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THE ITALIAN REVERSE AT ADOWA

(March 1st, 1896).

By LIEUTENANT J. F. SHAW, R.A.

(A).—Summary of the earlier events of the Campaign with Abyssinia up to February 1st, 1896.

IN July, 1895, the demands and encroachments of King Menelik and his ally, Ras Mangasha, Governor of the Tigré Province, had become so persistent, that General Baratieri, the Italian Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Eritrea, decided to proceed to Rome at once with the object of coming to some definite agreement with the Italian Government, as to the force required for the defence of the African territories, and also to ask for an increase of the sum of money annually granted for that purpose.

Baratieri returned to Eritrea in October. The earlier events of his career (he had seen service under Garibaldi) and his recent successes as Governor of Eritrea had not been forgotten, and he had found himself the most popular man of the day in Italy. Banquets, complimentary speeches, and other signs of respect and admiration had awaited him wherever he went, and he had no difficulty in obtaining a promise of a field force of 10,000 men; and in addition a sum of 13,000,000 lire (half a million sterling) was voted for expenses.

After landing at Massowah, Baratieri proceeded at once to Adigrat, at that time the most advanced post held by the Italians, to find that Menelik had already made his first formal sign of hostility. The mobilization of the native militia was at once ordered, and on October 6th there were 9,000 men and ten guns in readiness at Adigrat.

The first actual conflict occurred in December. On the 7th of that month 2,000 native troops with four guns met 30,000 Abyssinians at Amba Alagi, and after a hot fight the Italians were forced to retire in the face of superior numbers with heavy loss. The survivors fell back on Macalle, the main force still continuing to occupy Adigrat.

The Abyssinians now advanced and commenced to invest Macalle. Meanwhile, negotiations between Italy and Menelik were proceeding, but these were soon broken off and strong reinforcements despatched to Massowah. Adigrat was fixed upon for the base, and two lines of communication from the post of disembarkation selected; the first and chief line being Massowah—Arkico—Majo—Adi Caje—Adigrat; the second line, Massowah—Saati—Asmara—Saganeiti—Adi Caje—Adigrat. (See map.)

The next event of importance was the capitulation of Macalle on January 19th, 1896 (after a 45-days' siege) from starvation and thirst, the Abyssinians having cut off the water supply. The troops forming the garrison were allowed to march out with all the honours of war, and to retain their arms, on condition that they did not fight again against the Abyssinians.

Meanwhile, the war preparations at Massowah continued, troops and supplies being passed up to Adigrat as fast as they could be got ready.

(B).—Situation from February 1st to 29th.

On the 1st, Menelik was occupying the territory of Gundapta (north of Adowa) with nearly 100,000 men, and Baratieri was at Adagamus (near Adigrat) with about 20,000 of all ranks. The Italians had in addition collected a large quantity of stores at Asmara. Menelik, however, was closer to the latter place than Baratieri, and was threatening the Italian lines of communication, consequently a movement became necessary on the part of the weaker force. This took the form of a change of front half right and an advance to Mai Gabeta on the 3rd inst.; on the 7th Baratieri advanced still further to Tucuz, and finally, on February 13th, the Italian force occupied the heights of Sauria, Menelik being now four miles to the south. On the following day Menelik retired on Adowa, and in these positions the two forces remained facing each other until March 1st, when the decisive battle of Adowa was fought.

(C).—Baratieri's Dilemma.

Baratieri now found himself in an awkward situation. The general purpose of his advance was to cover Adigrat, which constituted his base. On February 13th he had 21,000 men and 50 guns concentrated at Sauria. His supply arrangements were defective, chiefly owing to an imperfect transport service and the length of his communications (110 miles). The troops were already on short rations, and on February 22nd there were only provisions for ten days left. Baratieri saw the necessity for one of two things—an advance or a retirement. Any idea of the latter movement, however, he dismissed from his mind at once as likely to prove fatal to the moral of his army, if it did not cause a rebellion amongst the natives in the neighbourhood. Meanwhile reports of native spies showed that Menelik's supplies were giving out, and that many of his people were away collecting food. On the 28th, therefore, Baratieri summoned his four generals (each commanding a brigade) to an informal council. All were in favour of an immediate attack, declaring that the spirit of their men was excellent. After much discussion Baratieri dismissed them, saying he would frame his decision on the further report of spies which he was expecting, and finally, on the evening of February 29th, 1896, he made up his mind to advance, a decision important in the history of Italy, Eritrea and Abyssinia.

(D).—Composition and Strength of the Italian Forces at Adowa.*Italian Troops.* *Rifles.*

Five regiments of infantry of three battalions each, strength about	7,000
One regiment of Bersaglieri of two battalions, strength about	800
Half company of engineers, strength about ...	70
Seven mountain batteries	38 guns.
Two quick firing batteries	12 „

Native Troops. *Rifles.*

Five battalions infantry, strength about ...	5,000
One battalion Native Militia, strength about...	950
One company of Native local troops (Asmara company), strength about	210
Irregulars, strength about	380
Native mountain artillery (one battery and one section)	6 guns.
Total strength, about 14,500 rifles and 56 guns, no cavalry.	

In addition, there were 3,200 officers, departmental troops, and non-combatants, making a grand total of 17,700 of all ranks actually present at the battle.

As regards arms, most of the infantry regiments had the Mannlicher rifle, the remainder retaining the old Remington.

The mountain batteries were in all respects far superior to the Abyssinian artillery.

(E).—Composition and Strength of the Abyssinian Forces.

<i>Commander.</i>	<i>Rifles.</i>	<i>Horses.</i>	<i>Guns.</i>
King Menelik	25,000	3,000	32
The Empress Taitu	3,000	600	4
Tacla Aimanot	5,000	—	—
Ras Maconnen	15,000	—	—
Ras Mangasha	12,000	—	6
Ras Mangasha Atichim	6,000	—	—
Ras Mikael	6,000	5,000	—
Ras Olie and others	8,000	—	—
Totals	80,000	8,600	42

There were also about 20,000 men carrying lances, besides various bands of armed peasants and rebels. The rifles were nearly all breech-loaders; Gras, Martini, Lebel, and some Remingtons. The mounted men were armed like the infantry.

(F).—Plan of Baratieri's Advance, and Orders issued by him.

It has been explained that the Italians were encamped at Sauria, and the Abyssinians round Adowa, about 16 miles to the south-west.

At a distance of nine miles from Sauria, three hills in a row form a natural barrier across all direct paths from Sauria to Adowa. These are the Spur of Belah, the Hill of Belah, and Mount Belah respectively. It was the line formed by these three hills that Baratieri meant to occupy, and hold as a defensive position.

On the left of this line is another hill whose real name has never, as far as is known, been ascertained. Baratieri on his map and in his orders for the advance called it "Kidane Meret." It was necessary to occupy this hill for the safety of the left flank. The real hill of "Kidane Meret," however, is about four miles nearer Adowa, and close to the hill "Enda Kidane Meret," overlooking the plain of Adowa. Hence Baratieri, having ordered his left wing to support the hill of that name, found eventually that it stood four miles in advance of the rest of his force, entirely unsupported and isolated. It is mainly due to this mistake that most of the subsequent misfortunes of the Italian force arose.

Baratieri's plan then, was briefly as follows :—To march in three columns on the night of February 29th by three paths, to deploy behind the three hills indicated, and finally to take up a defensive position on the front slopes. Should the enemy decide on an attack, he felt confident of success; should they not do so, the spirits of his men would be raised by the Abyssinians' hesitation; there was, moreover, a third probability, *i.e.*, that the enemy might retreat, in which case he would at once re-enter Adowa.

As regards the topography of the country, the ground over which the operations took place was generally very difficult, the roads being merely mountain paths winding up and down precipices; and further, owing to the hills and vegetation, it was impossible to move otherwise than very slowly, or to see far in any direction.

Baratieri's orders for the forward movement were as under, *viz.* :—

Orders of the day, February 29th, No. 87.

1. To-night the force as detailed for the operations will move from the position of Sauria in the direction of Adowa, formed in three columns as follows :—

(a) *The Right Column.* (General Dabormida.)

2nd Infantry Brigade (six battalions).

1st Battalion Mobile Militia.

Staff of 2nd Artillery Brigade; 5th, 6th and 7th Batteries.

(b) *The Central Column.* (General Arimondi.)

1st Infantry Brigade (five battalions).

1st Company of 5th Native Battalion.

8th and 11th Batteries.

(c) *The Left Column.* (General Albertone.)

Four Native battalions.

Staff of 1st Artillery Brigade, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Batteries.

(d) *The General Reserve.* (General Ellena.)

3rd Infantry Brigade (six battalions).

3rd Native Battalion.

Two quick-firing batteries.

Half Company Engineers.

2. The three columns as above detailed will move off from their respective camps at 9.0 p.m.; the Reserve will follow an hour later in rear of the Central Column.

3. The Right Column will follow the road from Zahala (Zala) hill through Guldamm Hill to the Hill of Rebbi Arienni.

4. The Central Column and Reserve will proceed from Adi Dikki through Gundapta to the Hill of Rebbi Arienni.

5. The Left Column will follow the road through Sauria—Adi Cheiras to Kidane Meret.

6. The Staff of the General Officer Commanding will march at the head of the Reserve.

7. *First Objective*—the position formed by the hills Kidane Meret and Rebbi Arienni, between Mount Semajata and Mount Eshasho, the occupation of which will be carried out by General Albertone's column on the left, General Arimondi's column in the centre, General Dabormida's column on the right.

8. *Further*—General Arimondi's column, if it finds itself on ground that can be held in sufficient force by the columns of Generals Albertone and Dabormida, will take up a waiting position in rear of these two brigades.

9. Every soldier of the Italian troops will carry 112 rounds of ammunition, a reserve of two days' rations, his cape, water-bottle and haversack.

10. Two transport animals per battalion (carrying hospital stores) to march in rear of each column, also eight with the reserve ammunition.

11. All remaining baggage animals to rendezvous at Entisho with to-morrow's issue of rations, 30 rounds of ammunition per man, also the tents, blankets, and other stores not carried with units; the whole under charge of a captain to be detailed from the 2nd Infantry Brigade.

12. The above-named baggage columns, the commissariat sections, the Servizi di Tappa,¹ and the park of artillery, will halt at Entisho under a guard furnished by the 7th Infantry Regiment, and will be ready to move off at once when ordered.

13. Brigades of artillery and Native Battalions will regulate their baggage as ordered for Italian battalions.

14. No man is to pass the points and the flankers of the column.

¹ The Corps that prepares food at the end of each day's march, it is taken from each Regiment in turn.

15. All persons arrested by the military police are to be sent at once to Headquarters.

16. The directors of the engineer corps will attend to the establishment of the telegraph. Also communication by heliograph is to be established as early as possible between the General's Staff and the different columns.

17. Officers commanding columns will frequently communicate with Headquarters, and with neighbouring columns.

(Signed). O. Baratieri,
Lieut.-General.

(G).—The Night March (February 29th—March 1st).

The weather on the evening of the 29th was favourable for night operations. The sky had been overcast during the day and a storm appeared probable, but just before the time appointed for the start the weather cleared. Shortly after 9 p.m., the various columns moved off silently along the appointed paths to the westward. Each brigade was headed by a body of natives with a guide, under the command of an Italian officer. No smoking was permitted, lest the glow should be observed, and all ranks appeared in high spirits at the prospect of an early meeting with the enemy.

General Baratieri, having made an inspection of the arrangements for the sick and wounded who were to be left in camp at Sauria, proceeded to follow his force. The night was fresh with a bright moon, and the men, though handicapped by ill-fitting regulation boots, marched well. According to calculation, by starting at 9 p.m., a period of eight hours was available for a march of little more than nine miles, so that plenty of margin had been left to allow for mistakes in the route, etc., such as are always likely to occur in movements by night. All went well for the first seven miles or so, until Baratieri, riding at the head of his staff, suddenly came upon a battalion of Bersaglieri halted by the side of the path, many of the men being asleep. He at once sent for the officer commanding (Colonel Stevani), who handed him the following note in explanation:—

“Gundapta, 1st March, 3.30 a.m.

“The advanced guard, having reached the heights where the valley opens on the plain of Gundapta, has been compelled to halt to allow General Albertone's brigade, *which is following in the same path*, to defile past them.

“I suppose that the cause of this unforeseen crossing is due to the fact that the two routes assigned to the brigade have a stretch of ground which is common to both.

“I will follow in rear of them, but I shall not be able to start from this point before 4 a.m.

“I have not been able as yet to get connection with Dabormida's brigade.

(Signed) “Arimondi,
“Major-General.”

It was clear from the above note that the native battalions had taken a wrong route. Still Baratieri did not even suspect the gravity of the mistake. What had actually occurred will now be described.

General Albertone, having delayed the other brigades for nearly an hour and a half, had reached the hill named Kidane Meret on the Governor's sketch map soon after 3 a.m., at which time the other columns were still some distance from their respective destinations. Realizing this fact, he halted his men to await the arrival of the brigades on his right.

He waited for about half an hour, and then, finding that there was no sign of Arimondi's column, began to think there must be some mistake. He consulted his guides, who told him that the hill on which he stood was not Kidane Meret, which was situated about four and a half miles further off from Sauria. He began to feel uneasy, and, after waiting a full hour for Arimondi's arrival, started off to march to the real Kidane Meret, overlooking Adowa, and only three miles from the enemy's camp.

The situation was certainly a trying one for Albertone, involving as it did two alternative courses of action; the one, to follow the accurate course which he knew to be wrong, the other, to act contrary to orders, but in accordance with what he believed to be their meaning. He chose the former, with results which proved fatal to the Italian force.

Meanwhile Baratieri did not attach much importance to Arimondi's note. As soon as possible the centre and right brigades moved forward, and at 5.15 a.m., General Dabormida reported that he had occupied Rebbi Arienni as ordered. A few minutes later Arimondi's brigade was in position on the eastern slopes of the same hill, and at 5.45 the Reserve Brigade appeared in sight.

(H).—Action of the Enemy.

By this time the Abyssinians were well on the move. Menelik had been convinced that Baratieri intended to stay in his entrenchments, so that the forward movement must have come as a surprise; but his spies brought him early news of what was going on, and he at once sent to warn the other chiefs.

His army was generally disposed as follows:—On the extreme right, to the south of Adowa, were the troops of King Tecla Aimanot, with cavalry thrown out in front. Adowa itself was occupied by Ras Maconnen's followers, while away to his left lay Ras Mikael with his Wolo Galla mounted riflemen lining the south and south-west slopes of Mount Shelloda. Ras Mangasha's Tigréans were to the north of that mountain, the extreme left being guarded by the followers of Ras Alula.

The Reserve, comprising Menelik's own men, and those of the Empress Taitu and Ras Olie, remained close behind Adowa, whilst the celebrated Galla cavalry were encamped in meadows

about eight miles off. The sun had not yet risen as the whole of this huge army, a hundred and twenty thousand strong, moved off across the plain of Adowa to their positions in the attack, and the forces of Menelik, of Ras Mikael and of Mangasha were soon engaged with Albertone's brigade. It is said that on the first shots being fired Menelik entered the church of St. George, and prayed earnestly for success for his side.

(I).—Opening Stages of the Battle.

The first firing took place about 6 a.m., near the real hill of Kidane Meret, which Albertone's advanced guard had just reached. The main body of this brigade had halted close to Addi Vetshi (Vecci) in order to establish connection with the brigade on the right, but owing to a mistake the advanced guard (one Native Battalion) had gone on and soon became seriously engaged with the enemy's outposts.

It was about this time that Baratieri arrived at the hill of Rebbi Arienni. He had no suspicion of Albertone's actual movements, but assumed that his brigade was in its proper position on the left; and further he paid little heed to rifle firing, concluding that it came from some advanced scouts of the Native Brigade. In fact his whole attention at this time was taken up with the action of General Dabormida, on whose right front and only three miles distant lay the large camp of 10,000 or 15,000 Abyssinians (at Mariam Shavitu).

At 6.15 Baratieri certainly sent to try and find out exactly where Albertone was, but he never for a moment suspected that the latter was already in danger of being cut off, and no orders were included in the message. Albertone, on the other hand, saw no choice open to him but to hold on to Enda Kidane Meret. This mutual ignorance of each other's movements had already placed the Italian force in a dangerous position.

At 6.45 the Governor ordered Dabormida's brigade to occupy the Spur of Belah and to support Albertone (if possible). At least Baratieri afterwards declared he gave this order, but it seems to have been misinterpreted. What he probably intended was that Dabormida should first occupy the spur and then push some of his troops forward to join hands with Albertone, whom the Governor imagined to be quite close. Dabormida, however, thought it necessary to advance at once to Albertone's assistance, and was eventually led away to the north (owing to the path being flanked by high cliffs) and became quite isolated.

At 8.15, the sun having risen and pierced the mist, Baratieri took up a position on Mount Eshasho, and observed that the Abyssinians were now aroused and moving near Mariam Shavitu. He sent messages to both brigades to hurry their movements. Looking towards the left he now saw for the first time that Albertone was seriously engaged. The true situation was at last clear to him; yet he did not consider it

advisable to order the Native Brigade to retire; his chief reasons being:—

- (1) That the other two brigades were not as yet ready to support the retirement.
- (2) That he did not imagine that Albertone was hard pressed.

The first news from Albertone reached Baratieri at 9 a.m., in the form of two notes, the first of which (despatched at 7.10 a.m.) announced the occupation of Kidane Meret and the engagement of the 1st Battalion with the enemy, the second (8.15 a.m.) reported that the 1st Battalion was still seriously engaged, but that the other two battalions were in position in rear. "Nevertheless," continued the message, "the enemy are in great force, and reinforcements would be welcomed."

Apparently all had gone well in this quarter up to now. Baratieri, after reading the two notes, galloped off to Mount Raio, but here he was met by a most distressing sight, namely, a long procession of wounded and fugitives from Albertone's column retiring from Kidane Meret towards Sauria. He at once sent some officers to try and check them, but their efforts were useless and the retreat continued. But we must leave them here and go back to the movements of the left column from the start.

(J).—Action and Disposition of Albertone's Brigade.

About 6 a.m., the 1st Battalion of the Brigade arrived at the true hill of Kidane Meret, and soon became engaged with the enemy on the far slopes. Albertone, seeing that the battalion was hard pressed, ordered it to retire, and prepared to support the retirement.

The brigade was disposed in the form of a cross, of which the 1st Battalion formed the front arm. The right (6th Battalion) rested on the inaccessible Mount Gusoso, the 7th Battalion was on the left, and the 8th constituted the reserve in rear; the artillery (14 guns) occupied the centre of the cross, and finally a few irregulars were scattered on each flank.

Albertone, from information brought in by his scouts, was led to expect the attack from the ridge connecting Kidane Meret and Lazata, a mile in front of his centre and well adapted for the enemy's artillery. At 7.30, all being in readiness, he sent off the first message to General Baratieri (already alluded to) reporting the engagement of the 1st Battalion. As the sun had not yet risen it was impossible to use the heliograph,¹ consequently the note took an hour and a half to reach the Governor; this point should be carefully noted, as it affected the whole course of subsequent events.

¹ It may here be noted that the heliograph does not appear to have been used at all at Adowa, although there was plenty of sunshine throughout the day.

The retirement of the 1st Battalion, as ordered by Albertone soon after it became engaged, does not appear to have been carried out until 8.30, when the commanding officer (Col. Turitto) seeing the hopelessness of holding out against such enormous odds, left one Company at the foot of the hill as a covering force and endeavoured to lead the remainder back over the ridge, covered by the fire of the artillery. The fire effect of the latter has been described as magnificent, the shells literally cutting furrows in the enemy's ranks. The Abyssinians, however, advanced so quickly and in such numbers that, in spite of the heavy losses, they succeeded in overwhelming the covering company, and the retirement of the battalion, at first orderly, was soon to degenerate into a flight.

The pursuing enemy were only checked upon coming under the effective rifle fire of the main body, most of the fugitives rallying in the centre. The Abyssinians were now compelled to retire from the first attack. It has been stated on good authority that Menelik then ordered a general retirement (this was the moment of the despatch of Albertone's second note to Baratieri), but that he subsequently cancelled the order, and added his own immediate following of 25,000 men to the firing line. The combined force now advanced to a second attack with renewed vigour.

The Italian guns were by this time in danger of capture. Albertone therefore ordered the 8th Battalion to advance with the 7th in support, in order to gain time for the artillery to retire. Three companies of the 8th deployed to the attack, with the 4th Company in reserve, dashing forward in the face of a storm of lead with such boldness that the enemy fell back confounded. But the triumph was only momentary. The Abyssinians speedily reformed for attack and came on again in increased numbers, the guns were once more threatened, and now commenced to retire by alternate sections, the 8th Battalion continuing to protect them until the last section had gone. The 7th Battalion was unfortunately unable to advance as ordered in support of the 8th, on account of rocky ground in its front.

Suddenly a shout went up that the Abyssinians were outflanking the 8th Battalion on the right. A hasty change of front was made in that direction, but no support was forthcoming from either the 7th Battalion or from the Irregulars (who had been compelled to retire), and after a short stand the 8th broke up and dispersed. The casualties on the Italian side were very heavy, the 8th Battalion having lost 12 officers (out of 19) and a large percentage of the men, and as the 7th Battalion was now outflanked on the left, a general retirement was ordered at 10.30 a.m. This order, however, did not apply to the two white batteries, which Albertone commanded "to continue firing to the last round and to sacrifice themselves where they stood," so as to cover the retreat.

At 10.15 Baratieri had sent an order to Dabormida to support the left, but the message never reached him, as he had

advanced towards the Mariam Shavitu valley. Albertone's brigade, therefore, was left entirely to its own resources. The 3rd and 4th Native Batteries fired their last round before being captured, whilst the two white batteries held on to their position for an hour, when they were finally rushed by the enemy and the personnel cut down almost to a man.¹

(K).—Action in the Centre.

As early as 9 a.m., the Governor, seeing that the situation was growing serious, decided to recall Albertone, and to attempt to occupy the original defensive position as described in the orders. A series of mishaps, however, followed, which made this action impossible. These will now be enumerated.

- (1) At 9.15 a note was sent to Dabormida, ordering him to be prepared to support Albertone's retirement. This note never reached him.
- (2) At 9.30 Baratieri sent a messenger to Albertone commanding him to retire at once. The messenger however arrived too late, for the rout had begun.
- (3) At 9.45 Baratieri sent an officer to find out where Dabormida was. The messenger returned and reported "that he saw the brigade advancing just in front of the position." But what he really saw was probably the battalion of De Amicis, which had been detailed to maintain connection with the centre and reserve, for at this time the Right Brigade was far away and well engaged with the enemy.
- (4) At 10, and again at 10.15, the Governor sent an order to Dabormida to advance and support Albertone, but neither message was delivered.

Baratieri, therefore, had failed utterly in his efforts to occupy the original position with his force. Neither had he ascertained Dabormida's position, for he seems to have still imagined that his right flank was safe, and that the Right Column was holding the Spur of Belah (commanding the right flank and line of retreat of the Central Column); whilst in reality Dabormida was at Mariam Shavitu ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles further to the right) fighting an independent action and cut off from the centre, and there were no troops at all at Belah. Under this wrong impression, then, the Governor now turned his attention to the left, lining the slopes between Mount Raio and Belah with the battalions of Arimondi's brigade. The two mountain batteries (8th and 11th) were reinforced by the two Q.F. batteries from Ellena's (Reserve) Brigade, and the 3rd Native Battalion (Col. Galliano) was brought up and placed on the extreme left. The two battalions of Bersaglieri belonging to the Central Column occupied the slopes on Mount Belah and the hill on the right of the brigade.

¹ Only 1 Officer and 2 men escaped out of 8 Officers and 135 other ranks.

Just before 10 a.m., the 8th Battery opened fire from Mount Raio on the mass of the enemy pursuing Albertone's retreating battalions, but the pursuit was so close that it was almost impossible to avoid hitting the fugitives, so firing had to cease. Very soon small but ever-increasing parties of Abyssinians began to crawl along and lie down under cover within rifle range of the battery, and succeeded in picking off some of the gunners. The arrival of the Native Battery from the Reserve, however, put a stop to all danger from this quarter. But while these events were taking place on the left, a serious misfortune was approaching from the other flank. An enormous body of Abyssinians suddenly appeared from a deep valley in front of the Spur of Belah, and advancing boldly and rapidly, pierced the Italian centre, and divided the line into two portions, besides cutting off all communication between Baratieri and Dabormida. Baratieri at once despatched two companies of Bersaglieri to retake the spur, with a regiment from the Reserve in support, but the effort was a failure. In fact, so determined was the assault of the enemy that hardly any men of the two companies returned.

The regiments on the hill and on Mount Belah itself were now outflanked by the enemy on the spur, and were beginning to waver, in spite of repeated orders from the Governor to hold on to their ground. The Bersaglieri certainly made an attempt at a rally, but the enemy had worked so far round their flanks that even the Reserves were engaged, and the line of retreat was being threatened; in fact, the Italians were very nearly surrounded.

It was at this time, whilst the right of the brigade was in such dire straits, that the Native Battalion of Galliano suddenly broke and fled. It had only been in action for about 20 minutes, and Baratieri had always regarded it as the most reliable of all the native units; hence its conduct on this occasion was put down to treachery. Whatever the cause, when the battalion dispersed, only a very few of the men remained with the officers, most of whom (including the colonel) were killed.

Up to this hour (it was nearly midday) the Italian casualties had not been very heavy, but the loss of the Spur of Belah was the turning point in the fortunes of the brigade. Both flanks had been turned, and some of the Abyssinians were in rear of them; the Reserves were also engaged. Baratieri, therefore, seeing that his men could no longer hold on to their positions, ordered a general retirement, trusting to Dabormida's brigade to cover the movement.

(L).—The Retreat.

The Governor, having given out the order for the retreat on the left, started off to ride over to Rebbi Arienni on the right. As he passed by Mount Belah he saw the enemy firing down from its summit on to the mass of retreating Bersaglieri

crowding into the valley below. An attempt was made to check the torrent by throwing the last available Reserves (one battalion and two companies of Alpini) across the gap in the centre of the position, but before these troops could deploy the fugitives broke through their line.

Continuing their flight and springing from rock to rock or creeping along the mountain paths, they afforded fine targets for the enemy's marksmen on the Mount. Amongst many who fell at this stage was General Arimondi, who with some other officers was cut off and surrounded. As each position was abandoned the Abyssinians seized it and continued their ever-increasing fire on the retreating battalions. Very soon the whole of the artillery was in the enemy's hands, nearly every officer and man having been shot down. "From this time," says the Italian account, "the troops were broken and the soldiers fired haphazard, except a few groups who, kept in hand by energetic officers, halted from time to time and formed for defence in rear of the retiring battalions."

These efforts at rallying, however, could avail nothing against the great waves of the enemy pressing on from the rear. Baratieri soon met General Ellena, and the two generals together managed to collect about 100 men to form a rear guard. It now became necessary to turn the head of the column further to the northward, in order to avoid the Galla cavalry who were seen advancing in large numbers along the Sauria road. By this time the moral of the troops had sunk to practically zero. "They were almost unconscious of their surroundings, and careless of everything except of their individual defence. The officers had lost authority over the soldiers, who looked in a bewildered and stupefied manner at those who gave an order or attempted to halt them."¹ In this way the retreat continued in various columns wandering along different paths, but always under the enemy's fire, to which the Italians would now and again fire a few rounds in reply.

The Abyssinians did not continue the pursuit for more than nine miles or so, but they lit fires on the hills to arouse the natives to rebellion. At sunset the remains of the Italian force reached a village close to Mount Amba Beesa, where Baratieri allowed the men one and a half hours' rest. When the column renewed its march it did so in some sort of order; first the natives in front as guides, then the unarmed men,² lastly, the armed men, the officers being divided amongst the several portions of the force. Their troubles were not yet over, however. The front portion of the column (with which were the guides) became separated from the main body, which had halted, and General Baratieri found himself without guides in a strange country at night with this large force of soldiers, many of them

¹ Memoirs of General Baratieri.

² Many of the men had thrown away their arms, with the idea that they would escape mutilation if captured unarmed.

wounded, and with hardly any provisions. After losing the way three times among the mountains, the bulk of the force straggled into the fort of Adi Caje on the morning of March 3rd, and the Governor telegraphed an account of the disaster to the Italian Government.

It now only remains to describe the conduct and fate, in the valley of Mariam Shavitu, of Dabormida's brigade, which Baratieri had neither seen nor heard from since 6.30 a.m. on March 1st.

(M).—Action of Dabormida's Brigade.

It has already been explained how, at 6.45 a.m. on the 1st the Governor ordered General Dabormida to advance from Rebbi Arienni and to support Albertone, and how Dabormida, interpreting the order to mean that he was to push on to assist Albertone without delay, was carried away to the right by the form of the ground and soon became quite isolated.

To understand the main points of this action, it will be necessary to describe the arrangements for the protection of the brigade on moving off.

- (1) The right flank was guarded by two companies of natives, who, in spite of heavy casualties, succeeded in checking all attempts at a turning movement by the enemy on that side.
- (2) The junction of the left flank with Albertone's brigade was never accomplished. The advanced guard, however, covered the left front before coming into collision with the enemy.
- (3) Connection to the rear was maintained by Arimondi sending a battalion (that of Major De Amicis) from his extreme right at 10.30 a.m. to join Dabormida's reserve.

The brigade then started off from Rebbi Arienni at 6.45, Baratieri himself superintending the movement. For over an hour the troops wound their way along the valley, then, taking a turn to the right, they entered another long valley, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Rebbi Arienni. Here (it was now 9 a.m.) a halt was made, during which the men, weary from the long march of the night before, proceeded to snatch a little rest, whilst the officers studied the ground. The valley in which they lay was about 2 miles long, and from 700 to 800 yards across. On the south side the cliffs were steep, those on the north less so, and the centre was formed by a plain shelving downwards and covered with high grass. A big Abyssinian encampment was visible across the plain on a spur of Mount Shelloda.

During the halt the advanced guard commander (Major De Vito) reported to the General that a large body of the enemy was visible on his left. Upon receipt of this news, Dabormida ordered him to move to the left, and sent off the following note (already referred to) to General Baratieri:—

“ 9.15 a.m. Extensive encampments of Abyssinians are to be seen to north of Adowa—a strong column is

advancing from there towards the Native brigade. I am holding out my hand to it, while keeping a strong body of troops massed near the road that leads from Rebbi Arienni to Adowa, and watching the heights on the right."

Dabormida also sent the Asmara Native Company to reinforce the company on the right flank. A few minutes later, while he was talking to his staff, distant rifle firing was heard from the direction of the enemy's camp, and a minute later an officer close to him was struck on the elbow by a spent bullet. The battle had evidently begun.

In accordance with orders, Major De Vito's Native battalion had started to march off towards the left; while the Asmara Native Company (Capt. Sermasi) was yet in the valley and inclining to the right; when suddenly some advancing Galla horsemen were sighted. Sermasi at once extended his company across the plain, and De Vito's battalion proceeded to occupy the steep ascent on their left, in order to gain time for the main body to act. They arrived at the crest, however, only to find a deep cleft in front with another steep ridge on the far side. A forward rush was made by the three leading companies (some 700 men) who threw themselves into the valley and scrambled up the opposite side, gaining the crest just in time to prevent the enemy from occupying it. A heavy fire was at once opened by the whole line, extending as far as the company on the right in the plain below. But unfortunately the body of the enemy encountered was 15,000 strong, including nearly the whole of Ras Mangasha's and Mikael's commands. The Asmara Company on the right was the first to give way, and their retirement exposed the right flank of De Vito's battalion on the high level. Very soon afterwards De Vito was killed whilst directing the action on the left of the line, and the command fell to Captain Tola, who at once sent 100 men to reinforce Sermasi on the right.

The Native troops stood well by their white officers, but the enemy were coming on in ever increasing numbers, the fire was every minute growing heavier, and still there was no sign of reinforcements from the main body. They knew that the Abyssinians outnumbered them many times over, and could guess at their fate if forced to surrender to the enemy. "Are the white troops coming?" was constantly asked, and the Italian officers, passing along the line, endeavoured to re-assure their men, as they anxiously scanned the distant hill for the long expected brigade. Very soon it was seen that the right flank was enveloped, and Sermasi was forced to retire his company to the opposite hill on the right of the valley. Captain Tola therefore ordered a retirement to the ridge in rear, where a stand was attempted. But even here his men could not hold their ground, although the main body of the brigade was at last visible in the distance, and the battalion continued to retire in disorder, having lost 12 officers out of 14. Sermasi's company on the right flank,

however, remained in their last position for the rest of the engagement.

So much for the rout of the advanced guard. Now for the action of the main body, which we left halted in the valley. As soon as firing from the advanced guard announced its engagement with the enemy, Dabormida ordered the remaining regiments of the brigade into position as follows :—

The 3rd Regiment (Col. Ragni) was to occupy the heights on the left, with its three battalions deployed from the high crest of the hill on the extreme left to a point halfway down the cliffs on the left of the valley, and the right flank thrown well back. In the centre of the valley, near a solitary sycamore, one Company of the 6th Regiment (Col. Airaghi) was placed, under cover of which the three Mountain Batteries took up a position on the right of the plain. One battalion of the 6th Regiment was sent to line the shelving ground from the northern slopes to the southern precipice. The other two battalions of this regiment were detailed to form the general reserve at the head of the valley.

The 3rd Regiment had hardly taken up its position when it was almost carried away by a crowd of fugitives from De Vito's defeated Native battalions, with whom were mingled many of the enemy, and a moment of panic ensued. The officers, however, soon restored order, and hardly had the flying mob passed through the ranks than an organized body of Abyssinians appeared advancing close in front. Colonel Ragni ordered a charge with the bayonet, which had the effect of driving the enemy back over the first ridge, the Italians losing two officers killed and two wounded. Meanwhile, in the valley below, the Abyssinians had been creeping up through the high grass, and made a furious assault on the 6th Regiment as the companies moved into their appointed places; whilst a large body of Galla horsemen made a dash for the guns, raising their wild battle-cry of "Ebalgume! Ebalgume!"¹ It was a fine effort, but the Italian infantry were equal to the occasion, pouring in a heavy magazine fire at short range, which the artillery supported by firing battery salvos. The combined attack was repulsed, and the Abyssinians retired with heavy loss and in disorder.

From this moment the enemy's fire grew slowly weaker. Towards midday it had become so slack that Dabormida decided to take the offensive. He accordingly sent up Airaghi's 3rd Battalion from the reserve to reinforce the firing line on the plain, beyond this no change seemed necessary, as each company appeared to be posted to the best advantage. The General had not as yet had any communication from Arimondi, or from the Governor, but this did not trouble him as he saw in his rear De Amicis' battalion (of the Central Column) and felt confident that all was going on well. This same battalion of De Amicis, to

¹ Meaning to sow, to reap. The idea is that of sweeping down the enemy like grass.

which reference has already been made, had been ordered forward very early in the day to form a connection between the brigades of Arimondi and Dabormida. It had taken up a position on the hill near the juncture of the paths from Enda Kidane Meret and Mariam Shavitu, and was there attacked by those bodies of the enemy who were attempting to surround the 2nd Brigade.

De Amicis, realizing the necessity of holding the hill, as it commanded Dabormida's line of retreat, entrenched himself as best he could and continued to fight an independent action, and it was entirely due to his efforts that the 2nd Brigade was not surrounded and cut off. About 11.30, being hard pushed, he sent to the reserve for assistance, and the 13th Battalion (Major Ragneri) was sent up. The Italian efforts on this side were so successful that by 12 noon the enemy's fire had become as slack as on the front, so that Dabormida felt perfectly safe in deciding to advance.

(N).—Dabormida's Attack (12 noon).

The Abyssinians had by now brought several guns into action on the opposite heights, but their rate of fire was very slow and the effect poor. The Italian artillery, on the other hand, were making splendid practice, the shrapnel bursting accurately over the enemy to their evident discomfort. The time seemed favourable, therefore, for a simultaneous advance of the two regiments holding the position. Two assaults by the 6th Regiment, led by Colonel Airaghi, succeeded in driving the enemy back in the valley, but a similar movement by the 3rd Regiment on the higher level made no impression on their opponents, so that Airaghi was forced to retire to his original position. Rushes by individual companies were then resorted to with a view of gaining ground, but the Italians were always forced to return to their cover, and in this manner the two opposing forces swayed to and fro without any great result, but with a slight gain to the Italian side on the whole. Presently, on a fresh supply of ammunition being issued, the order for infantry magazine fire supported by rapid gun fire was given, and on the strength of this the Italian firing line succeeded in gaining about 60 yards in two short rushes, yet the enemy did not give away a yard. The two forces were now only 100 yards apart, the supports had reinforced the firing line, Ragni had moved forward on the heights, and every officer and man felt that the decisive moment was at hand.

At last the General and his staff, together with Colonel Airaghi, rode out in front of the firing line and the bugles sounded the charge. With loud shouts the long white line of infantry, extending from one height to the other, dashed forward and threw themselves on the enemy, who in turn did not stay to try conclusions with the Italian bayonets, but fled at top speed, the advancing troops halting and again opening with magazine

fire. A few minutes later a fresh bayonet charge was ordered, and before the halt was sounded the Abyssinians had abandoned all their positions and were retiring in disorder towards Adowa.

But the triumph of the success was destined to be short-lived. About 1 p.m., a large body of the enemy with some guns and headed by Galla cavalry, came into view on the south side of the valley, advancing towards the Italian rear. It was a case for prompt action, and Dabormida resolved to hold on to his present position, to reinforce his rear, and also to strengthen his right flank, which appeared to be in difficulties. By this time the Italian troops were beginning to feel the effects of four hours hard fighting on top of an all-night march, and the scarcity of officers (many of whom had fallen) was becoming a serious matter. But still perfect order and discipline prevailed, and in obedience to the General's command the 3rd Battalion, supported by two batteries, advanced up the southern slopes of Mount Erar so vigorously that the enemy retreated in haste, the battalions of Ragneri and De Amicis co-operating in the attack. The Italian artillery very soon drove the inferior Abyssinian guns off the field, and thus the line of retreat was kept open. In fact, these three battalions and two batteries may fairly claim to have saved the brigade from being annihilated.

Owing, however, to the repeated advances of the brigade, the space covered by it in rear had by this time become greatly extended; in fact, so much so as to be quite untenable by the force at the General's disposal. The Abyssinians were beginning to swarm back in great strength, having completed the defeat of the other columns. By 2 p.m. Dabormida's troops were fighting on three fronts, one under Ragni on the left, another under Airaghi in the valley, with Ragneri and De Amicis in the rear. The Italians had now been on their feet for 17 hours, the ammunition was nearly exhausted, the reserves used up, and it seemed hopeless to try and hold the advanced positions any longer. The men of the 6th Regiment, threatened on both flanks, were gradually withdrawing slowly to the ground they had occupied early in the fight. The General, therefore, felt compelled to order a general retirement, and commanded Colonel Airaghi to cover it with his regiment.

(O).—Retreat of Dabormida's Brigade.

The retirement was commenced by the 3rd Regiment. As the different companies vacated their positions and filed slowly down into the valley below, the Abyssinians dashed forward on all sides, attempting particularly to form a wedge in the gap now caused on Airaghi's left flank. To prevent this Airaghi retired his men until his left joined with Ragneri's right, then he halted and formed a barrier across the valley, covering the withdrawal of the 3rd Regiment. Meanwhile, General Dabormida had sent an aide-de-camp to order Ragneri on the extreme

left to hold his ground as long as possible. The message was duly delivered and the bearer returned, but he could not find the General anywhere. This episode is of interest in one way, namely, it is the last that is authentically known of General Dabormida. Some months later, when the Italians were allowed to bury their dead, a body was discovered which Colonel Arimondi¹ believed he recognized as that of the General. Doubts, however, have been thrown on its identity, and the true facts attending his death will probably never be known.

The command now fell upon Colonel Airaghi. The brigade was at this moment making its final stand at the mouth of the valley, while Ragni's 3rd Regiment, covered by the battalion of De Amicis, was ascending the steep path on the north of Mount Atgebat; the men from time to time halting to fire downwards on the great mass of Abyssinians who now almost enveloped them. Soon it became the turn of the battalions of the 6th Regiment to retire, and the enemy, wild with joy at seeing them go, increased their fire and followed it up by a charge. The Italians now for the first time showed signs of unsteadiness. Colonel Airaghi, noticing this, ordered two guns of the retiring artillery to halt and open fire; this action checked the enemy for a few minutes, while Airaghi made a futile effort to organize a defence on the crest. By slow degrees the 6th Regiment was formed up, and retired following the 3rd, last of all De Amicis's battalion withdrew, its task now being to protect the rear. As the last companies left their positions, the Abyssinians dashed forward with furious yells, butchering the wounded in the trenches with their swords and lances.

Meanwhile, the two guns, halted as described by Airaghi's order, had fired their last rounds and lost all their mules, and were speedily rushed by the Abyssinians, who killed the gunners as they stood to their guns. The remainder of the artillery had been retiring slowly up the hill when they were in turn caught up by the enemy, but here the latter had to deal with De Amicis's men, who opened a heavy fire from the crest above. A desperate fight now began round the guns, during which Colonel Airaghi and Major De Amicis were both killed, the former in an attempt to get the guns away, the latter, whilst directing the fire of his battalion on the hill.

The end was not far off now. The Abyssinians, though checked by the Italian fire, by degrees picked off the gunners and mules of the artillery from behind cover, only two mules making their escape. And soon a violent thunderstorm, which had been gathering for some hours, broke over the combatants, and the rain came down in torrents. From this stage the pursuit began to relax, and the survivors of the brigade struggled on over the hills, eventually joining General Baratieri at Adi Caje.

¹ Brother of General Arimondi.

(P).—Statement of Losses, etc., and Concluding Remarks.

The following were the Italian losses at Adowa :—

	Officers.	Italian N.C.O.'s and Men.	Natives.	Total.
Killed ...	261	2,918	2,000	5,179
Permanently missing ...	—	954	—	954
Wounded ...	31	439	958	1,428
Prisoners ...	68	1,865	2,000	3,933
Total...	360	6,176	4,958	11,494

From the above Table, which is quoted from the official return, it will appear that the casualties (not including prisoners) amounted to 7,561, or nearly 43 per cent. of the force engaged. In addition to these figures, the whole of the artillery, and the stores left at the base camp at Sauria, were lost. A noteworthy feature is the large proportion of killed to wounded, which would point to the fact that many of the latter must have been massacred, as is customary in savage warfare.

The Abyssinian losses have been given as 7,000 killed and 10,000 wounded, figures which hardly appear excessive when the character of their attacks is considered:

On March 6th the new Governor (General Baldissera) arrived at Asmara. This officer had been secretly appointed from Rome on February 22nd, as Baratieri's continued inaction at that period had given rise to much irritation in Italy, but every precaution had been taken to prevent the news reaching Baratieri's ears. Baldissera's first steps were to reorganize the defeated force, to provide for the immediate defence of the Colony, and to start negotiations for the release of the prisoners. Meanwhile, on March 21st, an order arrived for General Baratieri's trial by Court Martial at Asmara. He was arraigned on two charges, as follows :—

Firstly—for having decided on an attack on March 1st, 1896, from motives that were inexcusable, and under conditions that rendered defeat inevitable.

Secondly—for having abandoned his command from 12.30 p.m. on March 1st, 1896, until 9 a.m. on March 3rd (*i.e.*, during the retreat), and having thus omitted to give orders, or take measures such as the circumstances required, etc., etc.

After a lengthy sitting, the Court decided against Baratieri on six important points, but qualified them by adding five considerations that formed some excuse for his conduct, and finally acquitted him of all criminality, ¹“ though deploring that the conduct of affairs, in so unequal a struggle, and in circumstances so difficult, should have been entrusted to a General who had shown himself so entirely unfitted to cope with the exigencies of the situation.”

¹ Official Report on Court Martial.