
Exploration in the Abai Basin, Abyssinia: Discussion

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Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (Jun., 1906), pp. 551-553

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1776290>

Accessed: 14-06-2016 16:54 UTC

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against the blessings of Abyssinian rule lies in this—that no Abyssinian, if he can help it, will go into their country. My own muleteers, who were undefeated in endurance and toughness, all abandoned me at this point, and refused to move for any wages I could offer. They have a proverb, “The cut on a man’s body is like a cut on the trunk of a tree,” and in cases of cuts and wounds they are extraordinarily plucky, as well as healthy, as I can testify from my own experience of a man surviving my amateur surgery—sewing up a man’s stomach from which his vitals were protruding, the result of a gash with a kitchen knife; but fever has an unholy terror for them, and they seem to offer very little resistance to an attack.

Before the paper, the PRESIDENT said: Just six years ago, Mr. Weld Blundell read a paper here, which some of you may remember, dealing with his travels during the previous eighteen months or two years in that country of Abyssinia, which must long remain one of the most interesting countries in the world. In that paper he described his journey from the Gulf of Aden to the valley of the Nile, and I dare say you will remember that he added largely to our geographical information (especially to our hydrographical information) about that region. He was accompanied on that journey by Dr. Koetlitz, who afterwards went as geologist with the Antarctic Expedition with Captain Scott, and who contributed a very excellent appendix, which also added largely to our knowledge. Since then Mr. Blundell has again been travelling in Abyssinia, and the geographical results of this journey we are going to hear to-night. You will understand that Mr. Blundell’s travels have not been confined to Abyssinia; he has been a wanderer for many years. He has one defect—he is not one of those who publishes all he knows, but I hope later on he will give us more information than he has at present vouchsafed to us. I call upon him to read his paper.

After the paper, Sir THOMAS HOLDICH said: It is thirty-seven years since I made acquaintance with Abyssinia, and then the point of my acquaintance was very far removed from the scene of Mr. Weld Blundell’s travels, for I was up in the north with an ever-memorable expedition. But it is somewhat interesting—it has been interesting to me, at any rate—to hear what Mr. Blundell has had to say about the general characteristics of Adis Ababa and Abyssinia. It reminds one what a vast country is really included in Abyssinia, the last, I believe, of the independent kingdoms in Africa. The expedition of 1868 started from the Red sea by a very rough and uneven way through a defile, until we reached the plateau at a point called Sanafé, which, I was pleased to see, was very well placed in that ancient Portuguese map. From there our track led us south along a remarkable watershed, constituting a very peculiar geographical feature. On the one side, one could look down over the tributaries of the Nile to an endless vista of hills rolling away westward; on the other side, a tumbled mass of spurs stretched to the flat plains which intervened between the plateau and the sea. It was my luck to be sent to find if there was any road from that plateau down to the sea-coast which would not involve our passing through that terrible defile. I succeeded in getting to the coast, but I never found that road, and I believe myself no such road exists. There is no road from the coast to the plateau between Sanafé and the latitude of Magdala. But whilst Mr. Blundell has described scenery which reminded me very much of what we saw in Abyssinia, I must confess the photographs did not remind me of it at all. In his series of pictures you have seen a country of rolling

hills stretching down to forest rivers, a country of lakes and streams. Now, what I remember is a country of perfectly flat-topped hills, escarped in a most extraordinary way so as to make them almost inaccessible. The plateau was a true level plain along which we passed, and, looking from it on either side, you saw smaller plateaus broken off as it were, set in the landscape in irregular formation as far as you could see. I did not see anything of that in the pictures to-night, but I believe the general characteristics of Southern Abyssinia to be much the same as they are in the north. You will remember, I dare say, that the fortress of Magdala was placed on top of just such a hill as I have described; and had it not been for the mistaken views of Emperor Theodore, who constructed a road in order to get one of his field-pieces to the top—I think it was a mortar—we should never have been able to reach the summit of that plateau. This is only one of the many happy and fortuitous circumstances which enabled us to bring an expedition to a successful end which might have had a very different termination. Indeed, I believe that if any military expert were to have forecasted that expedition on the basis of such events as did actually occur, he would have been called a lunatic. But I fully agree with all Mr. Blundell has said about the climate of Abyssinia. In spite of that diurnal rain which we experienced in the north, as he did in the south, it was one of the most delightful climates I have ever experienced. It beat even the renowned climate of the Himalayas, and that, I think, is saying a great deal. Indeed, with such a climate as that, it can only be a matter of congratulation to the world at large that there really is a prospect of a railway being extended from the present system in the Somali country to the capital, Adis Ababa, where perhaps a friendly rival sanatorium to Khartum may be founded for invigorating the jaded European constitution. Still, if all I hear is true, I think there is a good deal to be done at Adis Ababa before it is likely to become anything like an ideal sanatorium. I can only congratulate Mr. Weld Blundell upon the exceedingly interesting show of pictures he has placed before us to-night. I think they are one of the best series of views I have seen in this hall.

Major GWYNN: I am afraid any remarks I can offer will be rather commonplace after the very interesting lecture of Mr. Weld Blundell. About three years ago I had the pleasure of travelling in Mr. Weld Blundell's footsteps over the route he traversed in 1898, and I can only take this opportunity of thanking him for the great assistance his map was to me. Not only did his map prove an assistance, but, along his route, the spirit of friendliness towards English people was very marked indeed—a thing not always common in Abyssinia at that time. Mr. Weld Blundell has told us a great deal about the position of the Gallas as regards the Abyssinians. Part of the time I was in Abyssinia, I saw a good deal of the Gallas near the country in which Mr. Weld Blundell chiefly travelled, and, though undoubtedly they had suffered from Abyssinian rule, yet at the same time one district furnished a great proof of the enlightenment of the government of the Emperor Menelik; although the subsidiary chiefs have inflicted a good deal of hardship on the Gallas and other people, the emperor himself cannot be held responsible for it. The district I mean was at the head of the Dabus river. When the Emperor Menelik invaded the country, he sent on messengers to the chief Galla offering him terms, which were very wisely accepted. Practical independence was guaranteed, and only a small tribute exacted. In consequence that district now is, I suppose, one of the most prosperous in Africa, and there are only about three or four Abyssinians employed in the districts as clerks. This country, after one has come out of the deserted and war-ravished plains of the Sudan, is a most extraordinary sight to see; the whole country is studded with farms, and the people are most prosperous. There is a large plateau, with wide open fields and quantities

of tillage. Lekempti, which Mr. Blundell mentioned, is something of the same sort of country, but it suffered from the passage of an Abyssinian army, and the people are much more oppressed. Nothing could exceed the attraction of the Galla country, and it reminds one of nothing more than a very thickly populated English park, if you can imagine a number of homesteads scattered about a park in England. Sir Thomas Holdich has remarked on the difference between the character of the plateau in northern Abyssinia and in the south, the difference of the rolling hill country and the flat-topped hills. Travelling along the Abyssinian frontier, I noticed the change was very marked when one got north of the Blue Nile along the frontier. The change takes place between 11° and 12° N. lat.

The PRESIDENT: If there is no one else present who would like to make any remarks on the paper, it only remains for us to give our hearty thanks to Mr. Weld Blundell for what I am sure you will all agree has been a most instructive and interesting address.

Mr. WELD BLUNDELL said: I beg to return my heartiest thanks for the patience with which you have listened to me. With regard to the remarks of the gentlemen who have spoken, I beg to remove any apprehension or idea in any one's mind that when I spoke of the Gallas being oppressed by the Abyssinians, I meant in the outlying districts where the Abyssinian chiefs are out of sight, not only of their immediate overlords, but of the Emperor Menelik. The emperor has an extraordinary sense, not only of justice, but punishes most rigorously any infringement or persecution. In the outlying countries of these enormous districts, it is almost impossible for even his long arm to reach, and the consequence is that some of these native chiefs, who have small ragamuffin armies, are able to commit atrocities in the way of extortion or other things that would be discountenanced or even punished severely even in Adis Ababa. Again I thank you very kindly for the way in which you have accepted my lecture.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN INQUIRY INTO THE RESOURCES OF THE EMPIRE.*

By Prof. G. F. SCOTT ELLIOT.

THE suggestions which I have ventured to lay before the Research Department were originally formulated some time ago. It is not with any intention of finding fault or in a spirit of hostile criticism that I bring them forward.

No one can be more conscious than myself of the value of the surveys and investigations already made by commissioners and residents, under the Intelligence Department of the War Office, by the Colonial Governments themselves, and in recent years by the Imperial Institute, which has also been doing invaluable work. Already British India, Canada, and Australasia may be regarded as satisfactorily provided for in the way of maps. New Zealand, Mauritius, and several West Indian islands have already maps on the scale of 1 inch to the mile. The Surveyor-General of Natal has published a good map of Zululand on a scale of 5 miles; and, indeed, in places of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the inch. There

* Research Department, January 31, 1906.