

## Chapter Ten

# The War Renewed and the Battle of Dul Madoba

*Woe to the conqueror!  
Our limbs shall lie as cold as theirs  
Of whom his sword bereft us,  
Ere we forget the deep arrears  
Of vengeance they have left us!*

Thomas Moore

On 8 April 1910 *The Times* published a letter to the Editor from its own unnamed Military Correspondent. This correspondent was Lieutenant Colonel Charles à Court Repington, CMG. Repington's brilliant military career had been ended by a scandal. A married man, he had apparently had not a few extra marital liaisons, in the pursuit of which he was hardly exceptional for one of his class, the Prince of Wales setting an example to the 'Fast Set'. However, one such was formed with the wife of a brother officer; on discovery, he had signed a formal agreement never to communicate with her again – and he had broken the agreement – although there were other circumstances, including the ill-treatment of the lady in question, which clouded the issue and in his eyes exculpated him. Be that as it may, the army lost a very talented officer, his clubs lost a paying member, and *The Times* gained a very able military correspondent.

The letter was headed 'The Scuttle from Somaliland', which Repington referred to as 'one of the most deplorable acts ever committed by a British Government'.

'...It is clearly shown', he wrote, 'that the Mullah bluffed the King's Government out of a country mis-named a protectorate, caused Ministers to remove their troops in headlong flight to the coast, and caused them to desert tribes, very numerous in the aggregate, who are now suffering in their properties and their persons for their misplaced confidence in the "gracious favour and protection of Her Majesty the Queen – Empress" which they were promised by treaty.'

He continued:

There is some evidence in their words, but not in their acts, that the King's Ministers cared anything for the fate of these unfortunate people. The concern of the Government, from first to last, was not whether the Protectorate was protected, but whether protection, in its purely financial aspect, paid. Their all-compelling fear was that, if they did not cut and run, leaving their friends in the lurch, they might have been obliged to adopt some act of vigour which would have cost money, and so have been doubly displeasing to the principles of their party. For government in its true sense they did not care...

After further comments of the sort, including disparaging references to the Roman frontier policy – which Churchill seemed to admire, and loved to cite – Repington turned to a subject which would have caused grave embarrassment if the press had secured a 'leak':

What is the advice that Sir Reginald Wingate and Sir Rudolf Slatin have given? It is necessary that we should know it, *so that all the responsibilities may be ascertained.* [italics added] All that Lord Crewe admits is that the report of those authorities convinced him of the 'uselessness and impossibility of attempting to maintain the present state of things,' but this is not very novel, for all his officers had been telling him the same thing for months before...

Repington then sketched a plan of campaign which looked remarkably similar to that proposed by Gough, with whom he had possibly conferred, which included a force of 4000 men, part of which would be a mobile striking force. He concluded by predicting that this 'abject surrender to menaces' would have consequences across north east Africa.

It is interesting that throughout the article Repington's friend Winston Churchill was not mentioned as the author of the policy, neither was his crucial involvement in the decision referred to during the debate in Parliament. It was, of course, known to Cordeaux, who had seen Churchill's confidential Colonial Office memorandum, but no contemporary source revealed it to the public gaze.

In the Wingate Report, as we have seen, there had been criticisms of the policies by which the colonial authorities managed the Protectorate. Amongst these criticisms had been a report by Sir Rudolf Slatin on the irritation of the Somalis at the French Roman Catholic mission at Berbera and its treatment of Somali children. Berbera, Slatin noted, had been known as the 'Town of the Poor', for in a bad year the tribesmen sent their children there to fend for themselves. This Christian mission had been founded in April 1891 by Louis Lassere, Bishop of Morocco and Vicar Apostolic of Arabia, who with the permission of the assistant resident rented a house in Berbera for the purpose of feeding and educating waifs and strays. He was warned by the authorities not to attempt to proselytize the locals, and told that they would be required to leave if the locals objected to them. Indeed, the Mahomed

Isa tribe had already refused him residence. However, the residents of Berbera did not object when he was finally, and after much correspondence between officials, allowed a permanent site – although they were not consulted. Later, however, the Mission was not allowed to take in children save by the consent of their relatives or tribal leader, given before the District Officer. The Mission was later permitted to establish a rest home and garden at Shimbiraleh, where they also kept flocks and herds, on the same conditions. But all this aroused the indignation of the Sayyid and certainly enabled him to arouse the religious fanaticism of the local Somalis. The modern reader, scarred by recent revelations of the *damnable* actions of some Roman Catholic priests towards children in their care, might immediately think that the children had been ill-treated or abused; but the sins of the mission were, that they had fed and educated starving and homeless children, and had not only converted them to Christianity, a sin against their religion, but had de-tribalized them – a sin against all that the Somali people held dear.

‘The Kafirs are our enemies’, the Sayyid had written to the Aidegalla tribe in July 1895. ‘Do you not see that they have destroyed our religion and made our children their children.’<sup>2</sup>

The reader might think that the method of combating this advance of Christianity and Europeanism among their starving children which would be most congenial to a Muslim and a Somali would be to remove the children from the hands of the Christians by an equal or superior charity; but the poor waifs and orphans in Somaliland were not to benefit from a competition in kindness or pity, and in this the Sayyid demonstrated the difference between a fanatic fundamentalism and Islam, and between nationalist fervour and the love of a country and its people.

When Manning withdrew the British forces, the Roman Catholic Mission at Shimbiraleh was withdrawn as well. The Mission was ‘extremely poor’, wrote Manning to Lord Crewe, and on the way back to Berbera ‘much of their stock and private property was swept away and lost by the floods which were encountered...’

Manning further reported that, at Berbera, a guard of twenty-five Indian soldiers was placed over the Mission’s premises at night, which would become a ‘severe strain’ on the garrison’s strength. Manning therefore asked the Mission to retire to Aden, and requested that they be compensated with a gift of £100, which, he felt, ‘would be covered by savings on the 1910–11 estimates’.<sup>3</sup> This was sanctioned very quickly by HM Treasury.

A similar enforced withdrawal was made by the European staff of ‘The Somaliland Fibre and Development Company’, who were forced to leave their machinery and equipment at Mandera, as Manning felt that ‘it would have taken some months to transport it to the coast’. However, Manning reported that they were not very successful financially anyway.

The Roman Catholic Church, however, were not to be dismissed so easily. The Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne, now wrote to the Earl of Crewe, beginning:

Our Authorities in Rome are seriously preoccupied about some of the consequences of the *abandonment* [italics added] of Somaliland...

The consequences to which the Archbishop referred included not only material, but spiritual loss, as he added that:

It is stated that the Governor proposes that these children should now be returned to their relatives in the interior if the latter can be found; a proceeding which, it is not necessary to point out, would completely undo any work of evangelisation which may already have been accomplished...

However, the children’s relatives did not come forward, and could not be found, and the children therefore departed to Aden with the Mission.

The Church, having assessed its losses, now claimed 124,405 rupees (approximately £8400) in compensation, which it felt to be ‘far below’ its real losses.

The British authorities pointed out, however, that the Mission at Shimbiraleh was not formally recognized; that the flood was an ‘act of God’; and that Christian villages were the same as Muslim, i.e., the Government were not responsible for their losses. They accepted, however, (how could they deny it?) that the Government were responsible for the expulsion – for so it was – from Berbera. The Government valued the buildings which the Mission had to vacate in Berbera at £40,000 rupees (approximately £2600), and therefore on 8 June 1910 asked the treasury to sanction this sum, in addition to the £100 already paid. On 17 June the Treasury replied to the Colonial Office, politely asking why it was necessary to ‘call upon the Mission to withdraw from Berbera’, continuing with the very pertinent comment ‘It is not understood how the decision of His Majesty’s Government to withdraw from the interior affects the position of the Mission’.

The Colonial Office now replied to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury that the expulsion was ‘a precaution...in order to protect the Mission from the fanaticism of the Mohammedans. Their lordships will readily understand’, it was stated, ‘that it was essential to avoid all risk of any trouble of this kind, especially while the delicate operation of withdrawing from the interior was in progress.’

The Treasury understood this – after all, the desertion had been for financial reasons – and concurred in the payment.

A year later, the Vicar Apostolic of Aden asked permission to return to Berbera, promising to restrict his activities to mission work in the city, and to obey all Governmental orders; but the Government, still minding Sir Rudolf Slatin’s comments in the otherwise ignored and suppressed Wingate report concerning the unpopularity of the Mission among the Muslims, declined permission. By that time the mission was more needed than ever – at least by the rapidly increasing numbers of poor and orphans. Ominous signs of the collapse of order were not long in coming.

An upbeat Manning wrote to Lord Crewe, stating that he had withdrawn Customs Agents and Police from the small ports of Hais and Karam, and would be deciding whether to retain control of Bulhar and Zeyla. He drew the attention of the Noble Lord to a little problem. The Western Habr Yunis, rather than politely remonstrating with the Abyssinian Governor of Harrar, had raided the Abyssinian Ogaden to recover stolen stock:

‘...As I have already forecast in former despatches’, wrote Manning, ‘the condition of the interior is becoming unsettled, and disorders due to the absence of our control are occurring. For some time this state of affairs is likely to continue, until a *modus vivendi* has been established...’

Further, an engagement at Hardegga between the Sayyid’s forces and a combination of the Mijjertein and Dolbahanta,

ended as a severe reverse for the Mijjertein, who, having separated from the Dolbahanta, had attacked and defeated a dervish force advancing towards them, only to be surrounded and to run out of ammunition before supplies could be brought up. Reuter's agent, whose reporting seemed to Manning to be 'false or grossly exaggerated', had 'unfortunately' hit upon the truth about the ammunition.

The Foreign Office now contacted the Earl of Crewe, and forwarded a copy of a letter from the British Resident at Addis Ababa, Wilfred Thesiger, to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Thesiger reported that he had striven to re-establish the frontier agreement which had been made between Major Swayne and Ras Makunan, under which each side agreed to punish raiders from their respective territories. Accordingly, Thesiger had pressed the Abyssinians on this point, suggesting that an officer from each side should be appointed to sort out the tangle of claims and counter – claims which had accumulated. He had informed Manning, and duly asked for the services of an officer. Manning then informed him of the intention to withdraw all civil and military posts from the interior!

Thesiger wrote:

I am consequently now placed in a very difficult position. Having asked for and obtained from the Ethiopian Government satisfactory assurances that order will be restored, looted property returned, and raiding checked in future, I am no longer in a position to affirm that we on our side will do likewise...It is impossible to expect that the Abyssinian frontier tribes can be prevented from taking the law into their own hands under these circumstances, and when once they have been allowed to do so, they will always find a pretext for continual raiding.

Thesiger pointed out that, under these circumstances, the Ogaden tribes having long had greater facilities for obtaining rifles, the British tribes would be:

powerless to protect themselves either from the Mullah or the Ogaden tribes, and since we cannot in future extend to them more than a nominal protection, their only choice will be to throw in their lot with one or the other, or submit to being pillaged by both.

Thesiger concluded by requesting guidance on whether, in delimiting the frontier, to offer compensation to the Abyssinians in the form of additional (Somali) territory. In a later memorandum to Grey dated 15 April 1910, Thesiger added that:

...It is with considerable diffidence that I venture to give an opinion on such a difficult matter as the policy to be followed in Somaliland, but I feel it my duty to state that the policy of evacuation, as seen from the point of view of this legation, seems inevitably bound to produce a state of anarchy in Somaliland which will leave us eventually with no other alternative but to undertake a very costly and difficult expedition to pacify the country, or to give up all pretence of owning anything beyond a restricted area around Berbera, leaving it free for annexation by any nation which would undertake the responsibility.

Our present position, by which we claim the country while refusing to accept any administrative responsibility, appears to me untenable...

Thesiger suggested renouncing the eastern half of British Somaliland – even ceding it to Abyssinia – and simply holding the western half, which, he pointed out, 'had never even been threatened by the Mullah'.

In a separate despatch, Thesiger relayed a report from Mr Gerolimato, British Minister at Harrar, dated 8 April, that the Mijjertein defeat by the Sayyid's forces in the fight at Hardegga had been catastrophic, only seven surviving out of some three or four thousand, with some 900 rifles lost. This, Thesiger insisted, had been confirmed by the Italian Minister at Addis Ababa. If the Dolbahanta and Mijjertein combined were defeated, how were the others to face the Sayyid?

Curiously, on 27 May 1910 Manning, after looking at Zeyla, and concluding that both Zeyla and Bulhar should be retained, reported that he had visited Mr Gerolimato at Harrar, as he was, he stated:

Anxious to hear from Mr Gerolimato...his views as to the situation on the Abyssinian border as regards our tribes and the Ogaden, and also to collect any information bearing on the general situation as regards the Mullah, which, at the time of my visit, was very difficult to comprehend...

Manning stated that he had gained 'a clearer insight into the state of affairs on the Abyssinian border', without stating what that insight was. He mentioned nothing as to Mr Gerolimato's earlier misgivings about the results of the fight at Hardegga. He had himself estimated the Mijjertein losses at 250 men; he had also investigated the possibilities of using an Abyssinian site as a sanatorium for sick Somaliland officials, but specifically investigating Dirre-Dawa, reported that it was dirty, malarial and arid, with poor hotels, an epidemic of smallpox – and was difficult of access for an invalid. Clearly Brigadier-General Manning's information was scarcely reliable. Yet all this was despite the Medical Department and General Wingate recommending Sheikh for just such a role; even Churchill's memorandum had stated that:

...There would be no objection to the garrisons of Berbera, Bulhar and Zeyla spending the hot months at Sheikh or other convenient camping places on the Golis, provided that the political officers considered the country absolutely quiet.

Sheikh was around 40 miles from Berbera; but who among the supporters of the Government's policy ever thought that it would be absolutely quiet? It can be clearly seen that Manning did not.

However, the General had, on 29 April, written to Elgin that:

During the past month there has been nothing to report from the interior, except rumours... I have already stated that I am of opinion that the friendly tribes are now in a position to hold their own in any eventuality. The incident at Hardegga occurred at an unfortunate period, but it must be remembered that *it had no connection with our withdrawal to the coast* [italics added]...I believe that in the course of the next two months it will become evident that the system of tribal defence which I have instituted will provide a solution of the problem of actual defence against dervish attack. This would be a condition of affairs which was never reached while we occupied the interior, and therefore a very complete justification of the steps taken, which will prove themselves to be the best possible for the interests of the friendly tribes. I therefore consider that, unless any unforeseen contingency arises upsetting all previous calculations, it may be considered that the policy, as entrusted to me by His Majesty's Government, for the evacuation of the interior has been carried out, and that by the end of July my presence in the Somaliland Protectorate will no longer be required...I therefore request that I may be permitted to return to England, leaving Berbera on June 29th...

On 26 May Manning reported that '...Intelligence generally points to the breaking up of the dervishes, but I cannot gain reliable information...' By 31 May, referring to a reported defeat of the Bagheri (the Sayyid's own Ogaden tribe) at Balliwein, he estimated that the 'dervish' dead were equal in number to their losses in the Battle of Jidbali. Further, he reported that 'persistent rumour is current that the Mullah has either been killed or has died.' General Manning then went on to predict that, dervishism being defeated, the tribes would use their arms to fight each other, and that his successor, who he hoped would be Mr Byatt, must resist any attempt to intervene – at least before their ammunition ran out. Overflowing with optimism, no doubt fuelled partially by a strong desire to leave the country, he added that the garrison of Berbera might eventually be reduced to fifty men. This memorandum might have come as some relief to a Colonial Office which had tried – and signally failed – to prevail upon the Viceroy of India to undertake the task of garrisoning the Somaliland coast towns, Lord Morley, the Viceroy, laconically regretting that he was 'unable to concur in the proposal'.

However, Manning did comment on Thesiger's suggestion that the eastern half of the Protectorate should be ceded to the Abyssinians, pointing out that the Abyssinian Government, although 'organised and to a certain extent civilised, is still somewhat barbarous in its methods' and had been hated by the Somalis before the British had arrived. It 'would be regarded by Somalis generally as an act of treachery on our part, and would alienate any respect they may have for British rule', he added; a curious comment from a man who had just deserted them, and representing a nation which had a few years before 'ceded' what did not belong to them – the vast grasslands of the Ogaden – to the Abyssinians. However, Somaliland was perhaps fortunate that Thesiger's plan was not adopted.

On 16 June 1910 Manning reported that:

...there is little serious inter-tribal trouble, and reports go to show that the tribes are now peaceful and contented...I can only remark that though I have been optimistic throughout as to the results of leaving the tribes to their own defence, I had hardly hoped that a condition of affairs similar to that in the interior at present could have arisen in so short a period...The scheme for defence is now in working order. Whether it will be put to further tests I cannot definitely say, but the probability is that it will not...

'My further presence in Somaliland is unnecessary', said the dutiful soldier. The General then went on to list his achievements – retreat to the coast, evacuation of the Roman Catholic Mission and the Fibre Company, disbandment of police and troops, organization and arming of the tribes and the reduction of the political establishment. Desertion, betrayal and dismissal were presented as triumphs, and the erection of a house of cards as impregnable castellation.

Two days before leaving, Manning reported that a 'serious situation' had arisen at Hais, from which small port Manning had withdrawn both agents and police. Since the withdrawal, the Musa Ismail Turwa had ejected the Musa Areh, had fired on dhows trying to enter the port, and the master of one of them had been driven into the sea and drowned. They professed (though Manning doubted) that they were supporters of the Sayyid. In the generous spirit of religious fundamentalism they had exhumed the body of a British sailor who had died at sea and been buried there, and burnt it. Manning requested that a naval vessel bombard the town, destroying its four stone buildings.

After Brigadier-General Manning's departure, Horace Archer Byatt, the Secretary to the Administration, succeeded him as Acting Commissioner; he was not to be confirmed by King George V as Commissioner until July 1911. Byatt was born in March 1875, the son of a headmaster. He had attended Merchant Taylor's School from 1887 to 1894, graduated with honours in Classics at Lincoln College Oxford in 1898, and from December 1898 to December 1899 acted as a private tutor, a position which he left to enter Foreign Office service in Nyasaland, acting as Magistrate and Collector. He had been in Somaliland since September 1905, acting as an Assistant Political Officer and Assistant District Officer before becoming Secretary in August 1906. Cordeaux thought his intellectual attainments 'considerably above the average', and found him 'hardworking and painstaking', and said that he 'fully justified Swayne's good opinion' of him.<sup>4</sup>

One of his first acts was to confer with the Captain of HMS *Gibraltar*, which had been sent from Muscat to Berbera to carry out Manning's request for a destructive and indiscriminate retribution on the Musa Ismail Turwa at Hais. Byatt and the Captain agreed that there was 'no sufficient justification for bombarding Hais forthwith', and the ship duly proceeded to Hais under orders to 'use all possible care in confining punishment to the guilty parties'. The *Gibraltar* picked up the headmen of the tribe, and held them as hostages for the payment of a heavy fine, which was paid in full by November.

During August, all seemed well in the interior. After lengthy discussions with the Mijjertein Sultan and Dolbahanta Akils, Byatt reported that their tone and attitude seemed 'most satisfactory'. But by mid-September disquieting rumours were coming in – that the Mullah had pushed forward to Hardegga, and that the Dolbahanta and Mijjertein had abandoned Bohotle and the Ain Valley without a fight. On 19 September the rumour was confirmed as true. They were persuaded to return both by exhortation and a more effective withdrawal of subsidies, but were soon in retreat again. To their 'shamed surprise', reported Byatt, they discovered that the dervishes had not advanced at all.

A deserter reported to Byatt that the Sayyid had for some time simply refused to believe news of the British evacuation of the hinterland; perhaps he finally exclaimed, like Cromwell on seeing the Scots descend from the hills around Dunbar, 'the Lord hath delivered them into our hands'. Although less well armed with rifles than the Friendlies, he had – unlike them – an inflexible

purpose, an iron will, a remorseless, revengeful and terrifying cruelty and a poetic voice which still echoes an embittered defiance around those harsh hills and rivers of sand, inspiring or infecting each succeeding generation. Harassed by the Mijjertein, weakened by the losses at Hardegga, facing a drought at Illig, he had proposed to his supporters among the Dolbahanta and Warsangli to go to the Bagheri country in the Ogaden. The Dolbahanta had refused to go so far from home; the Warsangli had sent him a small supply of rice and cloth. Now the British had miraculously and ingloriously retreated, he changed his plans, and moved towards Gaolo (ending up by November 1910 at Goriasan) planning to replenish his stock in the time honoured way, at the expense of the Friendlies. Further, he sent parties forward to build two small stone forts at Urgia in Bur Anod (near Hudin). They were to be the first of many, and set the British a military problem which they 'failed to solve'.<sup>5</sup>

By December 1910 it was obvious to Byatt that Sir William Manning's system of paying one subsidy to the head of each clan unit, rather than to the Akil or leader of each subdivision, had failed. Intended to give power to the heads, it had resulted in further internecine quarrels, the Habr Yunis being the worst affected. Byatt now reversed this system, paying money to each Akil again, and he rather optimistically reported some positive results to the new Colonial Secretary, Lewis Vernon Harcourt.

By January 1911 the Sayyid had moved to the vicinity of Gorrowei, but Byatt had to report of the Friendlies that:

From Burao to the westward, among the Habr Yunis, Aidegalla, and Habr Awal, I regret to report the occurrence of frequent and somewhat serious tribal fights...I have succeeded in arranging terms in some instances, and am doing all in my power...to prevent the spread of dissensions...

From then on, inter-tribal relations went from bad to worse. On 23 August 1911 Byatt, newly promoted to Commissioner, wrote to Harcourt as follows:

...From the time of the withdrawal until March last various dissensions had taken place among our tribes...but it had been possible in nearly every instance to exert such influence as led to a settlement of these quarrels and to a restoration of peace between hostile sections. During the past six months, however, I much regret to find that these inter-relations of the tribes have changed very decidedly for the worse. Not only is every tribe now on terms of open hostility with every other, but each is divided against itself by differences between sections and sub-sections. Raiding and fighting is a matter of everyday occurrence and the total amount of bloodshed which has taken place is little short of alarming. The roads to the interior are no longer safe, so that representatives of the more distant tribes are unable to come down to the coast in order to discuss their affairs with the Government, and those on the coast fear to leave for the purpose of looking after their interests inland.

Byatt cited two 'main causes of the anarchy'; the influx of arms, and the perception of the tribes, 'which is steadily growing among all natives', that the British were unwilling – or unable – to intervene.

The arms themselves, blocked from entering via the ports west of Berbera, now came from Abyssinia via Djibouti, the Abyssinians not suppressing the trade although they had protested to Britain about issuing arms to the tribes. These latter, Byatt reported:

issued by Sir W. Manning for tribal defence have been sold, exchanged or discarded, to such an extent that the lists showing the numbers with each tribe are now worthless. It does not follow, as might be supposed, that our tribes, being well armed, are safe from outside attack. I feel certain that, if ever the Mullah were to advance, internal dissensions and hostile inter-relations would render their opposition of little effect...

Byatt proposed two remedies. First, that the Foreign Office should make strong representations to the Abyssinian Government to stop the trade in arms via the Ogaden. The second remedy was implied rather than spoken, for to the Liberal Government, and to the Giant within it, now Secretary of State for Home Affairs and soon to be First Lord of the Admiralty, it was unspeakable. Byatt continued:

...it is only latterly that the tribes have fully realised the meaning of our withdrawal. For many months they regarded it as merely a temporary measure, intended to demonstrate to them by its absence the real value of British administration, and there is still an idea and a hope that the interior may yet be re-occupied. But since during the present year they have seen several instances where looting on the main caravan roads and defiance of Government orders has not been followed up by active retaliation, the impression is gaining ground that it is the power rather than the will which is lacking, and, *unfortunately, this impression is, under present conditions, not incorrect.* [italics added] In former days it would have been sufficient to send mounted police to check caravan looting, but now that the tribes are fully armed there would be some risk in sending out the small force of mounted men at present available. *Ponies, moreover, are unsuited to desert work and less mobile than the old camel corps, for which, in my opinion, they should not have been substituted.*... [italics added]

After citing the fears of Government employees for their own safety, and the safety of their property, in the interior, Byatt concluded:

...It remains to be seen how far moral suasion may bring about a change for the better, and I hope that I may be able eventually to report an improvement; but the process of restoring order is likely, I fear, to be a difficult and a lengthy one.

Thus, in this missive – his, indeed, was a first class mind – Byatt had referred to the 'small force of mounted men *at present available*', and sown the seed of a new camel corps, whilst not actually recommending one, all the while referring regretfully to the *impression* of British powerlessness, rather than bemoaning the *fact*, which would not have been politic.

In late September 1911 Winston Churchill was invited to Archerfield, the Prime Minister's home in Scotland. Churchill had often involved himself in naval affairs, writing to Asquith direct, on the principle of Cabinet responsibility and because he relished any involvement in the armed forces. Originally he had been in favour of economy in the navy, but since the Agadir incident earlier in the year, when Germany had sent a gunboat, the *Panther*, to Morocco, he had argued for a strong navy. Asquith now offered him the position of First Lord of the Admiralty, which he accepted at once. He took office in October 1911, in a straight exchange of positions with Reginald McKenna.

It was quite usual, of course, for the Royal Navy to be involved in affairs in Somaliland, blockading and transporting, in intelligence work, and demonstrating British power. On 16 September 1911 the Admiralty informed the Colonial Office that HMS *Philomel*, due in Aden at the end of the month, had been directed to remain there and 'place herself in communication with the Commissioner of Somaliland'. On 20 September, however, the Colonial Office were informed that the ship was urgently required in the Persian Gulf. On 24 January 1912 they reported that the promised HMS *Proserpine* was similarly urgently required there.

On 29 January 1912, Harcourt wrote to the Admiralty that he regarded it as of the 'highest importance that the coast should be continually patrolled', and was therefore 'compelled to ask' that *Proserpine* be replaced.

The Admiralty replied on 6 February, stating first that the Somaliland patrol was 'less urgent' than the East Indies requirement, and pointing out the acknowledged fact that the traffic in arms via Abyssinia 'tends to make any repressive measures on the coast nugatory'.

The letter continued:

A further point also arises on which, however, the information present in the Admiralty is neither full nor recent. The policy of coastal concentration decided upon by His Majesty's Government in November, 1909, postulated garrisons in the coast towns sufficient to ensure their safety...

The letter added that the use of the navy to protect coast towns, in the view of the Commander in Chief East Indies, 'was totally opposed to British policy'. 'My Lords', it continued [of whom Churchill was, of course, the chief] 'while concurring in his view, did not desire to raise a question of so wide a scope if it could be avoided...'

It will be recalled that Churchill's original memorandum postulated a 'line of observation' from Hargeisa to Las Dureh, and a 'line of resistance' which 'would be the sea coast' and the garrisons of Berbera, Bulhar and Zeyla. 'The line of resistance can really be made good – with at the outside a few companies from Aden and a gunboat or two', he had added.

The Colonial Office replied on 13 February, stating that Harcourt was 'not prepared to press his request', but adding that the difficulties faced by Byatt would be 'greatly increased by the absence of a warship', and concluding with the comment that:

...it will be within their Lordships' recollection that the despatch of a cruiser to patrol the coast was requested in September last in order to prevent the Mullah obtaining supplies of arms and ammunition by sea, and not for the protection of the coast towns.

On 24 February the Admiralty, reiterating that ships were still detained in the Persian Gulf, offered HMS *Dido*, which had been at Muscat on trooping duties and was now homeward bound via Aden, for a 'passing visit' to Berbera, later adding that she could 'divert her course to some part of the eastern coast of the Protectorate in order to report to the Commissioner on the position of the Mullah', regretting that 'it will not be possible to delay the "Dido" longer than may be necessary to obtain the information required'.

However, the Colonial Office, in their reply, felt that they had, because of the worsening situation, 'no alternative but to request that arrangements may be made for H.M.S. "Dido" to remain in Somaliland waters until another ship can be supplied'.

On 25 February Harcourt wrote direct to Churchill, again asking for a ship.<sup>6</sup>

Churchill's Admiralty now, on 2 March 1912, informed the Colonial Office that HMS *Dido* would 'cruise in the vicinity' of the Somali coast for a few days, but insisted that she return home directly after. They promised that another ship would sail from the Persian Gulf 'as soon as her services can be spared from the important duties on which all these are now engaged.' But the sting was in the tail.

The letter concluded:

My Lords hope that Mr Harcourt will recognise that every effort is being made to meet his wishes and to lessen the anxiety which he doubtless feels; but they consider it incumbent on them to register a strong protest against the Navy being again called upon to deal with a situation which appears to be largely due to the absence of an adequate garrison from the coast towns of Somaliland. They once more beg that the military arrangements for the defence of the Protectorate shall be placed on a basis which will prevent the recurrence of such demands in future.

Harcourt now reported this to Byatt, stating that he was 'prepared to press matter on Admiralty further if you consider it necessary'. Byatt telegraphed that he did not, but wanted a vessel 'when practicable'. However, the next day his letter on the deteriorating situation, and the difficulty of assessing rumours of the Sayyid's whereabouts and intentions, dated 22 February, arrived at the Colonial Office, pointing out that:

...It is difficult to obtain early intelligence, since agents going overland often pass through a hostile people and an inhospitable country, and owing to the removal of the cruiser from the coast, communication by sea is slow. The two armed dhows have been away from Berbera for three weeks, and I cannot look for reliable information from the coast towns, or for news of the alleged letter from the Mullah, until their return.

The Colonial Office replied to the Admiralty on 8 March, thanking their Lordships for their letter, and hoping that *Dido*'s replacement would arrive with 'the least possible delay'.

Harcourt – for although the letter came from Mr G.V. Fiddes he most assuredly must have approved or initiated its contents –

now played his trump card. Referring to their Lordships' comments on the Navy's role, it was pointed out that the defence of Berbera was now secure, and that the original policy of coastal concentration had not contemplated more than the 'two or three principal towns' being garrisoned. Fiddes went on:

It was, however, clearly contemplated that in certain contingencies, such as the present, the co-operation of the Navy would be sought and obtained; and in this connexion, I am to enclose, *for the confidential information of their Lordships* [italics added], a copy of a memorandum on the situation in Somaliland which was drawn up by Mr Churchill in 1907, and which, as Mr Harcourt understands, was before the Cabinet when they came to a decision on their future policy.

The reference to the 'confidential information' was a nice touch. Harcourt could, of course, have approached Churchill in cabinet, or on a friendly basis. Churchill's memorandum was confidential, and no doubt Churchill, amid the ruinous consequences of his proposal, would have wished it to remain so. To use confidentiality as a means of exposure was a master touch! How would Winston Churchill, the Giant, brilliant, witty, with a supreme mastery of the English language, respond? How could he respond? It had to be through a subordinate, and it came through Sir William Graham Greene, Secretary to the Admiralty Board. After once again making the point that it was thought wrong by the Royal Navy that their ships should be used to defend the coast towns, which they considered to be the reason for the Colonial Office's spate of requests, he stated that 'They quite recognise that it may on occasion be decided *by His Majesty's Government* [italics added] that concerted action against the Mullah, involving the co-operation of His Majesty's ships, is necessary...'

Greene then added:

...The telegram of 12th November, 1909, conveying the decision of His Majesty's Government to adopt a policy of coastal concentration in Somaliland stated that the object was 'to limit our administration entirely to the holding of the two or three important towns on the coast by small garrisons sufficient to ensure their safety' and made no reference to naval action, which was undoubtedly regarded as likely to be exceptional. Nevertheless, one, or more, of His Majesty's ships has, as a matter of fact, been employed since then in the neighbourhood of Somaliland for periods amounting in all to about half the time which has elapsed.

...I am to add that my Lords recognise the difficulties of the present position in Somaliland, and that all departments must, to some extent, share in the inconvenience involved, but they trust that the Secretary of State may see his way to make such arrangements as will reduce to a minimum the demands made for the assistance of His Majesty's ships.

Thus Churchill had shifted the onus onto the Government and the wording of their telegram – which by its nature was bound to be concise – and off from his own paper of 1907, although he had been following up and pushing the policy of coastal concentration all the way since then.

On 27 February 1912 HMS *Dido* with the Senior Naval Officer Aden left Henjam Island off the Iranian coast and on 3 March radioed Byatt, who asked that he visit Lashkorai and Hais to see what he might discover of the Sayyid's movements. On 4 March she anchored in Aden, loaded 400 tons of coal and two interpreters, and left the same day, arriving at Lashkorai on 5 March. Finding no trace of a dervish force nearby, he sailed for Hais, where he heard that the dervishes had occupied the wells, and had a large force 50 miles inland – from which the friendly tribes had all fled in terror to the coast. On 7 March *Dido* returned to Berbera and informed Byatt of the news. Byatt reported that the Dolbahanta had been defeated and driven from the Ain valley, and had retired on Berbera for protection, 800 having already arrived. They could not be protected. They could not be fed. Dervish forces were within 90 miles. The garrison – 300 native infantry and 200 African rifles – would clearly be hard pressed in the event of an attack.

Sailing again to Lashkorai, Hais and Mait at Byatt's request, he returned to Berbera on 15 March, only to hear that evening that the rest of the Dolbahanta had been routed and driven from Bohotle. On 17 March Captain Curtis, in accordance with instructions, duly sailed the *Dido* for Aden and home, making a report to the Admiralty – who sent a copy of his report to the Colonial Office, adding that 'it appears to indicate that the garrison is insufficient'. Byatt, in consultation with Colonel Thesiger, Inspector-General of the King's African Rifles, thought so too, and on 28 March requested reinforcements from India (as Aden was a part of the Indian administration, and would be severely affected by the loss of meat supplies from Somaliland).

On the 29th he reported that the Dolbahanta seemed to have evacuated Bohotle and fled towards Burao and the Haud. He added:

...It is extraordinary that a common fear has absolutely no effect in welding the Friendlies together, but such is the state of dissension and anarchy prevailing generally that tribal fighting still continues with little abatement of vigour. The Habr Yunis have recently attacked the Habr Toljaala and the Habr Awal, and have been in turn attacked by the latter, and it is, in my opinion, highly probable that the Habr Yunis will profit by the disaster to the Dolbahanta to loot them of such property as still remains to them. That any tribes will combine for mutual defence it is no longer possible to hope...

4. It has been for some time growing apparent that the system of tribal defence inaugurated in March 1910<sup>7</sup> in pursuance of the policy then laid down, has been giving way in spite of all efforts to support it, *and it is now abundantly clear that it has finally and completely broken down.* [italics added] It has therefore been advisable as a precaution to strengthen the garrison at the coast, but it will shortly, I think, become necessary to reconsider *ab initio* the question of the policy to be adhered to with regard to Somaliland....

More tellingly to Churchill's system, after painting a picture of the loss of the interior to anarchy, and the closure of the trade routes, he added:

... We shall then have a needlessly elaborate machinery of administration, of which the annual cost will tend upwards, and for its maintenance an annual revenue on the downgrade...

Echoing this damning (in Liberal eyes) indictment, Colonel Thesiger listed four options: increased coastal garrisons, an expedition, the reoccupation of certain posts in the interior and complete abandonment of Somaliland [but what Great Power might rush in where the Liberals feared to tread?]

On 17 April 1912 Harcourt wrote to Byatt, suggesting that they discuss the whole affair of Somaliland personally when Byatt went home on leave in the summer, adding, however, that if he felt that things could not wait that long, then Byatt should send him a detailed memorandum with his views and recommendations.

Byatt felt that things could not wait that long, and on 1 May he wrote a detailed history and an indictment of Churchill's policy, making suggestions for the future of Somaliland which would quietly and economically redirect Liberal policy towards the Somalis onto a path of humanity and honour.

Byatt wrote that he was 'unable to see any prospect of an improvement', and followed by detailing, in a separate note, the history of the breakdown of Churchill's system. He pointed out that, although it was foreseen that 'a period of some disorder' would follow the evacuation, it was felt that 'men of intelligence and strong character' would take control and, imposing their will on the tribes, would redirect the Somalis into the ways of peace, retrenchment and platonic self interest – that they would, in effect, become Liberals. The first prediction had been absolutely correct. Strong men had stepped forward to take control. But they were Somali strong men, and the self interest? It depended what you meant by 'self' – clan, tribe, sub-tribe, extended family, individual? Far from uniting them, self interest had narrowed them once again into tribes, and then sub-tribes. Each raided each. They raided not for the purpose of killing, but for cattle, sheep and above all, camels. Camels were their wealth, their pride, and their very life. A tribe that lost its camels lost its livelihood. Bloodshed was theoretically incidental to plunder and gain. But now, inflamed by the necessities of survival, fear and vengeance stalked the land. Camels had to be regained. Bloodshed must be doubly requited. The losers starved. The victors trembled when they reflected on the accumulated *godob*.

Byatt recited the bloody saga of the collapse of British Somaliland. It had begun with the Habr Toljaala, who had fought amongst themselves. The Habr Yunis raided the Ogaden. This had resulted in complications with Abyssinia, and they had agreed to return 1330 camels, and had sworn to desist, but immediately resumed their successful raids. The western Aidegalla engaged in 'civil' war. The eastern Aidegalla fought the western Habr Yunis. Sections of both the Dolbahanta and Habr Toljaala fought amongst themselves. The Mijjertein under Omar Doreh, well armed by the Government, had become 'general freebooters'. The Habr Yunis had crippled the coastal Habr Awal.

The fires of ancient hatreds between the Isaaq [Ishak] and Darod had not flared, but simmered, with an occasional yellow flame giving a local indication of a sudden incidence of rapine, looting and bloodletting. The Dolbahanta, the shield and barrier of the Isaaq [Ishak] from the dreaded Sayyid, fleeing in confusion, fear and despair before the bands of his now resurgent dervishes, were allowed neither sanctuary nor passage by the remorseless and ancestral hatreds of the Isaaq. They were often attacked. Were they armed again, therefore, against whom would they point their rifles?

The sensible and soothing attempts at intervention of the local officials sometimes briefly seemed to cool the hatred and restore calm, but they simply placed cold firewood on hot coals. As a sanction, the increasing tide of vagrants and destitute refugees who surged hopelessly across the desert were refused assistance if they reached Berbera. The British thought of the tribes as entities in themselves, who had to be cajoled into reason and sensible behaviour. Individuals seemed to be treated as just parts of entities. And the Roman Catholic missions to the poor and the orphans had been sent away because of the irritation they had caused to the Islamic militants [and Baron von Slatin], and their return refused – for reasons of religion.

The Ayal Yunis tribe near the coast at Bulhar, and therefore more hopeful of British influence and help, reported attacks by the Habr Yunis. The Government gave advice and moral 'support'.<sup>8</sup> Now it lost authority everywhere, including the minds of its own employees; who then sought allies in the interior against the day when they should return to their homes and their families. They became unreliable, and criminals walked free because of their connections inland.

In all these disorders the raiders, the looters, the avengers found a ready supply of French rifles and ammunition. Indeed, because British ammunition supply was restricted, British rifles sold at a discount. Disorder stalked ever nearer the sea shore and the ports. The Arab, Indian and Jewish traders at the coast, their goods lying unsaleable in their warehouses, made representations to the Government.

Byatt recounted all these things in his enclosed note. Acknowledging that, since Somaliland was poor and seemingly incapable of development, political decisions would be guided by political expediency, he nevertheless dared to hope that 'the consideration of the cause of humanity may be taken into account'. Adding that it was 'impossible to estimate...the mortality', he suggested that it was 'seriously large' and that 'many have died from starvation, consequent upon the loss of stock'. Jardine estimated that a third of the population of the interior had perished.<sup>9</sup>

Byatt now reiterated the four choices available: an expedition; the establishment of military posts; continuation of the present policy; and complete evacuation. The first was uncertain, the second indecisive, the third a failure and the fourth (an even greater disgrace) was, he felt, a 'political' decision (as most disgraces are). He added a fifth, which was much criticized by his successor:<sup>10</sup>

the maintenance on the coast of a small mobile striking force, which could be used to maintain order by coercion within a radius of fifty miles or so of Berbera, and keep the main roads clear. It should consist of a camel corps of natives of the country not less than 70 strong...

This fifth possibility was indeed a masterstroke of practical politics. To have demanded 300 would have been to suggest a creeping renewal of the expeditionary phase. Seventy camelmens! How could the Liberal Government, with Churchill very active in cabinet as always, refuse just seventy men? Byatt added that there was 'a risk of such a small force suffering a reverse', but that this risk was 'small in proportion to the good results which might be looked for'. A small risk? How could the Government then not increase it, as, although a force of seventy men was very plainly inadequate, it showed that the Commissioner's mind was properly focussed on the economics of the Protectorate. Indeed, Byatt had made the additional point that the seventy might 'open the way to dispensing with the additional troops which have recently of necessity [thus emphasizing the cost of maintaining the failed Churchillian system] been imported to strengthen the defences of Berbera and Bulhar'. A sound man indeed. He shall have 150.



concluded the Government.

An obvious step to reduce the disorder in the interior was, of course, to stop the supply of weapons and ammunition which came oversea from Arabia, but above all, overland from Abyssinia. The Foreign Office, of course, attempted all in their power to stop this trade, but they were hampered by the 'coastal concentration' policy, which made it difficult to accuse the Abyssinians of disorder in their territories when the hinterland of British Somaliland was in anarchy; and by the decline in health of the great Negus Negusti, Menelik [Menelek] II. It is perhaps worthwhile to embark on a short survey of the recent history of Abyssinia, to show what Menelik had inherited, and what he bequeathed, to that great country.

The Emperor Theodore had written to the Foreign Office, proposing an embassy, but an official had pigeonholed the letter, and forgotten it. Perceiving a slight to His Majesty, he duly imprisoned and fettered some sixty British and Europeans who were in the country. The British sent a lowly Levantine to arrange their release, which increased the insult. Committing suicide after the British expedition of 1868 had rescued the prisoners, he was replaced after a conflict of four years duration by the Emperor John, who had to adopt Menelik, the powerful King of Shoa, in the south east of the kingdom, as his successor, while he ruled Amhara and the north west. As we have already seen, John was killed by a stray bullet and his army defeated by the Khalifa of the Sudan.

Menelik negotiated a difficult path between the Italians, the British, the French and eventually the Germans, and maintained his country's independence, notably on the field of Adowa, where his nephew Ras [Governor] Makonnen won his great victory. But in 1906 he appears to have suffered a stroke, and in that year Ras Makonnen died, being succeeded as Ras of Harrar by his son, Ras Tafari,<sup>11</sup> the future Emperor Haile Selassie. Partially paralysed, the great man summoned his Rases and pronounced that, on his death, he would be succeeded by his 12-year-old grandson, Lij Yasu. He appointed Ras Tesamma as regent. He now relapsed into an almost complete paralysis, and the Rases schemed and plotted, their only restraint being the slight indications of a partial recovery which from time to time flickered over the aged monarch, for his frown was still to be dreaded. Menelik died on 12 December, 1913. He had brought a postal system, electric power, the telephone, and the railway to his land. He cured a serious outbreak of smallpox by prayer and compulsory vaccination. He abolished slavery. He tried to introduce state education, and a new legal code. In all his long and glorious career, his only serious mistake was appointing his grandson as the Imperial heir.

Lij Yasu sought his own power base among his Muslim subjects, and in 1915 he announced to an astonished and indignant nation that he was descended from the Prophet Mohammed, rather than from King Solomon. He added 'There is no God but Allah' to the national flag. He aided the Germans in east Africa. And he sought a daughter of the Sayyid in marriage. Needless to say, the Christians arose, there was a bloody battle, he was deposed, and Menelik's daughter Zauditu was enthroned as Empress – with Ras Tafari as regent and heir to the throne.<sup>12</sup> However, he remained at large until 1921, a menace to Abyssinia and to British Somaliland; and a blessing to the Sayyid Mohammed bin Abdullah [who, by some utterly incredible genealogy, claimed to be his cousin]. By a previous decree of Menelik, no prince of the blood could be executed; Lij Yasu was, instead, handed by the Empress to the Ras of Tigre for perpetual confinement, bound in golden chains. There ensued a struggle between the old guard, supported by the Empress, and the modernizers, under Ras Tafari, which ended with the Empress Zauditu's consent to the latter's adoption of the title of Negus in 1928. On the death of Zauditu in 1930 he was crowned emperor; he took the throne name Haile Selassie I.<sup>13</sup>

Attempts to prevent or to interdict the supply of arms and ammunition by sea continued, but it was acknowledged by Byatt that the armed dhows maintained by the Protectorate for this purpose were virtually useless. Their planned movements were well known in advance, the native crews being not too secretive in this respect. They were slow, slower than the smugglers, and their outlines were readily recognized from afar. Their European commanders were, in the opinion of Byatt, 'not of a high order of intelligence', and an effective discipline and control was maintained neither over their native crews, nor themselves, Byatt noting that they 'tended to general laxity'. Of those who had been employed, two were dismissed for drunkenness, one for neglect, two resigned and one committed suicide. The dhows and their crews cost £1076 per annum to maintain. They had not once captured a smuggler, or reported an instance of smuggling, despite its notorious prevalence on the coast. Their only use, thought Byatt, was to provide 'a semblance of authority'. The Commissioner therefore once again pressed the Colonial office to ask the Admiralty for a cruiser between the months of October and May – for the rest of the year the rough weather of the south west monsoon rendered even smuggling too dangerous.

On 23 February 1913, Mr H.J. Read, on behalf of the Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, duly requested the assistance of a cruiser between October and May each year, adding as a sweetener that Mr Harcourt would recommend to the Treasury that the Colonial Office contribute £1000 annually towards its maintenance (i.e. the savings from the redundant armed dhows).

The Admiralty Secretary replied on 10 March with the pleasant news that a ship, HMS *Espiegle*, had been allocated and had arrived at Aden on 28 February, and would remain for three months on that station. However, he noted that Mr Byatt had previously observed that a sea blockade merely stimulated the overland supply, and added that the armed dhow service, if it had not actually captured smugglers, might well have prevented their trade. Finally, agreeing that the offer of £1000 annually was 'valuable as a recognition of the principle that all Colonies should contribute something towards naval services rendered', he felt, however, that it would make little impact on the annual cost of a ship, which he put at 'not less than £35,000'.

Harcourt replied that he would await an Admiralty report on the utility of the dhows, and that the French Government had now taken steps to prevent the importation of arms to the region, which rendered a greater need for vigilance at sea.

The report on the dhows, made by the Senior Naval Officer Aden aboard HMS *Espiegle*, Commander Nunn, while noting their limitations, repeated Greene's comment on their preventive effect. But on *Espiegle*'s return to the East Indies, Byatt noted that:

within a few days of 'Espiegle's' departure becoming generally known, a large cargo of arms was landed from Jibuti [Djibouti] on the Arabian coast at no great distance from Aden, whence no doubt a part of the consignment will find its way across to the Somali coast.

Harcourt, via Read, now (on 31 July 1913) bluntly pointed out to the Admiralty the effect of HMS *Espiegle*'s early departure, and reiterated that any arms getting in overland rendered the sea blockade even more vital, as did the efforts of the French to prevent it. With regard to the use of a cruiser being 'objectionable in principle', Read wrote, with biting sarcasm, that:

...Mr Harcourt fears that he cannot accept this view, as it appears to ignore two factors in the situation which are of great importance... He understands that it has always been recognised by His Majesty's Government that the policing

of the seas where it may be necessary is one of the duties of the Navy, and he presumes that there is no intention on the part of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty [especially the First Lord!] to depart from this general principle.

The letter went on to point out that the Somaliland Protectorate was in a 'special position', held for '...Strategic and other reasons *known to their Lordships*, [italics added] and not for purposes of trade or commerce'.

But matters on land now supervened in this discussion, and it will be necessary to return for a while to the creation and use of the 150-strong Camel Constabulary which was being raised, equipped and organized in Berbera. Byatt reported in November 1912 that delays had been caused by a shortage of Arabian camels, due to the Italo-Turkish war, and there were further delays due to the late arrival of saddles from India. The full complement of 150 Somalis had already been recruited, many from ex-soldiers of the King's African Rifles. They were formed into two companies, each company comprising four sections of eighteen men. The remainder were being formed into a Maxim gun team. At the head of the Constabulary stood the 30-year-old Richard Corfield.

Corfield, after leaving Marlborough College, had served in the South African Constabulary during the Boer War. He had been a political officer in Somaliland, and commanded a tribal levy, before leaving for Nigeria. Serving under him in the Camel Constabulary were two officers, Mr A. Gibb and Mr C.de S. Dunn.

The new Corps started work in December 1912 with a punishment of a combination of the Habr Yunis, Kassim Ishaak and the Habr Gerhajis Arab known as the Sulagudub, who for some months had been causing trouble, and had been raiding the coastal Habr Awal. To enhance the effect of the Camel Constabulary on this, its first mission, Mendera was occupied by the 119th Indian Infantry from Berbera, and Corfield made this his base. He was assured by the Sulagudub of their peaceful intentions, but raids on 43 villages 3 days later, in which all the male children were slaughtered, seemed to indicate otherwise, and Corfield, in concert with the Habr Awal, pursued them rapidly; spending 21 hours in the saddle out of 24, he crashed into them with a surprise attack near Robleh, slaughtered 38 without loss to the Constabulary (although two Friendlies were wounded and one riding camel injured – which Corfield solicitously reported was 'getting better and will be recovered') and awarded 1282 camels, 11,300 sheep, 170 cows, 17 donkeys, 6 horses and 16 rifles to the injured tribe and to their irregular Somali helpers.<sup>14</sup> The effect was salutary and immediate.

Next, Corfield moved to Sheikh, and thence to Burao, settling local disputes. Gibb proceeded to Las Dureh to settle disputes among the Habr Toljaala, and Corfield then took a detachment to Hargeisa with a similar purpose, returning successful to Burao in May 1913. 'The tribes', reported Byatt to Harcourt, 'are so weary of internal warfare that they are very ready to accept the settlements made between them.' Harcourt accepted these deployments, although splitting the Constabulary in this way made him 'apprehensive'.

In June Corfield, receiving reports that dervish raiders had attacked Dolbahanta Farah Gerad karias (mobile villages) at Udaweina, moved out to support them, but they were so shaken that they retired westward, which then caused trouble with the Habr Yunis.

Byatt was on leave at this moment, unfortunately writing to the Colonial Office that '...The corps itself is, I believe, in no danger of attack. The Mullah has neither men nor material for an attempt to drive it back...'<sup>15</sup> At the time, the 31-year-old Geoffrey Francis Archer was Acting Commissioner in his stead. He had seen service in Africa since the age of nineteen. Archer was an imposing man, standing six feet six and a half inches tall. In his memoirs, Collie Knox, his one time assistant, declared him to be 'the most tolerant, generous-minded man I have ever known'. His personal courage was demonstrated many times in the hunt, at which he excelled,<sup>16</sup> and would be demonstrated further in Somaliland, in the face of disaster. He had seen distinguished service as a District Administrator in Kenya, and was then given the task of surveying the Northern Frontier District, bordering on Abyssinian Somaliland. In May 1913 he proceeded from there to Berbera as Acting Commissioner.

Archer did not admire Manning's analysis on his withdrawal – in his memoirs he described Manning's appraisal as 'completely falsified by events' and 'very briefly summarized' Manning's conclusions, adding 'which is all that it is worth, seeing that nearly all his predictions were falsified in the end'. He also referred to Byatt's request for a small Camel Constabulary as 'most unfortunate'.<sup>17</sup>

Archer took Corfield to task for his move from Burao towards Udaweina, writing to him as follows:

...I cannot pass over the incident without drawing your attention to the explicit nature of the instructions conveyed to you from time to time on the subject of confining Camel Corps operations to the immediate vicinity of Burao (in the Nogal direction) with Ber as an extreme limit for occasional patrols. You are personally aware, moreover, that the Secretary of State has expressly disapproved of the suggestion of employing the Camel Corps against small dervish parties, even where danger was little and success more or less assured, on the grounds that such measures were entirely foreign to the duties of the constabulary, as well as contrary to Government policy; and there is no discretionary power of any sort on this subject allowed...

However, he allowed that 'this does not make your position easy'. The job of the Camel Constabulary was to attempt to organize the Friendlies, to enable them 'if they have the heart to do so, to offer resistance to outside aggression'.

On 6 August 1913, Archer himself arrived at Burao; on the 8th news came in of a dervish raid between Idoweina, Burao and Ber. Archer, entreated by the Friendlies for help, now ordered a 'strong reconnaissance' by the pony section of the Constabulary in the direction of Ber. At Corfield's request, he committed the whole force to Ber to 'watch developments'. However, he sent Captain G.H. Summers of the Indian force with them to advise him of the military situation. Mr Gibb, the expert on the Maxim, was unfortunately on leave.

Corfield had with him 119 men. Of these, 8 had to return to Burao, their camels being too weak to keep up. The men were armed with single loading .303 M.H. carbines. Ammunition carried was 140 rounds per man in bandoliers and cartridge belts, with a 60-round reserve in saddle bags. There was one Maxim gun, with 4000 rounds.

Retreating Friendlies gave information that a large dervish force, having looted and burned karias, was retiring towards Idoweina with a large quantity of stock. The pony section now returned, reporting that they had been heavily engaged with a large dervish force, perhaps 2000 strong, and had expended some 80 or 90 rounds per man. Corfield, forming a zariba some 5 miles north east of Idoweina, could see the lights of the dervish fires reflected in the sky on the other side of the ridge which separated