

TO KUMASSI WITH SCOTT

ABRIDGED AND ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL
DESCRIPTION OF A JOURNEY FROM LIVERPOOL
TO KUMASSI WITH SIR FRANCIS SCOTT'S
ASHANTI EXPEDITION 1895 – 6

BY
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Published by Adrian Musgrave
at Smashwords

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Author's Note

From his birth in 1874 until he answered the Reaper's call in 1932, George Clarke Musgrave's time in this world carried him through the great challenges and changes of the reigns of Victoria, Edward VII and George V. His life, his travels, his work and his writings, though, were always more closely aligned with the reformers, the heroes, the visionaries and the Empire builders of the 19th century, than with the dour and stifling traditionalists of the 20th. But, dear reader, it is you who must decide whether the soubriquet of "Victorian Adventurer" that he has acquired is appropriate.

In any event, it is the sad reality that he is no longer here to recount his life and times to you in person. That task has slipped several branches down the family tree to myself and it is with some trepidation, and a fervent desire to be faithful to his memory, that I have dedicated myself to channelling for you the stories of my great-uncle, the fascinating, multi-faceted, complex character, George Clarke Musgrave: author, war correspondent, journalist, soldier, hero and family man.

ADRIAN MUSGRAVE

Foreword

The 1895-6 Expedition to Ashanti in the interior lands of Africa's Gold Coast took place following reports that the new King, Agyeman Prempeh, had refused to accept an offer for the Ashanti Federation to become a British protectorate, and was threatening the stability of the region by raiding the borders to the north and east of the capital, Kumassi, committing acts of cruelty and barbarism.

The official reason for our military intervention was that the Ashantis had failed to pay the fines levied on them by the 1874 Treaty of Fomena. Some commented, though, that Lord Salisbury's government was anxious to retain control over the gold fields and that they had a hidden agenda to keep other European forces out of Ashanti territory.

The campaign itself was bloodless yet lives were lost in Kumassi. Twenty three of our number, including Prince Henry of Battenberg, succumbed to the fever and the register of our sick swelled to an alarming extent.

The British force marched 140 miles through jungle, dense forest and deadly swamp, fraught with perils more to be dreaded than the arms of the savage Ashantis, leaving numbers on the road, sick of fever and dysentery. These heroes invested the capital; captured the King and his chiefs; destroyed the bloody fetish power; then, sadly reduced by sickness, returned to the coast, having freed a large district from the tyranny of a bloodthirsty despot and opened up a vast territory to trade and civilization.

This account of the expedition briefly describes my introduction and entry to the world of the war correspondent, but is comprised mainly of a series of articles and notes written at different times and places on the journey from England to the Gold Coast and on the march up country. Digressing somewhat from a formal account of the campaign alone, I have endeavoured to create a record of general interest by touching on the habits and customs of the people, and on the experiences of those who generously offered me their company, their wisdom and their friendship. The march did not lack interesting incidents, especially as we drew near to and entered Kumassi, and I have attempted to faithfully portray these various scenes on the road.

GEORGE C MUSGRAVE

Folkestone, June 1896

From Folkestone to Liverpool

By any reasonable measure, my early years in Folkestone should have been amongst the happiest of my life. My parents were hard-working and successful and the comfortable lifestyle that my family enjoyed was a credit to their industry - but there was always something missing. My childhood memories are a little sparse but I do recall that on my thirteenth birthday, my father called me to his study and told me that he now considered me sufficiently mature to take a formal position as an assistant in the family Drapery business. Starting a career in this way was a common route to adulthood for many of my age, so this announcement came as no great surprise. In truth, though, this imposed formalisation of my future at such an early stage of my life filled me with what I can only describe as a mixture of resentment and trepidation. I had no real idea of what I wanted to do but I knew that I was not destined to be a Draper's Assistant. In the event, however, family loyalties, respect for my father and a lack of other options kept me in place for the next three years or so - but this was a place made tenable only because I could escape to the life that I really longed for through a rolling kaleidoscope of pictures that I was able to paint in my mind.

My pictures grew and took form from my insatiable scouring of the London Illustrated News, a journal delivered to my father each week by courier. He said that this should be read by all established and aspiring businessmen because it covered the world's political, social and domestic issues better than any other. For me, though, it was the stories of heroes and battles and glorious victories; it was the mystery of far-off exotic lands; it was Empire; it was Britain; it was the Army. I had not a shred of doubt that this was where I belonged but, still short of the minimum age for full enlistment, my only other option was to join the ranks of the volunteer reserve and to proudly play the role of soldier.

It took many family debates, much reasoned argument and a great deal of obstinacy on my part before I eventually wore down my parents' resistance. To say I had their blessing would be something of an exaggeration but, at least, there was no great family rift when I left home for Woolwich Barracks and signed as a gunner in No. 2 Field Battery, Royal Artillery. Just six months later, though, it was cruelly, catastrophically over. What had started as a simple enough training exercise for the day of 26th April 1894 turned dramatically from order to chaos with a wildly spooked horse - a runaway gun carriage - and my leg shattered from ankle to thigh. I have since felt the vicious heat of bullet wounds, the debilitating spasms of dysentery and the shivering ravages of yellow fever. I have known my share of pain - but none as intense as the shattering of my dreams on that fateful day. Over many weeks of recuperation and physiotherapy in the military hospital at Aldershot, the medical staff worked with me and did everything they could to bring me back to full fitness but to no avail. The subsequent Court of Inquiry took only a few miserable minutes to find me unfit for further service and to decree a medical discharge. Finished. Just a year and 47 days after I believed that my future had opened up in front of me, bitter chance had closed the circle and I was once again in Folkestone.

Despite the tribulations of this sorry year, I still held an unshakeable certainty in the facts that circumstances always change and that a man is the maker of his own destiny. Both of these adages of life were brought into a sharp focus for me as I was woken by the morning sun filtering through the window of my room on 1st May 1895, the day of my 21st birthday. I lay there for some moments, with the dark clouds that had fogged my thoughts for months rapidly clearing to be replaced by a shockingly simple and obvious idea. If I could not serve my country, fight the battles and travel the world as a soldier - then I would walk in the footsteps and write the stories of those who did. It was as though one of my pictures had become a blueprint for action and with this sitting clear and sharp in my mind, it took me less than an hour to dress and walk to Radnor Park where I boarded the train to St Pancras.

By two o'clock that afternoon I was in the foyer of the Illustrated London News offices and at six, just before the doors were locked for the day, the editor, Clement King Shorter, agreed to see me. I was not at all sure what sort of response I would receive to my announcement that I was seeking a commission as a foreign correspondent. His two subsequent questions, though, were similarly brief and to the point. He wanted to know only whether I was free to travel and whether I could write. My answer of "Yes" to both was followed by an equally straightforward instruction to submit samples of my work for review. And that was that. Interview over. I did not have my commission but, for me - buoyed with my re-discovered confidence, the process was now underway and it was merely a matter of time.

It was now in my hands and all that I had to do was demonstrate that my writing was up to the standard required by the Illustrated London News. I was reasonably comfortable with the mechanics of putting pen to paper but my first pieces were something of a challenge because I had no idea what to write about. I reasoned, though, that with sixteen full size pages to fill each week, quantity of material would be an editorial factor, so I wrote about everything that, to me, seemed even remotely interesting. Each week my packages to London became bigger and heavier, crammed with my local news reports, social sketches of the notaries, the businessmen and the people of Folkestone and comparative essays of five hundred or so words in which I tried to crystallise opposing views on the political and military matters of the day. Each week I received a formal acknowledgement for my submission but not a word of criticism, encouragement or rejection. I was beginning to wonder whether I should enquire about what the next stage would be - but then the letter arrived. Together with a Safe Passage Passport that I had to sign and have witnessed and a money order for £15 to cover the fare, the instructions were clear. In a somewhat terse, almost shorthand, tone (with which I would soon become familiar), I was told that I had just eleven days to prepare and travel to Liverpool, where I was to report to Elder, Dempster & Co. of 14 Castle Street to confirm my passage on the SS Loanda, sailing for West Africa on 30th November. I was also informed that, apart from the funds for the fare to Cape Coast, I was required to meet all other expenses and that I would receive payment for articles only if they were published. Onerous terms, some might say, thrust unkindly upon a novice correspondent but, even upon reading the letter through for perhaps the fifth or sixth time, such trivialities were of no consequence to me. This was my ticket and I grasped it eagerly.

The Empire at this time was in a ferment; wars and rumours of wars abounded on all sides. Excitement ran high, and in the midst of the turmoil, the operations in West Africa were high on the agenda of journalists and editors. Newspapers were crammed with reports about the troubles in our African colonies, and it was a relatively simple matter to research the immediate cause of our expedition to Cape Coast and an historic overview of our previous quarrels with the peoples of this exotic place.

We were bound for the Gold Coast, where a series of wars had been fought between the Ashanti Federation and the British Empire during the turbulent years of the 19th century. Gold had been produced in the region for some 400 years and Europeans had been trading there since the middle of the 15th century, constructing fortified trading posts at strategic locations along the coast. By the 19th century, treaties that we had forged with other countries had reduced the number of European nations possessing permanent trading posts to three: Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark. African power in the region was held by the Ashanti, with its capital at Kumassi in the center of the gold producing region and the tension in the region had been mainly over Ashanti attempts to establish control over the coastal areas. Neighbouring tribes, such as the Fanti came to rely on British protection against Ashanti incursions.

Unwilling to shoulder the increasing risks and responsibilities, the British Company of Merchants at Cape Coast handed its forts and trading posts to the Crown in 1821, at which time all the British holdings on the Gold Coast were placed under the colonial stewardship of the governor of Sierra Leone. Through the ensuing seven decades, this political intervention gave rise to a predominantly military governance characterised by a continuous round of threats, counter-threats, posturing, skirmishes and battles, interspersed with three more significant conflicts.

In 1823, Sir Charles MacCarthy, rejecting Ashanti claims to Fanti areas of the coast led an invading force through the jungle in an effort to defeat the Ashanti in their capital. He was defeated and killed by the Ashanti, who kept his skull as a drinking cup. Emboldened by their victory, the Ashanti marched to the coast where they bravely fought superior numbers of British troops in open battle. Ultimately however, riven by bush disease, the Ashanti were subjected to a final attack, wherein the British employed the fearsome Congreve rockets and drove the enemy back behind the Pra River, where they settled a truce with the British in 1831.

The second war flared up in 1863. When Governor Richard Pine refused to return a runaway slave to the Ashanti. A delegation crossed the river Pra into British territory and burned thirty villages. Pine responded by deploying a small retaliatory force of 7 officers and some 200 men but his request for reinforcements from England was declined and he was forced to withdraw his troops. There were no battle casualties and the end result of this conflict was a stalemate that dragged on until July 1864, with both sides losing more men to malaria and dysentery than to action.

In 1873, the third war began after the British took possession of the remaining Dutch trading posts along the coast, giving British firms a regional monopoly on the trade between the African tribes and Europe. The Ashanti had long viewed the Dutch as allies, so they invaded the British protectorate along the coast. A British army, 2,500 strong, led by General Wolseley, waged a strong and successful campaign against the Ashanti that led to a brief occupation of Kumassi and a treaty signed at Fomena, ending the war in July 1874.

In 1888 an attempt was made to restore the Ashanti kingdom by the selection of King Prempeh as the rightful heir to the stool. Some of the states rallied for a time, but the ambition of the young king and his mother to re-establish Kumassi supremacy over the whole of the kingdoms led to a series of inter-tribal wars that lasted for several years, and threw Ashanti into the utmost confusion. In 1891 it was proposed to take the whole territory under the British flag, but no friendly arrangement could be arrived at with Kumassi.

Sir Brandford Griffith dispatched two ultimatums to Prempeh, but he continued his policy of prevarication and double dealing. A final letter was then delivered to Prempeh by Captain Donald Stewart, the Special Commissioner, on October 7th, 1895 demanding that the King should receive a British resident, who would see the reforms carried out. Prempeh took the letter and said he thanked his "good friend the Governor" for sending it to him but took no further notice, and as the day of grace expired without any response, nothing remained but to enforce our demands.

To this end, Sir Frances Scott was appointed Commander of an Expeditionary Force, briefed to defeat the Ashanti once and for all and to firmly re-establish Britain's colonial power in the region. The force was to be some 2000 strong, comprising a special corps of 250 hand-picked troops from different regiments at home, 420 officers and men of the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment, 900 Houssa troops and 400 of the West India Regiment, together with a levy of some 5000 friendly natives to act as carriers and scouts. Logistical preparations were to be conducted with the utmost priority, and embarkation had been ordered at the earliest opportunity.

My letter from the London Illustrated News assigning me to the Expedition's press contingent, arrived on November 19th. A week later, I was in Liverpool.

Liverpool to Cape Coast

Liverpool landing-stage in a thin slanting rain, with grimy dock labourers shifting hawsers off the bollards on a dirty wet quay, releasing the tender, and by so doing they part husband and wife, lover and sweetheart, mother and son. The outward bound ones crowd to the port side, the others cling to the chains on the edge of the wharf. Young wives, struggling to keep back the tears that will come, wave wet handkerchiefs to dear ones on board, while mother and sister say the parting words to son and brother. The tender reaches the ship, luggage is transferred and the vessel slowly steams down the river as cheer after cheer goes up from those on board and is answered by the crowd on shore. Then England, the dear old mother country, grows less distinct, till only a faint grey line is visible, and the feeble echo of a last cheer is borne across, almost drowned by the swish of the waves as the tide runs up the Mersey.

Such was the scene on November 30th, 1895, when the good ship "Loanda" started for West Africa. We had on board officers and men to the number of 100, chiefly of the Army Service Corps and Engineers, also a detachment of Artillery for Sierra Leone. The holds were full of baggage, ammunition, niters, tanks and other stores for use in the forthcoming expedition to Ashanti for which the majority of passengers were bound. There was a mixed company on board, among others being His Excellency Colonel Cardew, Governor of Sierra Leone, returning with his wife to resume his duties there; also his aide de camp, Captain Morant; Surgeon Colonel Taylor, Principal Medical Officer to the expedition; Captain Benson, commanding the Ashanti Artillery contingent; Surgeon-Captains Maher and Josling; Captain Norwood, R.A.; Captain Hall; Lieutenant Faber, R.E., and Mr. Haddon Smith, Assistant Colonial Secretary at Lagos; Mr. Bennett Burleigh of Daily Telegraph fame, and Mr. Seppings Wright, special Artist to the Illustrated London News, represented the Press, the remainder of the passengers being health-seekers for the Canaries to winter.

After passing Holyhead, we lost sight of land and everyone prepared to settle down for the voyage. The first day past, we were getting over what one may call the unsociability of the average Britisher, and officers and civilians alike were soon rubbing shoulders in the comfortable smoking room, driven in by a sweeping wind off the Channel. The ladies soon disappeared, and there were the usual melancholy faces of passengers vainly trying to ward off the remorseless mal de mer and appearing cheerfully at dinner, but their heroic efforts would only last through the soup, when a hasty retreat was beaten to watch the seascape from the ship's side. Many of us, more fortunate in not dreading the horrors of sea sickness, found plenty to occupy the time as we ploughed our way through the choppy outskirts of the Bay; but once passed Finisterre, the ladies emerged from their cabins, the sick ones reappeared, and things brightened considerably on board. In the evenings we were enlivened by impromptu concerts on the troop deck, and it is marvellous what a large amount of talent can be found among British "Tommies" when opportunity arises for them to show it.

After Finisterre the temperature sensibly changes, the sun gives notice that it has come to stay, and we realised we were at last reaching the delights of a more southern latitude. Life on board became a pleasure as we steamed through a calm blue sea, and the time was passed by many diversions. Our genial skipper, Captain Jones, never let conversation flag when he was near, for he had an inexhaustible stock of anecdote ever ready. A sweep on the day's run of the vessel was instituted, and shuffle board or deck quoits freely indulged in.

A week after leaving Liverpool we reached Grand Canary, dropping anchor in the port of La Luz at 5 a.m. A glorious day was just dawning, the sun rising in almost eastern splendour. After the usual formalities were gone through, we got a clean bill of health from the authorities, and as the yellow flag was hauled from the fore-peak, dozens of waiting bumboats closed in, our decks being swarmed by eager vendors of the various commodities that delight the eye of the traveller. The majority of these swarthy merchants dealt in tobacco,

cigars, and Florida water, but there were many others with baskets of fruit, canaries in wicker cages, and native-worked fans and shawls. The collection was completed by two light-skinned Parsees with their suave salaams and stock of silks, shawls, and Benares work. One or more of these itinerant Hindoo merchants are to be found at every port of any size east or west. How they come and how they return to their own country again is a mystery, but they apparently thrive and are born traders with all their outward cringing and hypocritical cast of countenance.

We were soon pulled ashore in one of the native boats manned by picturesque looking ruffians who crowded round the foot of the gangway. Though the distance to the breakwater is barely 100 yards, the fare is on a sliding scale, which never goes below one shilling for each person, however you may try to beat them down. There were eleven passengers in the boat I journeyed in, and we were asked two shillings a head, reduced under pressure to one shilling - not a bad four minute's work for three men to earn eleven shillings.

The Port of La Luz has almost a natural harbour formed by a small peninsula joining Grand Canary by a narrow isthmus, and a stone breakwater, built at right angles to this, forms the three sides of a square within which the largest vessels can float in safety. The harbour is easy of access at fall tides, and this fact has no doubt done much in recent years to bring Grand Canary to the front as a coaling station.

Las Palmas can be reached from the landing stage by train, or rather steam tram, or a light tartana drawn by two or three horses may be hired to go by road, the charge being one peseta for each person. The horses of Canary are a distinct breed, being small, well formed, and very swift, but no proper care is taken of them, and few can be found that are not more or less covered, with festering sores, while the drivers use the lash mercilessly. The hotels have private carriages and horses of their own for hire, and these are necessarily kept in a better condition.

Las Palmas itself does not offer many attractions to the visitor, and a day is sufficient to make one thoroughly acquainted with all places of interest in the city itself. The Cathedral is a large edifice in the centre of the town, and its two towers make it conspicuous at a long distance. It is a fine building from an architectural point of view, and contains some large and well executed frescoes, while the wood carving inside well repays a visit. The interior is Gothic, with three large naves, four transepts and chapels at the side. An intending visitor would do well to try and be present at the regular afternoon service which is fully choral. The organ is a splendid instrument, while the excellence of the choir quite keeps up the reputation that the Spanish Church has always held for its fine music.

Las Palmas boasts of a theatre, visited by various opera companies of more or less ability. Putting the merits of the performance on one side, the building itself and the interior fittings would put many more pretentious English playhouses in the shade. Near the Cathedral is a handsome building, the lower part of which is used for the municipal offices, the upper chambers for the museum. The guide of the museum was as great a curiosity as any of the specimens under his charge, for he not only refrained from asking for a gratuity, but firmly and politely refused one when offered.

I tried to obtain an order to visit the bone-yard attached to the Cathedral cemetery, but found it was too difficult and tedious a matter to get the requisite permit, for the wheels of Spanish officialdom are clogged with red tape and move but slowly. The rich in Canary rent graves in the cemetery for their deceased friends, but with the poorer classes the remains are buried for a few months, the bones then being dug up and deposited in the adjoining bone-yard. This is certainly not a practice that commends itself from a hygienic standpoint, and shows little consideration for the feelings of the relatives, who know with what scant ceremony the remains of departed friends will be treated.

Las Palmas is well supplied with hotels, the three leading ones being under English management. Of these Quiney's, the oldest established, is right in the town, but the others, the Metropole and the Santa Catalina, are built in the outskirts on the road to the port. The Metropole is the leading hotel in Las Palmas, and as a sufficient guarantee for the excellence of all the arrangements, I may mention that it is one of the many enterprises of Mr. Alfred Jones, through whose indefatigable exertions the Canaries have entered a prosperous period after a chequered career under the proscriptive policy of Spain. Living is cheap in the islands, and at this palatial hotel it is possible to live in first-class style for 8 shillings per day inclusive.

The streets of the town are narrow but fairly clean, and the main thoroughfare is lined with pretentious looking shops. What strikes one forcibly is the air of listless indolence that pervades everywhere. The proprietors of the shops sit lazily enjoying a cigarette at the door, drivers lounge on their carts with reins hanging loosely and horses going as they please; sentinels stand negligently at their posts leaning on their rifles and moodily smoking, while the people saunter in the streets in a languid but contented fashion of their own. The Canaryite is a lover of idleness, and shut off as he is from the outside world, he cares nothing for the rush and turmoil of the nations around him, but lives in perfect contentment, knowing he has enough for to-day and not caring what tomorrow may bring forth.

Life is never dull in the islands, and if other things flag there are plenty of gay fiestas or semi-religious holidays, when the towns are brilliantly illuminated and the peasants flock in from the country, decked in glorious finery that has been purchased by many previous days of hunger. Then there are the plazas, where bands play every day, and golf, lawn tennis or cricket can be indulged in on well-kept grounds. The houses are irregular but well built, enclosing many glorious little piazzas and gardens, shut out completely from the outside world. Here the children can play and the elders rest in shady bowers amid dazzling visions of flowering magnificence, with gushing fountains and gay music of the bright yellow little songsters which we hear only in captivity, but which flit from tree to tree in Canary as free as air. Passing down the streets dark eyes gleam and flash dangerously through the green postigos or shuttered jalousies, but a peep behind often shows the splendid eyes belie the owner. Young ladies from fifteen to twenty-one are exceedingly beautiful, but Spanish loveliness is transitory, and when they reach maturity the beauty so rapidly fades that in a few years they are positively plain.

Unquestionably, the one charm of the Canaries is the splendid and equable climate. These fortunate islands form the ideal spot for invalids as they have every advantage the health-seeker needs. The climate is warm, but dry and bracing, and the heat is not too great as it is tempered by the stimulating breezes from the sea. The islands are too far south to feel any effect from the north winds which have expended all their force before they reach such latitudes. The east winds have a thorough sweep of the desert, being thus warmed and dried before they touch the islands, and the gentle westerly and southerly winds agreeably temper the heat and sometimes produce a gentle shower of rain that keeps the ground fruitful and moist. Thus as a winter resort for invalids they far surpass the Riviera, and though the journey has to be considered, a week on board one of the first-class Mail Steamers, under the management of Messrs Elder, Dempster and Co., is almost an added delight to the trip.

A few years ago the natural attractions of Grand Canary and the other islands were almost unknown, but their fame has now spread far and wide. Much has been done to improve sanitary conditions, and accommodation for travellers is provided in plenty. It will be well if the Spanish Government, realising what a prize they have in these possessions, do all they can to assist the English enterprise now developing them, and seeking to attract the thousands who annually flock to a warm climate for the winter.

Visitors to Grand Canary would do well to extend their visit to the neighbouring islands, the chief of which may be easily reached by the coasting steamers which ply from port to port. The Canary group is composed of thirteen islands, but six of these are very small. The origin of their name is attributed to the fact of Juba visiting them, and sending two large dogs to Rome from the islands, which he reported as clothed with eternal fire. Pliny mentions the existence of the Fortunate Islands, but in 1330 a French vessel was driven upon them by stress of weather and they were thus rediscovered, afterwards falling into the hands of Spain. Tenerife is the largest of the group and is almost as popular as Grand Canary. It is chiefly remarkable for its lofty volcanic peak, which rises almost in the centre of the island, of which Santa Cruz is the capital, possessing a well sheltered harbour. It is a great commercial centre and the chief inhabitants of the town are engaged in trade with Great Britain; but it is, nevertheless, a delightful little place, built at the foot of high mountains, though not greatly patronised by visitors, who flock on to the more fashionable resort, Orotava, about thirty miles distant.

The scenery round Santa Cruz is almost awe-inspiring, and within reasonable distance are glorious pine forests at Las Mercedes and Mina, with majestic mountains and imposing barrancos where the surrounding country rivals Switzerland. Laguna and Orotava are the fashionable resorts and the latter especially should be visited, as it is situated in the midst of lovely scenery, wild and mountainous, but with richly cultivated hills and valleys between. The ascent of the lofty Peak or Teyde of Teneriffe can also be made. For days it is never visible, but occasionally a partial view can be obtained through a break in the clouds. The transparent atmosphere then enables one to distinguish even small houses and trees at a great distance, and a magnificent view can be obtained from the top of the crater, which attains an elevation of 11,950 feet above sea level. A vast expanse of ocean, studded with the whole archipelago, stretches away on every side, and it is perhaps the most extensive view in the world.

We had dropped a number of passengers at the Canaries, and when we again steamed out of the harbour, all on board were more or less connected with the Expedition, except some officials and a trader or two returning to their unsalubrious posts on the coast. We left Las Palmas on Saturday night, and on Wednesday morning we sighted Cape Verde. The land leading up to the Cape is low and flat, extending as far as the eye can reach in dull monotony, broken only by solitary palms dotted here and there. As we steamed through the glorious sunlit waters, with the awnings to keep off the glare of the sun, and a pleasant sea breeze tempering the heat, it was difficult indeed to realise we were near the deadly West Coast of Africa.

On the troop-deck the men were busily engaged cleaning and sharpening their arms, while the officers spent much time in improving their shooting, revolver practice being the order of the day. When will revolver shooting be really looked upon by the authorities as a necessary qualification for an officer? It is essential for every officer to be a dead shot, and yet few facilities are offered for them to obtain the requisite proficiency, and few indeed of our English officers can even emulate the cowboy's feat of hitting a button at ten paces. We had some very fair marksmen on board, and the bottles suffered accordingly, but it remained for Bennett Burleigh to take the palm by the only shot he ever tried on the voyage, in which he shot away a small portion of cork left hanging after the bottle had been shattered.

On the morning of December the 13th we sighted Sierra Leone, and turning into the wide mouth of the Roquette, had our first view of "the white man's grave," a sobriquet which all the coast unfortunately seems to deserve. Passing the lighthouse, and steaming along the narrow strip of coast, the country appears to be a perfect paradise, with its luxuriant tropical vegetation, spreading palms and patches of bananas, intersected by enormous trees of great variety, extending right down to the water's edge. Nestling at the foot of the famous range of

the Lion Mountains is Freetown, but the whole appearance of the place is deceptive. The apparently substantial-looking white houses and wide streets, thrown in strong relief by the thick profusion of tropical bush, extending up the sides of the heights behind, and forming a many tinted green back-ground, make one almost exclaim "Utopia" and, at least, you think such a lovely spot cannot be as black as it is painted. Once on-shore, however, the illusion is instantly dispelled. Many of these houses that appear so substantial and clean in the distance are found, on a closer view, to be but roughly built and coated with white-wash, rendered a dirty yellow with the damp. True, the streets are wide and there is now a good supply of water, but there still remains that keen sense of disappointment which increases as you go further into the town.

The cause of the general unhealthiness of Freetown is apparent from its position. Freetown Bay forms a perfect natural harbour, which is the only one worthy of the name on the coast, and the town has naturally grown up around the port. Close behind the city the high crescent-shaped range of mountains completely shuts in Freetown, and prevents a breath of fresh air from that direction, while a series of ridges and spurs on the east keeps off effectually any breeze that may blow from the sea. Thus a north wind is the only one that can cause a leaf to stir near the town, and that blows across the river when it has lost all its force, retaining not a trace of freshness after traversing the desert and the muggy tracts of country extending to the northern bank of the Roquette. Freetown is thus left in a reeking atmosphere caused by the great heat, lack of fresh air, and the dampness of the low lying valley in which it stands, which also forms a cesspool for the drainage of the hills around. The strongest sanitary measures have been adopted, and have done a little towards making it habitable, but nothing can surmount the natural obstacles which render it so unhealthy.

When I landed at Freetown, I found every available approach to the quay crowded by thousands of brightly arrayed Negroes, eagerly awaiting to see the Governor land from the "Loanda" and the effluvia of "nigger," aptly described as the "bouquet d'Afrique" was much in evidence as they perspired freely under the glare of the midday sun. News of the expedition had already arrived, and many of the people were as well informed as we on all subjects "a l'Ashanti." A guard of honour was drawn up to receive Colonel Cardew, and when he stepped on shore, the natives went mad with excitement. They rushed, en masse, to get a closer view of the gallant Colonel and his lady, who were entering their hammocks, and judging from the display of popular feeling, His Excellency must be highly esteemed by all classes. The enthusiasm of these niggers did not appear in any way damped by the hard knocks they received from the batons of the police, who were vainly trying to keep the surging and yelling crowd from closing round the small procession.

The "Loanda" stayed two days in Sierra Leone, and on Saturday afternoon the Ashanti contingent of the West India regiment was embarked for Cape Coast Castle. This embarkation was a picturesque sight viewed from the ship. The slopes and steps leading down to the water's edge, and the quay were crowded with thousands of natives, who, dressed in every variety of colour under the sun, turned out to see the troops off. The band of the regiment, their dusky faces thrown up in striking contrast by their white zouaves and puggarees, played suitable airs as each barge load of men was towed off to the ship by the little tug of the Coaling Company. The music was the source of much gratification to the assembled masses who danced, clapped their hands and halloed to the different airs, but "Auld Lang Syne" seemed to cause special delight, probably because many of their well-known hymns have been adapted to it.

We weighed anchor just after dinner, and steamed out of the river through inky darkness, increased by the miasma rising off the land, and obscuring all the lights in the town. The scene on board was a striking one, with four hundred dusky warriors swarming over the decks, singing, chattering in pigeon English, and laughing as only a plantation nigger knows

how. There is something particularly simple and child-like about the sons of our West Indian possessions, but when offended in the slightest degree they show their deeper character of cunning, cowardly brutality. Thus, while they retain their Negro simplicity, they are strongly tainted with the curse of slavery that brutalised and crushed out every spark of manliness in their forefathers.

There is splendid material in the two regiments raised and recruited mainly in the West Indies, but the white officers in command require a large amount of tact in dealing with their men, who are over-sensitive, and will resent any supposed affront, regardless of consequences, and will stoop to most despicable means to obtain their revenge. Major Bailey, who was in command, appeared to understand them perfectly, while the men in turn seemed to regard him as a father and would follow him anywhere. The strict laws of military discipline could never be rigidly enforced, and it was a common thing on board, when orders were being read on parade by the officer, to hear a perfect chorus of "We no heah you heah, Sah! Kindly speak more loud, Sah!" from those who were in rear, though they were all drawn up at "attention," when a white soldier hardly dreams of winking, much less speaking.

It was impossible to find quarters for these four hundred men on an already crowded boat, so they had to make themselves as comfortable as possible with a single blanket on the decks and down in the forehold, which had been cleared for them. They lay in every conceivable position, singing far into the night a corruption of "Daisy Bell," and some of their own plantation ditties, their voices rising in perfect unison, despite the themes. A powerful spray of electric light, rigged to the mast, shone down on their upturned ebony faces, surmounted by their red caps, making a most weird scene as contrasted with the surrounding stillness of night on the ocean. Many interesting sketches of those last days on board were made by Mr. Seppings Wright, most of which were reproduced in ensuing numbers of the Illustrated London News.

Steaming down the coast we passed Sherbro, which forms the southern part of the Sierra Leone colony. This district is noted for the various secret societies formed among the inhabitants, and about which a great deal of mystery exists. Perhaps the most interesting of these is an order of native freemasons called "Poro" which is a Sherbro institution peculiar to the Imperrri country, with the men of the Tasso at its head. Such is the power invested in these Tassos, that they take precedence of the Sokong himself in some matters, and it enables them to raise objections to the laws made by the chief if they think fit. They assume a most barbarous costume, including a head-piece of enormous weight. This head-gear is over four feet in height, consisting of a foundation of plaited cane, covered with skulls and leg bones of defunct Tassos, and surmounted by a gigantic bouquet of feathers, three feet in diameter. On their body they suspend skins of various animals, and jingling charms which make a considerable noise as they walk. Beside these Tasso men, there is a subordinate rank called the Lagas, who attend the Tassos. They are bedaubed with large white spots on the body and have no head-dress. If a Tasso man dies in a town, he must not be buried there, but in the bush. No woman must look on a dead Tasso, and on the decease of one of the order, a law or "poro" is immediately declared, compelling all women to withdraw till the burying is over, the law being so imperative that the females have to drop their work and retire instantly to the bush. If curiosity prompts a woman to secrete herself, and she becomes acquainted with the mysteries of Poro, her superstition brings on an imaginary sickness, during which she confesses, and is at once taken to the Poro bush, where, like the famous lady of yore who was caught eves-dropping at a Freemasons' gathering, she is initiated into the inner rites of the order, henceforth being regarded as a Poro proper.

There are, however, far more horrible societies than this existing in the low lying country called British Sherbro, which comprises a large district, including Sherbro Island. A race exists there composed of professional poisoners pure and simple, and though their

actions are somewhat retarded by their now being under British rule, many victims still fall yearly. These poisoners form a profession of their own, doing their deadly work with the greatest secrecy, and they are well versed in compounding and preparing most mysterious and deadly poisons from vegetables unknown to the European world, and therefore difficult to trace. In out-of-the-way districts, if any vindictive native has a grudge against another person, he has only to make a present to one of these diabolical fiends, and the selected victim is carefully removed, either suddenly or by a lingering illness that is difficult to locate. The hereditary methods of preparing the poisons are secretly handed down from generation to generation.

Another most curious custom that is now dying out is the "Egugu," but this is a fraud practised by a few imposters who implicitly follow out the methods of the Mumbo Jumbo rites employed by Mandigoes and pagan tribes further south. The Egugu man is supposed to have unlimited powers by which the name and appearance of every woman who has been guilty of infidelity is revealed to him. This strange minister is sometimes consulted by a jealous owner of a house full of wives, and in that case his work of finding the offender is comparatively easy, but he also pays periodical visits to the different villages for the purpose of exposing the frail ones, announcing his arrival by loud and dismal screams on the outskirts of the surrounding woods. The women do not relish his visits, and consternation falls on a large portion of the feminine community, as they have nearly all been equally guilty, and there is little chance of his picking an innocent subject. When Egugu enters the town, presents are liberally showered on him, and he can easily mark down a victim by seeing the woman who seems most anxious to propitiate him by her gifts. No one dare absent herself from the parade that follows, and each lord and master takes particular notice that his wives, alias slaves, are present. When all are assembled at the "bentang" or meeting place, the ceremony is commenced by songs and dances, which continue till midnight, when Egugu suddenly pounces on his selected victim. The poor wretch is immediately seized, stripped naked, and tied to a tree, where this superficial quack inflicts a severe switching with his rod of authority, amid the derisive shouts of the assembly, the women being loudest in their exclamations against the unhappy sister.

A few months before I reached Freetown much stir was caused there by the capture in the Imperri country of nine men belonging to the Human Leopard society. Covered with leopard skins, members of this faction are in the habit of secreting themselves in the bush, near various villages, and anyone who ventures out is set upon and killed, a cannibal feast afterwards being held. So serious had the depredations of this gang become, that the Sierra Leone authorities sent men to scour the country for these murderers. Only nine natives were arrested, and, on investigation, no proofs could be found against six of them, and they had to be liberated. The other three were brought to Freetown, tried before a jury, found guilty, and hanged on August 5th, 1895.

One of these malignant wretches named Jowe was formerly a Sunday school teacher in Sierra Leone, but he subsequently adopted the more lucrative profession of trading in the Imperri country. Jowe, in his defence, said he had been compelled to join the society by threats. As, however, he had been a member for a long period, and was at perfect liberty to leave the country if he had chosen, his plea was not admitted. The defence of the others was, that the murders were committed to obtain special parts of the body, such as the heart, hand and leg, to make a certain fetish medicine. It was decided that their execution should take place at the scene of their crimes, and a force of police was dispatched with the prisoners and the scaffold to the Imperri country. The scaffold was erected and the execution took place in the public street, the bodies being allowed to hang for forty-eight hours as a warning to the natives. The murders committed by these "leopards" are numerous; one girl who had recently been tied to a tree and was about to be killed and eaten, screamed till she attracted the

attention of her friends in a village close by, and on their approach the miscreants fled. Eight more members of the "leopards" were afterwards arrested, and on arraignment, evidence was proved against two of them on the charge of murdering a Krooman named Jack Purser at Mabondo, about fifty miles from Freetown, in the Sherbro district.

Yet another atrocious outrage was recently brought to light at Bouthe, where a native of the Imperri country had been brought down the river to the St. Joseph's Catholic Mission there, for treatment of wounds, caused by these cannibals. He was working on his land when he was attacked from behind, and stabbed in the neck with a three-pronged dagger peculiar to this gang, gashes then being scored down his back in a manner which, to an unskilled eye, might suggest they had been caused by a leopard's claws. His cries attracted the attention of some other natives working in the vicinity, and on their arrival, his assailants made off. He was only just alive when taken in at the mission house, and succumbed to his terrible injuries shortly after.

On Sunday we could descry the dark outline of the Liberian coast extending monotonously in one long level line of vegetation and with no hills to vary the aspect, passed Cape Palmas and came abreast of French territory. Cape Palmas is the healthiest station on the West Coast of Africa, its highest point being one hundred feet above sea level. On the little peninsula, nestling picturesquely among a clump of palms, are the European houses and lighthouse. The coast here is very dangerous in rough weather, owing to the numerous reefs, and, lying high and dry on the sand, the steamship "Monrovia" may still be seen, where she was run up after striking a sunken reef, just off the point, many years ago.

After Cape Palmas, the French Ivory Coast is reached, extending to the Assinee River which marks the boundary with the English Gold Coast. On the Ivory Coast is the French settlement of Tabu, which consists of a native village of conical thatched huts and two European houses. The French have imposed a very foolish tax of £1 on every Krooman taken from their coast to work southwards. As these Kroomen spend all their earnings on every description of finery from the factories before returning home, only reserving just enough to pay their return passage, the French probably object to their subjects spending their money and bringing back goods from another market, but as the tax acts as a deterrent to the steamers calling on the coast, the diminution of exports and imports must make a greater corresponding loss to the revenue. Further down the coast is the desolate French settlement of Berebi, where the European community is made up of five French officials and one trader. As we steamed along in sight of the coast, the heavy surf was plainly visible as it broke on the beach in long stretches of foam, like banks of snow, extending as far as the eye could reach, the whiteness being intensified by the dark background of vegetation behind. The surf right along this coast is ever a source of wonder and danger, as the rollers surge in and break with sullen and monotonous roar.

The whole length of coast-line extending from the mouth of the Roquelle in Sierra Leone to Lagos, a distance of 1,300 miles, is without a single inlet or harbourage where a ship can rest in safety or discharge her cargo. Vessels calling at the Coast are forced to anchor some distance from the shore, and all communication with the towns or trading centres is carried on by means of surf boats. These boats are specially constructed with a curved keel, which lifts the craft as it meets each advancing crest instead of cutting through the waves as an ordinary straight stemmed boat would do. If a boat is launched for any reason from a man-of-war or one of the mail steamers, they never venture near the range of the surf as it would be courting certain death. Fortunately, the tornadoes which rage in these latitudes are of short duration, and hurricanes seldom blow, or the list of casualties must have been much greater on this inhospitable shore. In sandy places where the beach is smooth and level, the rollers regularly break in straight, unvarying line, but on rocky shores the heavy swell of water is broken and thrown up in immense columns of foam and spray as each wave surges up in mad

confusion. The mouths of the various rivers that empty themselves on the Coast of Guinea offer just as serious impediments to landing as the uninviting shores. A bar is formed across each mouth, over which the water ever boils and fumes, and only an experienced native in his specially shaped canoe dare cross.

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