

## The Canoe Expedition up the Zambesi (1823)

BY

MICHAEL GELFAND, O.B.E., M.D., F.R.C.P.  
Salisbury, S. Rhodesia.

In 1821 the Admiralty despatched two of its ships, the *Leven* and *Barracouta*, under the command of Captain W. F. Owen, to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar. When the expedition reached Simon's Bay the *Barracouta* was ordered by Capt. Owen to convey a party of three officers to Quillimane to explore the Zambesi and other inland parts.

The three officers were: Lieut. Charles William Browne, Mr. J. Forbes (botanist) and Mr. George Kilpatrick, who was appointed as surgeon to H.M.S. *Leven* on the 23rd April, 1823. The *Barracouta* left Simon's Bay on the 16th June, 1823. On reaching Quillimane on the 18th July the brig anchored off the river, and shortly afterwards the men were taken by an escorting party under Capt. Boteler in her largest boat and landed near the town, and went and delivered the official letter on the intended expedition to the Governor.

The Governor poured cold water on the scheme and considered the expedition to be futile. Having first seen Browne and his two companions comfortably situated, Capt. Boteler left Quillimane early the following morning and in a few hours reached the *Barracouta*.

Quillimane was thought to be founded either in 1585, when the Portuguese pushed into the interior under Francisco Barreta to Manica and Tete, or when Vasco da Gama entered the river on his way to the West Indies and found Arabs already settled there.

The town was founded on a marsh which was left undrained. It boasted of ten houses for the Portuguese officials and seven for the merchants from Goa. The total population including Africans was about 2,800. The houses were of brick lined with tiles made from river clay. Fruit in the town was plentiful—coconuts, mangoes, oranges, bananas, limes, custard apples, pineapples, guavas and plantains; and vegetables included cabbages, cucumbers, lettuce, spinach, peas and beans, tomatoes, pumpkins, and grains—rice, millet, maize and wheat. These were grown mostly in the private gardens of the richer inhabitants.

Quillimane at this period owed its existence to the market for slaves on the east coast, and a dozen or so slave vessels called annually from

Rio de Janeiro and took away about 6,000 slaves. At Quillimane a male or female slave cost about 25 Spanish dollars each and were sold in Rio de Janeiro for some 200 dollars.

Even as far back as 1823 Quillimane had a notorious reputation because of its deadly jungle fever caused by the "bad vapours" of its swamp. The fever was more prevalent and severe during the rains, although in 1822 many Europeans died in July, August and September, which are the dry months of the year. Despite the fever, many Portuguese had lived in the district for as many as twenty years. They were all sick and languid, with a yellowish hue and went about in a tottering manner.

For treating fever the Portuguese had little confidence in European medicines or doctors. "They condemn altogether the practice adopted by European surgeons and prefer either that pursued by the oldest inhabitants among their countrymen or the Blacks" (Boteler, 1835).

The medicines popular in the treatment of the fever were Peruvian bark, Columbo root, rhubarb and the Marcella pill, which was composed of Peruvian bark (from which quinine is derived) and rhubarb. The Portuguese too were opposed to bleeding or the administration of mercury as was recommended by many European doctors.

Acting Lieut. Browne was a young man 22 years of age, of brave habits and with a bright future. Twice before in his service he had been wrecked, and Forbes and Kilpatrick were also regarded with respect and esteem, the former being an able botanist and Kilpatrick, as well as being a doctor, was something of a chemist. The party was completed by two black men who were to accompany them as servants.

The party left Quillimane on the evening of the 23rd July, 1823, to the accompaniment of the good wishes and cheers of the crew of the *Barracouta*. They travelled in a large canoe capable of carrying a load of up to ten tons. Passing Masawe on the 24th, they arrived at Marangane, where Forbes collected several botanical specimens. They reached Boca de Rio on the 28th, 47 miles from Quillimane, and here Forbes, assisted by Kilpatrick, added many new specimens to their collection. In order to reach the Zambesi they were carried in machilas a few miles overland, as this was the dry season, and reached the Zambesi on the 3rd August, at the point where it divides to form the Luabo. They then came upon the nearby village of Marooro, where a Portuguese colonel of the

militia, by name of Mariano, lived. He was extremely kind to the men, received them well and offered them his house to live in.

On the day they arrived, Forbes fell ill with fever and the next morning he was put to bed. Although he appeared to improve on the evening of the fourth day, he had a severe relapse and Kilpatrick bled him, much to the disapproval of Mariano. His treatment for jungle fever, which he insisted was often effective, was to induce at all costs profuse perspiration by drinking large quantities of rice water. He so disapproved of Kilpatrick's treatment that he begged him not to repeat the bleeding and to try the Native method instead. Dr. Kilpatrick, however, dismissed Mariano's advice and continued his method, "alleging that a European constitution required far different remedies from those necessary to be adopted with persons inured to the climate." The fever was attributed to the extensive swamp from which arose the foetid vapour.

By the evening of the 5th, Forbes was still very ill, but having improved during the night, he felt better and wished to proceed with his comrades to Shapunga, where Donna Pascoe, a rich Portuguese woman who was in control of the district, lived. She was a merchant and probably the richest person in the country.

The canoe carrying Forbes was made as comfortable as possible with a canopy of rushes above and a well-arranged couch beneath. That evening, having travelled at the rate of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles an hour, the expedition arrived at Shapunga, where they were welcomed at the residence of Donna Pascoe, who at once gave Mr. Forbes a bed.

The Donna lived in a comfortable residence and her table was covered with expensive silver. Mr. Forbes continued to be ill, although at times improving a little, but then relapsing into a more serious state. Anxious that he should not hold back the expedition, and feeling better on the 11th, he insisted on accompanying the others. Two canoes were taken, one being large and made specially comfortable for the patient and the doctor. Before taking leave of their kind hostess, Kilpatrick presented her with various medical prescriptions which might prove of help should she ever need them in this remote place.

The next day (the twelfth), Forbes took a turn for the worse in the canoe and his friends began to regret having brought him. On the 15th they were still ascending the river and had

passed the Morambula range, but Forbes had become critically ill and passed away on the 16th, when they were still a day's distance from Senna. Browne sent forward a despatch informing the Commandant of the death of their companion and requesting a coffin and that arrangements for the funeral be made.

The following night they were attacked by myriads of mosquitoes in their canoe and got very little sleep or rest. When they arrived at Senna the next day they received a reception from the Commandant which was in contrast to that received from Donna Pascoe. He did, however, set aside a residence to accommodate the men of the expedition, and on the next day they proceeded to church and attended the funeral of Forbes, whose body was by now in a highly putrid state.

Illness was again to attack the party, for on the morning of the 27th August Lieut. Browne, who before had often suffered mild bouts, went down with a severe form of fever. The following day Adonis (one of the black servants) developed fever, and on the 1st September the doctor himself and the second steward, Antonio, became ill with malaria. By this time permission for the party to visit Tete was granted, but it was too late. Browne was on his death bed and he died on the 4th September. He must have contracted the cerebral form, for his mind wandered and his speech was incoherent. He became very restless and tried to tear away the blisters formed on his head by Kilpatrick's treatment.

Mr. Kilpatrick now succumbed to fever and had to be confined to his bed, leaving the servants to make funeral arrangements. This was not easy, but after some hours the Commandant granted them a spot in Senna in which to bury the deceased. With the help of some Natives, hired with a few beads, Antonio and Adonis buried their master.

Kilpatrick was so upset by Browne's demise that he appeared to give up all idea of himself recovering, lingered on despondently and took little interest in his surroundings. His two servants packed all their belongings and beseeched Kilpatrick that they should all leave at once for Shapunga. He refused, saying that in a few days he would have breathed his last. However, he was eventually persuaded to leave Senna and they carried him to the canoe.

The remnant of the expedition then set their faces on their return journey to Shapunga, which they reached in a few days. The Donna

Pascoe, on hearing of the death of the two men, expressed her regret that Kilpatrick had not tried the Native remedies. Kilpatrick, however, refused to follow her advice. He was still broken-hearted and was completely indifferent as to his future. He refused to eat and turned to spirituous liquors when he could obtain these, although he apparently never was addicted to them before. He remained in his bed and refused to speak to people. Three weeks after coming to Shapunga he stopped drinking and, greatly to the pleasure of his friends, began eating again, but some days later he again found consolation in drink. He died on the morning of the 28th October. A coffin made of bamboo was prepared and the doctor was buried near the Donna's house. In the afternoon Adonis and Antonio followed by some of Donna's slaves buried Kilpatrick.

After Kilpatrick's death the two servants experienced great hardships and privations. Owing to a lack of funds they had difficulty in getting back to Quillimane. The Donna refused to house them any longer owing to an argument over the fate of the deceased's belongings, which she claimed as part of debts owed to her by the expedition. They were obliged to find accommodation and food elsewhere in Shapunga, where they remained in precarious circumstances for some 14 days. Meanwhile Adonis developed dysentery, followed by "jungle fever." When

Antonio managed to find a canoe he took his sick comrade downstream to Mariano, who helped them to reach Quillimane, but on their way there, owing to a worsening of Adonis' condition, they stopped at the village of Mongallos, where they remained for a fortnight. A Native medicine man was called in, and after Adonis had recovered they continued their journey and reached Quillimane on the 2nd December, where they reported the deaths of the three Europeans.

#### REFERENCES

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