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Visit to the Coast of Somali-Land

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form a definite opinion. I think I shall be supported by the naval officers whom I accompanied, when I say that the Wami is not navigable for practical purposes of commerce by any craft which has not steam-power.

The timber we saw—acacias, gourd trees, thorns, with here and there a palm—would not repay an expedition. Cultivation, so far as we went, was but very scanty and confined to pumpkins and a little maize; and the country, rich though the soil apparently is, was so thinly populated that no assistance could be expected from, or trade looked forward to with the natives.

An expedition which had time to penetrate as far as Mbumi might produce valuable results.

The PRESIDENT said he thought that the Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society would concur with him in considering that they might return thanks to Mr. Hill, who was one of their recently elected Fellows, for the paper which had been read. He would now ask the Secretary to read to them some extracts from a letter from Dr. Kirk, giving an account of a visit which he had paid, in company with Captain Malcolm, to the coast of the Somali country, to the north of the true Negro country of East Africa.

The following was then read :—

2. *Visit to the Coast of Somali-land.* By J. KIRK, M.D., F.R.G.S.,
H.B.M. Consul, Zanzibar.

"DEAR SIR BARTLE,

"ZANZIBAR, May 11, 1873.

"I told you in my last that Captain Malcolm had invited me to accompany him in the *Briton* on a visit to the northern part of the station; the chance was one not to be lost, especially as I had written the letter, explaining the course to be followed with the slave dhows after the 1st of May, to the Sultan, and it seemed very much better he should digest it quietly. Before going I also explained the matter to Tana and Likindais. We touched for a few hours at Pangani, a difficult harbour, impassable to vessels over 200 tons, yet carrying on a large trade in ivory with the Massai country and the hills to the south. Caravans from Pangani also reach to the Nile lakes, and go even to Baringo. The trade here is in the hands of Bhattias, of whom there are about thirty; there is only one Bobera, and, I think, three Khojas. Here, as elsewhere, these people trade, but an agricultural population is growing up among the Makulla, and Sheher men, retired soldiers of the Sultan chiefly, who from keeping petty stores have now planted sugar-cane to a very considerable extent up the alluvial valley above the mangroves. For want of proper machinery and knowledge chiefly, but possibly also in part from a saltiness in the soil, they do not make sugar but molasses. We must recollect, again, that molasses pay (considering there is no trouble in their manufacture) about as well as sugar. Grain, too, is largely cultivated, but the slave-trade is the curse of the land. Two years ago the valleys between the Ushambala hills and the highlands themselves were peopled with very industrious races. This was the old kingdom of Kimwere, which, like all African states, lasted but for the life-time of the man who by his energy made it. The tribes commenced fighting with each other. Captives were sold—slaves brought in thousands into Pangani, which suddenly became a great place of export, from having imported slaves from Quiloa the year before. This slave war did not last long, as the place was depopulated to such an extent that the few remaining

villages became afraid; but the same thing still goes on, though to a less extent here as elsewhere along the coast.

"We went in the *Briton* direct to Mogdesho, or 'Magadoxo' of the charts. I was much struck with the number of large dhows at anchor, and volunteered as interpreter to the boats sent to examine them. We found twenty vessels, from 50 to 200 tons, all filled with or taking in native grain, which I learnt is largely grown on the river behind, near Geledi, where Ahmed Yoosoof lives, to whom I gave you a letter. There was no suspicion of slave dealing here, but, on the contrary, a large commerce in grain; while a coasting steamer and schooner, the one of Schultz, the other of Tarra, had just left with ivory and hides. I was very much pleased to see this trade going on. We could not land without swimming through the surf, and as Captain Malcolm did not feel desirous to remain next day, we took the opportunity of calling on the chiefs, and examining the really nice-looking and most interesting town of Mogdesho. I sent a message by the interpreter of the ship to the head man of the elders who manage the place. This man styles himself the Iman Mahmood. All the people on the beach were armed, but this was their usual mode of appearing, and no sign of ill-feeling. I am sure nothing either could have been more respectful than the conduct of the people in the dhows we boarded, unless when they were amused to see us hunt for slaves and find none, when they evidently had a good laugh; but all the tales of the fear of the Arabs at being boarded are clearly false from what I saw. There was not a man who doubted he would get justice, and as there certainly were no slaves in harbour, they took the search in the greatest good humour.

"We touched off Merka, but there again could not land, reserving our time for Brava, which I regretted, as it is the worst by far of the four Somali towns, of Worsheikh, Mogdesho, Merka, and Brava, which together constitute the 'Benadir,' or 'the ports' in the language of East Africa. Off Merka there were nineteen dhows, all loading native grain, brought on camels and by men from the river of Geledi. Determined not to be defeated in our visit to one of the Benadir at least, we anchored at Brava. Here there were no dhows loading, as this is not a grain port, and the ivory and hides had all been exported already, either in dhows to Zanzibar, or in the steamer and schooner mentioned above.

"The surf was high, but we landed; getting on shore here is not an easy thing, and on all but the first occasion we found it far the best way to swim through the surf to the boat and from the boat, for we could not afford to delay until the tide had fallen, when it is comparatively smooth.

"Seeing the people perfectly friendly, I proposed an excursion into the Somali country for one day; crossing the desert sand-hills that all along bound the view from seaward. Next morning, at day-break, we were on shore. I had engaged a relative of one of the head men to be our guide. We ascended the sand-hills, where were curious lines they called fences, to mark fields and gardens, but not a trace of any plant on the burning sand, unless regular desert-bush, such as you might see near Aden. The vegetation was peculiar and new to me, but African still in every respect. I made a small collection, but the fields I mention struck me as so peculiar, that I asked the meaning, and was told that in one month the rains would commence, and that, although they did not last long, for the time the gardens would be full of melons and vegetables. It must be a strange transformation. From the crest of the sand-hills, near Brava, I saw as noble a sight as I ever have in my life; it equals the plain of Damascus, but is far more level and extensive; as far as the eye could reach landwards was an endless plain covered with low trees, seemingly chiefly of the mimosa class; the distant horizon was as clear and level as the sea, and the sun's meridian altitude might have been taken on it with equal accuracy.

"On the counterslope of the hills the vegetation became much more abundant, and the plain, considering we were now at the close of the dry season, was rich. The guide pointed out the position of the now dry bed of the marsh, where the river of Geledi loses itself, for that stream never reaches either the Juba or the sea, and although even now containing water higher up, is here quite dry. This was the first year the people recollected to have seen the marsh quite dry.

"I have said that the plantations yielding the grain shipped from Merka and Mogdesho are on the borders of this stream; there two large crops of black sesame-seed are raised, and this, together with the picking of the coarse orchella weed, explains why Somali-land takes so many slaves, that are not exported to Arabia as is popularly imagined, but retained for work in the land itself. Somali-land must be a truly magnificent country, once you are away from the coast. It exports cow-hides by thousands, also ivory, but this comes from a distance; and until I came here I never knew there was so much cultivation. We tried to enter the River Juba, but the bar was quite impassable; next anchored in Kismayo (not of the charts, but in the bay near Cape Bissell). This is a really fine harbour, safe in all winds, and from its position, being the last harbour north of Lamo, unless Durnford, must in the end command an immense trade. There is, in fact, between it and Guardafui no other place to be called a harbour safe during the south-west monsoon. I had special reasons for wishing to visit this place. First, it had been encouraged by the late Seyd Majid very much under my influence and advice, with a view to country commerce in the line of the Juba; and, secondly, in order to make the inquiry I had been asked to carry out here, regarding the story of white slaves in Galla-land. Of the latter I could get no information whatever in the settlement, but took off a couple of guides with me for a long day's walk in the bush, where I collected plants. From these men I found out that the man who accompanied the Frenchman who gave the story to Mr. Churchill in Zanzibar was then at Kismayo; on return I found him and heard all he had to say, but this amounted to a statement that he had heard, when up the Juba with the Frenchman, of white captives, among whom was a woman, among the Gallas, but distant quite a month's journey from Berbera. The fact is, that the Gallas are now driven far off from the coast, and not found within a month's journey from the coast in this part. With the place which this man indicated, I should imagine Genanah, on the River Juba, must be in communication; it again trades with both Brava and Kismayo; but unless from this one individual I could at neither of these places obtain the smallest trace of such a report.

"We visited in the boats the Tola and Shamba rivers of the chart, both salt-water creeks of no importance, with very bad entrances, unless to boats. They are not rivers but creeks, the country on their banks being rock or light soil, covered with an impenetrable jungle of thorn-bush. Thence we steamed, in rainy and windy weather, the whole way to Zanzibar.

"The Cameron Expedition, I am glad to say, is fairly off, and by last accounts getting on well. Cameron must now be far through the wet country, and Murphy and Moffat following after them. I am sending off to-day to Murphy a special messenger with letters; he is thought to be about a week's journey on the way.

"JOHN KIRK."

The PRESIDENT said he need hardly remind them that the purpose of the late mission to the East Coast of Africa was not one of geographical discovery. It was a public duty they had to perform, and he hoped they did their best to carry it out; but they also felt that, as Fellows, *in esse* or *in posse*, of the Royal Geographical Society, they owed it as a duty to the Society not to return home empty-handed if anything came in their way, of geographical interest,

and Mr. Hill, Mr. Grey, Major Smith, and Captain Fairfax, who had been a long time on that coast, as well as his own son and himself, all felt that it was their duty to bring back something in the way of geographical information. He thought, however, that the paper which they had heard read that evening, embraced almost the only item of really new information which they had the good fortune to bring home; but they had the opportunity of seeing a great deal of the possibilities of easy additions to the stock of knowledge of the geography of East Africa, which it struck him they might like to hear, and, if they would permit him, before calling upon any of the Fellows present to discuss the questions raised, he would give a very brief account of some of the things which they saw.

3.—*A few Remarks on Zanzibar and the East Coast of Africa.* By
SIR H. BARTLE E. FRERE, K.C.B., ETC., PRESIDENT.

IN the remarks I have to offer on the geographical results of the late Mission to Zanzibar, the Society will not expect anything of real novelty, for the object of the expedition was not geographical discovery, and we went over ground often traversed before by accomplished observers in every branch of science; but as all the members of our party* were, or hoped to be one day, Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society, we felt that no opportunity of acquiring fresh geographical information ought to be neglected, and we may at least be able to indicate some points on which further valuable information may be easily obtained.

I must leave our excellent fellow-labourer, Mr. Badger, to tell you of the many courtesies we received from the Royal Geographical Society of Italy, who, through their President, the venerable Commendatore Negri Cristoforo, expressed their interest in the geographical questions which might receive some light from our expedition. To the Commendatore's good offices I may also ascribe the interest expressed by his Majesty King Victor Emanuel, who accepted from Mr. Badger a copy of his translation of the travels of the Bolognese traveller Varthema, published by the Hakluyt Society, and made me the bearer of a gold medal for Dr. Livingstone, as mentioned at our last meeting.

Mr. Badger will, I hope, tell you that this notice of the old Bolognese was not without result, as His Majesty's Government communicated with the Municipality of Bologna, and an order has been given for the erection of a monument to the traveller more than 350 years after his death; for which act of posthumous gratitude Varthema may, next to his Majesty King Victor Emanuel and the

* Rev. Percy Badger; Col. Pelly, C.S.I.; Capt. Fairfax, R.N.; Major Euan Smith, C.S.I.; Mr. Clements Hill; Mr. Charles Grey; Mr. B. Frere.