

# On the March with Menelik's Army.

BY CAPTAIN RALPH P. COBBOLD.

## II.

Captain Cobbold and Major the Hon. A. Hanbury-Tracy were detailed for special duty with the Abyssinian army in its operations against the Mad Mullah. Captain Cobbold saw many interesting and curious things in Menelik's country, and illustrates his narrative with a series of photographs taken during the progress of the expedition.



NUMBER of recent writers on Abyssinia have alleged that the trade in slaves is still carried on in that country and that many slaves are exported to Arabia through dealers on the western shore of the Red Sea. This I believe to be quite untrue. Menelik has issued a very stringent order against the traffic in slaves, and anyone caught selling them is dealt with severely. Nor is it easy to see how slave-dealers could maintain a footing on the western shores of the Red Sea, either in the British, French, or Italian territory which intervenes between Abyssinia and the coast, while the passage through Abyssinia of armed bands of slave-raiders making for the Western provinces or the Soudan could not be kept secret, and, being known, would not be tolerated by Menelik. Prisoners of war captured in the Western negro provinces are used as slaves by the Abyssinians for domestic service, though some have been turned into soldiers, a profession they readily adopt, receiving the same rate of pay as the rest of the troops.

These slaves have been formed into battalions and trained as soldiers by Comte de la Guibougere, a French officer, whose portrait I reproduce herewith. This officer came to Abyssinia some five years ago, and has done very good work amongst the Abyssinian troops.

All Abyssinians, except the very poorest, employ slaves in their household to perform the arduous work which their mode

of living entails. There are no mills in the country, and consequently all corn has to be laboriously pounded in a mortar. The barley, too, has to be parched and the chillies—of which Abyssinians consume astounding quantities—have to be ground. In all these services slaves are employed. They are, however, well cared for, and after a time are treated as members of the family.

The amount of work to be done in the household of an Abyssinian of position is enormous, as he is supposed to feed all his



COMTE DE LA GUIBOUGERE, THE FRENCH OFFICER WHO HAS TRAINED MENELIK'S BATTALIONS OF SOLDIER SLAVES. [Photo.]



*From a*

NATIVES SKINNING A LION SHOT BY CAPTAIN COBBOLD.

*[Photo.]*

retainers at least once a week. Abyssinian servants do not work well, and they require high payment for their services. As there is very little cash in the country, their employment in a general way is for the present quite out of the question.

Except in the case of prisoners of war, an Abyssinian can only procure a slave with the King's written permission. This permit must be shown to the Governor of the province in which the applicant lives. He will then receive an order from the Governor allowing the transaction to take place. The slaves are generally boys or girls, the former for outdoor work connected with the horses and cattle of the establishment, and the latter for indoors. They are bought from their parents at an average price of ten dollars (Abyssinian), or about £1 a head. The purchaser is not allowed to resell them, but he may, if he likes, give them away.

During my sojourn with the Abyssinian army I had a very good fortnight's hunting, which resulted, as the joint effort of my companion and myself, in a bag of twenty-one lions, twelve leopards, twenty or thirty kinds of antelopes and gazelles, and a rhinoceros. There were also



THE BRITISH OFFICERS' BAG—"TWENTY-ONE LIONS, TWELVE LEOPARDS, MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF ANTELOPE, AND A RHINOCEROS."  
*From a*

*[Photo.]*



From a] A CORNER OF THE BRITISH OFFICERS' CAMP—NOTICE THE LION CUBS IN THE FOREGROUND. [Photo.

a few smaller animals, and I may incidentally mention that we captured five lion cubs. Some of these cubs will be seen in the accompanying photograph, which depicts a corner of our camp with Major Tracy in the camp-chair.

The Abyssinian's busy time is before breakfast, in the cool of the day, when he transacts whatever business he has to do. He rarely does anything in the afternoon, which is generally devoted to sleep after a heavy meal—for the Abyssinians are large eaters. As a matter of fact, however, the Abyssinians do very little work of any kind. The great majority of them are priests or soldiers, not more than one in five being engaged in trade. They are very difficult people to deal with, being extremely dilatory. After the manner of the East they are more concerned

to say what they think will please their hearer than to tell the truth. They have also a rooted objection to saying "yes" or "no," and will

waste weeks and months of time in avoiding a direct engagement. It is always "We will see about it," or "We must talk it over," or "Come again and we will decide," and so on. If you give an Abyssinian a present or oblige him in any way he never troubles himself to repay the obligation if an opportunity should occur. He resorts to one of his favourite sayings, "*Izgahar istalagu*," which means, "May God reward you for me." He thus cheaply avoids personal responsibility.



THE ZEBRA PRESENTED TO KING EDWARD BY MENELIK.  
From a Photo.

Their method of reckoning the time of day is peculiar to our notions, though on the score of common sense it has a good deal to recommend it.



THE ABYSSINIAN ARMY ON THE MARCH—"SCOUTING THERE IS NONE; EVERYBODY AMBLES ALONG AS HE PLEASES, BUT NEVER FORGETTING TO LOOT WHEN OPPORTUNITY OFFERS." [Photo.]

Being so near the Equator their days and nights are nearly always of equal length. The sun rises about 6 a.m. and sets about 6 p.m. Accordingly they count the day as beginning at sunrise, and not at midnight as we do, while the twelve hours of the night begin with sunset. Thus our 7 a.m. would be one o'clock day in Abyssinia, our noon their six o'clock day, and our 6 p.m. their twelve o'clock day. Similarly 8 p.m. with us would be two o'clock night with them, and 4 a.m. with us ten o'clock night with them. Their calendar, too, is very remarkable. Like ourselves they count back to the birth of Christ, but for some reason are

nearly eight years behind us in their reckoning. Their year begins on our 11th September; thus, the 11th September, 1901, with us was with them the 1st of Maskaram, 1894.

During its operations against the Mad Mullah the Abyssinian army devastated nearly the whole of the country it traversed, its depredations being by no means confined to raids upon its enemies. The photograph reproduced above shows the army on the march, and gives a capital idea of the straggling nature of Abyssinian military formations and the extraordinary manner in which the cavalry and infantry are mixed up. Scouting there is none;



From a] RESTORING LOOTED PROPERTY TO A FRIENDLY TRIBE [Photo.]

everybody ambles along as he pleases, riding or walking as the fit takes him—but never forgetting to loot when opportunity offers. As I have indicated, the army ravages all the country through which it marches; no distinction whatever is drawn between the friendly and unfriendly tribes encountered. It therefore became necessary, on some occasions, to gather together all the property which had been looted from villages friendly to Menelik, in order that it might be restored as far as possible to the rightful owners, and thus in some measure militate against disaffection among the populace. The preceding photo. represents one of these "disgorgings" in progress. Grouped round the central figures are a large number of Somalis, who have come to put in claims for lost property. These applicants are all seated, the standing figures beyond being Abyssinian soldiers, who are sullenly watching the gradual demolition of their cherished piles of plunder.

A similar scene is depicted in the following



"AS EACH GARMENT IS HELD UP IT IS ROUGHLY DESCRIBED BY A CRIER. THERE MAY BE TWENTY STRENUOUS CLAIMANTS FOR ONE DAMAGED SHIRT." [Photo.]

snapshot, which shows a huge pile of clothing, looted from the Ogaden tribe, being restored garment by garment to its rightful owners. The Abyssinian commander-in-chief—under whose superintendence the business is being carried out—sits in the structure of branches on the right, which has been hastily built to protect him from the intense heat. As each garment is held up it is roughly described by a crier, the people in the crowd signifying ownership by holding up their hands. As, however, there may be some twenty strenuous claimants for one damaged shirt, it is seldom that the looted property reaches its rightful owner without much vigorous and high-voiced discussion.

The final decision is always pronounced by the chief present, whose mandate, however unsatisfactory to the claimants, is final.

That the Abyssinians did their looting in an effective and thorough fashion will be seen from the two photos. reproduced on the following pages. The first shows two vast herds of camels, all captured from the Mad Mullah. These camels, by the way, can travel for about three weeks without water, while the hardy little Somali ponies are capable of journeying for seven days without drinking.

The other photograph shows a flock of sheep and goats taken in various small skirmishes with the enemy's outposts. The commissariat department of the Abyssinian army being

practically non-existent, these captures were very welcome.

It is the ambition of every Abyssinian who is not a priest to possess a rifle, and this ambition the enterprise of European traders enables him to gratify on fairly easy terms. These rifles they let off in the most promiscuous fashion on the slightest pretext, and as they are innocent of blank cartridges the *feus de joie* and other demonstrative uses to which they put their firearms are not unattended with danger. I remember on one occasion that a soldier was knocked down and stunned by a discharge, whereupon a comrade rushed up to him and fired off his piece close to his head. This, I

was informed, was quite customary, and was merely done in order to ascertain whether the man was dead or alive!

When a man in Menelik's country dies his friends and neighbours are informed of the melancholy fact by word of mouth or, if living near at hand, by the firing of guns. The neighbours then repair to the house of the

In former days, before rifles came into general use, the killing of dangerous animals was held in high esteem; nowadays, of course, these feats are thought less of.

A lion counts as thirty men. The hunter hands the skin over to the Ras, or Governor of his province. The skin is then cured and made into two cloaks, one of which is given to the



From a

TWO VAST HERDS OF CAMELS CAPTURED FROM THE MAD MULLAH.

[Photo.

deceased, taking with them food for its inmates, who are supposed to be so stricken with grief that they are unable to attend to any household matters. The funeral takes place, if possible, on the day of decease. Well-to-do people are buried in a wooden coffin with the head turned in the direction of Jerusalem; the poor are merely wrapped in a sheet. After the funeral those who have attended return to the house to eat. Upon the seventh and again on the fortieth day following the burial the priests of the parish are feasted by the dead man's family to encourage them to pray for his soul. The period of mourning is forty days, during which time the men wear dingy burnouses and the women simply dirty clothes as a mark of respect; the men also generally shave their heads.

The Abyssinians are still a barbarous people in spite of their Christianity. They are extremely ignorant, and Menelik does not encourage education. To have killed a person is reckoned by them a mark of manhood without which a man remains of but small account.

hunter and the other retained by the Ras. These cloaks, which fasten down the front, are adorned with gold or silver filigree-work along the edges and round the neck and are very imposing. A rhinoceros counts as twenty men. The distinctive badge for this is a silver band to go round the ankle adorned with silver tassels. This is presented by Government, but not usually worn by the recipient. Another instance of their primitive notions is their custom when offering you food or drink first to taste it in your presence in order to prove that it has not been poisoned.

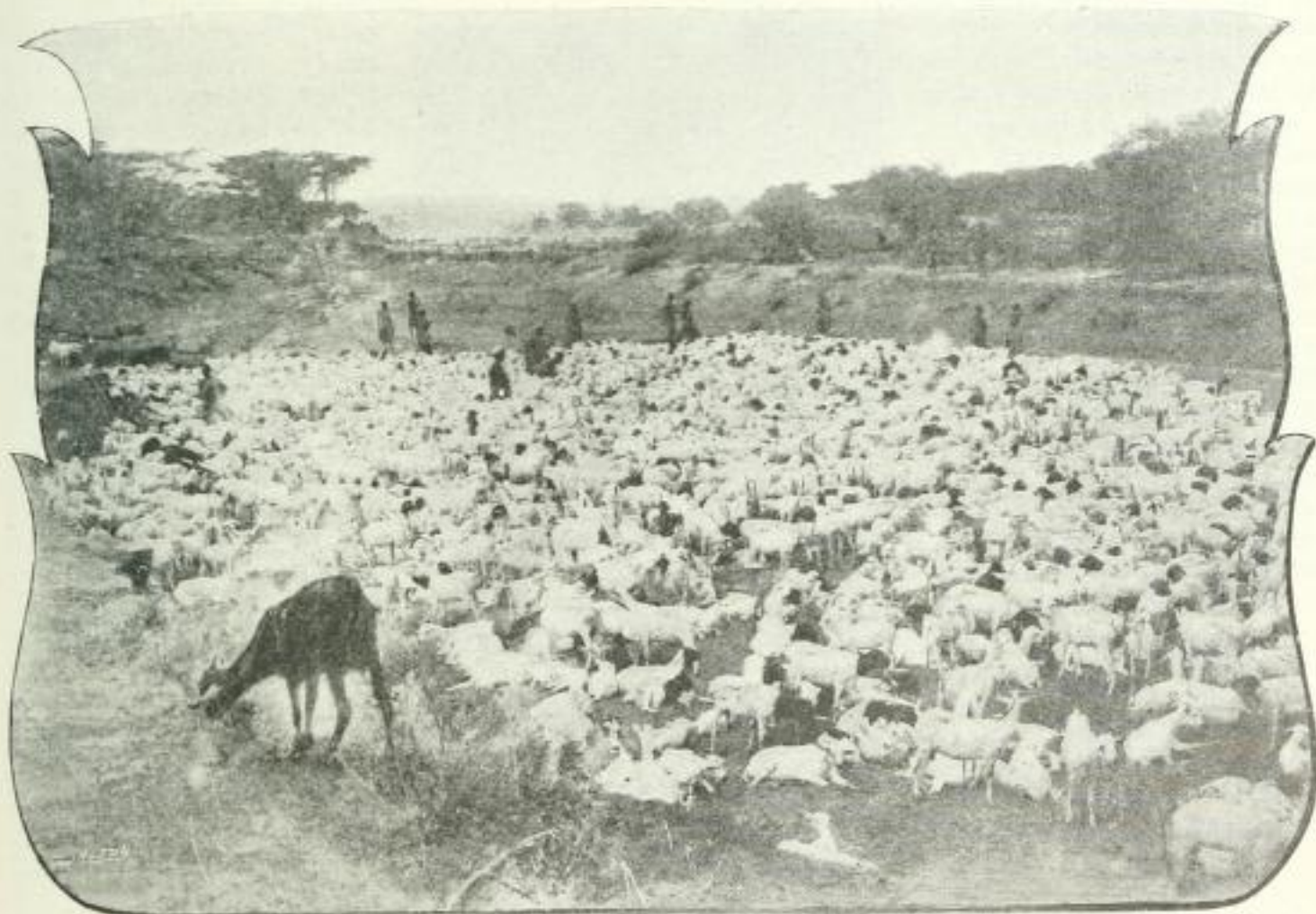
The foremost wish of the Abyssinian youth is to possess a rifle, for which he will diligently save any money he can earn; once armed with a rifle he considers himself as good as his fellows, and a good deal better than the unarmed Somalis and Gallas among the population, over whom he is thereby enabled to terrorize to his savage heart's content. Of late years, however, the position of the Gallas has considerably improved, as many of them have

become Christianized, and not a few have enlisted in the army. They make good troops—in fact, some of the best—and with the official recognition of their fighting qualities the constant raiding and plundering of their villages have become things of the past.

It is easy to become a soldier in Abyssinia. A man goes to one of the chiefs and says he wishes to join the army; he then attaches himself to that chief, whom he follows about wherever he goes, and in due course becomes his paid retainer. At this stage of his enlistment the chief will usually supply him with a rifle and a mule, but there are no terms of enlistment, no standard of physique, no drill, and no discipline. It is all very happy-go-lucky, and if the young recruit should tire of his new profession he has only to leave the chief's service—first, however, returning to him the rifle and mule—and resume his former occupation. The pay of the Abyssinian private is only

five dollars (Abyssinian)—about ten shillings—a month, though a great many get no pay at all; he is, however, entitled to quarter himself upon the Gallas or other subject peoples, from whom he is wont to demand and obtain whatever he wants. When going off on active service he receives, in addition, a month's ration of grain—about 120lb.—and a donkey to carry it. He gets nothing else, and if the campaign should last beyond the month he must for the rest of the time fend for himself.

King Menelik overwhelmed the Italian forces at the Battle of Adowa with a swarm of men who must have numbered 100,000. Such an army can always be collected by him by levies, but owing to the lack of adequate commissariat it is quite impossible for any large body of Abyssinian troops to maintain itself in the field for more than a month, even with indiscriminate looting and foraging.



SHEEP AND GOATS TAKEN FROM THE ENEMY—"AS THE ABYSSINIAN COMMISSARIAT DEPARTMENT WAS PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT, THESE CAPTURES WERE VERY WELCOME." [Photo.]

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