



MAJOR PINTO IN AFRICA.

MUCH of the ground traversed by Major Pinto is more or less known, but to him belongs the signal honour of having discovered the great Zambesi affluents, and of giving to the world some idea of the hitherto unknown countries and peoples in that part of Africa. There can be but one opinion about his indomitable perseverance, unsurpassed by any, though equalled by some other explorers, and the importance of his travels both to ethnographical and geographical science.

Serpa Pinto had already had some experience of Africa, and had also read and thought much about the subject, when, in the summer of 1877, he was appointed to the command of a Portuguese geographical expedition to South Central Africa. Two other gentlemen, Signors Capello and Ivens, were associated with him in the command. Major Pinto landed at the Loanda, on the West Coast of Africa, and found what was to be his plague and curse all through his journeyings—the difficulty of getting carriers necessary for the transport of the baggage. At Boma he was fortunate enough to meet Stanley, who was returning from his great expedition. In Benguella some bearers were procured—in all about seventy—but there were 400 loads in addition, and these had to be left to be forwarded to Bihé. Some more baggage arriving at the Domte, a hundred other men were necessary for its transport, but they were not to be found. Pinto was obliged to content himself with thirty men pressed into his service, and to push forward to Quillengues. At Caconda he had to

go out in search of bearers, and, while absent at this duty, he received word from Capello and Ivens that they had resolved to go on without him. Pinto was thus left alone with ten men in a place where even Silva Porto, an old trader, had to “fight his way through hordes of savages eager after plunder.” Should he turn back to Benguella, or go forward, in spite of a thousand difficulties and dangers, to Bihé? With a courage and a resolution beyond all praise, he resolved to go forward. Having secured forty bearers for the same number of loads sent on by his late companions, he looked forward to renewing his journey, but, to his dismay, the bearers decamped in the night with their loads! By the assistance of two chiefs, a few bearers were secured, and, leaving the rest of the loads to be forwarded, he once more resumed his march. Difficulties, however, seemed to multiply at every step; he was now prostrate with fever, now racked with rheumatic pains; now he was in trouble with his bearers, and again he was a prey to hunger and thirst. In endeavouring to cross the river Cuqueima, also, he was nearly drowned.

“I learned that the river Cuqueima was extraordinarily full, and that to wade across it was simply impossible; but hearing that a small canoe was to be had just below the cataract, I determined to go on and pass the river at that spot.

On reaching the stream, it became necessary to caulk the canoe with moss, for it was a wretched old thing, and would barely sustain the weight of a couple of men. The river, swollen with the late rains, was rushing along with great rapidity. After leaping over the rocks which formed the cataract, the waters divided, leaving an islet in the

centre, and shortly after they blended again into one channel, some 110 yards wide.

That was the spot selected for crossing. I was laid at the bottom of the canoe with the utmost care, as every involuntary jolt wrung from me a cry of pain. A skilful boatman handled the paddle, and the canoe left the bank.

The space to be traversed, as I have mentioned above, was scarcely more than 110 yards, but the water was not only made perilous by the rapidity of the current, but by the excessive 'choppiness' of the surface caused by the proximity of the falls.

The boatman steered his canoe for the ait, and until he reached the junction of the waters all went right enough; but there the fragile skiff, caught in the furious eddies, could not be persuaded to advance a foot in spite of all the skill and strength of the negro. As I lay, I saw the water leaping in foamy waves about us, becoming larger and more threatening as we got more into the current, and I began to comprehend the extreme peril in which I was placed.

I tried to move one of my arms, but only called forth a groan with the effort. I gave myself up for lost, for if the canoe went to the bottom I was surely incapable of swimming. The canoe, worked upon by the eddies of the seething water, would not go forward, and suddenly the unfortunate skiff began to whirl round itself. My boatman, apprehending we should go to the bottom, determined to jump overboard to lighten the canoe, and warning me of his intention, leaped into the stream.

The canoe, thus lightened, floated certainly higher, but scarcely improved my position, as it was now at the entire mercy of the rushing water.

All of a sudden, a wave leaped over the side and soaked me through. My senses for the time almost forsook me, and I scarcely knew what occurred, until I found myself swimming with one

arm with all my remaining strength, whilst the other hand was endeavouring to keep from out the water one of the chronometers I happened to have with me.

My sensations returned in the act of swimming, and I remember being conscious of a certain pride in thus buffeting with and overcoming the waves—a task that would have been easy enough to me under ordinary circumstances, as I had been accustomed from childhood to wrestle with the rapids of my native Douro.

The negroes, who are ever ready to admire feats of physical skill, stood upon the bank and animated me with cries of applause. My pains had ceased, my fever was gone as if by magic, and I felt, whilst the excitement lasted, as though my strength had returned to me.

When the canoe foundered, out of a hundred men that were present at the spectacle, and stood open-mouthed and undecided as they looked on, one at least tempted the perils of the waters, and leaped in to save me. A less skilful swimmer than myself, he did not reach the bank till after I had done so, nor did he render me any help; but his devotion at such a time made a deep impression upon me which will never be effaced. He was one of my own negroes, Garanganja, who, poor fellow, subsequently went out of his mind, unable to bear up against the misery and privations to which we were subjected.

When I got to land I found myself, as I have mentioned, without either pain or fever. I stripped at once; but unfortunately I had no change of clothes, as the whole of the baggage was still on the other side of the stream, so that I was compelled to remain exposed to the burning rays of the sun until they had thoroughly dried my things. The consequence was, the pains and fever came back with redoubled violence, and I remembered no more until I found myself next day lying on a bed in the

compound of the Annunciada, the late dwelling-place of the trader Guilherme Gonçalves, Verissimo's father."

When sufficiently recovered, Pinto left the Bihé with the design of making directly for the Upper Zambesi and surveying the affluents of the left bank of the stream. He had been at considerable pains before starting to make tables of square and cube roots, and sundry trigonometrical forms, for by an oversight his mathematical books had been sent back to Portugal from Loando. He had also made a large quantity of cartridges and iron pellets as a substitute for bullets. His bearers once more decamped, but securing the help of a few new ones, he commenced his march. By the time, however, that he arrived at the banks of the Cuanza, he had repeatedly to undergo the old experiences with his carriers, and was in the end compelled to destroy sixty-one loads. After a chequered but fairly prosperous march, Pinto arrived at the banks of the Cuchibi river in Amhiella land. Here, among others, he came in contact with a race little known, and low down in the scale of civilization—the Mucasseques.

"During the afternoon my negroes captured in the forest two Mucasseques, whom they at once brought before me. The poor savages were trembling with fear, and gave themselves up for lost. They knew a little of the Ambuella dialect, and by means of an interpreter we were able to understand each other. They imagined that sentence of death was about to be passed upon them, or that, at least, the rest of their days was to be spent in slavery.

I desired my men to let them go, and return them their arms. I then told them that they were free, and might return to their people, and I gave them also a few strings of beads for their wives. Their surprise knew no bounds, and they had much ado to believe that I was in earnest in what I said and did.

Having ordered them something to eat, I inquired whether they would take me to see their camp?

After a warm discussion between them—carried on in a language unknown to all the bystanders, and completely different in intonation to any tongue I had hitherto heard spoken in Africa—they said they were quite willing to conduct me to their tribe if I would trust myself to go alone. I accepted the offer, and immediately started with the two ill-favoured aborigines.

Accustomed as I was to the forest, I had much ado to keep up with my agile guides, who more than once had to wait for me to join them. An hour's fatiguing walk brought us to a patch of cleared ground, in the middle of which was the encampment of the tribe. Its inmates were three other men, seven women, and five children. A few branches of trees, bent downwards, with others interlaced in front, constituted their only shelter. Of cooking appliances there was not a semblance. Their food consisted of roots and fragments of flesh roasted upon wooden spits. Salt is quite unknown to them.

Both men and women barely cover their nakedness with small monkey-skins. Their arms are bows and arrows.

I had come among them, but was perfectly at a loss how to act now I had done so, for we neither of us could understand the other. I thought the best thing to do was to ingratiate the women, so gave them a few strings of beads I had brought with me for the purpose. They received them, however, without the slightest sign of pleasure at the gift.

I was touched by the abject misery of these poor people. I examined them closely, and was much struck by their excessive ugliness. The eyes were small, and out of the right line; the cheek-bones very far apart, and high; the nose flat to the face, and nostrils disproportionately wide. The hair was crisp and

woolly, growing in separate patches, and thickest on the top of the head. A few strips of the skin of some animal, encircling their wrists and ankles, constituted their sole ornament, and these were perhaps worn rather as amulets than for the purpose of adornment.

I managed to make my guides understand that I wanted to return, when, without leave-taking, they preceded me, and just as night fell left me at the edge of the wood, where I could hear the voices and merry songs of the people of my camp.

During my stay on the Cuchibi, I managed to gather a few more scraps of information about these strange aborigines. The Mucassequeres occupy, jointly with the Ambuellas, the territory lying between the Cubango and Cuando, the latter dwelling on the rivers and the former in the forests. In describing the two tribes, one may say that the latter are barbarians and the former downright savages.

They hold but little communication with each other, but, on the other hand, they do not break out into hostilities. When pressed by hunger, the Mucassequeres will come over to the Ambuellas, and procure food by the barter of ivory and wax. Each tribe would seem to be independent, and not recognise the common chief. If they do not fight with their neighbours, they nevertheless quarrel among themselves; and the prisoners taken in these conflicts are sold as slaves to the Ambuellas, who subsequently dispose of them to the Bihé caravans.

The Mucassequeres may be styled the true savages of South tropical Africa. They construct no dwelling-houses, or anything in the likeness of them. They are born under the shadow of a forest-tree, and so they are content to die. They despise alike the rains which deluge the earth, and the sun which burns it; and bear the rigour of the seasons with the same stoicism as the

wild beasts. In some respects they would seem to be even below the wild denizens of the jungle, for the lion and tiger have at least a cave or den in which they seek shelter, whilst the Mucassequeres have neither. As they never cultivate the ground, implements of agriculture are entirely unknown; roots, honey, and the animals caught in the chase, constitute their food, and each tribe devotes its entire time to hunting for roots, honey, and game.

They rarely sleep to-day where they lay down yesterday. The arrow is their only weapon, but so dextrous are they in its use, that an animal sighted is as good as bagged. Even the elephant not unfrequently falls a prey to these dextrous hunters, whose arrows find every vulnerable point in his otherwise impervious hide."

From the Ambuellas, Pinto received great kindness, the two daughters of the King—with whom he had a strange experience—acting as his guides to the limits of their father's territory. From this point until the Zambesi was reached, our explorer knew nothing but pain, privation, and anxiety. An imposing reception by King Tobossi could not obliterate the fact that Pinto was at the end of his resources, and that he was once more the miserable victim of fever. Moreover, troubles and dangers began to thicken around him. Rumours of the unsettled state of the country caused several of his bearers to desert him at the moment he was most needing their services, and the King was becoming very difficult to deal with. At last he ordered Pinto out of his territory; but the Major refused to go. Had it not been for Machanana, an old friend of Livingstone, and, therefore, a lover of the white man, Pinto would have been assassinated; for a motion to that effect had been proposed in the King's Privy Council. Plots, however, were laid for his life. A native tried to kill him, and some of his own trusted followers sought

to betray him. He discovered the plot; but this did not prevent the people from firing the encampment.

"Night came down serene and fresh, and I, seated at the door of my hut, was thinking of my country, my relatives, and friends. I was musing also upon the future fate of my enterprise, so seriously threatened in the country where I was at present sojourning; but though sad thoughts would often chase the bright ones from my mind, I lost neither faith nor hope of bringing my undertaking to a successful issue. Still, the event of the night before was a black cloud, which I essayed in vain to banish from my memory.

My Quimbaires, who had retired within their huts, were chatting round their fires, and I, alone, of all my company, was in the open air. Suddenly my attention was caught by a number of bright lights flitting round the encampment. Unable as I was at the moment to explain the meaning of this strange spectacle, nevertheless my mind misgave me as to its object, and I jumped up and looked out from the cane-fencing which surrounded my dwelling. Directly I caught a view of the field, the whole was revealed to me, and an involuntary cry of horror escaped from my lips. Some hundreds of aborigines surrounded the encampment, and were throwing burning brands upon the huts, whose only covering was a loose thatch of dry grass.

In a minute the flames, incited by a strong east wind, spread in every direction. The Quimbaires, in alarm, rushed out from their burning huts, and ran hither and thither like madmen. Augusto and the Benguello men gathered quickly about me. In the presence of such imminent peril, there fell upon me, what I have more than once experienced under similar circumstances, namely, the completest self-possession. My mind became cool, and I felt only the determination to come out victorious.

I called aloud to my people, half demented at finding themselves begirt by a ring of fire, and succeeded in collecting them together in the space occupying the centre of the camp. Aided by Augusto and the Benguello men, I dashed into my hut, then in flames, and managed to get out in safety the trunks containing the instruments, my papers, the labours of so many months, and the powder. By that time the whole of the huts were ablaze, but happily the fire could not reach us where we stood. Verissimo was at my side. I turned to him and said, "I can defend myself here for a considerable time; make your way through, where and how you can, and speed to Lialni. There see Lobossi, and tell him that his people are attacking me. See also Machanana, and *inform* him of my danger."

Verissimo ran towards the burning huts, and I watched him till he disappeared amid the ruins. By that time the assegais were falling thickly round us, and already some of my men had been badly wounded, among others Silva Portos, negro Jamba, whose right eyebrow was pierced by one of the weapons. My Quimbaires answered these volleys with rifle-balls, but still the natives came on, and had now made their way into the encampment, where the huts, all lying in ashes, offered no effective barrier to their advance. I was standing in the middle of the ground before alluded to, guarding my country's flag, whilst all round me my valiant Quimbaires, who had now recovered heart, were firing in good earnest. But were they all there? No. One man was wanting—one man whose place before all others should have been at my side, but whom no one had seen—Caumbrica, my second in command, had disappeared.

As the fires were going down, I perceived the danger to be most imminent. Our enemies were a hundred to our one. It was like a glimpse of the infernal

regions to behold those stalwart negroes, by the light of the lurid flames, darting hither and thither, screaming in unearthly accents, and ever advancing nearer beneath the cover of their shields, whilst they brandished in the air, and then cast their murderous assegais. It was a fearful struggle, but wherein the breech-loading rifles, by their sustained fire, still kept at bay that horde of howling savages.

Nevertheless, I resolved in my mind that the contest could not long continue thus, for our ammunition was rapidly disappearing. At the outset, I had but 4,000 charges for the Snider rifles, and 20,000 for the ordinary; but it was not the latter which would save us, and directly our firing should slacken, through the falling off of our rapidly charged breech-loaders, we should be overwhelmed by the bloodthirsty savages.

Augusto, who fought like an enraged lion, came to me, with anguish depicted in his face, as he held up his rifle, which had just burst. I passed the word to my little nigger Pepeca to give him my elephant rifle and cartridge box. Thus armed, the brave fellow ran to the front, and discharged his piece point blank against the enemy where their ranks were thickest. At the instant, the infernal shouts of the assailants changed their tone, and amid screams of fright, they precipitately fled. It was not till the following day that I learned through King Lobossi what had produced this sudden change in the aspect of affairs. It was solely due to the unexpected shots of Augusto. In the cartridge-box entrusted to him were some balls charged with nitro-glycerine. The effect of these fearful missiles, which decapitated or otherwise tore in pieces all those subject to their explosion, had produced the timely panic among those ignorant savages, who fancied they saw in this novel assault an irresistible sorcery. I saw at once that I was saved."

Pinto escaped Scylla only to fall into

Charybdis. Almost within sight of the burned encampment, his people, without any warning, deserted him. Eight only remained faithful. "I could not but bow my head," he says, "before this last heavy blow which had been dealt me, and a terrible tightening of the heart awakened for the first time since I set foot in Africa the presentiment that I was lost. I was in the centre of Africa, in the midst of the forest, without resources, possessing some thirty bullets at most, when to the sole chance of bringing down game I had to look for food, when, in fact, game only could save our lives, and when I had as supporters but three men, three lads, and two women." In his depression Pinto suddenly thought of the rifle the king had presented him with. In its case he found the apparatus necessary for casting bullets and charging cartridges. He was soon at work using the lead attached to his fishing net. This work saved him. The resolution to proceed grew stronger than ever. At length, Lobossi gave him three canoes, and committing himself to the river, he left the inhospitable region behind.

He was rescued from his troubles further on by M. Coillard, a Protestant missionary, and that but for the kindness of his amiable wife he must have died in the heart of Africa. Pinto confesses he did not always show to this most Christian lady even the conduct one expects from a gentleman, not to speak of anything else; but considering the tremendous strain that had been put upon both body and brain, it is very likely that he was not always accountable for his actions or words. With the Coillards he crossed the desert from Patamatenga to Shoshong, and thence pressed on to Pretoria and Durban. Thus had he crossed the great continent from West to East after enduring unspeakable hardships; and after having rendered great service to geographical science in exploring that hitherto unknown region.