

TO KUMASSI WITH SCOTT - CHAPTER VIII

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ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY 10TH, Prince Henry was not at all well, and though he made no complaint, everyone in camp noticed that he was not his usual cheery self. Naturally, he felt depressed at the news of Major Ferguson's death, for they were both walking together at Prahsu the evening before that gallant officer was taken ill. Towards evening, the Prince grew rapidly worse, and symptoms of malaria fever developed. Everyone hoped that as it was taken in its early stage, the Prince would recover sufficiently to resume the march. Surgeon-Colonel Taylor was in constant attendance, and everything done to relieve the fever; but malaria is a subtle enemy to deal with, and as the symptoms were serious, the doctors decided the Prince must return to the Coast and be removed to the "Coromandel."

The Royal sufferer was bitterly disappointed at this decision, and all ranks felt deeply for the brave officer who had entered into the campaign with such spirit, and who had uncomplainingly braved all the hardships, only to be invalided when the goal was almost in sight.

On Saturday morning, as we turned our faces Kumassi-wards, a little party, consisting of Prince Henry in a hammock, his attendant, George Butcher, and Surgeon-Captain Hilliard, who was in medical charge, started for the coast. The Prince cast longing eyes toward the troops already preparing to march, but he was much weaker, and realized that it would be useless to attempt to proceed further. Many expressions of deep sympathy for the poor fever-stricken patient went out from all members of the force: one could not but think that he, who, comparatively, a few hours before, had been in the best of health and spirits, was now paying Africa's penalty, whose malarious grip might demand even life itself from its victim. We sorrowfully watched the hammock till it was lost in the gloom, as the bearers carefully wended their way up the steep sides of the Monsi Hill; and then we resumed our march.

Leaving Kwisa, the road descends rapidly, afterwards winding through a swampy district, infested with frogs of enormous proportions. The slimy batrachians, who infest these morasses, are held in religious horror by the natives, who refuse to touch them; and even the ominous croaking is the signal for absolute silence from the usually irrepressible carriers.

Having crossed the Adansis and entered Ashanti proper, the natives acted very differently on the march. There was no lagging behind or plumping down loads for "chop" at every half mile; and even their remarks were made in an undertone for fear of arousing the dreaded 'Shantiman. The one topic among the white men was the probable chance of fighting; for the Ashantis fell back on Kumassi before the advancing scouts without firing a shot. What could be the intentions of His Sable Majesty Kwaku Dua III ?

Several skulls were found in the vicinity of these swamps below Kwisa, which evidently marked the spot of a fierce battle in bygone days. This swampy district was trying, for the bush was so dense all round, that it completely cased in the narrow path. The air in those murky forest depths was also vitiated by the long lines of carriers, that it was scarcely possible to breathe. The road, after crossing some low sand hills, became dryer, however, and the undergrowth less dense, though the forest was as luxuriant as ever.

Fomonah was once a flourishing town, and the capital of the Adansi Kingdom, but it is now in ruins and has few inhabitants. Passing through the village clearing, we reached a broad but shallow brook which was easily forded. By the marks and excavations on the banks and in the bed of this river, the natives had evidently been prospecting for alluvial gold, which abounds in many of the West African streams. Crossing the water, we were refreshed by a fragrant smell from a clump of smallish trees covered with a white bloom resembling hawthorn blossom. Nature here seemed to have wilfully joined two extremes, for a few yards further on, a noxious creeper grew in abundance, emitting a vapid foul muskiness which got into the throat and nose, and gave a peculiar taste to the mouth.

Dompiassi, another ruined town, is about four miles from Fomonah, and from there the road led direct into Essian Kwanta, where we arrived at 10.30, after a trying march of ten miles. Reports had reached Essian Kwanta that the piquet, who had evacuated the village and fallen back on Kumassi, had been reinforced, and 2,000 Ashantis were then within two miles of the camp bent on retaking their outpost. The small company of Houssas turned out with an alacrity worthy of better results, and the native levy got under arms. The piles of cases of biscuit and meat were hastily thrown round as a barricade, and others packed to form a rude fort. I am afraid all were highly pleased with the prospect of a fight at last with the Ashantis, and Prince Christian bustled about looking eagerly forward for the brush. Everyone was disappointed when further news came in that the movement was not being proceeded with, and the Ashantis had withdrawn again. Thus nothing came of all the preparations and the wily foe did not show fight.

When the Special Service Corps and Artillery arrived, they marched through the village, and bivouacked in the bush about a mile ahead, while the Staff took up their quarters in the village itself, which was deserted. The houses were superior dwellings, many having additional courtyards and out-houses for the use of the household slaves. The surroundings were also fairly clean; but there was a very bad smell, partly due to some plots of plantains rotting in the vicinity.



THE ALARM.

*From a sketch by Mr. H. C. Seppings Wright, Artist Correspondent to
"The Illustrated London News."*

Large piles of stores were stacked in readiness for the advance, and Captain Donovan, of the Colonial Service, had pushed well ahead throughout the march with his carriers and supplies, entering Kwise, and forming a camp there just behind the advanced scouts. Captain Swain, British Guiana Police, took the Bekwai carriers in hand, and he used these friendly Ashantis to the best possible advantage in getting necessities to the front. Governor Maxwell was journeying from the coast to enter Kumassi when it had been invested.

Saturday afternoon, by the time we had settled into quarters at Essian Kwanta, a furious drumming announced the arrival of the young King of Abadoom, who was coming with the King of Bekwai to sign a treaty with the British. He seated himself on the outskirts of the town to await the time arranged for the palaver, and a little later, the King of Bekwai arrived in the vicinity of the camp, resting his royal bones on a stool in the forest.

Punctually at five o'clock, the guard of honour, furnished by the Special Service Corps, marched in, and was drawn up in line outside headquarters. The Kings then came on the scene; the Bekwai monarch in great state. Immense war drums thundered, tom-toms were thumped, big metal bells hammered on continuously, while a hideous tooting on elephants' tusks completed his noisy if inharmonic arrangements for wooing the gentle muse.

Behind these raucous melodists marched the sacred Executioner and Fetish priest combined. With his appearance and rig, and enormous head-dress of leopard skin, surmounted with tusks and a high fringe of eagle's feathers, he could have taken his place among any Redskin chiefs of the Wild West, on the war path.

Then came his most sable Majesty of Bekwai, an intelligent but sensual looking negro of medium stature and apparently about forty-five years of age. A small black cap perched on the back of his cranium, and ornamented with gold filigree work, did duty for a crown; a long silken robe and sandals completed his outfit. His claw like fingers were covered with massive gold rings finely worked, which were well displayed by a paw bearer on either side, holding a bunched-up silken cloth on which the royal hands rested. Several gold fetish ornaments were hung on his wrists and suspended round his neck, while his royal toes were also adorned with gold work. In fact his Majesty was a veritable walking jeweller's shop.

Over his head rose the mighty folds of a gorgeous umbrella of plush and silk, which the attendant kept on a continuous hop and twirl for no apparent reason except it were to circulate the air about the King, but it seemed a clumsy and laborious method of fanning. Immediately behind his Kingship walked a prime minister, who placed his hands round the royal waist as a support to the monarch as he walked in majestic state.

The Lord Chamberlain followed, with a fine collection of rusty keys of every description hung in bunches on his body as an insignia of office; and bringing up the rear were a motley crew of minor chiefs, fetish men, soldiers with flintlocks, ladies in waiting and slaves with fly whisks, or bearing their master's stools, chairs and litters.

The King of Abadoom had a very different gathering. He was a gentle lad of fourteen, of pleasing countenance, and very nervous throughout the proceedings, though any lack on his part was amply made up by his two chief advisers; one, a cunning, white-headed old rascal, the other a younger but no less crafty looking negro. Many of the King's retainers were boys younger than their master, but there were also older chiefs, sheltering their sacred heads from the sun under common cotton umbrellas sent up from the coast, and all much the worse for wear. The bearers of these sorry gamps were quite young boys, some not more than five or six years of age. The poor little fellows are doomed to stand behind their master's chair for hours, with arms stretched upward to the utmost extent, in order to shade the lazy negro sitting at his ease, while his poor little slave is ready to drop with exhaustion.

When the Kings were seated on their respective thrones (otherwise brass-studded kitchen chairs), and the followers had grouped themselves around, the "General Salute" was sounded, the troops presenting arms as Sir Francis Scott and his Staff appeared on the scene. In the centre of the gathering stood a small camp table, with papers, pen and ink duly arrayed thereon, also a short end of candle; a valuable commodity in the bush, for use in sealing the treaty.

Captain Donald Stewart officiated; and, after asking if they had signed a treaty with any other foreign power, and being answered in the negative, he read the

articles of the treaty between “Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria and the Kings of Bekwai and Abadoom.” Each article was translated by a native interpreter, the terms being as follows:

- i. That Her Most Gracious Majesty would accord her protection over their countries, the same to be part of the Jurisdiction of the Gold Coast, provided that:*
- ii. The respective countries of Bekwai and Abadoom should be always kept open for trade; every facility being offered to traders; the roads kept open, and in good repair.*
- iii. That capital punishment must be abolished for all crimes except murder, and no slaves to be kept, bought, or traded with.*
- iv. They were to enter into no contracts with other Foreign Powers.*
- v. The King not to enter into any act of aggression or war, but must refer all disputes to the Governor of the Gold Coast.*
- vi. Great Britain would respect, and not interfere in any way with the customs and habits of the country not enumerated in the above, and no levy or tax would be imposed on them. The King’s methods of collecting the revenue remaining the same.*
- vii. Human sacrifices must be abolished and kept down with a strong hand.*

The young King listened attentively, but the more skilled diplomats of Bekwai did not want to appear too eager to accept British terms. He was in frequent conference with his chiefs, and having craved permission to speak, began to raise salient points of order and law.

The High Chamberlain wished to know what was to be done if a man committed a murder? Captain Stewart replied that he would be tried under British law, and, if found guilty, be put to death.

That only half satisfied the contumacious old wretch. “The King had a number of young slave girls that he was now going to give to his young men as wives; if one ran away might not she be killed, if caught?” To this it was pointed out that slavery must be abolished, and they would therefore be no longer slaves, but free.

We were then favoured with a few different phases of breaking the Seventh Commandment. It appears that in Ashanti, Sir Francis Jeune had a counterpart in the Executioner, who dealt summary justice to the offending parties; but the Bekwais had previously been told that no man or woman must be put to death except for murder, so that all these questions of moral law-breaking, involving death to the guilty parties, had been answered in that one stipulation.

More caviling was in course of preparation, and king and ministers were in close conference; but as the proceedings were getting unduly protracted, Sir Francis remarked to the interpreter, “Tell him I am not here to be made a fool of, and if he has any more to say, he must say it quickly.” Then, finding the King of Abadoom was quite ready to sign the articles, he gave the signal for him to advance.

The Bekwais were still deep in consultation on some learned subject, but it did not transpire. There was Bekwai prestige and precedent being rudely put aside, and the subordinate King of Abadoom signing first!

Their whole natures rebelled against such supersedure. The chiefs shouted; the court crier sprang to his feet and howled off some marvellous panegyric, informing us of the supreme dignity, nay, the cohabitation of the divine and mortal realized in their Lord and Master; while the King hastily gathered his rather dirty robes around him, advancing to the table with more haste than dignity.

The seal was attached, and the royal finger nail touched it; Captain Stewart then held the pen, the King placed his digital extremities on it, "Yow Boatin" was duly written, and the treaty thus signed. The King of Abadoom, who had been rather disconcerted by the previous little scene, then went trembling through the same ceremony. The Union Jack was hoisted; the general salute sounded, as the troops sprang to attention and presented arms; thus annexing the Kingdoms of Bekwai and Abadoom under British rule and protection. After much shaking hands the Kings took their departure, and the troops hied away for tea and much needed repose.

As the King of Bekwai was leaving in state, he expectorated freely, and, to my disgust, there was a general scramble among the followers to secure the saliva; some youths actually applying their tongues to the spot, to obtain the last traces.

To the credit of the Bekwai Monarch, on one occasion when Prempeh required a number of victims for sacrifice, and sent to levy slaves from the dependent monarchs, he refused to send human beings, but substituted an offering of gold dust instead.

In this village I was offered a peculiar native spirit with a most pungent odour. One has heard of Europeans becoming addicted to drinking "stink-pot," but I doubt if any white man could have taken a nip of this vile concoction. I pushed the nigger and his jar away, but he took a deep draught, which made his eyes water, and then smacked his lips with evident relish.

There are certain people who are continually making an outcry against the drink traffic in Africa. These gentlemen are doubtlessly prompted by the best intentions, but they are sadly mistaken by attributing the whole evil to the white man. The general impression is, that the whole of the curse lies at the door of the white trader and his fire-water, and that if he were prohibited from supplying drink to the natives, the evil would be removed at one stroke. This is a pure fallacy; the natives much prefer European drink if they can afford to get it, which is not always, but they will have drink of some sort; if not proper spirits then Pombi, or some other vile mixture. Spirits are far beyond the reach of the majority of natives in the interior, so they freely drink their own liquors, which are nothing more or less than a fiery poison, far more terrible in effect than the most adulterated trade gin.

A trader once remarked that sending rum to the African at a high price was a blessing in disguise. He loses his taste for native drink, and can only afford occasional debauches on the less harmful spirit. This is a curious line of argument, but it only advocates the lesser of two evils.

Khama will undoubtedly be held up at once as an example in dealing with the evils of imported drink. Now Khama was a thorough prohibitionist from the first,

and forbade the manufacture of all native drinks. He had hardly stamped them out when his country was invaded by traders who supplied bad spirits to his people, and the drink fiend again stalked throughout the land until he was able to get the second evil redressed. If Khama's legislation could be extended throughout Africa it would be a great blessing, but the only way to effectually stamp out the drink curse is to strike at the root of the matter, and not make a drastic removal of one evil and stimulate a greater one. On the coast towns, where cheap and common spirits are always obtainable, there are far too many mud liquor shanties licensed. Much greater care should be exercised by the proper authorities. They seem to grant a license to anyone who cares to pay for it, and the number of drink hovels in Cape Coast is a standing disgrace to the Colonial Government.

More news from Kumassi arrived by spies who stated that all the men were called into the capital, and the women were wailing in the villages for their husbands, who had gone to the war. News also came that every effort would be made to keep the white man from Kumassi, and envoys were on their way down to promise anything and everything, if only the troops would return to the coast. If the forces advanced on the city there might be no resistance unless the English fired the first shot, or injured or captured the King.

Telegrams arrived from the base concerning the sick. Captain Curtis, R.E., Lieutenants Mangan and Davies, who had all been dangerously ill, were now reported doing well. Everyone was hoping to hear Prince Henry had reached the Coast and had been safely removed to the "Coromandel," but his illness unfortunately proved even more serious than was at first anticipated. He arrived safely on the 12th at Prahsu, but had been much tried by the journey, the fever greatly increasing. The Medical Staff spoke of the great consideration shown by the Prince to all attending him. He was frequently bathed with warm water, with a view of inducing the skin to act. Though this water was well warmed, it seemed cool to the fever-stricken frame, and the Prince remarked "How refreshing that cold water is." The doctors were decidedly anxious about him, but he rallied enough to be moved to Mansu on the 14th and resumed the journey to the coast next day.

On Sunday, January 12th, the Staff remained at Essian Kwanta to enable the Ammunition Column and Bearer Company to close up, in readiness for the final advance into Kumassi.

Several hundreds of carriers were encamped in the forest just below the village. The thick undergrowth had been cut away, leaving the high trees alone standing. At night the flickering light of the numerous camp fires throwing a red glare on the surrounding foliage; hundreds of black naked forms moving about under the trees, or lying round the blazing fires in every conceivable position; a perfect babel of voices jabbering and shouting in unknown tongues, and you have the weird picture that requires far more than a pen to portray.

At half-past five the sun is just rising, the birds give a few preliminary whistles, flocks of parrots fly overhead, the crickets have ceased their chorus, while the sloths also stop their child-like screams, that render sleep impossible to the bush novice. He

constantly awakes during the night, startled from his doze with dim visions of murder and violence, till he suddenly remembers it is only the sloth, an African substitute for our feline tribe in their nocturnal choruses. Monkeys are not as common as is generally supposed, though at night they often come round the camp for a midnight chatter, while jackals occasionally give a short interlude by a series of mournful howls.

At sunrise, on January 13th, we resumed our march and experienced one of the worst strips of road on the whole advance. Progress was painfully slow, as the track was narrow, and a very large body of troops and carriers were on the move, the column wending its way over tree trunks and through vile patches of foul-smelling swamp, happily now rendered passable by furlongs of corduroy thrown across by the native levy. Passing slowly onward through Adawassi, now in ruins, we went through Kuraman and reached Ejinassi at midday.

The Special Service Corps marched on through the village and pitched camp in Amoaful, once a large and important town, but now little better than a heap of ruins. This place was the scene of a sanguinary conflict with the Ashantis during the '74 war, when fighting raged between Amoaful and Ejinassi all day, the natives being repulsed at nightfall. The Headquarter Staff again halted for a day, remaining in Ejinassi on the 14th to enable the forces in the rear to close up. The Special Service Corps advanced to Esumeja, their late camp being occupied by the West Yorkshire Regiment, who arrived from Essian Kwanta at eleven o'clock, and they marched into camp in splendid style, despite the drawbacks they were still suffering from.

The day passed very quietly, though the necessary delay was chafing, with Kumassi so near; and yet the force were in a state of absolute uncertainty as to the probable issue of the expedition. The water in all the adjoining villages was very bad, the only available supply being from a muddy gutter streamlet. There was one trivial incident; a hammock-bearer was caught robbing an Ashanti woman, so a parade of natives took place in the morning, while a Houssa Corporal administered twelve strokes on the thief, who was deeply impressed by the ceremony, as were the other natives, though in a different way.

In the afternoon the Bekwai Prime Minister arrived from the capital, bringing a "dash" for the white Chief. The "dash" consisted of a long string of natives, loaded with yams, plantains, fowls, and eggs, a present of gold dust, and last, but not least, a bullock, which was, perhaps, the most acceptable present of the batch, for no fresh meat had been procurable on the road. Major Piggott volunteered to shoot it, as none of the natives were capable of properly slaughtering the beast. Fire-arms came on the scene, the cowardly Fantis bolted to a safe place in the bush; a splendid shot in the forehead brought the animal down, and it was soon skinned and cut up, making an agreeable change after the long spell of preserved meat.

In connection with this beef, a curious incident occurred which caused much discussion and rumour in camp. Major Piggott cut off a joint of beef, and sent it ahead to the commander of the advanced scouts by a runner, with a scrap of paper attached, "Major Gordon. Killed 14th inst." Major Gordon received the meat safely,

and as paper was scarce, he scribbled a note of receipt on the back and returned it by the messenger, who duly delivered the same. The front script alone was an ominous missive to those out of the ken, and naturally the worst conclusion was jumped at, and the startling news spread. Poor Gordon! Killed! How terrible! Excitement ran high; fighting was imminent now, and bitterly was his death to be avenged. Then some far seeing person turned the paper over, and found note of acknowledgment on the back written by the defunct officer himself, and so the matter was cleared up.

The Bekwai people had opened a market as requested, and a plentiful stock of bananas, plantains, yams, and paw-paws were offered for sale. So high a value did these bush people put on an English threepenny bit, that sufficient fruit could be purchased with it to last a week if you thought the load worth the carrying. The market women were all very ugly, but probably that was intentional, for fear if more comely Bekwai maids were sent they might be turning the heads or capturing the hearts of the white men. At any rate, Darwin could never have been to Ashanti, or he would assuredly have found his missing link; and the evolutionary theory seems borne out in Africa by types of startling reliability.

With all due respect to these ladies, as some of them waddled about, it required a distinct stretch of imagination to realize that they were human beings, and not belonging to a race of the quadrumanous gorillas; and their shaved heads, a sign of slavery, did not add to their beauty. Many prevalent fashions among West African women are as cruel as those practised by their more enlightened European sisters; though the facial disfigurements are not as common on the Gold Coast as in surrounding districts, where the upper lip is slit and widened by pegs till a large ring is inserted to keep the orifice extended.

Though barbarism has its dark side, these bush people, quite cut off from every trace of civilisation, and out of the reach of missionaries, lead a very contented existence. "Ignorance is bliss," and the few requirements they have, are easily supplied: they have no luxury and no wants, few yearnings and few aspirations; a pointed stick makes them a spear, and a few sticks plastered with mud, a house, while an abundance of fruit springs up around for food which requires little preparation. Undoubtedly their great curse is the pernicious form of government and fetish, though this, of course, has more effect on the chief towns and immediate surroundings, than on the small scattered bush villages. With their cheeks for bellows, a stone for a hammer, a hard tree stump for an anvil, and tongs made of a split piece of green-wood, they can turn out work of a sort that would really compare favourably with that of an English blacksmith. Unfortunately, at first, civilisation spoils all this, they begin to covet; and once give them an education they lose their simplicity, becoming proud and arrogant; considering themselves quite equal to a white man.

The black brotherhood is all very well in its place, but the negro cannot be treated as an equal by a white man. He must first be taught to regenerate his character, quit habits of brutish sloth, and abandon the practice of most degrading crimes and filthy ways. Speke says, "I do not deem the African negro capable of

raising himself from the degradation in which he lives," and there is a great amount of truth in the assertion. Centuries of barbarism cannot be changed in a moment, though it may be hid under a thin veneer of civilisation, and, at present, it is doubtful if the invasion of the white man has been a great blessing to the African. That is more the fault of the European than the negro. With patient teaching, and wise legislation only, will the savage be taught self-respect, and gradually emerge from his age of darkness and hereditary paganism with all its incumbent horrors.

A white man has much influence over an uncivilised black by his superior moral power, and even the ordinary things of every-day life of a European seem supernatural to the savage mind; but this influence is only too often abused. The native wants a certain number of kicks, but also a certain number of "ha'pence"; and strict justice and impartial treatment will go a long way with a nigger. If the justice is too much tempered with mercy, he is not slow to take advantage of it; and on the other hand, too harsh a discipline will brutalize him. The fresh arrival in Africa who starts by making friendly overtures to natives usually turns into one of the hardest men when dealing with them, because he is so often taken in and has his clemency abused at every turn. The negro may become as faithful as a dog with proper treatment, but he will need as strict a breaking in as a colt, who is either made or marred by early training. He won't follow his teachers into civilisation, neither will he be driven to it, but he must be firmly led.

The natives have few games, the most universal being Po, which is played in most of the villages. The game takes place on a board containing twelve round holes, each containing four men. On making inquiry as to the rules, the answer was always the same, "No savey, sah!" but they get very excited when playing, and will gamble the very wraps from their bodies. Apparently it is not unlike the Indian "Pachisi"; at least, they have similar methods of reckoning.

Funerals are attended by scenes of disgraceful orgie, especially if a chief or big man has died. His remains are closed over by some dozens of his progeny, who, with his faithful wives, are all as drunk as they can afford to be. In cases of war, the dead enemies are never buried, but the bodies are sometimes eaten, or thrown into the bush to be devoured by wild beasts.

The birth of a child gives no pleasure to the Ashanti, with his plurality of wives; the woman is often banished to the bush, and never remains in the husband's house during confinement. The female offspring is sold as a wife-slave, at a tender age, to some neighbouring chief. Who can wonder that pudicity is unknown among these women, whatever other virtues they may possess, when wives are looked on in the same light as a farmer in England regards cattle. They all work for their lord; do everything for him, and their numbers are a standard of his wealth. There, indeed, Marie Corelli would have ample scope to dilate on, and anathematise the supreme egotism of man; and there is certainly an opening for a branch of the "Women's Rights Association." Perhaps some of our more advanced sisters of civilization will turn their wasted energies in this direction. "The Society for the Emancipation of African Womanhood" would sound even better than the "League

for Supplying the Blacks with Flannel Petticoats and Pocket Handkerchiefs," or similar societe de bienfaisance.

There was a great difficulty in keeping shaved in the bush; some let their hirsute appendages flourish, others shaved clean every day, but the climate played havoc with razors, and shaving was an ordeal. I had one of the finely-ground "Mabs," however, and that kept in splendid condition, often shaving half-a-dozen in one day; for no one is particular in those things in the wilds. "He that hath, lendeth," is a universal maxim there. On the 15th instant, preparations were made for the final advance, as the force had practically closed up. The order of march behind the scouts was:

- The Advance Guard of the Special Service Corps, under Major Northcote.
- Houssa Artillery, with maxim, two seven-pounders, and two rocket tubes.
- The Special Service Corps, under Colonel Stopford
- The Artillery, under Captain Blunt
- Part of the Medical Staff Bearer Company with sick hammocks.
- The Head-quarter Staff.
- The West Yorkshire Regiment.
- Remainder of the Bearer Company.
- Baggage column.
- Company of the West India Regiment.
- Remainder of the Houssa Artillery.
- The Supply and Ammunition Columns and Field Hospital.

Progress was painfully slow, the pace being reduced to a regular crawl, with frequent halts. The road at first was moderately clear, but plunged into a thick bush tunnel with the branches interwoven above, only just allowing free passage. The smell in the leafy avenue was unbearable as we followed in rear of hundreds of carriers. The numerous obstructions soon also caused straggling, and the long line of troops and bearers extended for some miles.

Crossing three streams in succession, which join about two miles down, and form the River Suberri, the road passes two sharp ridges with sides approaching the perpendicular, but once having cleared these, the path widened into an open and fairly smooth track right into Esumeja, being the best and widest piece of road after the Prah.

From the top of the ridges a splendid view was obtained. The long straggling line of the column could be seen winding in and out, patches of scarlet showing the position of the troops moving through the trees, with streaks of white, caused by the light robes of the carriers.

At Esumeja we found the Bekwai King drawn up in state, with his band well to the fore, to play us from his dominions. They made a terrible din, monotonously uttering a peculiar war chant, which was almost drowned by the infernal drumming and jangling of the musicians. We sighed in vain for wax to stop our ears, like the companions of Ulysses, when they rowed past the sirens and their delusive

melodies. This music, however, would have rather caused one to die in agony than in ecstasy of delight. Judging from their faces they derived a considerable amount of gratification from the display, but we were much relieved to get out of earshot.

After leaving Esumeja the forest archway was again apparent, while the rough and swampy track reduced the advance to a snail's pace, and there were frequent stoppages. The foetid smell caused by the narrow air space, vitiated by hundreds of carriers, and the stench from the swamp was really filthy. Everything comes to an end at last, but the trying march had its effect on the troops, many of whom fell by the wayside, thoroughly exhausted, and the numerous sick severely taxed the resources of the Bearer Company. We reached Edunku at three o'clock, the Special Service Corps advancing to Dede Siwa, and bivouacking on the banks of the Adra; but it was almost sunset before the end of the long straggling column came in and had settled down. The troops pitched their tentes dabri where practicable, and these useful and portable little shelters, which are just large enough for three men to snuggle inside, can be easily put up in any situation.

Some of the miserable hovels in the village were turned into temporary hospital wards, and the remainder only afforded accommodation for a few officers of the Staff. Several of us bivouacked in the forest, hastily rigging up rough shelters of bamboo poles, with creepers twined above, and palm leaves laid over for a roof. Fires were soon burning, and we had settled down fairly comfortably before the chilly night came on. An encampment in the bush is soon made, as the material is near at hand. Some search for young trees or bamboos for uprights; others lop down plantains and palm leaves, and thus rough shelters are easily formed.

Several Fanti servants and interpreters were grouped round a camp fire, each relating tales of their wonderful presence of mind and their prowess, and what they would do if the 'Shantiman came across the river and attacked our camp that night. Crack! bang! bang! went some fresh bamboos, thrown on the next fire. 'Shantiman had come at last, and they were off helter-skelter to the bush, without waiting to see the cause.

These explosions, when burning bamboos, are very common, as the cavities between the joints are often filled with water, and when put on the fire steam is generated, blowing up the section before the wood is burnt through. This water is often drunk by the natives, who select a likely-looking reed, and obtain a pint or more from a single cavity; though it would not be fit for European consumption except in a case of dire extremity.

There were various howlings and roarings from the different animals prowling round in the forest; but after making big fires by the shanty, for comfort's sake, I had dropped off to sleep in spite of this mournful nocturnal chorus, when suddenly despairing screams of mortal agony, followed by a fearful hub-bub, and more cries, harrowed every soul as they were startled from their sleep. The attack had come at last, and the wily foe had crept through the bush and was upon us, was the first thought. To spring up and get outside was the work of a moment, and two other pyjamad figures came rushing on the scene shortly after, while the startled natives

sat half dazed on their mats, which they had spread near the fires. Hastening in the direction of the noise there was a gang of hammock bearers with a Fanti in the midst, who was yelling and screaming madly, for no apparent cause, while the others shouted to drown his yells. Our slumbers had thus been disturbed, and our small camp alarmed, for nothing more serious than some horseplay of the niggers, who speedily retired at the end of a good thick stick.

Morning dawned, and everyone was up betimes to resume the march. Still no signs of the Ashantis, and only four hours' sharp travelling from Kumassi. The road was good, but the column made a short advance only, ready to invest the capital on the morrow. Passing down a broad well-cleared track we passed Adwabin, which place was quite deserted save for a hideous old hag, who sat in one of the houses, left, apparently, with the hope that the English would make off with her.

After an easy march Dede Siwa was reached, the West Yorks camping on the site occupied the previous day by the Special Service Corps, who crossed the Adra and halted on the other bank. The Headquarter Staff took up their quarters in the village, which boasted of several very fair houses, the inhabitants having cleared out stick and stone. Officers and men were fretting with the slow advance, and all would have preferred a quick dash into Kumassi, but that would have entailed possible risk, with no gain beyond the few hours saved.

The Adra river was then a shallow stream about one hundred and fifty feet wide, and it was easily and quickly bridged over in a rough fashion, though the Engineer officers and men who were directing operations, had to stand up to their middle in slush and water for some hours. Stockades were also thrown up, so that the bridge could easily have been held.

Both the Engineers and Army Service Corps were decidedly undermanned, especially the former. There were only sufficient men sent out to meet the bare exigencies of the Expedition, and when fever made many gaps in the ranks, the remainder of the sappers were very hard pressed, especially the Telegraph Section. They had lost the services of their commander, Captain Curtiss, and several men, though Lieutenant McInnes, with a mere handful of assistants, pluckily pushed ahead with the cable.

Envoys came down to the outposts bringing as hostages, boys bedecked with gold, and said to be Prempeh's sons. They were only two poor slave children of no value to Prempeh or anyone else. Major Baden-Powell instructed them to return to Kumassi and tell the King that it was not the intention of the British to force the fighting, or depose Prempeh if he agreed to come to terms, but they had better hurry to Kumassi and await the Governor's arrival, for the Expedition must enter the capital, and the treaty would be arranged there.

Prempeh, still hoping to delay the advance, again sent down Kwaku Fukoo, Boatin, and a number of subsidiary chiefs to treat with the white man and promise anything and everything if they could only stop the troops investing Kumassi.

The envoys came down to Ordasum, where the advanced party of Houssas and native levies were camped, and they also brought a numerous following; attendants

and slaves bearing stools, umbrellas, litters, state swords, and many emblems of office. An unfortunate occurrence followed this visit; and though the Ashantis were themselves greatly to blame, it was none the less to be regretted, as it was contrary to the British methods of treating negotiators of an armistice. The Ashantis, huddled together waiting palaver, were obstructing the Houssa quarters. Three times they were asked to move by the interpreters, but they seemed to think it derogatory to their dignity, and would not budge an inch. The Houssas, always ready for a little fun, thereupon started to move the offending niggers, who were still stubborn, till canes were seized and freely used. The Ashantis moved then; the followers, dropping umbrellas and stools, bolted into the forest, leaving their belongings behind. The native levies, seeing a chance of "getting their own back" for years of aggression, then rushed at the Ashantis, whom they freely hustled and cuffed, till the officers came on the scene and stopped the row. In the confusion the envoys had been driven for a considerable distance, dropping even their smallest articles in the ignominious flight, and some of these things were stolen by our levies, who looked on Ashanti goods as lawful spoil.

The Ashantis soon regained confidence, and after retailing their grievances, returned to camp, where a short search revealed most of the lost property, which was restored to the owners. Three young delinquents were then tied to a tree, and had half-a-dozen lashes apiece, in sight of the Ashantis, who saw strict justice had been done; but they took advantage of this by trebling the previous stated amount of their losses to Captain Donald Stewart, when the palaver started. Captain Stewart, through the interpreter, first said he was very sorry for what had happened. It was an accident, and they must tell the King so. They had complained about their losses, but most of the things had been recovered and returned, yet they now gave a finely exaggerated tale of missing property, but he would tell the Governor, and see what could be done. Chief Assufu first said he had lost £60 worth of gold dust, and now he has added £100 to that. The Ashantis were fond of doing such things. Every man who had lost anything during the last twenty years put it down, but the Governor would see they got justice. He was now ready to hear their message from the King.

The lanky Kwaku Fukoo, after along preamble, replied that they had taken the letter to the King, and Ansah had read it; but the voluble linguist then went on with such a jumbled speech that no one could quite grasp the gist of his remarks.

Captain Stewart answered that they did not seem to understand the letter, which said that it was not the intention of Her Majesty's Forces to depose King Prempeh if he fully submitted and paid a war indemnity, and would agree to the demands of the British Government, namely, the appointment of a Resident. Also he must send hostages to be held till the indemnity was paid.

Kwaku Fukoo interrupted: "You want hostages! Why, I brought you two, and you refused to take them." Captain Stewart rejoined: "Thank you! We shall choose the hostages, not you, and the two children you brought were not royal personages, and not worth anything. You know that!" (A broad grin of acknowledgment

illuminated three hundred dusky faces.) "We shall come to Kumassi, and the King must submit in proper fashion to the Governor."

Boatin sprang to his feet: "I am the eye of Kumassi, and the people agree to submit. Lo! I say so! We are here to settle the whole matter for the King, and you need not come further. I am a big chief, yet your people have robbed me. Perhaps we shall be treated thus if we let you come to Kumassi."

Captain Stewart rejoined that the palaver about their losses was settled, and they had punished the guilty. The Governor would agree about compensation but things had gone too far, and the Expedition must go to Kumassi and nowhere else.

The Chiefs begged and pleaded that the treaty might be drawn up there and then, and they would touch the British flag in token of submission, so the white men could then march back to the coast. Finding that their entreaties met with no response, and that the terms would be discussed in Kumassi alone, the envoys returned with sad hearts to the capital. The visit of these messengers still further reduced the chances of fighting, but in the last Expedition the same tactics were adopted in the earlier stages of the advance, when the sole efforts of the Ashantis were also to keep the troops out of Kumassi, and when the British General steadily advanced, the foe resisted and made a desperate stand outside the town.

There seemed now two probable courses; either Prempeh would bolt, or a stand would be made at the gates of the city when they found the occupation of the capital inevitable.

The night of the 16th the whole force was encamped on the banks of the Adra, and everyone turned in, eagerly looking forward to the final march on the morrow, and the solving of the Ashanti enigma, which was a difficult one. It was a glorious night for Ashanti, and little mist, so all settled down to sleep in eager expectation of the morrow, and what it would bring forth.

About midnight, without any previous warning, a fearful clap of thunder awakened everyone with a start. The lightning flashed incessantly, and the rain suddenly poured down in torrents. The rough roofs of plantain-leaf thatch were washed away in a second, and everyone was drenched to the skin. It was a copious shower bath which would have been pleasant in the heat of the day, if we could have stripped, and put clothes and effects in a dry place. The flashes of lightning were vivid and incessant, followed immediately by the deafening roar of thunder reverberating through the trees. The forest was lit up as brightly as at noonday, the electric fluid playing dangerously over the tree tops, and bringing many a giant of the forest down with a crash. In one case a huge cotton tree was struck, and fell, crushing to jelly a group of native carriers who were clustering, affrighted, round its ample roots. The tornado raged without cessation for over two hours, and then the clouds dispersed as suddenly as they had gathered.

Everything was in a deplorable state of dampness, with water, inches deep, flowing around; but, when the rain ceased, soldiers and carriers turned out to cut down wood for bonfires, and, before long, cheery piles were blazing for all to warm and dry themselves by. During the storm the officers moved about freely among the

troops, administering rum to those who needed a stimulant, and the surgeons were up all night doing what they could to the poor fever-stricken patients in their charge.

Things were getting more comfortable, when the storm started again, extinguishing the fires and swamping everything; but, luckily, tea and cocoa had been prepared by the men before the rain began. At 4.30 reveille sounded, ending a strange and dreadful night; and, after a hasty breakfast had been swallowed in the rain, the column re-formed to wend its bedraggled steps into Kumassi.

Captain Birch, R.A.; Captain Bain, Royal Irish Constabulary; Lieutenant Straubensee, R.A.; and Lieutenant Vesey, R.E., disembarked at Cape Coast on January 12th to reinforce the Departmental Corps. They travelled up country almost night and day, with relays of hammock bearers, and reached the main body near the Adra, making a record journey through the bush.

