

~~HERB.~~
~~FRANK~~

THE TAYLOR PAPERS

BEING A RECORD OF
CERTAIN REMINISCENCES, LETTERS, AND JOURNALS

IN THE LIFE OF

LIEUT.-GEN. SIR HERBERT TAYLOR
G.C.B., G.C.H.

MASTER OF ST. KATHARINE'S HOSPITAL
MILITARY SECRETARY TO H.R.H. THE DUKE OF YORK
ADJUTANT-GENERAL OF THE FORCES, 1828-30

WHO AT VARIOUS STAGES IN HIS CAREER
HAD ACTED AS PRIVATE SECRETARY TO
KING GEORGE III., TO QUEEN CHARLOTTE,
AND TO KING WILLIAM IV.

ARRANGED BY ERNEST TAYLOR

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LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

1913

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CHAPTER XXVI

1837

A TREK IN SOUTH AFRICA

Letter from Captain J. Edward Alexander.

ALTHOUGH the following letter could not have been received until many weeks later—probably at Cannes—it can be well inserted here and treated as an interlude. It comes as a breath of fresh air from the wilds of South Africa, and, by its complete change of subject, conveniently separates the close of Sir Herbert's official life from his travels in France and in Italy, where he was so soon fated to end his days.

CAPTAIN J. EDWARD ALEXANDER *to* SIR H. TAYLOR.

The Cedar Mountains, Cape Colony.
September 8th, 1837.

DEAR SIR,

It is now a long time since I had the honour of addressing you, for I have been a wanderer in desert places for nearly a year. I rejoice, however, that I am again within the bounds of civilization, and that I have an opportunity of writing you.

I earnestly trust that these lines will find you in the enjoyment of health and happiness.

I am now on my way to Cape Town as fast as worn-out cattle will allow, after having performed a very trying journey through the countries of the Great Namaquas, Boschmans, and Hill Damaras; and as I find an order from the Horse Guards for my presence with my regiment (the 42nd R.H.) on the 31st December (or, if I fail in being then in England, removal to half-pay of Captain awaits me), I must leave the Cape immediately (probably by the flagship "Thalia"), give up my A.D.C. and private secretaryship for which I always very heartily thank you, and leave my estimable chief, Sir Benjamin D'Urban.

Perhaps I may have the honour of a personal interview with you about the beginning of next year.

I now proceed to give you a short outline of my expeditionary discovery, reserving the details for a future occasion. 1837.

On the 18th January of this year I left the Warm Bath, Orange River, with a light waggon, some pack oxen, seven servants, and a small Namaqua escort. For three days I travelled north; and then leaving the waggon with half my party I went with the other half among the wild recesses of the Caras Mountains to endeavour to recover for my guide some cattle from a robber chief. I failed at the time in recovering the cattle, though afterwards the robber was compelled to surrender them. He then threatened to attack the waggon. We prepared for him by surrounding ourselves with an abattis, when his courage failed him, and there was no fight. Warm Bath.

Finding my escort great cowards—they made lions of mice, and Bushmen of baboons—I dismissed them, crossed the Lion and Fish rivers, and arrived at the deserted station of Bethany. (There is now only one Mission Station north of the Orange River, West Coast, and that is at the Warm Bath.)

A Namaqua chief and three head men now offered to accompany me to the North, and I availed myself of their offer, though their followers were stronger in numbers and appetite than I wished.

At one time my party consisted of fifty; and in one week we (they) ate one rhinoceros (equal to five or six bullocks), three zebras, and half a dozen buck and other small deer.

Esquimaux-like, my coloured attendants always ate up to the throat, and (when they could get it) each finished 10 lbs. of solid flesh per day. The stamping of marrow bones at night made our sleeping-places resemble a shoemaker's shop.

I now travelled towards the tropic, crossed the great plain of "Kei" Kaap, saw many new mountains and rivers, and arrived at a poort or pass in a range called "The Bull's Mouth."

Here rhinoceroses were running about like a herd of cattle—twelve were seen in one day. There was also abundance of lions, zebras, camel-leopards, and other large game. I was charged by two large rhinoceroses, which came on ploughing up the ground with their awful horns. I doubled them, and got a shot at the last as it passed me.

We next cleared a road through the pass, and dragged through the waggon with difficulty—found ourselves in a region of fig trees, and then in the dreary Desert of Tans, where we nearly all perished from thirst.

For two days the people had no water (thermometer in April 100°), and for three days the oxen had not a drop to drink. I lost my horses, some oxen, sheep and dogs. Twelve people lay down in the sand and desired to be buried.

At last with tottering steps we reached the bed of the

1837. Koorsip River, beyond the tropic, and were thus mercifully preserved.

Seven impassable sandhills now "brought up" the waggon, which I accordingly sent back towards the Orange River with one of my head people, ten men and twenty-five oxen; and went on myself with pack oxen. Since then I have walked on foot night and morning, and ridden an ox in the heat of the day.

Walfisch
Bay.

We again suffered much from thirst, but at last reached the sea at Walfisch Bay¹—the first who had done so from the Cape.

Our provisions were now all exhausted—the people ate up the shoe leather, and we searched the strand for dead fish, found some cabaljas, and dug with our hands in the sand for clams.

We looked in vain for the promised man-of-war to help us. (Two months after this I heard she had been seen on the coast.) However, two American whalers came into the bay, and I exchanged with them some rope, knives, zebra heads, etc., for a little biscuit. We also *hunted* and caught the Red men of the bay, and put pipes in their mouths to give them confidence, when they brought us out a few lean goats.

One of the American captains offered me a passage to St. Helena with my seven men—a week's sail—for the price of a whale, or 1000 Rix dollars (at 1s. 6d.); but I was not frightened yet—wished to see more of the interior, and not being able to go further north than 22° (for want of guides to show us the waters), I left the bay on the 3rd of May, and travelled east towards the Negro stations.

On this last course I accomplished three hundred miles, and arrived at the verge of another desert, quite impassable. Previous to this I found the Damara country very beautiful—fine ranges of mountains, grassy plains abounding in game, hot and cold springs, forests, copper mines, etc.; our wants were also for a time supplied by the chief Aaramah, living at the Mat-house town of Eineis, containing about twelve hundred souls.

Having gone as far north and east as I possibly could, I turned south, suffered severely from cold for two months, saw plenty of ice on the tableland of the Unuma or Bulb mountains, and often rose in the morning from our sandy or rocky bed covered with hoar frost. Eleven hundred miles southwest brought me again within the Colony,² with spoils in the shape of rhinoceros, lion, zebra, gemsbok, and other large skins,

¹ Walfisch Bay is still British territory, but most of the country traversed by Capt. Alexander was annexed by Germany in 1883 and is now known as *German South-West Africa*.

² The route describes, as it were, the figure 8 between the Somerset and Orange rivers.—J. E. A.

drawings and plants, and three hundred bird skins, many of 1837. which are new and curious.

On this journey, though we suffered the extremes of hunger and thirst—heat and cold—ate everything from a lion to a locust, the rank flesh of the rhinoceros and zebra—drank water black, green, or impure with wild beasts; though I had not slept out of my clothes or shoes or off the dust for months, and had undergone fatigues incessant, yet, thank Heaven, I have not had a moment's illness.

My simple receipt for health is "no wine, no fat, and plenty of exercise." My people were often seriously ill, principally from eating fat. Grease is the Devil!

Among our various encounters with wild beasts was one with a large male lion, which, after killing one of my oxen, gave us a chase after him on foot at the top of our speed for eight miles—then turned and hunted us. He fell within four yards of the muzzles of the guns.

I worked as hard as I could for the Royal Medal for travellers, and a step of rank, though I am sorry to see that the Horse Guards have extended my leave of absence to 1st January next, *very* reluctantly, forgetting, I think, that I was invited to undertake our expedition in South Africa by the Colonial Office and Royal Geographical Society, and that during the greater part of the Caffer War and for about a year and a half the Governor here had no other A.D.C. than myself.

Captain Beresford A.D.C. has not been with Sir Benjamin since June, '35.

I hope this expedition will not prove a barren one, but will considerably extend our knowledge of this mysterious Continent, extend commerce, civilization, and our holy religion. It will then repay me for the sacrifice of a year spent companionless, and living as a Bushman in the wilderness. I have spent, of my own, £300, besides the Government allowance of £300. The sale of the waggon and cattle may reduce my expenditure to £200. I believe no other extensive expedition ever cost less than £2000.

When Cape Town is reached, 4000 miles will have been accomplished in a year. This is trifling compared with some other expeditions I have made in the same period—but these were not in Africa.

I now observe with great sorrow that our Royal Master has been gathered to his fathers. This great loss I deeply deplore.

With regard to Cape news I am sorry to say that the circumstances of the Colony are at present not at all flourishing. Sir Benjamin's just frontier policy having been completely upset by the new Lieut.-Governor (Stockenstrom, ^{Cape} Colony, whose mother was a Hottentot) who has actually rewarded

1837. the aborigines, the Caffers, for their murderous and unprovoked attack on the Colony—given them land they did not even occupy before the war, and admitted them to the dangerous Fish River Bush.

The consequence of this has been that 10,000 Dutch and some English have left the Colony for the interior, selling their valuable farms for a few hundred dollars, and carrying with them their flocks and herds. Corn has risen to about three times the price it was last year at Grahamstown. Slaughter cattle are now 100 dollars, last year they were 40 dollars each. So much for pseudo-philanthropy.

Many more farmers are moving, I hear—so that soon His Honour will have few white men to rule over in the Eastern Province.

His friends the Caffers plunder the few farmers still left, of forty head of cattle and horse a week! They have also lately broken his treaty with them—attacked our Fingo allies between the Fish and Keiskamma rivers—killed many of them—plundered them of 1000 head of cattle, and driven these poor people (17,000 of them here saved from slavery by Sir Benjamin) into the Colony. It is anticipated that the next move of the Caffers will be against our Caffer allies in the war, the tribe of Congo; and that then the Hottentot Settlement on the Kat River (where according to that arch hypocrite Dr. Philip the boys learn Greek) will be attacked.

I hope my publisher sent you, as he was directed, a copy of a certain "Voyage and Campaign." When I sent home that MS. the prospects of this Colony were very bright. Alas! alas! Fifty years would not restore it to its late palmy state.

. . . The Caffers well know our weakness. Heaven help this valuable but most unfortunate Colony!

The African squadron has been very successful during the last three years under Sir Patrick Campbell; 16,000 slaves have been already captured, and it is anticipated that nearly 20,000 will be saved from bondage by the end of this year.

Excuse the rambling way in which this letter is written. I am rather discomposed with the threats of Sir John Macdonald.¹ He says my "long leave is unjust to the regiment." It is at home, and there is no other officer employed away from it. Few, I think, would have liked to have exchanged situations with me during this last year. Yet I must submit without repining. . . . I hope that next year I shall find other employment than "opening ranks" and "inspecting kits."

Believe me, always with high regard,

Your faithful and very grateful servant,

JAS. EDW. ALEXANDER.

¹ Adjutant-General.