

THE ABYSSINIAN CAPTIVES.

The following extracts from the diary of Dr Blanc, one of the Abyssinian captives who was appointed to convey the Queen's letter to Theodore, are very interesting and we are sure will be acceptable to our readers.

"In the valley between the hills a large body of cavalry, about 10,000 strong, formed a double line, between which we advanced. On our right, dressed in gorgeous array, almost all bearing the silver shield and the bitwa, the horses adorned with richly plated bridles, stood the whole of the officers of his Majesty's army and household, the governors of provinces and of districts, &c. All were mounted—some on really noble looking animals—tribute from the plateaux of Gedgars and the highlands of Shoa. On the left the corps of cavalry was darker, but more compact than its aristocratic *ris a-vis*. The horses, though on the whole perhaps less graceful, were strong and in good condition; and seeing their iron ranks we could well understand how thunder-stricken the poor scattered peasants must be when Theodoros, at the head of the well armed and well mounted bands of ruthless followers, suddenly appears among their peaceful homes, and, before his very presence is suspected, has come, destroyed, and gone. In the centre, opposite to us, stood Ris Engedah, the Prime Minister, distinguished from all by his gentlemanly appearance and the great simplicity of his attire. Bareheaded, the shama girded in token of respect, he delivered the Imperial message of welcome, translated into Arabic by Samuel, who stood by him, and whose finely chiselled features and intellectual countenance at once proclaimed his superiority over the ignorant Abyssinians. Compliments delivered, Ris and ourselves mounted and advanced towards the Imperial tents, preceded by the body of mounted grandees and followed by the cavalry. Arrived at the foot of the hill, we dismounted, and were conducted to a small red flannel tent pitched for our reception on the ascent itself. There we rested for a while, and partook of a slight collation. Towards 3 o'clock we were informed that the Emperor would receive us. We ascended the hill on foot, escorted by Samuel and several other officers of the Imperial household. As soon as we reached the small plateau on the summit, an officer brought us renewed greetings and compliments from his Majesty. We advanced slowly towards this beautiful durbar tent of red and yellow silk between a double line of gunners, who, on a signal, fired a salute very creditable to their untaught skill. Arrived at the entrance of the tent, the Emperor again inquired after our health and welfare. Having acknowledged, with due respect, his courteous inquiries, we advanced towards the throne, and delivered into his hands the letter from her Majesty the Queen. The Emperor received it civilly, and told us to sit down on the splendid carpets that it covered the ground. The Emperor was seated on an alga, wrapt up to the eyes in a shama, the sign of greatness and power in Abyssinia. On his right and left stood four of his principal officers, clad in rich and gay silks, and behind him watched one of his trusty familiars, holding a double barrelled pistol in each hand. The King made a few compliments about the European prisoners, and regretted that by their conduct they had interrupted the friendship formerly existing between the two nations. He was happy to see us, and hoped that all would be well again. After a few compliments had been exchange-

ed, on the plea that we must be tired, having come so far, we were allowed to depart. We remained with the Emperor from the 28th January to 5th February. During that period we were treated with the utmost courtesy, had the honor of several private interviews, and were abundantly supplied with bread, sheep, cows, and money. His Majesty accompanied us several stages towards the Tana Sea, as Kourata had been fixed upon as our place of residence until the arrival of our countrymen from Magdala. On the first day's march we were left behind on account of our luggage, and had a good opportunity of experiencing what it is to travel with an Abyssinian army. The fighting men were in front with the King, but the camp followers—numbering on that occasion about 250,000, encumbered as they are with the tents and provisions of the soldiers—came more slowly behind. It is almost impossible to describe the crush and confusion that frequently took place. For example, when a small river has to be forded, or when a single footpath leads to a long and steep incline of almost naked rocks, thousands heaped together push, scream, and vainly endeavour to penetrate the living wall, always increasing as the mules and donkeys get more frightened, and the muddy banks of the stream more slippery and broken. We had been the whole day upon a march that the Emperor accomplished in an hour and a half. Theodoros travelled with us for several reasons. He wanted to take us by a short cut to the Tana Sea, and as the country was depopulated, he was obliged to have our luggage carried by his soldiers."

The treachery of Theodoros is thus exemplified by Dr. Blanc:—

"On the morning of the 25th of June we received a message from the Emperor to the effect that Mr. Rassam, his companions, the priests, and any one he would like to take with him, should repair to Debra Tabor to be present at a political trial. The European workmen, Cantiba, Hailo, and Samuel, accompanied us. Arrived at Debra Tabor, we were surprised at not being received with the usual salutation. Instead of being at once conducted to the presence of the Emperor, we were ushered into a black tent pitched in the King's enclosure. We guessed that the political trial concerned ourselves. We had been seated but a few minutes when the European workmen were sent for by his Majesty. After a while they returned with Cantiba, Hailo, Samuel, and an Afa Negus (mouth of the King) who delivered the Imperial messages. The first and most important was, 'I have received a letter from Jerusalem, in which I am told that the Turks are making railways in the Soudan to attack my country conjointly with the English and French.' The second message was much to the same effect, only adding that as Mr. Rassam must have seen the railway in construction, he ought to have informed his Majesty of it. The third question was, 'Is it not true that the Egyptian railway was built by the English?' Fourth, 'Did he not give a letter to Consul Cameron for him to deliver to the Queen of England, and did not the Consul return with an answer?' Altogether there were some seven or eight questions, but the others were insignificant. A few days before a Greek priest had arrived from the coast with a letter for his Majesty. Whether these statements were contained in the missive, or were merely a pretext invented by Theodoros himself to give a reason for the ill-treatment he intended to inflict upon his innocent guests, it is impossible to say. The concluding message was,

'You must remain here. Your arms his Majesty no longer trusts in your hands, but your property will be sent to you.' Mr. Rassam, the following day, requested his Majesty to allow me and some of our companions to remain for the rainy season at Gaffat. In my case, and in Mr. Rosenthal's, permission was granted, but refused to all the others. Every day we heard that orders had been issued for the camp to be struck, but his Majesty did not leave. His Majesty visited Gaffat twice during the few days I was there, and on each occasion sent for me and received me courteously. Mr. Rassam and the other Europeans were allowed to come to Gaffat and spend the day with us, and, though now and then the word 'Magdallah' was whispered, still it seemed as if the storm had blown over; and we hoped before long to be all again united at Gaffat, and there in peace spend the rainy season."

The accounts previously given of the savage propensities of Theodoros are fully confirmed by Dr. Blanc, who writes:—

"On 3d July an official brought us the Imperial compliments, and stated that his Majesty was coming to inspect the works, and that I might present myself before him. I went at once to the foundry, and on the road I met two of the Gaffat workmen also proceeding there. A little incident then occurred which was followed by serious consequences. We met his Majesty near the foundry, riding ahead of his escort. He asked us how we were, and we all bowed and took off our hats as he passed along. The two Europeans with whom I walked covered themselves; but aware how touchy his Majesty was on all points of etiquette, I kept my head uncovered, though the sun was hot and fierce. Arrived at the foundry, his Majesty again greeted me cordially, examined for a few minutes the drawing of a gun his workmen proposed to cast for him, and then left all of us following. In the courtyard he passed close to Mr. Rosenthal, who did not bow, as his Majesty took no notice of him. As soon as he issued from the foundry fence a poor old ggar asked alms, saying, 'My Lords (gaitosh), the Europeans have always been kind to me. Oh! my King, you also relieve my distress.' His Majesty, on hearing the expression Lord applied to his workman, got into a fearful passion. 'How dare you call any one Lord but myself? Beat him, beat him to death!' Two of the executioners at once rushed upon him and began beating him with their long sticks. His Majesty all the while exclaiming, 'Beat him, beat him to death!' The poor old cripple at first in heartrending terms implored for mercy, but his voice grew fainter and fainter, and in a few minutes more there lay his helpless corpse, that none dare remove or pray for. The laughing hyenas that night caroused undisturbed on his abandoned remains. Theodoros' rage was by no means abated by this act of cruelty. He advanced a few steps, stopped, turned his lance in its rest, looked round the image of ungovernable fury. His eyes fell upon Mr. Rosenthal. 'Seize him!' cried he; immediately several soldiers rushed forward to obey the imperial commands. 'Seize the man they call an Akim.' Instantly a dozen ruffians pounced upon me, and I was held fast by arms, coat, trousers—by every place that afforded a grip. He then addressed himself to Mr. Rosenthal. 'You donkey, why did you call me the son of a poor woman, why did you abuse me?' Mr. Rosenthal said, 'If I have offended your Majesty, I beg for pardon.' All the while his Majesty was shaking his lance in a threatening manner, and every minute I expected