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NARRATIVE

OF

A JOURNEY THROUGH ABYSSINIA

IN 1862-3.

WITH AN APPENDIX ON "THE ABYSSINIAN
CAPTIVES QUESTION"

SMITHSONIAN

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BY HENRY DUPON

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levée has a number of soldiers with drawn swords and muskets around his divan. The time when he is willing to give a hearing to complaints or to receive visitors is always signified by the loud beat of kettle-drums. Whenever he goes out he always has a fore-runner, called the shûm's mouthpiece, who bellows out in a most horrid yell his intimation of the great man's approach.

Matammah is an important place, on account of its situation on the high-road to Abyssinia and its being the last place on the frontier. It has a great market for cotton, horses, mules, and cattle. Cotton is supplied to Abyssinia, being the growth of the district between Gedârif and Matammah; the live stock is brought down from the former country. A few slaves are sold here, being kept in private houses, where the purchases are transacted.

Four miles from Matammah the banks of the Atbara are reached, which is here a broad rapid stream, passing through a country rich in its flora, possessing amongst other trees the baobab, sycamore, and a kind of cedar. Its banks abound with every variety of wild beast—the elephant, lion, rhinoceros, and hyena. Gazelles, antelopes, and giraffes are also found. The hyena is every-

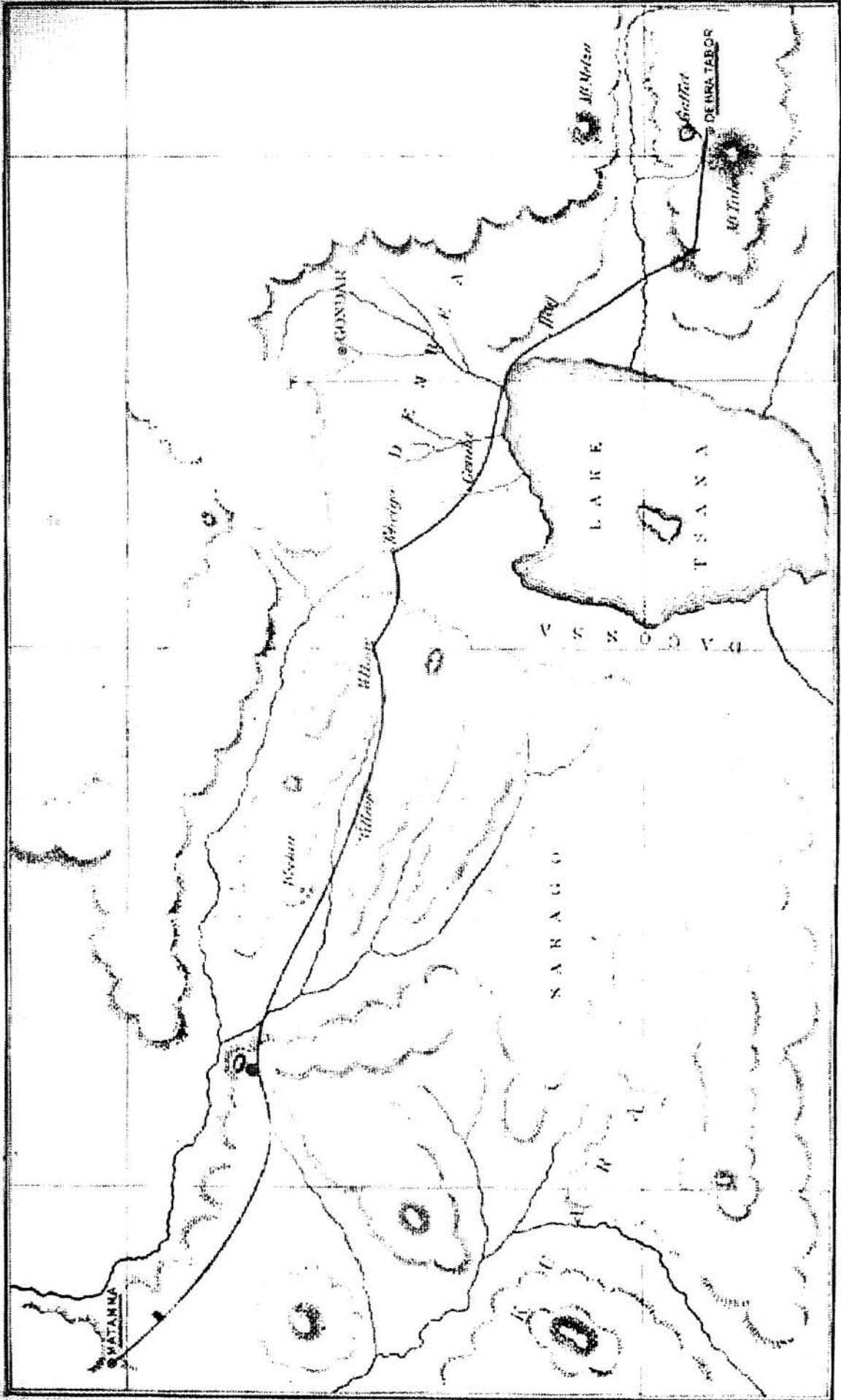
CHAPTER IV.

MATAMMAH TO TCHELGA.

Enter Abyssinia—Ill-defined frontier—The Switzerland of Africa—
 Earthly paradise—Slight adventure—River Coang—Wekhni—
 Abyssinian exclusiveness—Detention at Wekhni—Magnificent
 view—Teff—Again on the march—An European a *rara avis*—
 Custom-house authority—Abyssinian inhospitality—*In nubibus*—
 Cool climate—View of Lake Tsana—Enter Tchelga—Impudence
 of natives—Muscular Christianity.

IN the afternoon of November 24, 1862, in company with M. Lejean, the French consul, I left Matammah in the country of the Tokruris for Abyssinia. The frontier is very indefinitely marked; but as for four days the country is almost uninhabited, there is no great necessity for an exact line of division. The River Coang, situated midway between Matammah and Wekhni, the first village of Abyssinia, is the most natural boundary. The possibility is, that King Theodore still lays claim to the Tokruri country as being properly a part of Abyssinia, and an Abyssinian sovereign has perhaps

ROUTE FROM MATAMMA TO DEBRA TABOR.



ENGLISH MILES 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Source: British Atlas

stream ; and here I saw for the first time the beautiful *Euphorbia* called the Kolquol, whose dark candelabra-shaped branches, tipped with bright yellow flowers, stood out in deep relief from the lighter green around. Bright flowers of every variety, most of which were unknown to me, but amongst others the familiar wild-rose, the honeysuckle, and jessamine, lent their beauty and fragrance to the scene. The whole was a perfect gem of Nature.

On one occasion we had a small adventure. We were resting one night near the summit of a mountain, when about two hours before daybreak we were awaked by a loud hubbub and the discharge of a gun. Starting to our feet, we inquired what was up, and our anxiety was increased by M. Lejean's Arab seizing the second gun and discharging it. All I saw, for it was pitch dark, was one of the mules kicking about amongst the ashes of a half-extinguished fire, and endeavouring to extricate himself from the leather thong which bound his head to a tree. This he soon succeeded in doing, and went off at a furious rate towards the woods which clothe the sides of the mountain. I thought he had burnt himself at the fire, and that this was the cause of his breaking loose, but the rest maintained that he

had been bitten by the hyenas: and they were right, for at daybreak we saw and gave chase to one of these brutes, who was still prowling about. He was only a short distance off, but not being certain of my skill as a marksman, I tried to get nearer before I shot at him. The animal was too wary, and, though in his flight he frequently turned round to have a look at us, he was careful to keep at a safe distance. These creatures were much bolder here than near the villages, and would sometimes, as in the present instance, come across our path, even in daylight. I found in this spot traces of the rhinoceros. As we were sleeping in the open air, with our faces exposed, it was fortunate for us that the hyenas preferred trying mule's flesh to man's. We heard afterwards that the mule had returned to Matammah, a distance of forty miles, but was so severely bitten in the flank that he was perfectly useless.

The River Coang was swollen with the rains, and my donkey required much manual persuasion to be induced to cross, and then he refused to take me over, but obliged me to wade. During the whole of the journey he was a mortification to me; for having been born and bred on the flats of Khartoum, he could not or would

consists in rushing pell-mell upon the foe, hurling the spear, which is their principal arm, and picking up and re-hurling the spent darts of the enemy. The musket, which is mostly in the hands of the Tigrean soldiers, is even less effective than the spear, and the amount of powder and shot wasted must be enormous. The sword is seldom brought into requisition (unless it be in eating *brundo* or raw flesh), as arm to arm combat is unfrequent; and I actually saw one individual, though certainly this was not in the camp, who had allowed the blade so to rust in the scabbard that it was quite impossible to draw it. These swords are in the shape of scimitars, curled up into a semicircle, resembling a dog's tail, and are always getting entangled with the dress or the trappings of the horses. The sheaths are not strong, and one frequently sees the point of the weapon peeping out at the end, though in some cases this is prevented by a large brass knob, or even a lady's thimble, stuck on the end. The best hilts are made of the horns of the rhinoceros, and ornamented with silver. The spears are about six feet long, the length of the head being one foot, and the breadth two inches in the broadest part. The butt has a piece of iron twisted round it to prevent vacillation in the aim. The shields, made of