

Scientific.

A DEFILE IN ABYSSINIA.

The Times of India, November 18th, contains extracts from the diary of Lt. Col. Phayre of Her Majesty's service in India, who surveyed the routes over which an invading army must pass to penetrate from the coast into Abyssinia. He thus describes the defile of Sooro, the most difficult one which he met.

"We passed a cool refreshing night, and at daylight I sent the guides back, surveying as they went, to Koomaylo Wells, whilst M. Munzinger and I with our guides and 2 or 3 mules, proceeded to explore the remaining difficulties of Sooro. After proceeding about 300 or 400 yards up the defile from our bivouacking ground, we arrived at the worst of the obstacles in the whole defile. It was caused by immense masses of granite, having in past ages, either been hurled down the torrent so as completely to block its passage, or by the torrent itself having cut through the overlying strata to the granite, and dislodged masses of it. These masses were piled, one on the top of the other, to a height of 50 feet, and a length up stream of 100 or 200 feet. In order to surmount this obstacle, the natives have constructed a 3 or 4 foot wide zigzag path of timber and large boulders by which their bullocks and asses ascend and descend. A drove of unladen bullocks, accompanied by a few armed Abyssinians, happened to be coming down this formidable zigzag at the time, and it was curious to see how clearly and safely the animals picked out their way. I should here state that several such parties had been met in the lower part of the pass on the previous day en route to the plains to cultivate tracts of land. I was quite unprepared to believe that laden animals could pass it, but on our return, an hour afterwards, we found a drove of 15 or 20 bullocks, each laden with a bag of salt weighing 180 to 200 lbs., preparing to struggle up it; and afterwards again, when we returned to Koomaylo, we found a drove of about 30 or 40 bullocks similarly laden, preparing to carry their burdens the whole way to Senafe. I mention this to show that the Sooro defile, even as it is, is made use of by the natives of the country with laden cattle. But to return to our own party: we scrambled on foot up the zigzag whence, to one more bad, but less difficult place, was 5 minutes walk; beyond which, in a few minutes more we reached the head of Sooro defile, whence to Senafe, as before stated, was described to us to be just as good a road as the one we had come over in the first 8 miles from Koomaylo, though narrower. But for this defile I would have wished on 8 or 10 miles further to a plain beyond the head of the defile, which, from the description given, would be a good place for us to occupy as soon as we have troops sufficient to hold it. But being on foot, without supplies, and having moreover to return to position No. 1 at Mukutto (judged to be 22 miles distant) during the day, I was compelled to retrace my steps.

"I would here observe, that in my judgment all that is required to make the Sooro defile passable for laden cattle is 100 Sappers and a few hundred pounds of gunpowder. The ascent of the waterway of the defile is naturally easy. It is merely in consequence of its having been blocked up by the large fragments of granite referred to that the sudden drop of 50 feet above described occurs. The whole defile from bottom to top is between 2 1/2 and 3 miles long, and there are four bad obstacles in that distance; the worst of which I have described as the zigzag surmounting 2 or 3 masses of granite which happen to have lodged, one on the top of the other, in the narrow waterway, which is not more than 60 feet wide or thereabouts. A clever Engineer would very soon make a good 10 or 15 feet roadway past each of these 4 obstacles, and the work is one which ought, I think, to be undertaken at once, as opening the most direct approach to a good part of Abyssinia (Senafe) from our position No. 1 on the sea coast."

ELECTRICAL COUNTRIES.

In a paper addressed to the Academy of Sciences, M. J. Fournet treats of a new and curious subject, viz, the electric state of certain regions. From the report of this paper, in Galignani, it appears that in the mountains of the basin of the Rhone and their off-shoots, there are some spots distinguished for their evolution of electricity, which is sometimes very remarkable; while others, though apparently identical in surface, are in a state of absolute electric neutrality. Some very striking instances of this are quoted by M. Fournet. On the night of August 11, 1854, when Mr. Blackwell was on the Grands-Mulets, at an altitude of 3,455 meters, the guide, F. Cottet, on leaving the hut, perceived the surrounding regions apparently on fire. He immediately called to his companion to witness the scene, which was owing to a tempest. Their clothes were literally covered with electric sparks, and their fingers, when held up, were phosphorescent. At that very time Lyons was visited with a deluge of rain, and the whole day had been exceedingly stormy. In 1841, as the same guide was accompanying M. Chenal up Mont Blanc, they were overtaken by a violent storm, and found themselves enveloped as it were, in thunder and lightning. All the stones and rocks around them emitted electric flames, and yet the summit of Mont Blanc, and the sky around it, was perfectly clear. In 1867, Saussure, Jalabert, and Pietet were on the Brevan, at an altitude of 2,520 meters. They soon experienced a strange pricking sensation at their fingers' ends on stretching them out. This sensation became stronger and stronger, and at length electric

sparks could be drawn from Jalabert's hat-band, which was of gold lace, and from the knob of his cane. As the storm was raging above their heads, they had to descend some twenty-five or thirty meters, where the influence of this electricity was no longer felt. Another instance of this occurred on July 10, 1863, when Mr. Weston and several other tourists ascended the Jungfrau, and there the snow itself, which fell during the storm which overtook them, proved to be electric.

A SINGULAR discovery has just been made at Chagny (Saone-et-Loire), by workmen engaged in digging the foundations of a railway shed. At a depth of about nine meters, in a stratum of sandy clay and ferruginous oxides, remains of proboscideans (elephants, rhinoceroses, &c.), were brought to light, comprising several back teeth and a formidable tusk in large fragments, which, on being put together, constituted a length of seven feet. The depth at which this was found was still six meters higher than the level of the most considerable inundations of the Dhoune, and in an undisturbed stratum. So far, there is nothing absolutely extraordinary; but who would have thought of finding, underneath the bed containing these fossils of the tertiary period, an aqueduct of the most primitive kind and of human workmanship? Yet such was the case, the only instance of the kind on record. It is explained by M. Tremaux, who relates the circumstance, by supposing, what seems indeed to have been the fact, that the tertiary fragments above alluded to have been washed into the trench by a violent inundation, and thus filled up the aqueduct. The latter is about 80 centimeters in depth 60 centimeters broad at the bottom, and only 40 in breadth at the upper surface. It is not easy to account for this principle of making the conduit narrower at the top than at the bottom; at all events the small dimensions of the cavity were evidently caused by the want of proper tools.

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