went away with drooping heads to die; but some

fought for their dear lives, cleared a way to the trough with heels and teeth, and drank despite the blows which were showered upon them. I inquired of the Land Transport Corps why these scattered mules are not collected and fed. I am told that nearly the whole of these mule- and camel-drivers have deserted and gone to Massowah. And so it is. The mules and camels are dying of thirst and neglect; the advanced brigade cannot be supplied with food; the harbour is becoming full of transports, because there are no means of taking the men inland, although there are plenty of animals; and all this because the land transport men desert. The officers of that corps work like slaves; they are up early and late, they saddle mules with their own hands, and yet everything goes wrong. Why is all this? One reason undoubtedly is, that the animals have been sent on before the men. A few officers and a comparatively small body of native followers are sent out, and to them arrive thousands of bullocks, thousands of mules, thousands of camels. The Arab followers, appalled by the amount of work accumulating upon them, desert to a man, the officers are left helpless. Had a fair number of officers and followers been sent on to receive the animals as they came, all might have gone well. It was simply a miscalculation. And so it is, I regret to say, in some other departments. You apply for a tent, and are told there are no bell-tents whatever arrived. You ask for a pack-saddle, and are told by the quartermaster-general that there is not a single pack-saddle in hand, and that hundreds of mules are standing idle for want of them. You ask for rations, and

are informed that only native rations have yet arrived, and that no rations for Europeans have been sent, with the exception of the sixty days' provisions the 33d regiment have brought with them. Why is this? There are scores of transports lying in Bombay harbour doing nothing. Why, in the name of common sense, are they not sent on? The nation is paying a very fair sum for them, and there they lie, while the departments are pottering with their petty jealousies and their petty squabbles.

The fact is, we want a head here. Colonels Merewether and Phayre have gone five days' march away, taking with them all the available transport. Brigadier-General Collings only arrived yesterday, and of course has not as yet been able to set things in order. I am happy to say that General Staveley arrived last night, and I believe that he will soon bring some order into this chaos. The fact is, that in our army we leave the most important branch of the service to shift for itself. Unless the Land Transport Train is able to perform its duty, nothing can possibly go right; but the Land Transport Corps has no authority and no power. It is nobody's child. The commissariat owns it not, the quartermaster and adjutant-general know nothing whatever of it. It may shift for itself. All the *lâches* of all the departments are thrown upon its shoulders, and the captains who are doing the work may slave night and day; but unaided and unassisted they can do nothing. The land transport should be a mere subordinate branch of the commissariat; that department should be bound to supply food at any required point. Now, all they have to do is to join the

other departments in drawing indents for conveyance upon the unhappy land transport, and then sitting down and thanking their gods that they have done everything which could be expected of them. General Staveley is an energetic officer, and will, I believe, lose no time in putting things straight. Even to-day things look more hopeful, for General Collings yesterday afternoon put the services of 200 Madras dhoolie-bearers at the disposition of the Transport Corps to supply the place of the mule- and camel-drivers who have deserted. I have therefore every hope that in another week I shall have a very different story to tell. In addition, however, to the mortality caused by the voyage, by hardships, and by bad food and insufficient water, there is a great mortality among the horses and mules from an epidemic disease which bears a strong resemblance to the cattle-plague. Ten or twelve of the mules die a day from it, and the 3d Native Cavalry lost ninety horses from it while they were here. The district is famous, or rather infamous, for this epidemic; and the tribes from inland, when they come down into the plain, always leave their horses on the plateau, and come down on foot. The Soumalis and other native tribes along this shore are a quarrelsome lot, and fights are constantly occurring among the native workmen, who inflict serious, and sometimes fatal, injuries upon each other with short, heavy clubs resembling Australian waddies. The washing, at least such washing as is done, is sent up to Koomaylo. Yesterday two dhoolies, or washermen, were bringing a quantity of clothes down to the camp, when they were set upon by some natives,

who killed one and knocked the other about terribly, and then went off with the clothes.

Some of the ships have brought down the horses in magnificent condition. The Yorick, which has carried the horses of the officers of the 33d, is a model of what a horse-ship should be. The animals are ranged in stalls along the whole length of her main-deck, and the width is so great that there is room for a wide passage on either side of the mast. These passages were laid down with cocoa-nut matting, and the animals were taken out every day – except once when the vessel rolled too much – and walked round and round for exercise. In consequence they arrived in just as good condition as they were in upon the day of starting. While I am writing, the Great Victoria is signalled as in sight. This vessel contains, it is said, the Snider rifles, the warm clothing, the tents, and many other important necessaries. Her arrival, therefore, will greatly smooth difficulties and enable the troops to advance.

At the time that the above letter was written I had only been a few hours upon shore, and was of course unable to look deeper than the mere surface. I could therefore only assign the most apparent reason for the complete break-down of the transport train. The disaster has now become historical, and rivalled, if it did not surpass, that of the worst days of the Crimea; and as for a time it paralysed the expedition, and exercised throughout a most disastrous influence, it is as well, before we proceed up the country, that we should examine thoroughly into its causes.

After a searching inquiry into all that had taken place prior to my arrival, I do not hesitate to ascribe the break-down of the transport train to four causes, and in this opinion I may say that I am thoroughly borne out by ninety-nine out of every hundred officers who were there. The first cause was the inherent weakness of the organisation of the transport train, the ridiculous paucity of officers, both commissioned and noncommissioned, the want of experienced drivers, and the ignorance of everyone as to the working of a mule-train. The second cause was the mismanagement of the Bombay authorities in sending animals in one ship, drivers in another, and equipments scattered throughout a whole fleet of transports, instead of sending each shipload of animals complete with their complement of drivers and equipments, as was done by the Bengal authorities. The third cause was the grossly-overcoloured reports of the officers of the pioneer force as to the state of water and forage, and which induced the Bombay authorities to hurry forward men and animals, to find only a bare and waterless desert. The fourth reason was the conduct of the above-mentioned officers in marching with all the troops to Senafe, in direct disobedience of the orders they had received. This last cause was the most fatal of all. In spite of the first three causes all might, and I believe would, have gone tolerably well, had it not been for the fourth.

At Koomaylo and at Hadoda, each thirteen miles distant from Zulla, there was water in abundance, together with bushes and browsing-ground for the camels. Had the animals upon landing

been taken at once to these places, and there allowed to remain until the time approached for a general forward movement of the whole army, as Sir Robert Napier had directed, everything would have gone well. The officers would have had plenty of time to have effected a thorough and perfect organisation; the men would have learnt their new duties, and would have acquired some sort of discipline; the camels could have gone to Zulla and brought out forage for the mules; not an animal need have remained at Zulla, not one have suffered from thirst; and the immense expense of condensing water for them would have been avoided, besides the saving of life of many thousands of animals. But what happened? As I have shown in the previous chapter, General Napier had said to Colonel Merewether, in his parting instructions, "It is not at all intended that this force shall take up a position upon the high land, for which its strength and composition are not fitted;" and again, he had written at the end of October, "that if the news were satisfactory, Staveley's Brigade would sail, and *upon its arrival* the advance may be made." To Colonel Phayre he had written October 9th: "It is not of course intended that Colonel Field should move to the high table-land at Dexan, &c., but shall merely take up such position as will cover the dépôt and protect the cattle;" and again, in the same letter: "You will understand that it is not my desire to precipitate a lodgment upon the table-land, which we should have to retain too long before advancing." General Napier, then, had been as explicit as it was possible for a man to be in his orders that no advance should

take place; and he had specially said, in his memorandum of 7th September, the subject of the transport train, that "great care should be taken to prevent their being overworked." And yet, in spite of these orders, Colonels Merewether and Phayre, together with Colonel Wilkins, – to whom the making of piers, &c., had been specially assigned by the General in his instructions to the pioneer force, – with Colonel Field and the whole of the troops, start up to Senafe on or about the 1st of December! And this at a time when two or three large transports might be expected to arrive daily! The consequences which might have been expected ensued. The unfortunate animals, the instant they arrived, were saddled, loaded, and hurried off without a day to recover from the fatigue of the voyage. The muleteers were in like way despatched, without a single hour to acquire a notion of their duties.

Senafe is five days' march from Zulla, up a ravine of almost unparalleled difficulty.

Up and down this ravine the wretched animals stumbled and toiled, starving when in the pass, and dying of thirst during their brief pauses at Zulla; the fortunate ones dying in scores upon the way, and the less happy ones incurring disease of the lungs, which, after a few painful weeks, brought them to the welcome grave. And all this to feed Colonels Merewether and Phayre and the troops at Senafe. *Cui bono?* No one can answer. No one to this day has been able to offer the slightest explanation of the extraordinary course adopted by these officers. If Colonel

Merewether had felt it his duty to go to Senafe in order to enter into political relations with the chiefs in the neighbourhood, and to arrange for the purchase of animals and food, a small escort would have enabled him to do so. Not only was their absence disastrous to the mule-train, but it was productive of the greatest confusion at Zulla. There no one was left in command. Astounding as it may appear to every military man, here, at a port at which an amount of work scarcely, if ever, equalled, had to be got through, with troops, animals, and stores arriving daily in vast quantities, there was at the time of my arrival absolutely no "officer commanding," – not even a nominal head. Each head of department did his best; but, like Hal o' the Wynd, he fought for his own hand. The confusion which resulted may be imagined but cannot be described. Having thus briefly adverted to the causes which led to the breakdown of the transport train, I continue my journal.

Koomaylo, December 9th.

I mentioned in my letter of two days since, that the news from the front was, that the King of Tigré, with an army of 7000 men, was inclined to make himself unpleasant. Our last "shave," that of yesterday, goes into the opposite extreme, and tells us that the Kings of Shoa and Lasta have both sent to Colonel Merewether, and have offered to attack Theodore. The hostilities and the alliances of the kings of these tribes are, of course, matters of importance; but as these native potentates seldom know their own minds for many hours together, and change from

a state of friendship to one of hostility at a moment's notice, or for a fancied affront, I do not attach much importance to any of them, with the exception of the King of Tigré, through whose dominions we have to pass. If he allows us to pass to and fro without interference, we can do very well without the alliance of Shoa or of Lasta. We are strong enough to conquer Theodore, even if he were backed by the three kings named; and now we have got everything ready, the difference of expense between a war of a few weeks' duration and one of twice as many months, will be comparatively trifling. As for the troops, nothing would cause such disgust as to return without doing anything, after all the preparations which have been made. I do not think, however, that it would make much difference in our movements now, even if the prisoners are given up. Of course, had they been released a year ago, in consequence of our entreaties or in exchange for our presents, we should have been contented; but now we must demand something more than a mere delivery of the prisoners. There is compensation to be made for their long and painful sufferings, and an attempt at any rate made to obtain some sort of payment for our enormous expenses. I attach, therefore, little importance to what is doing at Senafe, but consider the state of the preparations at the landing-place at Annesley Bay to be the central point of interest. For the last two days much has been done towards getting things in order. Pack-saddles in abundance have been landed. Sir Charles Staveley has disembarked, and is hard at work; and in the Land

Transport Corps, in particular, great things have been done. Captain Twentyman, who is in command, laid a number of suggestions before the general, which he at once sanctioned. Fodder was strewed near the watering-place, and as the starving animals strayed down they were captured. One hundred and fifty of them were handed over to the Beloochee regiment, whose men cheerfully volunteered to look after them. Tubs were obtained from the commissariat to supplement the absurdly-insufficient troughs at the watering-place, and which were only kept full of water at certain times of the day. The 200 Madras dhoolie bearers, who have been transferred to the transport, are doing good work, and there is every hope that in another week things will be straight, and the wretched stragglers who at present shock one with their sufferings be again safely hobbled in line with other animals.

The work which the officers of this corps get through is prodigious. Captains Twentyman, Warren, and Hodges, and Lieutenant Daniels, are beginning to forget what a bed is like, for they are at work and about for more than twenty hours out of the twenty-four. Indeed, I must say that I never saw a greater devotion to duty than is shown by the officers of the various departments. The quartermaster's department, the commissariat, and others, vie with each other in the energy which they exhibit, and the only thing to be wished is that there were a little more unanimity in their efforts. Each works for himself. Whereas if they were only branches of an *intendance générale*, the heads

of the departments might meet each other and their chief of an evening, each state their wants and their wishes, concert together as to the work to be performed next day, and then act with a perfect knowledge of what was to be got through. However, this is a Utopia which it is vain to sigh for. Probably till the end of time we shall have separate departments and divided responsibilities; and between the stools the British soldier will continue to fall, and that very heavily, to the ground.

On the afternoon of the 7th the first two companies of the 33d regiment were to land; and this spectacle was particularly interesting, as they were the first European regiment to land upon the shores of Abyssinia. A large flat, towed by a steam-barge, came alongside, and the men, with their kit-bags and beds, embarked on board them. As they did so, the regimental band struck up, the men and their comrades on board ship cheering heartily. It was very exciting, and made one's blood dance in one's veins; but to me there is always something saddening in these spectacles. This is the third "*Partant pour la Syrie*" that I have seen. I witnessed the Guards parade before Buckingham Palace. I saw them cheer wildly as the band played and the Queen waved her handkerchief to them; and six months afterwards I saw them, a shattered relic of a regiment, in the Crimea. Last year I described a scene in Piacenza, on the eve of the march of the Italian army into the Quadrilateral. There, too, were patriotic songs and hearty cheerings, there were high hopes and brave hearts. A week after I saw them hurled back again from the

land they had invaded, defeated by a foe they almost despised. Fortunately, in the present case I have no similar catastrophe to anticipate. As far as fighting goes, her Majesty's 33d regiment need fear nothing they will meet in Abyssinia, or, indeed, in any part of the world. It is a regiment of veterans; it won no slight glory in the Crimea, and a few months later it was hurried off to aid in crushing the Indian mutiny. In India they have been ever since, and are as fine and soldierlike a set of men as could be found in the British army. We were to have landed at two o'clock, but a few of the little things which always are found to be done at the last moment delayed us half an hour; and that delay of half an hour completely changed the whole plans of the day. It had been intended that, after landing, the men should remain quiet until five o'clock, by which time the heat of the day would be over; that they should then pack the baggage upon the camels, which were to start at once with a guard, that the men should lie down and sleep till midnight, and that they should then march, so as to arrive at Koomaylo at five o'clock in the morning. All these arrangements, admirable in their way, were defeated by this little half-hour's delay. There was not a breath of wind when we left the ship, but in the quarter of an hour the passage occupied the sea-breeze rushed down, and when we reached the pier the waves were already breaking heavily. Time after time the man-of-war's boats came to us as we lay thirty yards off, and took off a load each time; once, too, we drifted so close to the end of the pier that the men were able to leap off upon the rough stones. In

this way all the troops got off except the baggage-guard. But by this time the surf had increased so much, that the boats could no longer get alongside; accordingly the tug had to tow the barge a couple of hundred yards out, and there to remain until the sea-breeze dropped. In consequence it was nine in the evening before the baggage got ashore, and nearly one in the morning before the camels had their loads; and even then some of the men's beds had to be left behind. Considering the extreme lateness of the hour, and the fact that the moon would soon be down, I thought it best to get a sleep until daylight. Under the shelter of a friendly tent I lay down upon the sand until five o'clock, and then, after the slight toilet of a shake to get rid of loose sand, I started.

The road from Annesley Bay to Koomaylo can hardly be termed either interesting or strongly defined. It at first goes straight across the sand, and, as the sand is trampled everywhere, it is simply impossible to follow it. We were told that the route lay due west, but that just where the jungle began there was a sign-post. Compass in hand, we steered west, and entered the low thorny scrub which constitutes the jungle. No sign-post. We rode on for a mile, when, looking back at the rising sun, I saw something like a sign-post in the extreme distance. Riding back to it, it proved to be the desired guide, and the road from here is by daylight distinct enough. For the first six miles it runs across a dead-level of sand, covered with a shrub with very small and very scanty leaves, and very large and extremely-abundant thorns. Bustards, grouse, deer, and other game are said to be

very abundant here, but we saw none of them. A sort of large hawk was very numerous, but these were the only birds we saw. At about six miles from the sea the ground rises abruptly for about ten feet in height, and this rise ran north and south as far as the eye could reach. It marked unquestionably the level of the sea at some not very remote period. From this point the plain continued flat, sandy, and bushy as before for two miles; but after that a rocky crag rose, rather to our right, and the sand became interspersed with stones and boulders. Our path lay round behind the hill, and then we could see, at about four miles' distance, a white tent or two, at the mouth of an opening in the mountain before us. These white tents were the camp at Koomaylo. About three miles from Koomaylo we came upon a very curious burial-place. It was in a low flat, close to a gully, and covered a space of perhaps fifty yards square. The graves were placed very close together, and consisted of square piles of stones, not thrown together, but built up, about three feet square and as much high. They were crowned by a rough pyramid of stones, the top one being generally white. Underneath these stone piles was a sort of vault. From this point the ground rose more steeply than it had yet done.

Koomaylo is situated at the mouth of the pass which takes its name from it. The valley here is about half-a-mile wide. It is rather over thirteen miles from the sea, and is said to be 415 feet above the sea-level; but it does not appear to be nearly so high. At any rate, its height does not make it any cooler; for, hot as it is

at Annesley Bay, it is at least as hot here. The greatest nuisance I have at present met with in Abyssinia are the flies, which are as numerous and irritating as they are in Egypt. Fortunately they go to sleep when the sun goes down; and as there are no mosquitoes to take their place, one is able to sleep in tranquillity. We found on arriving at Koomaylo that the troops had not been in very long. They had got scattered in the night, owing to some of the camels breaking down; had lost their guides, lost each other, and lost the way. Finally, however, all the troops came in in a body under their officers at about eight o'clock. The animals were not quite so unanimous in their movements; for a number of them took quite the wrong road, and went to Hadoda, a place about six miles from here, to the north, and twelve miles from Zulla. There are wells there, so they got a drink, and came on in the course of the day. A few, however, have not yet turned up, and one of these missing animals bore a portion of my own luggage and stores. The others will perhaps arrive; but I have a moral conviction that that animal will never again make his appearance. As the men were too tired upon their arrival to pitch their tents, many of which indeed had not yet arrived, they were allowed to take possession of a number of tents which had been pitched for head-quarters. When we arrived they were all shaken down; the men were asleep in the tents, and the camels had gone down to water. The first step was to go down to water our horses and mules, the next to draw rations for ourselves, our followers, and beasts. The watering-place is a quarter of a mile from this camp,

which is on rather rising ground. The wells are, of course, in the bed of what in the rainy season must be a mighty torrent fifty yards wide.

I have seen many singular scenes, but I do not know that I ever saw a stranger one than these wells presented. They are six in number, are twelve or fourteen feet across, and about twelve feet deep. They are dug through the mass of stones and boulders which forms the bed of the stream, and three of the six have a sort of wooden platform, upon which men stand to lower the buckets to the water by ropes. The other wells have sloping sides, and upon them stand sets of natives, who pass buckets from hand to hand, and empty them into earth troughs, or rather mud basins, from which the animals drink. The natives while so engaged keep up the perpetual chant without which they seem to be unable to do any work. The words of this chant vary infinitely, and they consist almost always of two words of four or five syllables in all; which are repeated by the next set of men, with the variation of one of the syllables, and in a tone two notes lower than that used by the first set. Round these wells are congregated a vast crowd of animals – flocks of goats and small sheep, hundreds in number, strings of draught-bullocks, mules, ponies, horses, and camels, hundreds of natives, with their scanty attire, their spears, their swords exactly resembling reaping-hooks, and their heavy clubs. Here are their wives and sisters, some of them in the ordinary draped calico, others very picturesquely attired in leathern petticoats, and a body-dress of a sort of sheet of leather,

going over one shoulder and under the other arm, covering the bust, and very prettily ornamented with stars and other devices, formed of white shells. Round their necks they wear necklaces of red seeds and shells. Some of them are really very good-looking, with remarkably intelligent faces. The scene round the wells is very exciting, for the animals press forward most eagerly, and their attendants have the greatest difficulty in preserving order, especially among the mules and camels. The supply, however, is equal to the demand, and by the end of the day the wells are nearly deserted, except by the soldiers, who like to go down and draw their water fresh from the wells. The upper wells, where buckets with ropes only are used, are really very fair water; those for the animals are not clear, but are still drinkable. All have a taste somewhat resembling the water from peat-bogs. Natives are employed digging more wells, which can be done, for the quantity which is drawn appears to make little or no difference in the level of the water in the present wells. Some of the camels occasionally get quite furious; to-day I saw one, whose saddle had slipped round under its belly, begin to jump and plunge most wildly, with its head in the air, and uttering the most uncouth cries. There was a general stampede, especially among the mules, many of whom have, I fancy, never seen a camel before. It was some minutes before the animal could be caught and forced down upon its knees by its driver, and by that time he had quite cleared the ground in his neighbourhood. The camels are kept as much as possible kneeling, and there were a hundred or two near him at

the time he commenced his evolutions. When one camel rises, all in his neighbourhood always endeavour to do the same; and the efforts of these beasts to rise, the shouts of their drivers, and the stampede of the mules, made up a most laughable scene. Near the wells is another large graveyard; the tombs here are rather more ornate than those I have already described, some of them being round, and almost all having courses of white quartz stones. Upon the top of many of these tombs are two or three flat stones, placed on end, and somewhat resembling small head- and foot-stones. As there is no inscription upon them it would be curious to find out the object with which the natives erect them.

Having finished watering our horses, we proceeded to the commissariat tent. Here an immense quantity of work is got through, all the animals and men drawing their rations daily; and I have heard no complaint of any sort, except that some Parsees, while I was getting my rations, came up and complained bitterly because there was no mutton, and it was contrary to their religion to eat beef. The commissariat officer regretted the circumstance, but pointed out that at present no sheep had been landed, and that the little things of the country are mere skin and bone, and quite unfitted for the troops. The Parsees, who were, I believe, clerks to one of the departments, went off highly discontented. The moral of this evidently is that Parsees should not go to war in a country where mutton is scarce. As for the Hindoos, I cannot even guess how they will preserve their caste intact. It is a pity that their priests could not give them a dispensation to put aside

all their caste observances for the time they may be out of India. As it is, I foresee we shall have very great difficulty with them.

Koomaylo, December 12th.

When I wrote two days ago I hardly expected to have dated another letter from Koomaylo. I had prepared to start for Senafe, leaving my baggage behind me, and returning in ten days or so. The great objection to this plan was that neither at Zulla nor here are there any huts or stores where things can be left. The only thing to be done, therefore, was to leave them in the tent of some friend; but as he, too, might get the route at any moment, it would have been, to say the least of it, a very hazardous proceeding. The night before last, however, I received the joyful and long-expected news that the ship which had left Bombay with my horses six days before I started myself was at last in harbour. My course was now clear; I should go down, get my horses, and then go up to Senafe, carrying my whole baggage with me. Vessels and troops are arriving every day, and the accumulations of arrears of work are increasing in even more rapid proportion. Major Baigrie, the quartermaster-general, is indefatigable, but he cannot unload thirty large vessels at one little jetty, at whose extremity there is only a depth of five feet of water. Unless something is done, and that rapidly, and upon an extensive scale, we shall break down altogether. It is evident that a jetty, at which at most three of these country boats can lie alongside to unload, is only sufficient to afford accommodation for one large ship, and that it would take several days to discharge her cargo of say

one thousand tons, using the greatest despatch possible. How, then, can it be hoped that the vessels in the harbour, whose number is increasing at the rate of two or three a-day, are to be unloaded? In the Crimea great distress was caused because the ships in Balaclava harbour could not manage to discharge their stores. But Balaclava harbour offered facilities for unloading which were enormous compared to this place. There was a wharf a quarter of a mile long, with deep water alongside, so that goods could be rolled down planks or gangways to the shore from the vessels. The harbour was land-locked, and the work of unloading never interrupted. Compare that with the present state of things. A boat-jetty running out into five-foot water, and only approachable for half the day owing to the surf, and, as I hear, for months not approachable at all. It can be mathematically proved that the quantity of provision and forage which can be landed from these boats, always alongside for so many hours a-day, would not supply the fifth of the wants of twenty-five thousand men and as many animals. Everything depends upon what the state of the interior of the country is. If we find sufficient forage for the animals and food for the men – which the most sanguine man does not anticipate – well and good. If not, we must break down. It is simply out of the question to land the stores with the present arrangements in Annesley Bay, or with anything like them. The pier-accommodation must be greatly increased, and must be made practical in all weather, that is to say, practical all day in ordinary weather. To do this the pier should be run out

another fifty yards, and should then have a cross-pier erected at its extremity. The native boats could lie under the lee of this and unload in all weathers, and there would be sufficient depth of water for the smaller transports to lie alongside on the outside in calm weather, and to unload direct on to the pier. I know that this would be an expensive business, that stone has to be brought from a distance, &c. But it is a necessity, and therefore expense is no object. I consider that the railway which is to be laid between the landing-place and this point will be of immense utility to the expedition; but I believe it to be a work of quite inferior importance in comparison with this question of increased pier-accommodation. There is no doubt that in spite of the troops and animals arriving from Bombay before things were ready for them here, things would have gone on far better than they have done, had there been any head to direct operations here. But the officers of the various departments have been working night and day without any head whatever to give unity and object to their efforts. I understand that General Staveley was astonished to find that before the arrival of General Collings, two days previous to himself, there had been no head to the expedition.

Sir Robert Napier was fully alive to the extreme importance of this question of wharfage, for in his memorandum of September 12th he recommended that planking, tressles, piles, and materials to construct wharves should be forwarded with the 1st Brigade. "There cannot," he proceeded, "be too many landing-places to facilitate debarkation, and on such convenience will depend

the boats being quickly cleared, and the stores removed from them dry. It would be advisable that a considerable number of empty casks should be forwarded to be used as rafts, or to form floating-wharves for use at low water, particularly should the shores shelve gently. Spars to form floating shears should also be forwarded." Thus Sir Robert Napier, himself an engineer, had long before foreseen the extreme importance of providing the greatest possible amount of landing accommodation; and yet three months after this memorandum was written, and two months after the arrival of the pioneer force at Zulla, an unfinished pier was all that had been effected, and Colonel Wilkins, the officer to whom this most important work had been specially intrusted, was quietly staying up at Senafe with Colonels Merewether, Phayre, and Field. A second pier was not completed until the end of February, and consequently many vessels remained for months in harbour before their cargoes could be unloaded, at an expense and loss to the public service which can hardly be over-estimated.

We had quite a small excitement here this afternoon. I was writing quietly, and thinking what a hot day it was, when I heard a number of the soldiers running and shouting. I rushed to the door of my tent and saw a troop of very large monkeys trotting along, pursued by the men, who were throwing stones at them. Visions of monkey-skins flashed across my mind, and in a moment, snatching up revolvers and sun-helmets, three or four of us joined the chase. We knew from the first that it was perfectly hopeless,

for the animals were safe in the hills, which extended for miles. However, the men scattered over the hills, shouting and laughing, and so we went on also, and for a couple of hours climbed steadily on, scratching ourselves terribly with the thorn-bushes which grow everywhere – and to which an English quickset-hedge is as nothing – and losing many pounds in weight from the effect of our exertions. Hot as it was, I think that the climb did us all good. Indeed, the state of the health of everyone out here is most excellent, and the terrible fevers and all the nameless horrors with which the army was threatened in its march across the low ground, turn out to be the effect of the imagination only of the well-intentioned but mischievous busybodies who have for the last six months filled the press with their most dismal predictions. I have heard many a hearty laugh since I have been here at all the evils we were threatened would assail us in the thirteen miles between Annesley Bay and this place. We were to die of fever, malaria, sunstroke, tetse-fly, Guinea-worm, tapeworm, and many other maladies. It is now nearly three months since the first man landed, and upon this very plain there are at present thousands of men, including the Beloochee regiment and other natives, hundreds, taking Europeans only, of officers, staff and departmental, with the conductors, inspectors, and men of the transport, commissariat, and other departments. From the day of the first landing to the present time there has not been one death, or even an illness of any consequence, among all these men upon this plain of death. As for the two companies of the

33d, their surgeon tells me that the general state of their health is better than in India, for that there has not been a single case of fever or indisposition of any kind in the five days since they landed, whereas in India there were always a proportion of men in hospital with slight attacks of fever. All this is most gratifying, and I believe that all the other dangers and difficulties will, when confronted, prove to have been equally exaggerated. The difficulties of the pass to the first plateau, 7000 feet above the sea, have already proved to be insignificant. There are only four miles of at all difficult ground, and this has already been greatly obviated by the efforts of the Bombay Sappers. The December rains have not yet begun, but yesterday and to-day we have heavy clouds hanging over the tops of the mountains. The rain would be a very great boon, and would quite alter the whole aspect of the country. The whole country, indeed, when not trampled upon, is covered with dry, burnt-up herbage, presenting exactly the colour of the sand, but which only needs a few hours' rain to convert it into a green plain of grass, sufficient for the forage of all the baggage-animals in the camp.

While I have been writing this the Beloochees and a company of Bombay Sappers and Miners have marched into camp, with their baggage and camels. The Beloochees are a splendid regiment – tall, active, serviceable-looking men as ever I saw. Their dress is a dark-green tunic, with scarlet facings and frogs, trousers of a lighter green, a scarlet cap, with a large black turban around it; altogether a very picturesque dress. The Sappers and

Miners are in British uniform. Both these corps go on early to-morrow morning to Upper Sooro. I have not decided yet whether I shall accompany them, or go on by myself this evening.

A letter has just come down from Colonel Merewether saying that all is going on well at Senafe. The King of Tigré has sent in his adhesion, and numbers of petty chiefs came in riding on mules, and followed by half-a-dozen ragged followers on foot, to make their "salaam." I do not know that these petty chiefs, who are subjects of the King of Tigré, are of much importance one way or another, but their friendship would be useful if they would bring in a few hundred head of bullocks and a few flocks of sheep. It is, I understand, very cold up there, and the troops will have need of all their warm clothing.

Upper Sooro, December 13th.

I must begin my letter by retracting an opinion I expressed in my last, namely, that the defile would probably turn out a complete bugbear, as the fevers, guinea-worm, and tetse flies have done. My acquaintance with most of the passes of the Alps and Tyrol is of an extensive kind, but I confess that it in no way prepared me for the passage of an Abyssinian defile. I can now quite understand travellers warning us that many of these places were impracticable for a single horseman, much less for an army with its baggage-animals. Had not Colonel Merewether stated in his report that the first time he explored the pass he met laden bullocks coming down it, I should not have conceived it possible that any beast of burden could have scrambled over the terrible

obstacles. Even now, when the Bombay Sappers have been at work for three weeks upon it, it is the roughest piece of road I ever saw, and only practicable for a single animal at once. It is in all twelve miles; at least, so it is said by the engineers, and we took, working hard, seven hours to do it; and I found that this was a very fair average time. A single horseman will, of course, do it in a very much shorter time, because there are miles together where a horse might gallop without danger. I remained at Koomaylo until the afternoon, as it was too hot to start till the sun was low. Nothing happened during the day, except the arrival of the Beloochees and Bombay Engineers. The soldiers had two or three more chases after the monkeys, of which there are extra ordinary numbers. I need hardly say that they did not catch any of them: a dog, however, belonging to one of the soldiers seized one for a moment, but was attacked with such fury by his companions that it had to leave its hold and beat a precipitate retreat. I have just been watching a flock or herd – I do not know which is the correct term – of these animals, two or three hundred in number, who have passed along the rocks behind my tent, at perhaps thirty yards' distance. They have not the slightest fear of man, and even all the noise and bustle of a camp seem to amuse rather than alarm them. They are of all sizes, from the full-grown, which are as large as a large dog, down to tiny things which keep close to their mothers, and cling round their necks at the least alarm. The old ones make no noise, but step deliberately from rock to rock, sitting down frequently to inspect the camp, and indulge

in the pleasure of a slight scratch. These full-sized fellows have extremely long hair over the head and upper part of the body, but are bare, disagreeably so, towards the caudal extremity. The small ones scamper along, chattering and screaming; they have no mane or long hair on the head. The old monkeys, when they do make a sound, bark just like a large dog. In the afternoon an enormous number of locusts came down the pass, and afforded amusement and diet to flocks of birds, who were, I observed, rather epicures in their way, for on picking up many of the dead bodies of the locusts, I found that in every case it was only the head and upper part of the thorax which had been eaten. I shall accept this as a hint; and in case of the starvation days with which this expedition is threatened – in addition to innumerable other evils – really coming on, I shall, when we are driven to feed on locusts, eat only the parts which the birds have pointed out to me as the tit-bits. I am happy to say that there is no probability of our being driven to that resource at present; for on our way here yesterday I passed considerable quantities of native cattle, and any quantity is procurable here, and as for goats they are innumerable. We bought one this morning for our servants for the sum of a rupee. The commissariat have made up their minds that all servants and followers must be Hindoos, and therefore abstainers from meat, and so issue no meat whatever in their rations – nothing, indeed, except rice, grain, a little flour, and a little ghee. Now, the fact is that the followers are generally not Hindoos. Many of the body-servants are Portuguese, Goa men;

and the horse-keepers are frequently Mussulmans, or come from the north-west provinces, where they are not particular. Even the mule-drivers are Arabs, Egyptians, and Patans, all of whom eat flesh. It thus happens that the whole of our five servants are meat-eaters, and it is fortunate that we are able to buy meat from the natives for them, especially as they have really hard work to do; and in the cold climate we shall enter in another day or two meat is doubly necessary.

We had intended to start at three o'clock, but it was four before our baggage was fairly disposed upon the backs of the four baggage-animals – two strong mules and two ponies – and we were in the saddles of our riding-horses. Our route, after leaving the wells, ran, with of course various turnings and windings, in a south-westerly direction. The way lay along the bottom of the valley, a road being marked out by the loose stones being removed to a certain extent, and laid along both sides of the track. The valley for the first seven or eight miles was very regular, of a width of from 200 to 300 yards. Its bottom, though really rising gradually, appeared to the eye a perfect flat of sand, scattered with boulders and stones, and covered with the thorny jungle I have spoken of in a previous letter. This scrub had been cleared away along the line of road, or there would have been very little flesh, to say nothing of clothes, left upon our bones by the time we came to our journey's end. Backward and forward, across the sandy plain, as the spurs of the hills turned its course, wound the bed of the torrent – I should think that we crossed it fifty

times. It is probable that on occasions of great floods the whole valley is under water. To our left the hills, though rocky and steep, sloped somewhat gradually, and were everywhere sprinkled with bushes. On the right the mountain was much more lofty, and rose in many places very precipitously. Sometimes the valley widened somewhat, at other times the mountains closed in, and we seemed to have arrived at the end of our journey, until on rounding some projecting spur the valley would appear stretching away at its accustomed width. Altogether, the scenery reminded me very much of the Tyrol, except that the hills at our side were not equal in height to those which generally border the valleys there.

At half-past six it had become so dark that we could no longer follow the track, and the animals were continually stumbling over the loose stones, and we were obliged to halt for half-an-hour, by which time the moon had risen over the plain; and although it was some time longer before she was high enough to look down over the hill-tops into our valley, yet there was quite light enough for us to pursue our way. In another three-quarters of an hour we came upon a sight which has not greeted my eyes since I left England, excepting, of course, in my journey through France – it was running water. We all knelt down and had a drink, but, curiously enough, although our animals had been travelling for nearly four hours enveloped in a cloud of light dust, they one and all refused to drink; indeed, I question if they had ever seen running water before, and had an idea it was something uncanny. This place we knew was Lower Sooro, not that there was any

village – indeed, I begin to question the existence of villages in this part of the world, for I have not yet seen a single native permanent hut, only bowers constructed of the boughs of trees and bushes. But in Abyssinia it is not villages which bear names; it is wells. Zulla, and Koomaylo, the Upper and Lower Sooro, are not villages, but wells. Natives come and go, and build their bowers, but they do not live there. I fancy that when there is a native name, and no well, it is a graveyard which gives the name. We passed two or three of these between Koomaylo and Sooro, all similar to those I have already described. From Lower to Upper Sooro is a distance of four miles. It is in this portion of the road that the real difficulties of the pass are situated, and I never passed through a succession of such narrow and precipitous gorges as it contains. The sides of these gorges are in many places perfectly perpendicular, and the scenery, although not very lofty, is yet wild and grand in the extreme, and seen, as we saw it, with the bright light and deep shadows thrown by the full moon, it was one of the most impressive pieces of scenery I ever saw. The difficulty of the pass consists not in its steepness, for the rise is little over three hundred feet in a mile, but in the mass of huge boulders which strew its bottom. Throughout its length, indeed, the path winds its way in and out and over a chaos of immense stones, which look as if they had but just fallen from the almost overhanging sides of the ravine. Some of these masses are as large as a good-sized house, with barely room between them for a mule to pass with his burden. In many places,

indeed, there was not room at all until the Bombay Sappers, who are encamped about half-way up the pass, set to work to make it practicable by blasting away projecting edges, and in some slight way smoothing the path among the smaller rocks. In some places great dams have been formed right across the ravine, owing to two or three monster boulders having blocked the course of the stream, and from the accumulated rocks which the winter torrents have swept down upon them. Upon these great obstacles nothing less than an army of sappers could make any impression, and here the engineers have contented themselves by building a road up to the top of the dam and down again the other side. We were three hours making this four-mile passage, and the labour, the shouting, and the difficulties of the way, must be imagined. Of course we had dismounted, and had given our horses to their grooms to lead. Constantly the baggage was shifting, and required a pause and a readjustment. Now our tin pails would bang with a clash against a rock one side; now our case of brandy – taken for purely medicinal purposes – would bump against a projection on the other. Now one of the ponies would stumble, and the other nearly come upon him; now one of the mules, in quickening his pace to charge a steep ascent, would nearly pull the one which was following, and attached to him, off his feet; then there would be a fresh alarm that the ponies' baggage was coming off. All this was repeated over and over again. There were shouts in English, Hindostanee, Arabic, and in other and unknown tongues. Altogether it was the most fatiguing

four miles I have ever passed, and we were all regularly done when we got to the top. I should say that the water had all this time tossed and fretted between the rocks, sometimes hidden beneath them for a hundred yards, then crossing and recrossing our path, or running directly under our feet, until we were within a few hundred yards of Upper Sooro, when the ravine widening out, and the bottom being sandy, the stream no longer runs above the surface. Altogether it was a ride to be long remembered, through that lonely valley by moonlight in an utterly unknown and somewhat hostile country, as several attempts at robbery have been made by the natives lately upon small parties; and although in no case have they attacked a European, yet everyone rides with his loaded revolver in his holster. A deep silence seemed to hang over everything, broken only by our own voices, except by the occasional thrill of a cicada among the bushes, the call of a night-bird, or by the whining of a jackal, or the hoarse bark of a monkey on the hills above.

It was just eleven o'clock when we arrived at Upper Sooro. An officer at once came to the door of his tent, and with that hospitality which is universal, asked us to come in and sit while our tent was being pitched. We accepted, and he opened for us a bottle of beer, cool, and in excellent condition. Imagine our feelings. Brandy-and-water would have been true hospitality, but beer, where beer is so scarce and so precious as it is here, was a deed which deserves to be recorded in letters of gold. I forbear to name our benefactor. The Samaritan's name has not descended

to us; the widow who bestowed the mite is nameless. Let it be so in the present case. But I shall never cease to think of that bottle of beer with gratitude.

My tent was now pitched; my servant procured some hot water and made some tea; and having taken that and some biscuit, and having seen that the horses were fed, I slightly undressed, lay down upon my water-proof sheet, and lighted a final cigar, when to my horror I observed many creeping things advancing over the sheet towards me. Upon examination they turned out to be of two species – the one a large red ant, the other a sort of tick, which I found on inquiring in the morning are camel-ticks. They are a lead colour, and about the size of sheep-ticks, but they do not run so fast. This was, indeed, a calamity, but there was nothing to be done. I was far too tired to get up and have my tent pitched in another place; besides, another place might have been just as bad. I therefore wrapped myself as tightly as I could in my rug, in hopes that they would not find their way in, and so went to sleep. In the morning I rejoiced greatly to find that I had not been bitten; for they bite horses and men, raising a bump as big as a man's fist upon the former, and causing great pain and swelling to the latter.

I describe thus minutely the events of every day, because the life of most officers and men greatly resembles my own, and by relating my own experience I give a far more accurate idea of the sort of life we are leading in Abyssinia than I could do by any general statements.

Upper Sooro is a large commissariat dépôt, exceedingly well managed by Conductor Crow. It is a new basin of five hundred yards long by two hundred across, a widening out of the pass. It is selected for that reason, as it is the only place along the line near water where a regiment could encamp. Owing to its elevation above the sea the temperature is very pleasant, except for two or three hours in the middle of the day. Another agreeable change is that the thorny bushes have disappeared, and a tree without prickles, and which attains a considerable size, has taken their place.

At seven o'clock this morning the Beloochees began to arrive, having started at midnight. The advanced guard were therefore exactly the same time doing the distance that we were. Their baggage, however, has been dropping in all day, for it was loaded on camels, and most of these animals stuck fast in the narrow passages of the pass, and had to be unloaded to enable them to get through; and this happened again and again. The pass, in fact, is not, as yet, practicable for camels; mules can manage it, but it is a very close fit for them, and it will be some time yet before camels can pass with their burdens. I suppose after to-day's experience camels will not be again employed this side of Koomaylo until the pass has been widened. Some of the poor animals were stuck fast for a couple of hours before they could be extricated. There are now a hundred of them lying down within fifty yards of my tent. I consider the camel to be the most ridiculously-overpraised animal under the sun. I do not deny that he has his virtues. He is

moderately strong – not very strong for his size, for he will not carry so much as a couple of good mules; still he is fairly strong, and he can go a long time without water – a very useful quality in the desert, or on the sea-shore of Abyssinia. But patient! Heaven save the mark! He is without exception the most cantankerous animal under the sun. When he is wanted to stand up, he lies down; when he is wanted to lie down, he will not do it on any consideration; and once down he jumps up again the moment his driver's back is turned. He grumbles, and growls, and roars at any order he receives, whether to stand up or lie down; whether to be loaded or to have his packs taken off. When he is once loaded and in motion he goes on quietly enough; but so does a horse, or a donkey, or any other animal. After having made himself as disagreeable as possible, there is small praise to him that he goes on when he cannot help it. I consider the mule, which people have most wrongfully named obstinate, to be a superior animal in every respect – except that he wants his drink – to the much-bepraised camel.

A messenger passed through here yesterday from Abyssinia. He was bringing letters from Mr. Rassam to Colonel Merewether. He reports that Theodore is continuing his cruelties, and killing his soldiers in numbers. Under these circumstances one can hardly feel surprised at the news that, in spite of his efforts, he is unable to increase his army beyond seven or eight thousand men. He is still at Debra Tabor.

Camp, Senafe, December 16th.

I arrived here only half-an-hour since, and find that the post is on the point of starting. I therefore have only time to write a few lines to supplement my last letter, which was sent from Sooro. All description of the pass between that resting-place and Senafe I must postpone to my next letter, and only write to say that there is no particular news here. The messenger from Mr. Rassam arrived in the camp yesterday. He states that the King of Shoa's men are between Theodore and Magdala, and that there is every hope that they will take the latter place, and liberate the prisoners. The reports about the King of Tigré are, to a certain extent, founded on fact. He has professed the greatest friendship, but there are sinister reports that he really means mischief, and for two or three days the pickets have been doubled. It is not thought that there is any foundation for the report of his intention to attack us. The situation of this camp is very pleasant – upon a lofty table-land, seven thousand feet above the sea, and with a delightfully bracing wind blowing over it, and reminding one of Brighton Downs in the month of May. At night I am told that the thermometer goes down below freezing-point. The camp is situated in a slight hollow or valley in the plain; through its centre flows a stream, which when the camp was first formed was knee-deep, but has greatly fallen off since, so much so that reservoirs are being formed and wells sunk in case the supply should cease. Short as the time is before the post goes, I might have sent you more intelligence were it not that Colonels Merewether and Phayre are both absent upon some expedition in the surrounding

country, and I am therefore unable to draw any news from any official source. The health of everyone up here is excellent, and the horses are suffering less from the disease which has almost decimated them in the lower ground. There are plenty of cattle brought in for sale, but unfortunately the authorities have no money to buy them with.

Senafe, December 19th.

I wrote a few lines, upon my arrival here two days ago; but as the post was upon the point of starting, I could not do more than state that the rumours which had reached us down below respecting the King of Tigré were untrue, and that that monarch was at present pursuing a course of masterly inactivity. I will now, therefore, resume my letter at the point where my last regular communication ended – namely, at the station of Sooro, in the pass leading to this place. I do not apologise for making my description of this pass very detailed, for at present the whole interest of the expedition centres in the passage of the troops and baggage from Zulla to this point, and I feel sure that any particulars which may enable the public to picture to themselves the country through which our soldiers are marching will be read with keen interest. From Sooro to Rayray Guddy, the next regular station, is, according to the official report, twenty-eight miles; but I am convinced, and in this opinion I am borne out by every officer I have spoken to, that thirty-three would be much nearer the fact. Indeed, in every march up here the official distances are a good deal under the truth. But, indeed, the officers of the

exploring force appear to have seen everything through rose-coloured spectacles. At Zulla they reported plenty of water, and they found, a short way further, an abundance of forage, which no one else has been able to discover before or since. It was on the strength of these reports of forage and water that the baggage-animals were hurried forward. I am not blaming the officers who made the reports. They simply acted as it is the nature of explorers to act. Every father thinks his own child a prodigy. Every discoverer believes that the country, or river, or lake which he has been the first to report on, is a country, river, or lake such as no man ever saw before. Over and over again this has happened, and disastrous consequences have ere now arisen from the persistent use by explorers of these rose-coloured spectacles. It is not more than four or five years – to give one example out of a thousand – since Dr. Livingstone reported that he had discovered a magnificent navigable river in Eastern Africa, with rice, cotton, and corn abounding upon its banks, and a climate beyond reproach. In consequence of this report the "Universities Mission" was organised, and a band of missionaries, headed by their bishop, Mackenzie, started. After months of struggle they arrived at the place of disembarkation, having already discovered that their noble stream was, at a good average time of year, about three feet deep. There they set up their mission; there, one by one, these noble fellows died of want and of fever, victims of an explorer's rose-coloured spectacles. After that we must not grudge the few hundred mules that have fallen a sacrifice to the

want of springs and forage which could be seen only through the glasses of the chiefs of the exploring party.

From Sooro to Rayray Guddy is too far a march to be made in one day along such a road as there is at present, and accordingly it is generally broken at a spot called Guinea-fowl Plain, where there is a well yielding a small supply of water, the colour of pea-soup. We had had quite sufficient of night-marching previously, and, having passed one day at Sooro, we started at ten o'clock the following morning. We had intended to have started an hour earlier; but making a start here is a very different thing from sending for a cab at an appointed time to catch a train. In the first place there are the trunks, which have been opened the night before, to close; there is the tent to strike and pack up. Then at the last moment you discover that your servants have not washed up the breakfast-things, and that your mule-wallah has not yet taken his animals to water. At last, when all is ready, comes the important operation of loading the four baggage-animals. Each load has to be adjusted with the nicest precision, or the very first piece of rough ground you arrive at, round goes the saddle, and your belongings come to the ground with a crash. With our two mules we have the "Otago saddle," which is excellent. Indeed, in the opinion of almost everyone here, it is by far the best of the rival saddles. Upon these saddles we pack our own baggage, and once fairly adjusted this is pretty safe for the day. Not so the other animals, for which we have common mule-saddles. Upon these is piled a multifarious collection of bundles. Our

servants' five kits, our animals' rugs and ropes, our tents, two sacks containing cooking-utensils and numerous etceteras, and a water-skin for use upon the road. The actual weight that these animals have to carry is not so great as that borne by the others; but the trouble of adjusting and fastening on is at least ten times as great. The loads have frequently to be taken off three or four times, and then when we think all is right, and get fairly into motion, we have not gone twenty yards before there is a gradual descending motion observed on one side of an animal, and a corresponding rise of the opposite burden, and we are obliged to stop and readjust everything, or in another minute or two the whole would have toppled over. These things ruffle the temper somewhat, and our equanimity is not improved by the intense stupidity which our native servants always manifest upon these occasions. They seem to have no eye. They heap bundles on the side which was before palpably the heaviest; they twist cords where cords can be of no earthly use: altogether they are horribly aggravating. However, by this time I am getting accustomed to these things, and take matters into my own hands, and insist on things being done exactly as I direct them. At ten o'clock, then, we were fairly off, and I do not know that I ever rode through a more monotonous valley than that between Sooro and Guinea-fowl Plain. It was the counterpart of that I described in my last letter as extending between Koomaylo and Lower Sooro. A dead flat of two or three hundred yards across, with the torrent's bed winding across it, and spur after spur of mountain turning it every

quarter of a mile. Some of the mountain views which we saw up the ravines were certainly very fine, but it became monotonous in the extreme after six hours' march at the rate of little over two miles an hour. The vegetation, however, had changed since the preceding day. The thorny bush no longer covered everything, but a variety of shrubs now bordered the path, and the diversity of their foliage was a relief to the eye. Immense quantities of locusts were everywhere met with, making the ground yellow where they lay, and rising with a rustling noise, which was very discomposing to the horses at our approach. They did not eat all the shrubs, but the species upon which they fed were absolutely covered with them, and most of their favourite plants were stripped completely bare. Monkeys, or rather baboons, still abounded: we saw numerous large troops of them, which must have been over a hundred strong. It was about five o'clock when we reached Guinea-fowl Plain, which may have guinea-fowls, although we saw none; but which is most certainly not a plain, for at the place where the well is the valley is narrower than it had been for miles previously. Here we found some really large trees, and under them we pitched our tent. It was not long before our servants had fires lighted and dinner in a forward state. There were two or three other parties who had arrived before us, and, as it got dusk, all lighted fires; and, as each party, with their cooking and grooms' fires, had at least three bonfires going, it made quite a picturesque scene. The night was raw and cold, and we had a few drops of rain. It was fortunate that we had brought water with

us for cooking purposes, for the water in the well was perfectly undrinkable.

The next morning we were again off early for our longest journey, that on to Rayray Guddy, where food would be procurable for horse and man, neither one nor the other being obtainable at Guinea-fowl Plain, where there is no commissariat station. We had carried our own food, and a small portion of grain for the horses; but they would have fared very badly had we not met some natives in the pass with a bundle of hay, and done a little barter with them for rice. The valley for the first twelve or fourteen miles from Guinea-fowl Plain greatly resembled in its general features that we had passed the day previously, but the vegetation became more varied and interesting every mile. We now had great trees of ivy, we had the evergreen oak, and occasionally gigantic tulip-trees. We had great numbers of a tree, or rather large shrub, of the name of which I am ignorant; its leaves more resembled the sprays of the asparagus when it has run far to seed than any other foliage I know, but the growth of the shrub was more like a yew. Upon its branches were vast quantities of a parasite resembling the mistletoe, whose dark-green leaves afforded a fine contrast to the rather bluish tint of the tree. Climbing everywhere over the trees, and sometimes almost hiding them, were creepers of various kinds; on the ground grew vast quantities of the aloe. There were, too, numerous cacti of various kinds, some thick and bulky, others no thicker than a lady's little finger, and growing like a creeper

over the trees. But, strangest of all, upon the hill-sides grew an immense plant, or rather tree, of the cactus tribe, which I had never seen before. It started by a straight stem fifteen or twenty feet high, and thicker than a man's body. This branched out into a great number of arms, which all grew upwards, and to just the same height, giving it a strange and formal appearance, exactly resembling a gigantic cauliflower. I believe its name is *Euphorbia candalabriensis*, but do not at all vouch for this. Some of the mountain slopes were quite covered with this strange tree, but as a general thing it grew singly or in pairs. The tulip-trees were superb; they grew generally in rocky places, and with their huge twisted trunks, and glossy green leaves, and limbs more than a hundred feet long, they were studies for a painter.

At about three miles from Rayray Guddy the valley narrowed to a ravine, and we came upon running water. The pass from here to the station is steep and difficult, but nothing to that at Sooro. Having drawn our rations, and received the unwelcome intelligence that there was no hay, and only the scantiest possible amount of grain for our animals, we established our camp and went up to look at the land transport division, about a quarter of a mile higher up the valley. There were four or five hundred mules and ponies here, in good order, but hardly good condition; in fact, the work has been hard and forage scant. How hard the work has been, our journey of the two preceding days had testified. All along the line of march we had come across the carcasses of dead animals, from which great vultures rose lazily

at our approach. As we approached Rayray Guddy the remains of the victims occurred much more frequently, and the air was everywhere impregnated with the fœtid odour. This was only to be expected, as the poor animals had been obliged to endeavour to accomplish the march of thirty miles from Sooro without food, and in most cases without water. No time should be lost in forming a small commissariat dépôt at Guinea-fowl Plain, where a ration of hay and grain could be served out to the animals as they pass through. The work these baggage-animals have to go through is extremely severe, and their half-starved appearance testifies that they have not sufficient food served out to them, and to expect them to do two days' work on their one day's scanty rations is a little too much even from mules. We found our friends who had started before us from Guinea-fowl Plain encamped up there with Captain Mortimer of the transport train. It was proposed that we should throw in our mess with them. We accordingly returned to our own encampment, took our meat and rum, our plates and knives and forks, and marched back again. In an hour dinner was ready, and in the mean time I was glad of an opportunity of inquiring how this advanced division of the transport train had got on. I found that they had, like the one down at Zulla, had the greatest trouble with their drivers. The officer complained bitterly of the class of men who had been sent out – Greeks, Italians, Frenchmen, Spaniards, the mere sweepings of Alexandria, Cairo, Beyrout, and Smyrna. The Hindoo drivers, he said, upon the whole, worked steadily, and

were more reliable than the others, but were greatly wanting in physical strength. The Persians, on the contrary, were very strong and powerful men, and could load three mules while a Hindoo could load one; but they had at first given very great trouble, had mutinied and threatened to desert in a body, but, upon the application of the lash to two or three of the ringleaders, things had gone on more smoothly. The Arab drivers had almost all deserted. Even up here the mules still suffer from the disease which prevailed down upon the plain, and which carried off a hundred horses of the 3d Native Cavalry. It is very sudden in its action, and is in nearly every case fatal. The animals seem seized with some internal pain, arch their backs, and become rigid. In a short time the tongue grows black, a discharge takes place from the nostrils, and in a few hours, sometimes not more than one, from the time he is attacked, the animal is dead. At present, as with our cattle-disease, all remedies are ineffectual. Animals in good condition are more liable to be attacked than are the poorer ones. After dinner we returned to our tent, where, however, we did not pass a remarkably-pleasant night. In the first place, it was bitterly cold – the temperature of Rayray Guddy is indeed colder than it is here; and in the second, a mule had broken loose from its head-ropes, and came down to our encampment. Five or six times it nearly upset our tent by tumbling over the tent-ropes, in addition to which it made our horses so savage by going up among them, that we were afraid of their breaking loose. Four or five times, therefore, did we have to get up and go

out in the cold to drive the beast away with stones. The grooms were sleeping at their horses' heads, but were so wrapped up in their rugs that they heard nothing of it. The next morning it was so cold that we were really glad to be up and moving, and were on our way at a little before eight. The first six miles of the road is narrow and winding, and is as lovely a road as I ever passed. With the exception only of the narrow pathway, the gorge was one mass of foliage. In addition to all the plants I have mentioned as occurring below, we had now the wild fig, the laburnum, various sorts of acacia, and many others, One plant in particular, I believe a species of acacia, was in seed; the seed-pods were a reddish-brown, but were very thin and transparent, and when the sun shone upon them were of the colour of the clearest carmine. As these shrubs were in great abundance, and completely covered with seed-pods, their appearance was very brilliant. Among all these plants fluttered numerous humming-birds of the most lovely colours. Other birds of larger size and gorgeous plumage perched among the trees at a short distance from the path. Brilliant butterflies flitted here and there among the flowers.

At last we came to an end of this charming ride, and prepared for a work of a very different nature. We turned from the ravine which we had now followed for sixty miles, and prepared boldly to ascend the hill-side. As soon as we left the ravine all the semi-tropical vegetation was at an end; we were climbing a steep hill covered with boulders, between which stunted pines thrust their

gnarled branches and dark foliage. We had gone at one leap from a tropical ravine to a highland mountain-side. The ascent was, I should say, at the least a thousand feet, and a worse thousand-feet climb I never had before and never wish to have again. It is a mere track which zigzags up among the rocks and trees, and which was made by the 10th Native Infantry and the Sappers, as the pioneer force rested below and had breakfast. The men effected marvels considering that it was the work of two hours only; but it is at best a mere track. Sometimes the mules mount a place as steep as a flight of stairs; then they have to step over a rock three feet high. In fact, it is one long struggle up to the top, and in no place wide enough for two mules to pass. One mule falling puts a stop to a whole train, and this was exemplified in our case, for we were following a long line of mules when they suddenly came to a stop. For half-an-hour we waited patiently, and then, climbing up the rocks and through the trees at the side of the stationary mules, we finally came to the cause of detention – one of the mules had fallen. The drivers had taken no efforts to remove his pack or his saddle, but were sitting by his side quietly smoking their pipes. After a little strong language we took off his saddle, got things right, and the train proceeded again. This is the great want of the transport corps – a strong body of inspectors, as they are called, volunteers from European regiments. There ought to be one of these to every ten or fifteen drivers, who, as in the present case, if not looked after by a European, will shirk work in every possible way. But this is a subject upon which I shall have

much more to say at a future time. This road or path is really not practicable for the passage of mules, for, although singly they can go up well enough, if one party going up were to meet another going down, it is probable that, if no European came up to make one party or other retrace their steps, they would remain there until the last animal died of starvation. Three companies of the Beloochee regiment arrived yesterday at the bottom of the hill, and have set to work to widen and improve it; and as a party of sappers and miners have begun to work downwards from the top, the road will soon be made passable. For this hill-side is not like the pass of Sooro, which would require an incredible amount of labour to render it a decent road. There are no natural obstacles here beyond trees to be cut down and stones to be rolled away; so that by the time the main body of the army arrives I have no doubt that they will find a fair road up to the plateau.

Senafe, December 20th.

I closed my letter in great haste yesterday afternoon, for the authorities suddenly arrived at the conclusion that it was the last day for the English mail. I was obliged to break off abruptly in my description of the road, being at the point where we had just arrived upon the plateau. Looking backwards, we could see peak after peak extending behind us, which when we had been winding among their bases had looked so high above us, but which now were little above the level of the spot where we were standing. A few of the peaks around us might have been a thousand or fifteen hundred feet higher than the plateau, and we

were standing nearly on the summit of that high range of hills we had seen from the sea. We are now seven thousand four hundred feet above Zulla, and by my description of the pass it will be seen that it is no child's-play to attain this height. It is not that the ascent is so steep; on the contrary, taking the distance at seventy miles, the rise is only one in a hundred, an easy gradient for a railway; but more than half the rise takes place in three short steep ascents, namely, the Sooro pass, a rise of one thousand five hundred feet in four miles; the Rayray Guddy pass, a rise of one thousand feet in three miles; and the last climb on to the plateau, a rise of one thousand five hundred feet in two miles. Thus four thousand feet, or more than half the rise, takes place in nine miles, and over the remaining distance the rise is only one foot in every two hundred. The difficulties of the journey are the general roughness of the road, the long distances the animals have to go without water, and the ascent of the Sooro pass, for there is no doubt that the final rise to the plateau will soon be made a good road by the exertions of the Beloochees and Sappers. Turning our horses' heads we proceeded onward. The change to an open plain and a fresh wind in place of the long valley and oppressive stillness was charming. One would have thought oneself on the top of a Welsh hill. The ground was a black peaty soil, with a short dried-up grass. Here and there were small patches of cultivated ground, and clumps of rock cropped up everywhere. Looking forward, we could see that the general character of the ground was that of a plain; but enormous masses of rock, of seven

or eight hundred feet in height, rose perpendicularly in fantastic shapes sheer up from the plain. Here and there were ranges of mountains, some of considerable altitude. Far in the distance we could see hills rising between hills, but never attaining any great height. Everywhere over the plain were little groups of cattle and sheep grazing. We were evidently in a thickly-populated country.

After about two miles' ride we turned the corner of a slight rise, and there before us lay the camp. It is prettily situated on the side of a little valley, and faces the north. The 10th Native Infantry are encamped on the right wing; the Mountain Train occupy the centre; and the 3d Cavalry camp lies on the left. Behind the rise a plain stretches away, and upon this the troops will be encamped as they arrive. The soil of the valley-side and of the plain beyond is a mere sand, covered with grass and bushes, but in the hollow of the valley, where the stream runs, or rather used to run, it is a deep black peat. Wells are now being sunk in this peat, and these rapidly fill with water. There are still deep pools where the stream formerly ran, and dams have been formed, which will keep back a considerable supply of water. The troops are not, therefore, likely to fall short for some time, and if they should, there is plenty at a stream two or three miles farther on. The health of the troops is pretty good, but both officers and men are subject to slight attacks of fever, much more so than they were when encamped on the plain by the sea. This is singular, for except that the nights are rather cold, this feels the very perfection of climate. The horses and mules are doing much

better up here, and although some died at first, it is probable that they had brought the seeds of the disease with them from the pass below. As it is, the cavalry have suffered terribly. The 5th Cavalry, out of five hundred horses, have lost one hundred and seventy, and the officers' horses of the infantry and Mountain Train have been nearly exterminated.

Things are very tranquil here. The King of Tigré, after first being friendly, and then blustering a little, has just at present, influenced probably by the reports of the increasing force of the expedition, determined upon the prudent policy of friendship, at any rate until he sees a better opportunity of plunder than he does at present. Yesterday afternoon an ambassador arrived from him, saying magnanimously, "Why should we not be friends? My foes are your foes; my interests your interests. Take therefore my forage, and my blessing." Colonel Merewether is greatly delighted at this message, and sees, through those rose-coloured spectacles of his, an early end to the expedition. Everyone else is perfectly indifferent. The King of Tigré's army of 7000 men could be scattered like chaff by a battalion of Europeans; and if he ever sees a chance of falling upon our rear, it is more than probable that his friendly professions will go for nothing. I do not think that the smallest reliance can be placed in the friendship of these semi-savage chiefs.

We gave his ambassador a lesson this morning, which will, I have no doubt, have its effect. It was a brigade field-day, and Colonel Merewether took the ambassador out to witness it. It is a

great pity that the artillery and the infantry had not a few rounds of blank cartridge, which would have given his ambassadorship a much more lively idea of what the real thing would be like, and would have given him such a tale to bear to his king and master as would have opened his Majesty's eyes to what the consequences of a war with us would probably be. But even as it was, it no doubt had a very salutary effect. The enemy were supposed to be holding a steep rise at the mouth of a long valley. The infantry threw forward skirmishers, and the mountain guns took up a position upon a neighbouring hill, and were supposed to open a heavy fire. Presently the infantry advanced in line, and made a rush up the steep rise. As they reached the top they lowered bayonets to the charge, and with a loud cheer rushed upon the defenders. An instant afterwards the word "Charge!" was given to cavalry, and away they went down the valley, sweeping the enemy's supports and the fugitives from the hill before them for half a mile, and then scattering in pursuit. It was very well done, and, as I have said, no doubt had its effect, especially when the ambassador was made to understand that the force he saw before him was only one-tenth of our advancing army. The movements of the troops were fairly performed, and did great credit to their respective commanding-officers. Their remaining horses are in excellent condition, and are very strong serviceable animals. Their uniform is a very effective one, light-blue and silver, with white covers to their forage caps. The infantry, whose uniform is precisely similar to our own, also wear white cap-

covers. Going out to the parade-ground, which is about two miles distant from here, we passed several native villages, and a great number of them can be seen scattered all over the plains. The country, indeed, is very thickly populated; very much more so than a rural district in England of the same extent. The people possess goats, sheep, and cattle in abundance, together with ponies, donkeys, and mules. They are ready to sell all these animals to us, but demand very high prices, which has been to a certain extent encouraged by the prices Colonel Merewether has ordered to be paid at the bazaar for them. Thus, he has fixed the price of a goat at a dollar and a half, that is six and ninepence, whereas I paid down in the pass only two shillings for a goat, and could have bought any number at that price. It is probable, too, that the current price for goats, or indeed for any animals, is considerably less here than in the valley, for there forage is extremely scarce, and must be sought at long distances; whereas here it is abundant, the plains being covered with it. Of course, this price having been once fixed, the natives will not take less, that is, in specie. They would take a shilling's worth of rice for a goat; but of course we have no rice to give them. It may make but little difference to Colonel Merewether whether he pays seven shillings or two shillings for a goat; but the subalterns naturally grumble at having to pay three times the real value for their food. Not, indeed, that the officers here have to buy much, for their guns supplement their rations to a very considerable extent. Guinea-fowls, partridges, ducks, and geese abound, and a large

number are daily shot by the sportsmen of the camp. The ration allowance of one pound of meat, including bone, a pound of biscuit, two ounces of preserved vegetables, and a quarter of a pound of rice, is quite insufficient for one's wants in a bracing atmosphere like this. The meat issued contains an enormous proportion of bone, so that there is little if at all more than half a pound of clear meat in a ration. I am sure that I consume at least three times my daily allowance of meat.

The natives completely swarm about our camp. The men do not do much, but loiter about with their swords and spears, and shields made of elephant-hide. These spears are really formidable weapons. They are from six to ten feet long, and weighted at both ends, and the natives are able to throw them with great force and considerable accuracy for a distance of over thirty yards. These would be ugly weapons in a hand-to-hand fight in a bush, but as it is, against a disciplined force armed with firearms, they are simply absurd, and I have seen no offensive weapons – such as bows or arrows – which could be used with effect against us during the passage of a defile, in their possession, since my arrival in the country. The women appear to do all the work. They come into the camp in hundreds laden with firewood, and keep up a perpetual cry of "Lockaree, lockaree!" – which is the Hindoostanee for wood, they having picked up that word, – and "Parnè!" water. Even the children bring their bundles of wood. The women are not nearly so pretty as some of them I saw down the pass, nor are they so neatly clad. They are dressed in

cotton and leather; but neither are these so tastefully arranged, or so fancifully ornamented with shells, as were those I described in a previous letter. They are very thin, many of the children painfully so, which is surprising when one sees the abundance of their flocks and herds. The villages, too, are well built. The houses are low and flat-roofed. They are in many cases built of stone, and some of them have inner courts, with a sort of veranda formed of boughs to sit under. They have, like the Arab villages I saw at Alexandria, and which they strongly resemble, no windows; but as the native's life is entirely passed in the open air, I suppose that matters but little. The natives seem to feel the cold much, and go shivering about in the early morning and evening in a pitiful way. They bring in honey for sale in pots, weighing about ten pounds, and for which they charge two dollars. Their own drink is made of this honey, fermented with the juice of a plant which grows abundantly upon the plain. The honey, as they bring it into camp, is very impure, and needs refining before using. The commissariat officer rode out yesterday to one of the villages, and bought a quantity of chillies, which will prove a great addition to our fare when they begin to issue them, for we have had no pepper served out since we landed; and a course of mutton, unrelieved by condiment of any kind, is apt to pall upon the stomach.

All praise must be given to the commissariat for the way in which they have performed the service from Zulla to this place. Not one day have the troops been without their rations;

and the animals, although they have not always received their full supply, have yet always had something to eat at the end of the day's work. No commissariat officer accompanied the pioneer force in their march up; but the whole arrangements were made by Conductor Darcey, to whom the greatest credit is due. During the whole march he did not lose a single animal, or a single bag of grain. A commissariat officer has arrived within the last two days; but honour should be given where it is due, and certainly the greatest credit is due to those noncommissioned officers for the manner in which, alone and unaided, they have carried out the difficult duties intrusted to them. Two prisoners were brought in yesterday. They are part of the gang who have been infesting the pass, robbing every convoy without a guard of Europeans. They were captured by a friendly chief, who, with his men, came upon the whole gang. The rest fled, throwing away their weapons, of which quite a bundle was brought into camp. The prisoners, being old men, were unable to escape, and were brought in triumph by their captors into Rayray Guddy, whence they were forwarded to Colonel Merewether. Their preliminary examination by the interpreter took place in the open air. The prisoners and their accusers squatted in a circle, and a number of natives gathered round. These last were evidently greatly amused and surprised at the formality of the proceedings, – as the guilt of the accused was undoubted, articles of European manufacture, such as portions of harness, being found in their possession, – and the idea being evidently prevalent that we should hang them at

once. They were removed to the guard-tent, and will, I suppose, be regularly tried, and well flogged, in a day or two.

This expectation was not verified; the prisoners were let off, with an admonition to behave better in future; and this happened again and again. The absurd course pursued by our political officer towards native offenders produced, as might have been expected, very disastrous consequences afterwards. The natives learnt that our baggage could be plundered with impunity, and that even when taken red-handed in the act, the chances were that no punishment whatever would be inflicted. They naturally ascribed this conduct on our part to fear – for in Abyssinia the punishment for theft is very severe, the culprit frequently having his hand cut off – and were encouraged to plunder accordingly. A moderate share of energy, one grain of common sense among the authorities at Senafe at this time, so that the first two or three offenders caught plundering our convoys in open day should have been flogged to within an inch of their lives, and plundering would have been put a stop to at once and for ever; and a very great many lives, both of our own muleteers and of the natives themselves, would have been eventually saved.

It is a great satisfaction to know that in the course of a short time we shall be able to purchase for the use of the army any number of bullocks and sheep. We have not been able to do so heretofore, for the absurd reason that we have had no money. Will it be believed that a body of troops marching on into a country where it is supposed they would be able to purchase

any quantity of animals for themselves and the army which is to follow them, should have come up with the military chest totally unprovided with money? It is almost too preposterous, but it is perfectly true. A chest of two thousand pounds arrived yesterday under a guard. But what are two thousand pounds when we want three or four thousand bullocks alone, and when Colonel Merewether has fixed the price of each at six dollars and a half – that is, as nearly as possible, thirty shillings?

I shall be able to send you but little news from here. Colonel Merewether proceeds to-morrow morning forty miles into the interior. He takes with him a troop of cavalry, a large stock of mules, &c., but he declines positively to allow a *confrère* and myself to accompany him. He is civil, but firm. "The addition of two persons would probably break down the whole party. Starvation might ensue, and he could not guarantee that we should be fed." These are actually word for word the reasons he gives for declining to allow the only two special correspondents here from accompanying his force. He can victual himself, Colonel Phayre, three or four other staff-officers, and a troop of cavalry; but two correspondents were too much for the resources of the commissariat. We called upon him twice; we urged upon him that it was a matter of great interest to the public that we should go forward. We said that we would put him to no trouble, but would bring our own mules, with ten days' provisions, if necessary. He declined positively to allow us to go. He would, when he returned, give us details, and that was all he would do.

The public, in fact, might read his official report and be thankful; for none other, says he, shall they receive. Had we arrived here as two unaccredited strangers, his conduct was perfectly explicable; but provided as we were by the courtesy of the India Office with letters to Sir Robert Napier, and furnished by him, in consequence, with a circular letter, requesting all officers of the army to forward our wishes in every way, we certainly had not expected to have been refused the chance of availing ourselves of the very first opportunity which has fallen in our way of sending you something really new from Abyssinia.

Camp, Senafe, December 23d.

At the time I closed my last letter I had no idea that my next communication would be dated Senafe. Colonel Merewether's unaccountable refusal to allow my fellow-correspondent and myself to accompany him upon his expedition had rendered our further stay here useless.

Accordingly, an hour or two after the expedition had started from camp, I packed up a light kit and started for the sea-shore. The road, as far as the top of the first descent, is now so free from stone that it might be used as a race-course, but we found that nothing had yet been done with the zigzag down the face of the hill. However, as we met no mules upon our way it was an easy descent enough; indeed the whole pass, from end to end, although it has its difficulties, still presents no real obstacle to a single traveller. It is only when viewed in the light of a highway for an army, as the only line of communication up which

the stores of 20,000 men must come, that one considers it to be a really terrible business. No forage is procurable for the baggage-animals between the sea and Senafe, seventy miles. A large proportion, therefore, of the mules is occupied in carrying food for themselves and their companions. The stages, too, for heavily-burdened animals across an exceedingly-rough road are distressingly long. Twelve miles a-day, with a pause for an hour to feed and water in the middle of the day, could be done by heavily-loaded mules without deterioration of their quality. But here all the stages, except the last, considerably exceed that distance; and from Sooro to Rayray Guddy, over thirty miles, is practically without food or water. This is what makes the Koomaylo Pass so difficult as the highway of an army – want of forage the whole distance, and long intervals between the watering-places; to which may be added the disease which infects the pass and decimates the animals as they go up and down. The mule, although one of the most enduring of creatures, and capable of sustaining great privations, is yet a delicate animal. Feed him well, keep him supplied with water and hay, and he will do wonders; but without regular and abundant food he falls away rapidly. During the last campaign in Italy there were thousands of mules engaged transporting provisions up the Tyrol to Garibaldi. They had great fatigue and long marches, but they were well fed and had plenty of water; and consequently throughout the campaign I never saw a dead mule, and hardly one out of condition. Here it is just the reverse; the mules are

greatly fallen off, and although they are now much better fed, they will be a very long time before they regain their lost strength. In respect to food a great improvement has been effected in the last few days. Captain Sewell has been here about a week. He is in charge of the commissariat, and has purchased considerable quantities of hay, which is now served out to the mules here, and to their even worse-off brethren down at Rayray Guddy; for here, at least, in their intervals of labour the mules were able to graze, while in the valley there is not a blade of grass to be had. Captain Mortimer, indeed, who is in charge of the transport division there, only kept his animals alive by compelling their drivers to go up to the summit of the hills, either before their day's work is begun or after it was over, and to cut and bring down a certain weight of hay. It is very fortunate that vultures are so abundant in this country. Were it not for them the pass would be unbearable from the taint of dead animals. Between the top of the pass and Rayray Guddy, a distance of eight miles, we passed more than that number of dead mules and ponies, most of which had been only dead three days at most; and everyone of these had been partially eaten by the vultures, who keep wheeling and circling in the air overhead, and scarcely is life out of an animal before these scavengers swoop down upon it. I have seen as many as seven or eight of these great birds eating and fighting over the carcass of a single horse. The ride from the bottom of the steep incline to Rayray Guddy I have already described, and it is certainly the most beautiful ride of seven miles I ever traversed,

the brilliancy and variety of the foliage, the number and beauty of the humming-birds and butterflies, all being in addition to the ordinary scenery of a mountain pass. I find that the great trees I described as tulip-trees are not really tulip-trees, although their foliage strangely resembles that tree. Authorities differ as to what they really are; some affirming that they are banyan-trees, while others say that no banyan-tree was ever seen without the long pendulous roots from its branches, of which there are here no trace.

Upon reaching Rayray Guddy we found that Sir Charles Staveley had arrived there two hours previously from Sooro. He had not heard of the departure of Colonels Merewether, Phayre, and Wilkins, and as the principal object of his journey had been to see them, he was of course much disappointed. However, he determined now he had come so far, to go on to Senafe, and we decided upon returning with him, as we had now no motive for going down, and, indeed, it was possible that he might either ride out himself to the point whither Colonel Merewether had gone, or might send an aide-de-camp to request him to return, in either of which cases we knew that he would grant us permission to go. General Staveley was the more disappointed at the absence of Colonel Merewether because he had taken the precaution of writing two days previously to announce his coming. The letter, of course, had not arrived, for the general had performed the distance in three days from Zulla to Senafe, and the post would take at least two days longer. Nothing, indeed, can

possibly be worse than the postal arrangements, or rather want of arrangement. Relays of men on foot carry the letters, and even these do not travel at night. But the great question which everyone is asking is, "What becomes of the letters?" I have not received a single letter or newspaper of a later date than November 4th. Some few people have been more fortunate, and occasionally get a letter or paper; but they are exceptions. One feels as absolutely cut off from England as if a great gulf had opened between us. I did hear this morning from someone who had had the luck to receive an odd newspaper that the amount for the Abyssinian war had been voted, and we had a hearty laugh over the news that the expenses were laid at four millions. I only hope that the post down is a little better regulated than that up, for if not, instead of getting my letters regularly once a-week, they will probably arrive in a mass about the end of next June. The general came up here on the 22d. He will, I believe, start on his return journey to-morrow, whether Colonel Merewether and his party come into camp or not, as his presence is absolutely necessary on the sea-shore. It will be unfortunate if he should miss them after his long journey up here, especially as he had made certain of seeing them; for the committee of exploration, which consisted of Colonels Merewether, Phayre, and Wilkins, was dissolved by an order of General Napier, which was published ten days since, and of which these gentlemen of course received a copy. General Napier thanked them warmly for their efforts to carry out their duty, and for the success which had attended them, but stated

that General Sir Charles Staveley had gone to Zulla to take the command until he himself arrived, and that therefore there was no longer any occasion for the existence of the committee. In the face of this order General Staveley could hardly have expected that these gentlemen would have proceeded on an expedition forty miles into the interior without any consultation or reference to himself.

An important messenger came into the camp on the afternoon of the 22d. He stated that he was the servant of Mr. Flad, and, indeed, was identified as being so by several people in camp. He stated that he had started with a letter from Mr. Flad, and with one from King Theodore, but that he had been robbed of them upon the way. He brought, however, one piece of important and very disagreeable news, namely, that Theodore had marched from Debra Tabor to Magdala; had raised the siege of that place by the King of Shoa, and had taken the whole of the captives back with him to Debra Tabor. This is the most unfortunate occurrence which could possibly have taken place. As long as the captives were separated from him by his enemies they were safe; and if, as will in all probability be the case, the army of Theodore should disband at our approach, and he himself rule safely in the fortresses of the mountains, where search for him would be out of the question, we should have marched to Magdala and effected the release of the prisoners. Now we have no such hope. We may toil on across mountain and ravine, but we know that our hands are shackled, and that the tyrant we war against can

at any moment purchase peace upon his own terms. Theodore can laugh our efforts to scorn; he knows that he need not disquiet himself. He can let the expedition approach him. He can chuckle over the enormous waste of treasure and effort, even if not of human life; and he knows that at the last moment he can arrest us with the ultimatum – "Return at once, and I will release my prisoners; move one step forward, and I will sacrifice every one." This is very disheartening, and takes away from the expedition that zest and buoyancy which the thought of a possible skirmish at the end of the toilsome journey would give it. Nothing could be more unfortunate than the loss of Theodore's letter by Mr. Flad's servant. It may be that in it Theodore offered to restore the captives at once upon the agreement that we would advance no farther. It may be that he held out the threat that the prisoners would be put to death did we not at once agree to his terms. Altogether it is most unfortunate. It is to be hoped that Theodore will see the manifest likelihood of his messenger being stopped upon the way, and will send his letter in duplicate by some other hand. There is a rumour current among the natives this morning that Theodore has released the captives, and that they are upon their way down. There is, of course, no finding out the origin of this report, but it is most unlikely that he would deliver them up until, at any rate, he had obtained a promise that we in return would abandon all idea of advancing upon him.

The disease among the horses still continues. Those who have been the longest up here appear comparatively safe, but it would

seem to require some time to get the disease out of the blood. Every morning three or four mules are dragged out of the camp to the foot of the hills, a mile off, there to be eaten by the vultures. Yesterday afternoon my groom came to me with the unpleasant intelligence, "Sahib, your baggage-pony ill." I went out and found him lying down. Upon the veterinary surgeon arriving he shook his head, and, pointing to the swollen tongue, said that it was the disease, and that in a couple of hours it would be dead. We tried brandy-and-water in the vain hope of reviving him, but it was quite useless, and in a little over the two hours the pony died, having been apparently unconscious for an hour and a half previously. Yesterday, too, the horse of Dr. Lamb, chief veterinary surgeon of the transport corps, died. Dr. Lamb came up with us a week since. After spending three days here inspecting the animals he returned, but as he did not wish his horse to run the risk of again going down into the pass, he left it here in perfect health, and rode down again upon a baggage-pony. Yesterday the poor animal died, after the usual three hours' illness. Dr. Lamb strongly recommended that all animals which can be spared should be at once sent up here. Unfortunately none of the baggage-animals, except those which work the last stage from Rayray Guddy here, can be spared. They must remain below to carry up provisions and baggage whatever the mortality may be. General Staveley has ordered that in future 10 per cent of spare animals shall accompany every train of loaded mules, to take the baggage off those who give in on the way. He has

also ordered that the artillery-horses shall be instantly sent up here with their native attendants. The soldiers cannot accompany them, as their warm clothing has not yet arrived. He has also ordered that the cavalry regiments shall be sent on the instant they land. The general has taken particular interest in the transport train since he arrived at Zulla, and it is due to the order he gave and to the assistance with which he supplied them from the 33d and Beloochee regiments, that the train down at Zulla has been enabled to make head against the tremendous difficulties they have sustained owing to the wholesale desertion among the drivers, and to the uselessness of a great portion of those who remain. He has divided the baggage-animals which are in the country into regular squadrons, stationing a number at each station proportioned to the length and hardship of the journey. General Staveley, indeed, is the very man for an expedition of this sort. Whatever he sees is necessary, he takes upon himself the responsibility of ordering to be done. I consider his arrival at Zulla to have been most providential. Everything was going wrong, disorder ruled supreme. All this is now at an end. General Staveley has taken the command, and unity of action is once more introduced. Whether Colonel Phayre, now that his committee of exploration is dissolved, may determine to go down to Zulla or to remain here, is now of little importance, as Major Baigrie, the deputy-quartermaster-general, is fully capable of carrying on the duties, supported as he is by the weight of General Staveley's authority.

This morning the 10th Native Infantry were engaged in clearing a large space of ground of stones, in order to make it suitable for a parade-ground. It was wonderful to see how fast they got through the work, and how much more they accomplished than an equal number of Europeans would have done in the same time. And this because squatting is the normal attitude of an Oriental. In this attitude they can remain for hours; therefore the work of collecting the stones into heaps, which in turn were carried away in empty rice-bags by another party, was the easiest affair possible. It is very amusing looking on at these native fatigue-parties, the varieties of costume are so great. The 10th Native Infantry, like the Beloochees, is recruited from all parts of India, and contain Mussulmans, Punjaubees, Sikhs, Patans, Hill-men, and, in fact, specimens of most of the native races, the Hindostanee proper being greatly in the minority. To a certain extent these men cling to their own costume, consequently in a party of a hundred of them on fatigue-duty the variety is astonishing. Men in red turbans and white turbans, in red, white, or violet nightcaps – these articles having been served out to these men as part of their warm clothing – some in coloured jackets, white underclothing, and long drawers, others with nothing on but the cumberband, or loincloth, some entirely in white, with their legs covered to the knee. Many are the shades of colour too, from nearly jet black down to the rich bronze of the Sikhs. Almost all are fine, well-built men, and all appear to work with good temper and with a will. The parade is to take

place upon the new ground to-morrow evening. It is not settled yet upon what day General Staveley will leave, but his present intention is, in case Colonel Merewether returns on the morning of the 25th, to start the same afternoon.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.