

THE ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION.

The following is a description, dated Feb. 23, of an interview between General Napier and Prince Kassal, an Abyssinian Prince:

"A little before eleven o'clock a message came in to say that the Abyssinian vanguard was in sight. Shortly afterwards a dark group crowned the top of the slope opposite the British camp, where a red tent was quickly pitched. A red tent is the sign of the King's residence with an Abyssinian army. In about half an hour news was received that Kassal's main body, with drums beating and colors flying, was moving towards the Diab. In a short time the group of men around the red tent was largely swollen, and soon about 4,000 soldiers could be made out on the summit of the hill. A few minutes before mid-day the army of Tigre began its advance down the slope towards the river. It numbered about 4,000 men, who moved in a long, deep line, to the music of rude kettle drums. Two yellow and red pennants, borne aloft in the centre, marked the position of the chief. As soon as the Abyssinians began to move the British troops got under arms, and in a few minutes were, in an opposite direction, moving down towards the water. They halted about a hundred yards from the stream, where a large tent had been erected for the meeting. The Commander-in-chief, mounted on an elephant, and followed by his staff, rode down to the banks of the rivulet. The appearance of the British general on the elephant was to impress Kassal with the power and scientific spirit of the British nation, for the Abyssinians fear the elephant much, and have never ventured to tame him. Close to the stream the Commander-in-chief dismounted from the elephant and mounted his horse, lest the unusual sight of the huge earth-shaking beast should create a panic, and cause disasters among the cavalry of Tigre. By this time the Abyssinian line was within 100 yards of the stream. It suddenly opened out in the centre, and Kassal, surrounded by his immediate counselors and guards, rode forward on a chair, mule with a crimson umbrella borne above his head. He forded the stream, and was received by Sir Robert Napier. Mutual salutations were exchanged, which no doubt were quite as sincere as those in daily vogue in the civilized world, although the words of each were quite unintelligible to the other. Kassal was then conducted to the tent, where he was received by a salute from a guard of honor. Here all dismounted. The British commander led Kassal into the tent and placed him in a chair on his right hand, he himself also being seated in a chair. Their respective officers ranged themselves on opposite sides of the tent, those of Kassal squatting on the floor, while those of Sir Robert Napier adhered to their more usual, though, perhaps, less natural, erect position.

"Kassal is a young man of thirty-five years of age. His face, of a dark olive color, is intellectual, but he wears a care-worn and wearied expression which justifies his statement that he did not desire power, but that it was thrust upon him by the people of Tigre. He wore the Abyssinian costume, a white robe or toga, embroidered with crimson around his body, and the flowered silk shirt which marks those high in office around the King. His dark black hair was arranged in careful plaits, which, drawn back from the forehead, are tied by a piece of ribbon around the back of the neck. The conversation was conducted through an interpreter. At first, it consisted of almost meaningless inquiries after mutual health. But the Abyssinians soon threw out hints for presents of firearms. These hints were adroitly fenced, and the conversation turned to the subject of our mutual Christianity. In this subject neither the chief nor his counselors appeared to take nearly so much interest as in that of the firearms; but they were held to it until it was suggested that a private interview would be desirable. The presents to be given to the Abyssinian chief were now brought in. These consisted of a double-barreled rifle and some jugs and goblets of Bohemian glass. They were laid on the floor at Kassal's feet, and then, after inspection, removed by one of his servants. The most valuable present of all could not be brought into the tent, but was surveyed through the doorway for Sir Robert Napier gave to him a fine Arab horse which had been his own charger. The goblets were brought back for use, and port wine, which was much enjoyed by the Tigrean courtiers, served out in them. According to Oriental custom, the Commander-in-chief had to drink some to prove that it was not poison, a not unnecessary precaution, considering that it was obtained from some spare hospital stores, as in a camp where all depend upon commissariat rations no wine could be obtained from any other source. The tent was then cleared of all but one or two officers on either side, when doubtless serious matters were discussed, but the subjects of further conversation have not transpired.

"In a short time Kassal was left alone to rest, and about an hour later was summoned to witness a review of the British troops. The 3d Bombay Light Cavalry, clad in light blue and silver; the 4th King's Own, in scarlet; the gunners of Murray's battery, in dark blue and red facings; and a small detachment of the 10th Native Infantry, with scarlet coats and white turbans, formed a picturesque and compact though small force. The cavalry charged, the infantry skirmished and formed square, much to the admiration of the Abyssinians; but they were chiefly delighted and impressed by the Armstrong guns. Kassal dismounted and closely inspected the pieces, handled the shells, looked through the rifled barrel, while some of his followers remarked that the English must be good Christians, or Heaven would not give them intelligence to mould such wondrous weapons. By this it would appear that to their ideas the greatest blessings which can be vouchsafed to Christian morality are firearms and gunpowder.

When the review was over Sir Robert Napier and the officers of his staff accompanied Kassal to the rivulet, and there intended to bid him farewell. At the point of parting, however, an urgent invitation was given that the English officers should visit the Abyssinian camp. The rivulet was crossed, and in a moment they found themselves in the

middle of the camp of Tigre. All were astonished at their appearance and armament. They clustered around the Englishmen in dense but orderly masses. Their heads were bare, except for their plaited hair; their costumes were picturesque—long white togas, embroidered with scarlet; they were nearly all possessed of firearms of every description, from the matchlock to the double-barreled rifle, but by far the greatest number had double-barreled percussion guns of English or Belgian manufacture. Many had pistols, and all had the long, crooked swords worn on the right side, a cut from which it is said to be impossible to guard. The few—but there were very few—who had not firearms were armed with the sword, spear and shield. Of the 4,000 men present, about four hundred were cavalry, mounted on mules or ragged, wiry ponies. The horsemen were armed similarly to the foot soldiers. Truly, these men are an enemy not to be despised. Hardy mountaineers, quick in scaling the most difficult paths in this rugged country, they would give an infantry of trouble to any European force. If Theodore's army is as well equipped, and his soldiers are said to be the better armed, there will be British blood spilt before Magdala falls, should the Negakistand at bay. Nor numerically are the soldiers of Tigre contemptible. At Adow, his capital, Kassal has some 6,000 more equally well armed. Their discipline is good, and in their short visit they showed a power of marching which would not have disgraced the forces of a civilized nation. Their serious error is that by night no sentries or pickets are posted outside their camp. Hence the wonderful effect of Theodore's night attacks, for which he has become famous, may be accounted for, and as he has always adopted these precautions for his own security, no Abyssinian chief has yet been able to turn his own tactics against him.

Up the hill went the English staff, with the drums beating in front of them, and surrounded by the dense clusters of wild warriors, until they approached close to Kassal's tent. Here they dismounted, and were bidden to enter. At the further end of the circular tent was a small couch covered with silk cloth, on which the Prince took his seat, and placed Sir Robert Napier at his side. The Abyssinian officers of high grade sat round the tent on the floor as the English also seated themselves on the ground to the left of their commander. The scene was mixed and picturesque. The afternoon sun shone through the red tent and lighted up with a crimson hue the robes and silken shirts of the Abyssinians and the uniforms of the Englishmen. Girls bearing large baskets of Abyssinian bread and curry came in and placed them on the ground in front of the visitors, who were requested to eat. The bread was brown, formed in flat circular cakes about a foot in diameter, and had a slightly sour taste. Very little suffices to satisfy curiosity, although here it was permitted that each guest should help himself. In general, in Abyssinia, the servant who brings in the loaves and curry rolls some of the latter in a piece of the former, and after kneading it into ball thrusts it into the mouth of each diner. After enough had been eaten, other girls entered bearing huge bullock horns filled with "tedj," a drink made from fermented honey. This tedj, or hydromel, was poured into Florence flasks, and was given to each. It was expected that the recipient should bow towards the Prince, and then empty his flask. No sooner, however, was the vessel emptied than it was seized by a watchful servant and again replenished. Each had to drink several flasks of the liquor, which tasted not unlike small beer, but rather sour. After a while, when many flasks had been emptied, musicians were introduced. The band consisted of six men who played on long pipes, which uttered wild but not unpleasant music. A war song was then sung by a minstrel and all the Abyssinians joined in chorus. The entertainment was now drawing to a close, and the presents were brought in which were to be bestowed upon the British commander. He was first invested with a silver-gilt armband, the sign of a great warrior. Then a lion's skin and mane, the mark of a fierce fighter in battle, were placed upon his shoulders, a sword was girt upon his side, and a spear and a shield for him were handed to one of his staff, who acted on this occasion as his armor-bearer. The meeting then broke up. Kassal, after frequent hand-shaking, accompanied the general to the door of the tent, where a gray mule, caparisoned with Abyssinian saddlery and trappings, was waiting. On this Sir Robert Napier had to mount, and, again accompanied by the Abyssinian army, rode down to the Diab, where the Abyssinians halted. The English general and his staff rode into their own camp, but the shades of evening prevented the soldier from witnessing the return of their leader in such an unwonted disguise.

"Early next morning Kassal paid a farewell visit to the British camp, and had a second private interview with Sir Robert Napier, the results of which are said to have been most satisfactory. He is reported to have promised to afford security to our convoys, to send in grain to the markets of our stations, and to threaten with severe punishment any who should molest our telegraph throughout his dominions."

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