

THE ADVANCE UPON COOMASSIE.

THE BLUE JACKETS IN THE VAN.

General Sir Garnet Wolseley's victorious advance upon the Ashantees may be said to have begun on the morning of 27th December, 1873. At 2 30 that morning Sir Garnet proceeded up country with 276 blue-jackets and Marines, forming as it were the advanced guard of the expedition against Coomassie. This preference was given to those aloft in consequence of the active part they had taken in the Ashantee war. The *Himalaya*, *Tamar*, and *Surmalian* were lying off at anchor, the troops on board simply waiting for the order to disembark. That order was, however, to be deferred till the 1st of January, 1874, as it was presumed, the great leader of the Red River Expedition wished to commence the year well. The necessary magazines, &c., having been formed at Dunquah and Mansu, the wished for order at last reached Cape Coast, and at 2 30 a.m. the headquarters and left half battalion of the Rifle Brigade 2nd battalion, under the command of Colonel Warren, disembarked, and marched up country to Inquakim, about seven miles from Cape Coast. Everything appeared to favor the advance—full moon in the early morn and no surf—a thing which is of very rare occurrence on the Gold Coast. On the morning of the 2nd, at the same hour, the other half battalion of the Rifle Brigade disembarked and proceeded up country. The advance was thus to be made by successive half battalions to the front, each stage being vacated by the one wing of a regiment as the other marched up. This no doubt was necessary on account of the total absence of the roads in the Fantee country, so much so that the lines of operation had to be confined to one bush road or path, which has been cleared and widened under the superintendence of Lieut Gordon, 93th Regiment, to the extent of 120 feet. For this service and his untiring exertion in every way, this officer has been promoted to a Captaincy in the 84th Regiment. Great difficulty was experienced to obtain the necessary number of carriers for the Rifle Brigade. This regiment had after it over 600 carriers. This number may appear large, but it was absolutely necessary. The hammocks (about thirty in number) which followed each regiment required 240 carriers, in addition to the number required for the men's and officers' field kits.

On the morning of the 3rd January, the headquarters and one wing of the 12nd (Black Watch,) under Colonel McCleod C.B., landed from the hired transport *Surmalian* and marched up, the right half battalion landing at the same hour on the morning of the 4th. The first company of the 42nd landed in silence but the next was headed by a piper in full Highland garb, whose martial strains produced an immense sensation among the natives.

At last came the left half battalion of the 23rd Fusiliers, which landed on the morning of the 5th at 2 30 a.m., and marched to the front, with drum and life, band playing, and goat at the head of the regiment.

Here, however, difficulties were encountered. The lazy, cowardly Fantees, having been tried as soldiers and found worthless, were as a dernier resort made use of as carriers and some 5,000 engaged for that purpose at good pay. Finding the country clear of the enemy, however, and themselves in possession of more money than they ever had before in their lives, they began deserting en masse, so that the expedition was nearly brought to a stand still. In this emergency

the soldiers of 1st and 2nd West India Regiments, (colored) were asked to help, and cheerfully responded. In this way the troops were enabled to continue their advance, except the 23rd Fusiliers, who, much to their chagrin, were ordered back to the Coast to re-embark for want of sufficient carriers.

The Naval Brigade, mustering 23 officers, 183 seamen, 70 Marines and Kroomen and native cot carriers, under the command of Captain William H. Blake, R.N., after eight days' marching over the 76 miles distance, arrived at camp on the Prah's banks. What is greatly to the credit of the Brigade and the honor of the naval strength is the fact that every man marched into camp with his rifle and accoutrements, and every carrier also with his load. This very satisfactory completion of the Brigade's first eight days' march towards Coomassie excited the admiration of every one, the average loss sustained by the military in such a march having been as much as 5 per cent., arising from falling out from fatigue or footsore. To obtain this excellent result, even with our hardy seamen and Marines, great anxiety and careful watching over the men's health and comfort had to be given by Dr. Fegan and his colleagues. The Kroomen and the natives attached to the Brigade were treated with the same care and attention that had been given to the blue-jackets and Marines, but in marching along such vile roads as they have done, with bare feet and carrying loads of 50lb. weight upon their heads, it can be easily imagined that the number of complaints of sore feet were not small.

The climate on the Prah is described as most decidedly better than at Cape Coast Castle. The thermometer marks from 82 deg. to 86 deg. in the daytime, and during the night, at times, it falls to 52 deg. The scenery all through from the coast has been most beautiful. The river Prah at the camp varies in breadth from 120 ft. to 300 ft.; the water is very muddy, but very good after being filtered. The banks are in parts vertical, at others sloping. Lofly trees of every shade of green, with a rich undergrowth of bamboo, banana, &c., in great abundance, give shade and beauty to the scene.

The scene is a busy one all throughout the day. At earliest dawn engineers and control laborers are paraded with noise and confusion truly inconceivable. In addition to these, 400 and 500 of Wood's and Russell's regiments are daily paraded for "fatigues." The Tower of Babel could have been nothing to the confusion of tongues, that here takes place, where every man insists on chattering, and the talk is carried on in all the many varieties and dialects of West African languages, few understanding each other, the European officers understanding none of them. In the midst of this confusion the men are paraded, tools are issued to them at the engineer yard, and they are marched off by officers to the work for which they have been told off—either to clear and level ground, to fetch building material, or to build huts. When under the constant superintendence of Europeans, these native work really well and willingly, but the moment the European turns his back work ceases. Native overseers cannot or will not make them work. The strain on the Europeans is, therefore, very great. At ten o'clock the working parties are brought in for mid-day rest, and to cook their meals. At one o'clock they turn out again till evening.

The camp of Prahau, which is rapidly assuming vast proportions, was stirred to its

centre by the arrival of the naval brigade, consisting of 250 picked blue-jackets from Cape Coast squadron. These brave fellows had marched from Barracoe, seven miles from here. They advanced in perfect order along the road, one half singing the well known song, "When Johnnie comes marching home," the other half keeping step and chorus to "John Brown's knapsack is number ninety two." If any set of men ever looked adapted for hard work the litho bodied, soft paced men of the naval brigade did. Their frames looked green, sapful, and their faces as cherry and healthy that one could hardly believe they had marched through the eighty miles of irclaimable forest and swamp between Cape Coast Castle and the Prah River. Sailors always march as if marching were natural to them, as if they were animated men, of joints and muscles; while English soldiers appear stiff and rigid, more like walking machines in comparison.

The uniform of the sailors is the naval blueshirt and wide pants, which they use on shipboard, while they appeared somewhat jaunter in their broad brimmed straw hats, covered with a canvas cap fastened around the hat by a brown muslin veil. The naval brigade is armed with Sniders.

About 300 of the Second West India regiment arrived under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Webber. The Second West India regiment consists of coloured soldiers enlisted from the negro population of Jamaica, Nassau and other British settlements. Physically they are fine, huge fellows, some of them giants in frame, but as soldiers they don't strike me favourably. They are faithful, loyal men though, and I suppose are as ardent in Queen-Victoria's cause as the blue-jackets are, and no one can rob them of the laurels they have already acquired on this campaign in the bush skirmishes of Abr-crampa, Dunquah and Fasus. But their appearance contrasted unfavourably with that of the naval brigade.

A memorandum of instructions to the soldiers was issued by Sir Garnet Wolseley. It is a very elaborate document, and contains many useful hints for guarding against climatic effects, as well as precise directions for the manner of conducting warfare in a country such as that through which the expedition will pass—"a great forest of gigantic trees, with an undergrowth of bush varying in thickness," as the Commander in Chief describes it. He mentions incidentally that "the operations beyond the Prah will last only a few weeks." It thus concludes:—

"Soldiers and sailors, remember that the black man holds you in superstitious awe: be cool; fire low, fire slow, and charge home, and the more numerous your enemy, the greater will be the loss inflicted upon him, and the greater your honor in defeating him."

The bridge over the Prah was completed on the 6th January. Lord Gifford, who commanded the scouts, had pushed to Essiaman, 12 miles beyond the Prah, and had a slight skirmish with a few of the enemy's scouts left in the place. Some time previously some Ashantee Ambassadors arrived and were detained to see troops marched in. A Gatling gun was fired for their edification, and though they showed no great surprise the scene had evidently been too much for one of them, for on returning to quarters assigned to them he blew out his brains with his own gun. The letter they brought from the King stated the return of his army, and that his General attributed the several losses it had sustained to sickness,