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James Mackenzie

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Extract of a Letter from Lieutenant JAMES MACKENZIE, of the Bengal Cavalry, to the Right Hon. Sir ALEXANDER JOHNSTON, dated Judda, the 22d of February, 1836.

* * * * WE left the Calcutta Pilot on the 16th December, and sighted Ceylon on the 26th of the same month: coasting Ceylon, as far as Cultara, on the western side of the island, we sighted Cape Comorin on the 31st, and arrived at Cochin, on the Malabar coast, on the 5th January, where we took in wood and water. Sailing again, on the 8th, we worked up to latitude $15^{\circ} 10'$ north, and then hauled off to the westward; and, after a rough passage of seven days, the wind blowing strong from the north and north-north-east, sighted Cape Fartash, on the coast of Arabia Felix, on the evening of 21st ultimo: here we found ourselves about ninety miles out in our longitude, the captain having no chronometer, and being unable to take lunar observations. From Fartash, we steered to the south of west, and, after losing our way (caused again by errors in the longitude) for two days, sighted the high, black, and arid mountains of Aden (the most southerly point of Arabia) on the 27th; passed the narrow strait of Babelmandeb on the 28th, and anchored inside for the night, as we were afraid of not being able to reach Mocha before dark. On the morning of the 29th, weighed at daylight; the wind blowing violently from the south-east, and passing the shoals to the south and west of the town, anchored in Mocha Roads at twelve at noon, alongside an American barque, which had been waiting five months for a cargo of coffee. The Hon. Company's schooner of war, Shannon, of four guns, was lying inside, and about fifteen or sixteen buggalos (or Arab vessels, with one mast and one large lateen sail.) On the 30th, I and my family landed, and were received at the Bab Sahil, or water-gate, by Sheikh Taib, the Hon. Company's agent, who conducted us to his house, seated us on a divan, and gave us a capital breakfast. After breakfast, I strolled into the town, the streets of which, though narrow, are clean, being watered every day, each inhabitant being obliged to sprinkle the space before his own door. The town is falling to decay, having been the scene of plunder and devastation for many years: Mahummad Ali's government may restore it. The place belonged to the Pasha of Egypt, when, in 1833, it was taken by a rebel officer in His Highness's army, who ruled for some time in the name of the Sublime Ottoman Porte. Muhammed Ali bribed the Bedouins to attack the traitor Toorkee Bilmus, and the garrison of Mocha, composed chiefly, if not entirely, of Turkish troops, amounting only to 600 men. Accordingly, several thousands of these barbarians came down from their fastnesses, and sacked the place, driving the Turks into the sea, and killing, plundering, and maltreating the inhabitants. About a year ago, Muhammed Ali retook it from the Bedouins, and it is now garrisoned by 1500 infantry of the line, commanded by Mustapha Bey, a colonel in His Highness' service. The Mohafus, or governor of the town, is Sooliman Agha, a respectable gray-bearded Turk, upon whom I waited, and who received me very politely, giving me coffee and a pipe. I told him, that, on approaching Mocha, we were delighted to see,

from the deck of the Khassovie, the Pasha's flag flying on the ramparts, 'because Muhammed Ali is a just prince, and protects travellers and merchants.' He replied, 'Muhammed Ali wishes to act justly, but his authority is frequently abused by his representatives in distant parts. If any oppression is committed by them, depend upon it it is without the pasha's sanction or knowledge.' The following morning I rode into the country to see the date plantations to the south of the town. The soil is sandy, and the dates not so large or well-flavoured as those of Persia. No grass grows on the arid plains around Mocha: a few weeds, of stunted growth, here and there relieve the universal barrenness. All vegetables for the consumption of the inhabitants come from Gibal, the mountainous country to the east of Mocha; and fruits, from Senna. The coffee hills are to the north and north-east, distant several days' journey. At present it is difficult to bring down the berry, owing to the road being infested by the Cisseers, a fierce and powerful tribe at war with Muhammed Ali. The pasha's troops are tolerably well drilled by the French and Italian *instructeurs*; but they do not appear to have much respect for their officers, who are in the habit of sitting, smoking, and even gambling with them. The dress of the men is white cotton cloth, with white belts, good cartouch-boxes covered with deer skin, and excellent muskets and bayonets after the French fashion, which are made at Cairo, and kept very clean. The soldiers do not shew any mark of respect to British officers in uniform, although lately desired to do so by their commandant. The guard at one of the gates lately beat a British subject who had come by land from Hodeida. A representation was made to the authorities, who not giving a satisfactory answer, a statement of the affair has been forwarded to Colonel Campbell, the Consul-General, for his Highness' consideration. On the 31st, as Napier and myself were passing through the water-gate to reembark, the commander of the troops, Mustapha Bey, sent us a polite message to walk into his apartment under the arch. He gave us coffee, of course, and me an Albanian pipe. I found all the officers exceedingly civil and urbane. I cannot say the same of the troops. On the evening of the 31st ult. we weighed, and with a strong south-east wind made quick progress as far as Jibal Teir, a volcanic island: afterwards had calms and northerly winds, which compelled us to sight the Abyssinian islands, and took to the north-east. A southerly wind springing up on the 8th, carried us into Judda harbour on the 10th instant. Here we found the Hon. Company's sloop of war, Clive, eighteen guns, commanded by Captain Hawkins, in whose house on shore we are now living. He has been very kind to us, as have all his officers.

'The governor of this town is a Turk, named Sooliman Effendi, upon whom I called, and who promised us every aid I required. He said, 'Muhammed Ali is the brother of the English; and if I were not to befriend you, I should incur his displeasure.' He talked about European politics; and, on my saying that I thought it very likely there would be a collision between Russia on one side, and England and France on the other, he replied, that it was much to be wished that the Russians should be driven back to their Siberian deserts; and that the pasha would lend his aid to effect so desirable an object. For the safety of India, it is much to be desired that British councils should supersede Russian ones in Persia and Turkey. The commander of the Egyptian troops encamped

outside the town, is Osman Bey, who speaks French fluently. I went the other morning to see the men exercising, and called on the general, who told me he was practising light infantry (*voltigeur*) movements, to enable him to contend against the Asseers. The men worked slowly, and by word of command instead of the bugle. The encampment is regular, and the tents good. About three thousand men are fit for duty; but many, particularly Nubians, pressed into the service, are in hospital, under the charge of French, German, and Italian surgeons. Besides the troops at Mocha and Judda, there are two or three thousand men under Ibrahim Pasha (Muhammed Ali's nephew) at Hodeida, and several thousand, with some cavalry and artillery, at Mecca, where at present resides the commander-in-chief, and governor-general of Arabia, Koorshid Pasha. More troops are coming down from Egypt; and when the *haj*, or pilgrimage is over (forty days hence), nearly 20,000 men will take the field against the Asseer tribe, who inhabit the mountains to the east and south-east. Last year these formidable Arabs defeated Muhammed Ali's troops, cutting up five regiments. The defeat was attributed to treachery on the part of the Shereef of Mecca, and Hamed Pasha, the viceroy's nephew. Both have been summoned to Cairo to answer for their alleged misconduct. It is supposed Hamed Pasha wished to conciliate the Arabs, that, on the event of a break up at his uncle's demise, he might secure their services in usurping this country. As his Highness' post starts to-day for Cairo, *via* Mecca, I must say adieu. We hope to leave this in two or three days on the Khassovie for Kosseir, which we may reach on the 6th or 8th proximo. The desert of the Thaboid will occupy five days; the voyage down the Nile, twelve. God willing, we may be in time for the April steam-packet from Alexandria to Malta.

* * * * *

‘ Believe me, my dear Sir,

‘ Yours very sincerely,

‘ JAMES MACKENZIE.’