EXPLORING EAST AFRICA.

A TALK WITH DR. J. W. GREGORY.

BY J. D. SYMON.

TO the popular imagination the African explorer figures as a man of huge physique and commanding presence, one who cuts his way by main force through every obstacle and conquers the wilds of the Dark Continent by sheer prowess. But as a matter of fact many African explorers of note have not been huge men physically — Mr. Stanley himself is not a Goliath—and there are other things than mere force necessary to effect successful exploration. Force, it is true, is sometimes indispensable, but there is the mightier weapon of tact and adroit leadership, which will often bring a man through, where rougher persuasion would fail. It was therefore no surprise to me to find in Dr. Gregory a man not altogether of herculean proportions; although I was well aware that he had performed, practically single-handed, almost herculean feats of African exploration, which have laid the foundation of a great reputation as traveller and scientific explorer. One cannot however be long in Dr. Gregory's company without realising the tremendous pluck, energy and determination which underlie his outward quietness of manner, and which, combined with a ready wit and an ability to make the best of every situation, have contributed to his success as a leader of men, where men are for the most part barbarous and where roads are sadly to seek.

From a photo by] DR. J. W. GREGORY. [*Russell.*

In the course of a long talk, Dr. Gregory told me many interesting details of his career, beginning with his school-days, which are not so very far distant.

"I was educated at Stepney Grammar School in Bow, and as a boy I was always very fond of topography. On my half-holidays I used to take long walks into the country and make little sketch-maps of the localities I visited. Then, at the same time, geological questions puzzled me. I would ask myself why rivers flowed in one direction and not in another. In the year 1879 I left school and went into the City where I remained till 1887. During my business life I continued my rambles,

still pursuing the old habit of drawing maps and thinking out questions, such as, 'Why has the Thames cut a valley for itself when there was a valley ready for it?' and so forth. In my holidays I travelled a little on the Continent, chiefly in Switzerland, visiting places of geological interest. In this way I went on till 1887, when I was offered a nomination to the geological department of the British Museum. This delighted me very much, for I detested office-work. I was successful in the examination for the British Museum, and took up my new duties at once. In the evenings I read science and qualified myself for the London University B.Sc. degree, which I obtained in due course. The longer vacations which the Museum allowed me I devoted to further travel in Switzerland, still keeping my interest in topography abreast of my geological studies. I was particularly interested in the Western States of America, which I desired to see, as the geological conditions there are so different from anything in Western Europe; so in 1891 I obtained leave of absence to visit the American museums and to study the Rocky Mountains and the great ranges of Colorado. I did some climbing on the Rockies, for my Swiss excursions had made me an enthusiastic mountaineer. How did I climb? I found the Austrian system with climbing-irons and a rope most serviceable in Africa. On the Rocky Mountains I was attacked by dysentery, and returned home. The following year I again visited Switzerland, and finished work for my doctor's thesis, but while abroad I was again attacked by my old enemy.

"Before the end of 1892 I was asked to join an expedition to East Africa as geologist. An African expedition had always been the dream of my life. I applied at once for leave of absence. This was granted for ten and a half months on condition that the Museum should have the first right to any specimens I brought home. This proviso was readily conceded by the promoters of the expedition, so in November we set out, arriving at Lamu in the middle of November. There the expedition dawdled, so that by February 12 a march of 50 miles inland was only effected. For causes which I needn't particularise, the expedition fell to pieces and was abandoned."

"Not a very happy ending to your dream, Dr. Gregory?"

"No; but happily it didn't end there. I was determined not to be done. My leave was rapidly running out, the rainy season was at hand, but it was now or never. I might not see Africa again in a hurry. So I got together forty Zanzibaris and some odd equipment and started inland again on my own account."

"Without any other Europeans?"

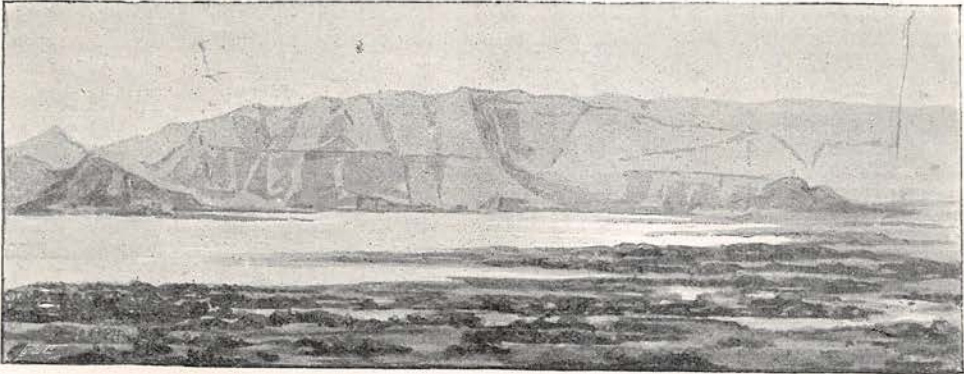
"I could find no white man to accompany me. You think my force was small. Well I was warned that a large force was necessary as I'd to pass through the country of the warlike Masai, of whom the papers have been full lately with regard to the massacre of that Uganda caravan—but of that later. Well, to return. It has been often said that a force of 1000 is necessary, but so large a number is, in my opinion, certainly needless. Tact and discretion can do a great deal. Some said I succeeded in getting through because the Masai knew that a powerful caravan was on the march from Uganda. The real reason was, I think, that we were well organised, and then"—added the Doctor slyly—"there's a Zanzibari proverb, 'he travels safe who is guarded by poverty.'"

"Here," continued Dr. Gregory, turning to a map of East Africa, "is our route. I was making for the Great Rift Valley, which I was anxious to examine geologically. We had started from Mombasa, on the coast, and were going to the north-west. I was ill both at and after the start, and the rains were already upon us, but by hard marching we reached Fort Smith, the British East African Company's station, and from there pushed on to the Kikuyu scarp, from which we descended into the Kedong Valley, which we crossed in a north-westerly direction and made Lake Naivasha."

"May I inquire if the scientific side of your travels is capable of being understanded of the layman, Dr. Gregory?"

"I think it is, and of that I'll have something to tell you presently. At this point it is most appropriate to say a word about the Masai, for at Lake Naivasha, just at the spot shown in this sketch, I had my first difficulty with that tribe. What I have to say has an interesting bearing on the recent massacre of the caravan. Dread of this formidable tribe has kept the country unexplored until comparatively recent times, and indeed it was the terror of their name that made Stanley choose the Congo route for his Emin Relief Expedition, instead of the route from Mombasa, which he first contemplated. It was at Naivasha, then, that I had the first taste of the Masai quality. I wished to halt for fifteen days or so on the lake shore, and was rather annoyed when a band of insolent young warriors forbade us

to encamp. One appeared at the door of my tent and wanted to enter. 'El Moru?' I inquired ('Are you an elder?'), and when he cheekily replied 'El Moran' (warrior), I kicked him away and told him to leave the camp, which his comrades compelled him to do. I sent for some Masai elders and ordered a 'shauri' (council). Seeing that a longer halt was impracticable, I merely asked permission to stay where I was for the night, to buy wood and water and to push northward to Lake Baringo. Their reply was brief: 'You have no business here; pack up and return.' Knowing that the way to manage the Masai was by 'bluff,' I said I was not going back, I would halt for the night; they must decide whether we were to be friends or foes. Then they altered their tone and demanded *hongo* (passage money). I had no great objection to pay *hongo*, but they asked more than my whole stock of goods. So I pointed first to the bales piled in the centre of the camp, then to my guard, who were standing with their rifles at the 'ready,' and told my worthy friends that whatever *hongo* they wanted they must come and take. This rather took them down, so they departed with threats of what would happen next day. As soon as they were gone we made a zareba of thorn bushes and stood to arms all that rainy night, but no attack was attempted. Next day the game of brag and bluster was resumed; they boasted of having massacred caravans of twenty times our strength, and taunted us with the weakness of our numbers. Any concession would now have ruined the whole expedition, so there was nothing for it but to answer defiance with defiance. I made them a speech in which I let them know that I meant to go on at all hazards, and that if harm befel us it would be the worse for them, for there was approaching from Uganda a caravan with warriors more in number than there were papyrus stems about Lake Naivasha."



VIEW ACROSS LAKE NAIVASHA

"Did you speak through an interpreter?"

"No, my interpreter, Ramathan, translated the little harangue for me during the night, and I relieved the tedium of the watch by learning it off by heart. When I had spoken the Masai withdrew, and for a little matters looked uncomfortable, but we made a start, and the elders, seeing us determined to go, became more friendly. At last the chief came up and held out a knobkerry for me to shake. I shook it, and in a minute or two he presented it again. This time he too shook his end, and the ceremony was repeated a third time with greater vigour. He walked by my side for a little way, and at last held out his hand. We shook hands, first coldly, then more cordially, and when we had walked another hundred yards the chief spat on me, a civility which I had been hoping for, and which I returned with a becoming degree of heartiness. Then I felt that the worst was over, for if the Masai retire from a conference without spitting the spit of peace, there is trouble ahead. The crowd of El Moran followed us across the plain, at first quietly, but at last they grew mischievous, and tampered with one of our donkeys. But I kept the upper hand of them, and the judicious persuasion of our rifle-butts brought them to order. I made them catch and bring back the donkey, and after this they gave less trouble. Late in the afternoon a troop came up and said they had been sent to dance to us, so I put some marks in the ground as a limit of approach, and commanded a Masai elder to sit on a

box before me, within easy reach of my revolver. My men stood to their posts and I gave permission for the performance to begin. It was certainly very picturesque. Among others, they gave us their dance of victory. I told them I wanted to see that, but they needn't show me their dance of defeat, for if they didn't behave better they would soon dance that in real earnest. At the close of this Wild East show I sent the performers away contented with a couple of shillings' worth of beads. During the next night I kept close watch. A surprise attack was attempted, but a few shots fired over the enemies' heads were sufficient to send them flying. No further attack was delivered, and till four in the morning I turned in to snatch the first three hours of continuous sleep I had enjoyed since we had left Fort Smith. A day or two later we got clear away from the Masai, and I was glad to turn from anthropology to geology and botany.

"As we pushed northward to Lake Baringo we encountered troubles of a different sort. At Lake Losuguta we found the water hot and sulphurous, and for forty hours we were without a drink. Skirting the lake on the eastern side we at length found a river which, according to former maps, had no business there, but which was fortunately drinkable. The river, however, had to be bridged, and so we arrived at Njemps several days late, only to discover that there was a serious famine in the land, and that the starving natives were living on the bark of trees. There was food in North Kamasia, and thither I sent to purchase it, but a legacy of European dread defeated the negotiation. I had accordingly to rush south-east across the great sacred land of the Masai, the plateau of Laikipia, which we traversed with bad luck dogging our footsteps. Scanty food, scantier game, and the necessity of keeping constant outlook for the Masai made the journey extremely trying, but we got across without any encounter, and reached Kikuyu in safety, where we were again in trouble for food. The people were hostile and would sell us nothing, but after three days of 'shauri' we contracted the rite of blood-brotherhood and obtained what we wanted."

"It would be interesting," I suggested, "to know exactly how the ceremony of contracting blood-brotherhood is performed."

"It is not so very terrible," the Doctor replied. "A goat was killed and a little piece cut from the liver. Then the chief and I drew each a little blood from our arms and smeared it on the bit of liver, of which we both swallowed a morsel, and were straightway blood-brothers for all time."

"Was it not rather—shall I say repulsive?"

"Oh, not at all," the Doctor answered airily, so I did not press the question, for I reflected that no doubt the excellent chief, Iyutha, will in due course read his WINDSOR MAGAZINE by the camp fire, and it would not do for him to discover that his blood-brother thought anything but highly of the ceremonial.

"It would be too long," continued Dr. Gregory, "to give you a full account of my ascent of Mount Kenya, which I approached from the Kikuyu country, striking eastward into the forest zone. As we ascended my men suffered terribly from cold, and blizzards of sleet and hail. The latter part of my climb had to be performed alone. No, I did not expect to reach the summit, but I made 16,800 feet, and had accomplished my scientific objects when a terrific snow-storm compelled me to return, after some five days on the mountain."

"How did the hardships of mountaineering affect your party?"

"I'll tell you an interesting story of fidelity. During a blizzard one of my porters fell behind, and when we were about to encamp I learned that he had not come in. My headman and askaris had pluckily tried to go back to the rescue, but could not face the storm, so I at once rushed back, and after an hour's search found the man, half buried in snow, lying on his load nearly frozen to death. I had to carry him back to the camp. Next day I told him he was a fool to have sat shivering there, and that he should have left his load and come on. He answered reproachfully: 'What! leave my load without my master's order to do so! How could I?' Such is the stuff of which a good Zanzibari porter is made. But my favourite porter, Fundi Mabruk, had no great stomach for mountaineering, so far as actual scrambling went. Once he consented to be roped, but it wouldn't do; one fall settled him. 'That is all very well,' he objected, 'for wajuxi (lizards) and Wazungu (Europeans), but Zanzibaris can't do that. You'd better come back, master. I promised to follow you anywhere in Africa, but how can I when the path stands up on end?'. So I had to climb alone. But generally the Zanzibari are capital fellows. I had no deserters, and Fundi was no exception, though Alpine climbing was not in his line. With the Zanzibari one can accomplish

anything by good nature and chaff. Once when famine stared us in the face they hesitated about advancing, and asked what they would do when our scanty provisions failed. 'Why then,' I retorted, 'you must just eat me!' and the prospect was sufficiently tempting to urge them forward.

"On my return from Kenya the Wakikuyu again offered some resistance. The chief told me frankly, 'You white men have faces that smile like the sky, but you are bad inside.' As I was the first white man who had been in his country his generalisation was sweeping. But in one point he was correct, for at the moment I was very bad inside — physically I mean. However my candid friend was also bad inside — with toothache — so I conciliated him and his molar by an injection of cocaine, accompanied by the suggestion that if I had to go back the 'devil in his tooth' would likely go back too, so he allowed me to proceed in peace. From this point to the coast the march was of little interest."

"And now, Dr. Gregory, may I remind you of your promise to say something about the objects of your expedition?"

Dr. Gregory again had recourse to the map, which, with the help of a more recent one of his own, afforded no difficulty in following his account.

"You see," he said, "from Lebanon almost to the Cape runs a long deep valley occupied by the sea, by salt steppes where lakes have been, and by a series of over twenty lakes, of which only one has an outlet to the sea. This depression is known as the Great Rift Valley, and is unique so far as the earth is concerned, though, by the way, the 'rills' on the moon must be very like it. The whole valley is haunted by legends of great structural changes, which must have taken place at a date geologically recent. The question arises: Is this cleft due to accident or to one great connected series of earth-movements? and as our geological knowledge of the region was based on insufficient data it was with the hope of obtaining more precise information that I was so eager to accept the offer of joining the first ill-fated expedition as geologist. I hoped that as the formations were more recent the methods would be more clearly shown. The results of my private expedition were, everything considered, such as to make me content that I had run the risk. On Mount Kenya I accomplished all that I had proposed to myself: the collection of the flora and fauna of the different zones; an inquiry into the nature of its Alpine flora; a geological examination of the mountain; the quest of true glaciers, and an inquiry into their former extent. Being single-handed, and badly off for instruments, I was often at considerable disadvantage. I lost my only camera early. It fell into a stream, and the bearers, who had been specially charged as to its safety, in consternation sent forward for me to return to the scene of the mishap. When I reached them the unfortunate instrument, still in its dripping cover, was placed in the midst of a sorrowful circle, who sat gazing upon it in silence. The slide shutters were by that time hopelessly warped, and the instrument was useless.

"I have delivered about fifty scientific papers to various societies, including the Zoological, the Geological, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Geological Society of America. In 1893 I gave the evening lecture to the British Association at Oxford on 'Problems of African Geology.' It may be worth while to mention that Toynbee Hall has always had a great attraction for me. I've been connected with the natural history society there, both as secretary and president."

"And now, Dr. Gregory, just a final word about your books, of which I think you have three in the press at present."

"Mr. Murray is about to publish for me 'The Great Rift Valley,' a narrative of my journey, with some account of the problems to be worked out there. Besides this book I have on hand the Bryozoa catalogue and work for one of the parts of the 'Oxford Natural History' in the Clarendon Press."

Unlike many of Herodotus' "travellers' tales," however, Dr. Gregory's narrative needs no pinch of salt, for he speaks with certainty concerning those things which he has himself seen. He even discovered some pigmies, who were reported as existing in 1844, but have not been seen since by any white man. Among the most interesting of the many new plants discovered by him is that known to botanists as the *Lobelia Grejorii*. It is to be hoped in the interests of many branches of learning that Dr. Gregory's physicians will not long find it necessary to dissuade him from returning to Africa, for it would seem that he is peculiarly capable of shedding yet greater light on the secrets of the Dark Continent, where this young man of science has proved himself a veteran in achievement.