

# THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXIX.

MARCH, 1885.

No. 5.

## THE LAND OF THE FALSE PROPHET.\*

In this paper I have endeavored to describe the Nile route which the British have selected for their line of advance, the country in which their operations must be carried on, and the warlike race they have to encounter. The Soudan, as any one may see by referring to the map, is an immense region extending on both sides of the equator and across the entire continent of Africa. Its name is derived from the Arabic *aswad*, plural *suda*, black, and *Beled-es-Soudan*, as the Arabs call it, means literally the Land of the Blacks. On the east of the Nile it extends to the Red Sea, and on the west it embraces Kordofan and Darfour. Its capital is Khartoum, at the junction of the White with the Blue Nile. South of Khartoum is Sennaar, bounded on the west by the White Nile and on the east by Abyssinia. When General Gordon was Governor-General of the Soudan in 1873-78, a chain of Egyptian garrisons, of which Gondokoro was the principal, reached as far as the great lakes. Egypt proper extends only from the Mediterranean to the first cataract.

The Nile, issuing from the lakes near the equator, is the only source of life for the entire region. No wonder the ancient Egyptians worshiped the Nile as a god, for without it their country would have been a desolate, sandy waste, like the deserts to the east and west of it. After a course of 3300 miles (the last 1700 without a single affluent or tributary) the Nile separates into two main branches at the head of the Delta, finally discharging the greatly diminished volume of its waters into

the Mediterranean through the Rosetta and Damietta mouths.

Let us imagine ourselves ascending the stream when it is at its full, in early September. Twelve miles above the apex of the Delta we arrive in sight of the city of Cairo. On the eastern bank, on a plain extending three miles back to the Mokattan hills, stands the vast Arab city of nearly half a million of people, with the thousand minarets of its four hundred mosques, its palaces, and its gardens of waving palm-trees. On one of the first spurs of the Mokattan, three hundred feet above the plain, rises the great citadel founded by Saladin. On the west bank tower those wonders of the world, the great pyramids of Gizeh, and beyond them the Libyan desert stretches without limits until it merges into the Great Sahara. As we advance, the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of the Nile unfolds itself before our eyes. We pass the site of ancient Memphis and the eleven pyramids of Sakkara. In the narrow valley, rarely three miles in width, and generally much less, is contained all the cultivable land of Egypt. Excepting a few oases, all the rest is the desert. At many points the utterly barren hills of the Arabian and the Libyan chains come down to the river's edge, and nothing is seen but the rugged red and yellow cliffs, with the heated air visibly quivering under the fierce African sun. Then again, as the hills recede for a mile or less, sometimes on one shore alone, sometimes on both, are rich harvests, whitening cotton, green sugar-cane, date-

\* The reader will be interested in knowing that General Colston writes out of his knowledge of the Soudan gained while he was an officer on the general staff of the Egyptian army, in the service of which he commanded two expeditions of exploration in the Soudan, traveling on all the principal caravan routes, and spending two years in the towns and among the tribes which are frequently mentioned in connection with El Mahdi's rebellion.—ED.

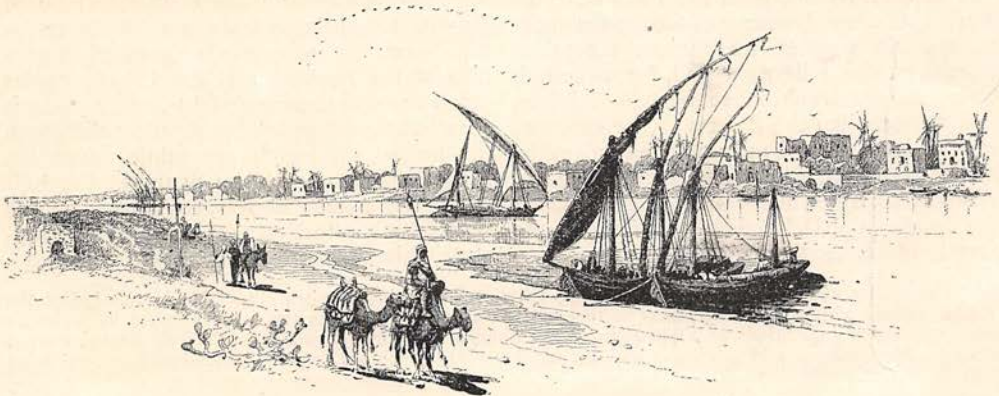
laden palms, and native villages with their quaint pigeon-houses and solitary minarets; while here and there under the orange and fig trees may be seen the white dome over the tomb of some Mussulman saint. At sunrise and sunset long files of veiled women in loose blue robes come down from the villages to the river's brim; then, with their water-jars carefully poised on their heads, walk away with stately stride. We pass Denderah, Karnak, Luxor, Thebes, with their temples, sphinxes, obelisks, and majestic ruins, before we reach the first cataract. Our boat, towed by some five hundred naked Nubians, yelling like so many black demons, is dragged up above the rapids between great rocks of glistening basalt, and resumes its course up the river. Passing the island of Elephantine and the great Ptolemaic temple of Isis at Philæ, the most picturesque ruin in Egypt, two hundred miles more of uninterrupted navigation brings us to the wonderful cliff-excavated temple of Abou-Simbel and to the second cataract at Wady Halfa.

Here we must leave our boat, which has carried us nine hundred miles from the sea. Five great cataracts and many rapids several miles in length make navigation impracticable, if not quite impossible, to Berber, a further distance of seven hundred and fifty miles by water. It is at and beyond Wady Halfa that the river expedition will encounter its greatest difficulties; yet there is nothing within the limits of possibility that British gold, skill, and pluck may not accomplish. But too much time has been lost, for the Nile is as regular as the course of the seasons. It begins to rise at Khartoum about June 21st, is at its fullest by September 1st, and decreases steadily and regularly from October 1st until the next summer solstice. Instead of wasting months in vacillating about impossible desert routes, the British authorities should have understood from the first that the expedition *must* follow

the Nile, which alone can save it from perishing of thirst. The army should have left Cairo in August, and have reached Khartoum in December. Now it is impeded by low water — the hot season begins in March, and a summer in the Soudan will cost more lives than the enemy.

At Wady Halfa ordinary expeditions mount the desert-ship — the camel — and follow the western bank of the river. As we ascend the Nile, the complexions of the natives shade toward black. The fellah of Lower Egypt, no darker than a creole, becomes of a deeper hue with every day's journey. The Nubians above the first cataract are chocolate in color, but with straight hair and profile. Next, the Dongolawee, more or less mixed; and after them, the endless variety of Central African types begins to prevail, the complexion growing darker, the profile more prognathous, and the hair more kinky, yet altogether unlike the woolly headed negro of the Guinea coast, the parent-stock of America's colored population. Ruins of great temples bear witness in these far regions to the extent of the dominion of ancient Egypt.

At Hannek, near the third cataract, numerous islands of basaltic rock rise to the height of two or three hundred feet above the bed of the river. Most of these are crowned with the ruins of large and imposing castles with lofty towers and battlements, erected nine or ten hundred years ago by the dwellers of the Nile Valley as a refuge against the *razzias* of the robber tribes. These ruins, especially at Sarras, are strikingly like those of the feudal castles on the Rhine. Above the third cataract we pass the large and fertile island of Argo on our way to New Dongola, the place so frequently mentioned in the daily dispatches. It is the center of a turbulent and adventurous population, in great part descended from the old Memlooks who escaped Mohammed Ali's massacre in 1811 and fled here for refuge. Among these people,



KHARTOUM.



A CAMEL-DRIVER.

slave-hunters always find an abundance of willing recruits.

Passing Old Dongola, an almost abandoned town on the eastern bank, we reach Debbeh just at the elbow where the Nile resumes its northern course after its sharp

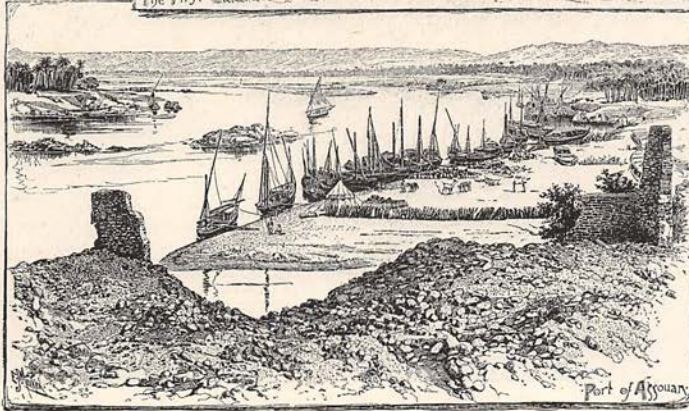
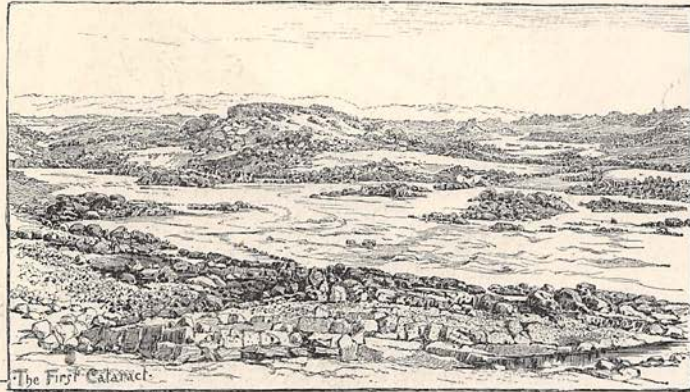
bend to the south-west at Abou-Hamed, nearly two hundred miles above. At Debbeh the great caravan route to El Obeid and Darfour leaves the Nile and strikes off to the south-west through desolate deserts.\* Half-way between Debbeh and Abou-Hamed is

\* A short distance above Debbeh are Ambukol and Korti, which the British will make their second base if they abandon the river route in consequence of the increasing difficulties due to the regular fall of the Nile at this season. From Ambukol a trail leads across the Bahiouda desert to Shendy, and another to Khartoum (220 and 240 miles); but this route presents the same difficulty explained in the September CENTURY as common to desert routes, *i. e.*, the impossibility of marching several thousand men with their immense trains through a waterless tract in which the wells, few and far apart, can never supply more than 500 men at one time.

the fourth cataract, near Merawi, which acquired a tragic celebrity as the scene of the massacre of Colonel Stewart and his party in October last. Abou-Hamed is a miserable Nile town, memorable for the destruction of a body of eight hundred Turkish Bashi-Bazouks (irregular cavalry), who were surprised by the Bishareens, in 1820. All who escaped from Bedouin swords and spears were driven into the river and drowned in the cataracts below. It derives its only importance from being the southern terminus of the great Korosko caravan route. On the way between Abou-Hamed and Berber is the fifth cataract, one of the

export trade, which here leaves the no longer navigable upper river and finds its way by the great caravan route to Suakim on the Red Sea.

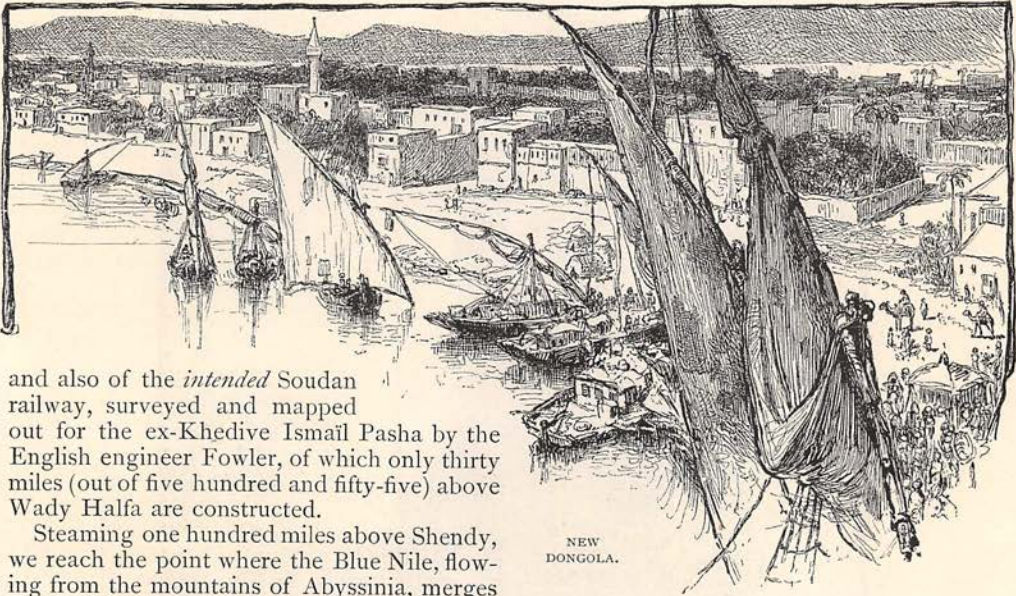
Here the ascending traveler may take to the river once more, embarking on one of the small side-wheel steamers brought in sections on camel's-back many years ago and put together at this point. Not over seventy feet in length, drawing very little water, yet frequently getting aground on sand-banks, they seem to have been Gordon's chief reliance. Thirty miles above Berber we pass the mouth of the Atbara, the last affluent of the Nile,



most picturesque as well as difficult on the Nile. From several days' observation at two different times, I believe this cataract to be quite impassable for ascending boats on account of the rocks and the extreme velocity of the water. The crocodile and hippopotamus abound there, and aquatic birds are found in great numbers. One hundred and thirty-three miles above Abou-Hamed is Berber, a town of ten thousand people, recently shelled and temporarily recaptured by General Gordon. It owes its importance to its position, being the great *entrepôt* of almost all the Soudan

coming down from Abyssinia and flowing only during the rainy season. In the peninsula formed by the Nile and the Atbara, called by Strabo the island of Méroé, and just above the sixth cataract, are wonderful vestiges of Ethiopian civilization. Besides sphinxes and ruined temples, I counted no less than forty-two pyramids, which, though far smaller than those of Gizeh, would be considered gigantic in any other land.

A few miles above these ruins is Shendy, an important market-town, the terminus of the caravan route from Kassala and Abyssinia,

NEW  
DONGOLA.

and also of the *intended* Soudan railway, surveyed and mapped out for the ex-Khedive Ismaïl Pasha by the English engineer Fowler, of which only thirty miles (out of five hundred and fifty-five) above Wady Halfa are constructed.

Steaming one hundred miles above Shendy, we reach the point where the Blue Nile, flowing from the mountains of Abyssinia, merges its limpid stream with the turbid waters of the White Nile. Just above the angle formed by the two rivers lies the city of Khartoum, the capital of the Soudan. It was founded by Mohammed Ali, a man of great genius and iron will, who originated all those reforms, both civil and military, that placed Egypt far ahead of all other Mussulman countries. When he had completed the conquest of Kordofan and the submission of the Bedouin tribes in 1820, he at once recognized the importance of the commercial and strategic position of Khartoum. A palace for the governor, barracks for a garrison, an arsenal and a ship-yard were constructed in substantial style, and the new city soon became the center of a vast trade in ivory, ostrich feathers, gum arabic, grain, cattle, and last, though far from least, slaves. In fact, it always was the point where slave-traders fitted out their expeditions, obtained their recruits, and found a market for their human cattle. I was there while Gordon was Governor-General of the Soudan. He had received from the Khedive Ismaïl Pasha the most stringent orders to suppress the slave-trade by the sternest exercise of military power, and the native governors dared not show any remissness in seconding him; but the trade was so interwoven with the ideas and customs of the people, that very little effect was produced beyond forcing it to seek concealment by going around the city instead of through it. The Austrian consul, Mr. Rossett, a very intelligent gentleman, told me at the time that the slave-bazaars were closed, it was true; but if any one wanted one hundred boys or girls, they could be procured

quietly, within two hours, at the rate of thirty-five to fifty dollars a head.

Khartoum is a city numbering between fifty and sixty thousand people. Several European consuls reside there. The American consul was Azar Abd-el-Melek, a Christian Copt from Esneh, and one of the principal merchants. The European colony is small and continually changing; for Khartoum is a perfect grave-yard for Europeans, and in the rainy season for natives also, the mortality averaging then from thirty to forty per day, which implies three thousand to four thousand for the season. Khartoum is the commercial center of the Soudan trade, amounting altogether to sixty-five million dollars a year, and carried on by one thousand European and three thousand Egyptian commercial houses. Drafts and bills of exchange upon Khartoum are as good as gold in Cairo and Alexandria, and *vice versa*. From official sources I learned that the city contained three thousand and sixty houses, many of them two-storied, each having from ten to one hundred and fifty occupants. Stone and lime are found in abundance, and the buildings are, after a fashion, substantial, the houses belonging to rich merchants being very spacious and comfortable. There are large bazaars, in which is found a much greater variety of European and Asiatic goods than would be expected in such distant regions. In the spacious market-place a brisk trade is carried on in cattle, horses, camels, asses, and sheep, as well as grain, fruit, and other agricultural produce. Many years ago an Austrian Ro-

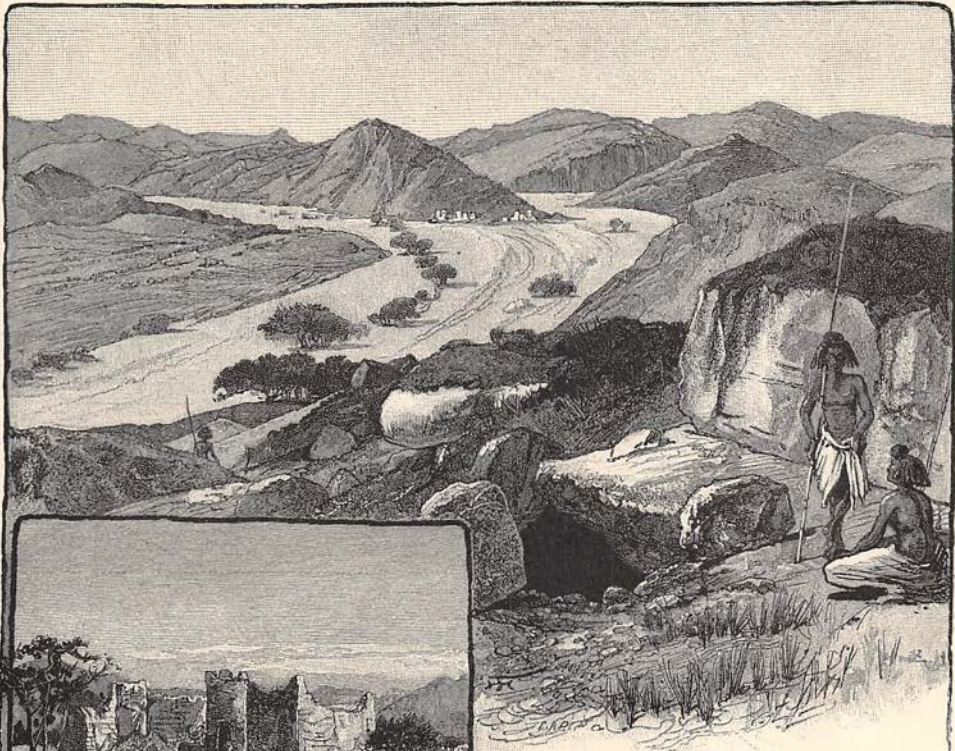


A DONGOLA GIRL.

man Catholic mission was established and liberally supported by the Emperor of Austria and by contributions from the entire Catholic world. It occupies a large parallelogram surrounded by a solid wall. Within this inclosure, in beautiful gardens of palm, fig, pomegranate, orange, and banana, stand a massive cathedral, a hospital, and other substantial buildings. Before the people of Egypt and the Soudan had been irritated by foreign interference, such was their perfect toleration and good temper that the priests and nuns, in their distinctive costumes, were always safe from molestation, not only at Khartoum, but even at El Obeid and the neighborhood, where the majority are Mussulmans and the rest heathens. It was stated some months ago that Gordon had abandoned the Governor's palace and transformed the Catholic mission into a fortress, its surrounding wall and massive buildings rendering it capable of strong resistance.

From Khartoum the Nile is navigable nearly to the great lakes. Sennaar on the east and Kordofan on the west of the White Nile are

the most southern provinces of the Egyptian Soudan, and extend to about the twelfth degree of latitude, which is also the limit of Moslem predominance. Beyond are the heathen tribes known as Shillooks, Denkas, Doowairs, etc. A little south of the tenth degree the Sobat falls into the Nile on the east and the Bahr-el-Gazal on the west. A few miles above, the Nile Valley expands into an immense net-work of almost inextricable marshes, over one hundred miles in breadth. There is no river that presents more sudden and enormous variations than the Nile. On one of the little steamers which have been doing Gordon such good service, I passed through a gorge of basaltic cliffs, at Jebel Rowyan, about fifty miles below Khartoum. There the whole volume of the Nile flows through a cañon just forty yards in width, but the stream is one hundred and fifty feet deep at low water. A mile below, the river is three miles wide, full of islands, and becomes so shallow that my steamer grounded five or six times in one day.



WADY OLLAKEE.—GOLD MINES OF DEREHIB.



WADY OLLAKEE.—ANCIENT ARAB CASTLE.

From Khartoum to the lakes, crocodiles and hippopotami become more and more plentiful. On a cool day, in December or January, crocodiles of all sizes are seen sunning themselves on every sand-bank, as thick as logs after a freshet. Herds of wild buffaloes and gigantic antelopes, elephants, and giraffes come to slake their thirst at the water's edge, and the night is made lively, if not hideous, by the lion's roar on the land, and the continual bellowing of the hippopotamus in every pool.

Agriculture is carried on industriously enough all over the narrow valley of the Nile, which, from Sennaar to the Mediterranean, including the few oases, contains only ten thousand square miles of arable land, in-

habited by seven or eight millions of people cultivating the soil and living in towns and permanent settlements. Even where the cliffs come down to the river, if a strip of cultivable ground only a yard or two in breadth is left exposed at low Nile, it is made to bear its tribute of a few rows of beans, onions, or doura. Wherever water can be elevated, the land exhibits wonderful fertility; and the amount of labor expended upon merely lifting water to the highest attainable level, by means of the most primitive machines, is absolutely prodigious as well as continual, for a few hours' intermission would result in the burning up of the crop. At the line where the irrigating waters halt the desert begins, and its limit is as sharply marked as a gravel walk across a greensward. Ancient Egypt was the granary of the Roman Empire, and the soil has lost none of its fertility.

It is impossible to form an accurate estimate of the savage tribes along the Nile between the tenth degree and the lakes, but they probably number two or three millions. They cultivate only a little land, and are herdsmen, hunters, and robbers.

Such is the valley of the Nile, that mysterious river which, the reverse of all others,

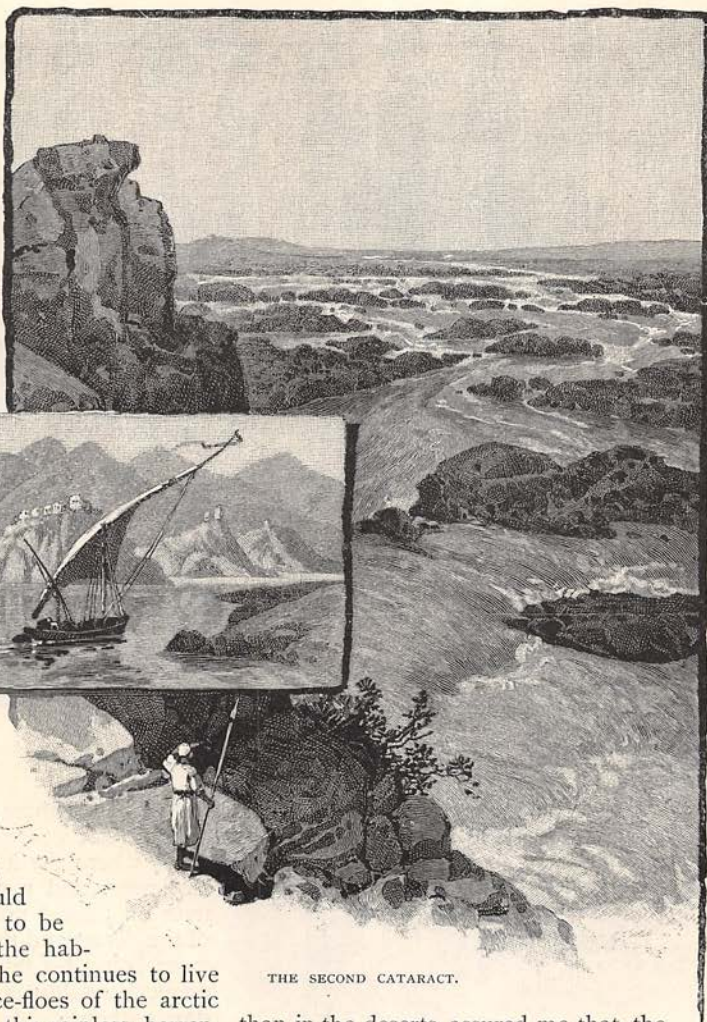




steadily decreases in volume by irrigation and enormous evaporation for the last 1700 miles of its course, and whose fountain-heads south of the great lakes have never yet been ascertained.

## THE DESERT.

ALL the vast spaces east and west of the



Nile Valley between the fourteenth degree and the Mediterranean (over eight hundred thousand square miles) are The Desert. It would seem at the first glance to be absolutely unfitted for the habitation of man; but as he continues to live and multiply amid the ice-floes of the arctic circle, so he does here in this rainless, barren, and torrid zone. He who has never traveled through the desert cannot form a just idea of that strange and marvelous region, in which all the ordinary conditions of life are completely changed. It is essentially a waterless land, without rivers, creeks, rivulets, or springs. Once away from the Nile, the only supply of water is derived from deep wells, few, scanty, and far apart. Long droughts are frequent. When I explored the great Arabian Desert between the Nile and the Red Sea, it had not rained for three years; and when I traveled over the Suakim route and through Kordofan, no rain had fallen for two years. Between the twenty-ninth and the nineteenth degree of latitude it never rains at all. Water becomes precious to a degree beyond the conception of those who have never known its scarcity. Members of the Catholic mission at El Obeid, where water is much more plentiful

THE SECOND CATARACT.

than in the deserts, assured me that, the summer before, water had been sold as high as half a dollar a gallon by the proprietors of the few wells that had not dried up. When long droughts occur, the always scanty crop of doura fails away from the Nile, and the greater part of the flocks and herds perish, as well as a considerable part of the population. It follows naturally that when undertaking a journey through the desert, the paramount question is water. A supply must be carried sufficient to last to the next well, be it one or five days distant. It is usually carried in goat and ox skins suspended from the camels' pack-saddles. These are the water-bottles of Scripture, which become leaky from wear, and always lose a considerable portion of their contents by evaporation. The first thing after reaching a well is to ascertain the quantity and quality of its water. As to the former, it may have been exhausted by a pre-



GEBEL AND WADY HEGATT.

ceding caravan, and hours may be required for a new supply to ooze in again. As to the quality, desert water is generally bad, the exception being when it is worse, though long custom enables the Bedouins to drink water so brackish as to be intolerable to all except themselves and their flocks. Well do I remember how at each well the first skinful was tasted all around as epicures sip rare wines. Great was the joy if it was pronounced "*moya helwa*," sweet water; but if the Bedouins said "*moosh tayib*," not good, we might be sure it was a solution of Epsom salts. The best water is found in natural rocky reservoirs in deep narrow gorges where the sun never shines. As to "livesprings," I never saw more than half a dozen in six thousand miles' travel.

The desert would be absolutely impassable without the camel. He was created for it, and

thrives better there than anywhere else. His broad, soft foot enables him to traverse deep sands where the horse would sink nearly to his knees, and would promptly perish. He lives on almost nothing, the scanty herbage of the desert and the twigs of the thorny mimosa being his favorite food; but his most precious quality is his ability to travel five days without drinking during the fiercest heat of summer, and much longer at other seasons. For this reason wells are very rarely more than five days apart. The African camel comes from Arabia, and has only one hump. The best breeds are reared by the Ababdehs and Bishareens between the Nile and the great Arabian chain. They are distinguished by small head, slender neck and limbs, and short hair. The camel and the dromedary differ only in breed, just as the dray horse differs from the racer. The burden camel, called *gamal* by the Arabs, never changes his regular walk of two and a half miles an hour under a load, which should never exceed three hundred pounds for a long journey, for his strength must be estimated by what he can carry when exhausted by hardship and privation. The dromedary, or riding camel, called *hageen*, is much swifter. With no other load than his rider, a bag of bread or dates, and a skin of water, he can travel a hundred miles in one

day on an emergency. The walk of the dromedary (as of the camel) is the most excruciating, back-breaking, skin-abrading mode of locomotion conceivable; but when pressed into a pace of five or six miles an hour, which is his natural gait, a good, high-bred dromedary is as comfortable a mount as can be desired; and I can aver, from personal experience, that a fairly good horseman will find himself perfectly at home on camel's-back

and squatty Bongo, about two feet shorter, and presenting every type of feature and every variety of color from a dark olive to the brightest copper and the deepest black.

The natives divide their deserts into two classes. To the first they apply two names, *el jebel*, the mountain, or *el barriyeh*, the wilderness. This is the kind of desert spoken of in Scripture, where John the Baptist preached to the multitude who went out to hear him, and



CAMELS DRINKING.

after two days' practice. One of the most interesting and picturesque sights of the desert is a caravan of several hundred camels just from Central Africa. The sheikhs and chief merchants wear turbans and flowing robes of various colors; the camel-drivers and common people are bare-headed, and with only a few yards of coarse white cotton around the loins, but all armed with swords or lances. The animals are loaded with great bags and bales of ostrich feathers, gum arabic, hides, and senna, the chief productions of the Soudan; while not a few carry four or six elephants' tusks wrapped in raw hides, and looking like gigantic scythe-blades. On foot is a motley crowd of almost naked savages from all the tribes of the Upper Nile, from the lanky Dinka, nearly seven feet in height, to the fat

found supplies of locusts and wild honey. I never found wild honey, but of the living locusts, which are sometimes eaten by the Bedouins, great abundance at times, as well as of the pods of a species of the locust-tree, which are edible and are thought by some commentators to be the locust used as food by St. John. The wilderness is diversified by mountains always absolutely bare of all vegetation. A Bedouin can hardly believe that in other lands the mountains are clothed to their summits with green and luxuriant forests, and that from their flanks dash down cascades and rivers of "living waters." Such things he has never seen or even dreamed of, unless as a vision of the Moslem paradise. But the valleys, or *wadies* (pronounced *waddies*), and some portions of the plains are often com-

paratively well supplied with vegetation. After every shower of the brief rainy season, the dry beds in the wadies are converted for a few hours into furious torrents. The water disappears, quickly absorbed by the thirsty soil; but where an impenetrable stratum lies parallel and close to the surface, the water is kept from sinking too deep, and in such spots will be found trees and herbage, the latter springing up with magic rapidity after the first showers. Many kinds of grasses afford camels, sheep, and goats abundant pasture for a portion of the year. Wild flowers are seen in great variety: on the slopes of the Arabian chain, acres upon acres of heliotrope; on the plains, a bush called merk, resembling the Scotch broom, and bearing small five-pointed yellow stars of sweetest fragrance. In Sennaar and Kordofan are hundreds of square miles covered with the plant which takes its name from the former province and supplies the world with senna. After the first rain the trees which drop their leaves during the intense heat of summer are swiftly clad in living green. Numerous species are found: the heglík (*Balanites Ægyptiaca*), and several kinds of acacia, among which are the seyal, of considerable size; the sount, used for saddles and various utensils, and its bark for tanning; the small *Acacia mimosa*, with its huge thorns, the favorite food of camels; and in Sennaar and Kordofan the hashab (*Acacia gummifera*), which produces the gum arabic of the world. It bears a small orange-colored button of intense and delightful odor, identical with the "poppinack" of Carolina and Georgia. The proximity of a thicket of these trees (the favorite resort of



SON OF EX-SULTAN OF THE KOUNGURAS.

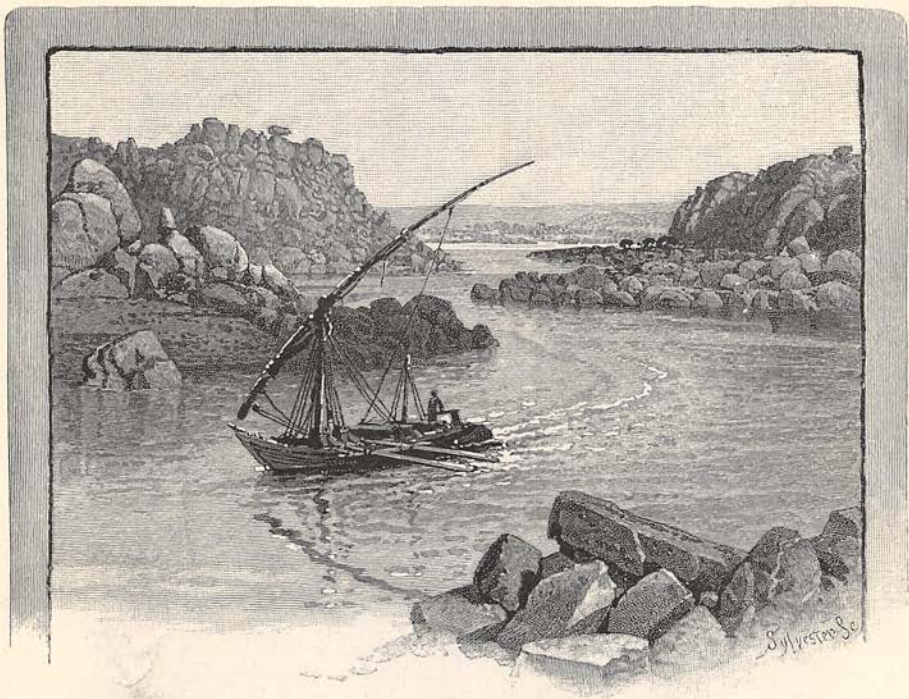
over fifty in height. Its trunk, always hollow, is used in Kordofan and Darfour as a reservoir for water, holding from fifteen to twenty thousand gallons.

From November to February, just after a good rainy season, the climate is perfection, just like the brightest and warmest October days in Virginia. Though the thermometer occasionally rises into the nineties, and sometimes higher, the air is perfectly dry, and the mornings and nights are pleasantly cool. Game is found in proportion to the vegetation: on the plains, ostriches and countless gazelles and antelopes; in the wadies, rock-partridge and grouse, guinea-fowls and hares; on the high ridges, capricorns and wild asses. Among the fauna of the wilderness are some unwelcome specimens, locusts, serpents, and scorpions, the latter quite numerous, and altogether too fond of nestling on one's blankets of a cold night, but quite unaggressive if let alone. Add to these the vultures, which stalk familiarly about the camp, picking up what they can find, and the jackals and hyenas, whose howls are heard in the night. Traveling at this season is perfectly charming. Everybody is in fine spirits, for water and pasture are plentiful; laughter and endless chaff are heard from one end of the column to the other. A caravan of five hundred camels covers more ground than a large cavalry regiment, marching with a front of about one hundred yards where the wadies are broad, and reducing to single file when crossing narrow defiles between gates of granite and basaltic cliffs. When evening comes, camp is pitched in some pleasant wady, and quickly dozens of fires illuminate the valley. The large Soudan sheep, which follow the caravan, grazing as they go, supply a delicious roast added to the game killed during the day's march, and the canned soups, meats, and vegetables we used to carry in abundance. After dinner comes the unequalled coffee, straight from Mocha, then pipes and pleasant chat, while all around we hear the laughter and gabble of the good-natured soldiers and Bedouins mingled with wild and barbaric songs, accompanied by the viol, called *kemengeh*. Occasion-



MODE OF WEARING HAIR BY A DANDY OF SUAKIM.

monkeys and guinea-fowl) is revealed hundreds of yards off by the sweet perfume wafted upon the breeze; and at the proper season lumps of the gum are seen glistening like icicles all over the limbs. South of the thirteenth degree the huge baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) flourishes across the entire African continent. This is the elephant of the vegetable kingdom, thin-foliaged, unsightly, from sixty to seventy feet in circumference, but not



ROCKS OF KONOSSOO.

ally, of a moonlight night, the Bedouins perform their national war-dance, with sword, lance, and shield, in mock attack and defense, and even their great sheikh, the princely Mohammed Khalifa, condescends to take part; while the beating of the *darabukas* wakes the echoes of the wady and the answering yells of the astonished jackals and hyenas.

If the "wilderness" in winter offers many attractions, it is quite the reverse with the *atmoor*, as the Arabs call the utterly barren kind of desert. This is truly the ideal desert, consisting mainly of hard gravel plains diversified by zones of deep sand, rocky ridges, sometimes of considerable altitude, and rugged defiles. It is absolutely destitute of all vegetation, and consequently of animal life. Only the ostrich and hyena cross it swiftly by night, and the vulture hovers over the caravans by day. Not a tree, not a bush, not a blade of grass relieves the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow sand. No one can resist the solemn impression of deep silence and infinite space produced by the desert. When night has come, and the soldiers and Bedouins are asleep in their bivouacs, walk away under the unequalled African moon beyond the first ridge of sand or rocks. Around you stretches a boundless sea-like horizon. The sand gleams almost as white as snow. Not a sound falls upon the ear, not the murmur of

a breeze, not the rustle of leaf or grass, not the hum of the smallest insect. Silence—only silence—as profound as death, unless it is broken by the howl of a prowling hyena or the distant roar of the king of beasts.

Within the limits of Egypt and the Soudan these desolate atmoors extend over three-quarters of a million of square miles, never trodden by the foot of man. Only a few caravan trails cross them in their narrowest parts, with scanty wells at long intervals; and the necessities of trade can alone account for their being penetrated at all. They are like oceans, where caravans pass each other in haste, like vessels at sea. The marches are perfectly terrible, and yet it is worse to halt during the day than to keep in motion, for the heat makes sleep or rest impossible, even under canvas. With the burning sand under your feet and the vertical sun over your head, you are as between the lids of an oven. In summer the thermometer rises to 150 and 160 degrees. The air that blows feels as if it had just passed through a furnace or a brick-kiln. Over the plains it quivers visibly in the sun, as if rising from a red-hot stove, while the mirage mocks your senses with the most life-like image of lakes, ponds, and rippling waters. No more laughter or merriment along the column now. Soldiers and camp-followers protect themselves as best they can with



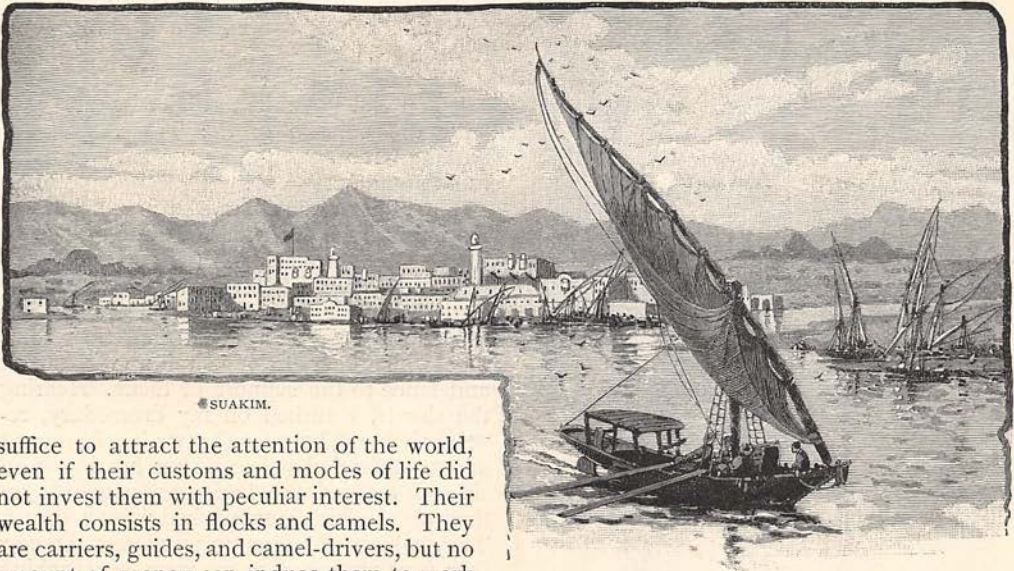
THE DAHABIEH.

turbans and blankets, bringing over all the hoods of their cloth *capotes*, leaving only a narrow aperture just enough to see ; while, strange to say, the Bedouins stride along on foot, *bare-headed* and almost naked, without appearing to suffer any great discomfort. Were not the nights comparatively cool ( $80^{\circ}$  in summer), neither men nor animals could endure the terrible ordeal.

#### THE BEDOUINS.

THE small area, not exceeding five or six thousand square miles, coming under the description given above of the "wilderness," is the wandering-ground of those tribes of nomads called Bedouins. Their total number is probably about half a million. They all claim to be of Arab descent, their ancestors having crossed the Red Sea from the Hejaz (Northern Arabia) centuries before the Christian era ; but some of them have become very much mixed since that time. In fact, in the

Arabic language, whose plurals are so strangely formed, Arab is the plural of Bedáwee, and is the name of the inhabitants of Arabia proper, though very improperly applied to all the people of Egypt, who speak Arabic, it is true, but belong to an entirely different race. The nomads of the desert are always called Bedaween'. The principal tribes between the Nile and the Red Sea are the Ababdehs, Bishareens, and Hadendawas ; west of the Nile are the Hassaneeyehs, the Kababeesh, and the Beggáras. All these, divided into numerous sub-tribes, have almost identical customs, and differ chiefly in their dialects and the mode of wearing their hair. They constitute the great bulk of the Mahdi's forces, and are the most formidable adversaries the British have to encounter, as the latter learned from their experience at Tamaï, where a British square of two thousand men was broken, driven back half a mile, and its artillery captured by these naked sons of the desert, armed with only swords and spears. This alone would



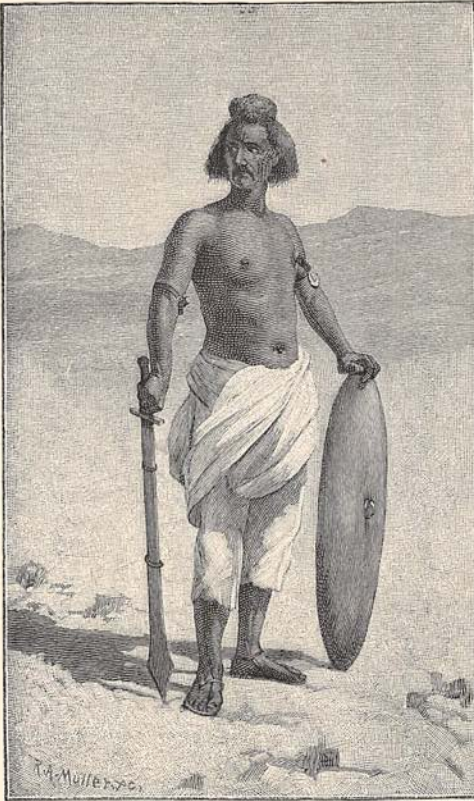
©SUAKIM.

suffice to attract the attention of the world, even if their customs and modes of life did not invest them with peculiar interest. Their wealth consists in flocks and camels. They are carriers, guides, and camel-drivers, but no amount of money can induce them to work the ground, and they look with infinite contempt upon the fellaheen and the inhabitants of towns, whom they scornfully term "dwellers among bricks." On my first expedition, a large sum in Austrian silver dollars (the money they prefer) was given me by the Government to hire my camel-drivers to dig out the Roman reservoirs on the ancient military road between Keneh on the Nile and Berenice on the Red Sea. In reply to my offers of extra pay, the sheikhs assured me that not one of their men would degrade himself by such labor for any price, even a guinea per day. They are governed in an absolutely patriarchal way by their great sheikhs, and their condition is very much like that of their ancestors in the days of Abraham and Lot and Ishmael. They have no individual possession in the land, but the territorial limits of each tribe are well defined, and the encroachments of one tribe upon the range and wells of another are the most frequent cause of their feuds.

The great Bedouin tribes were not reduced to obedience to the Egyptian Government without long and fierce struggles. Mohammed Ali's iron hand forced them to submit when he conquered Kordofan in 1820. But it was a very limited submission. The Government never interferes with their internal affairs or wars, leaving them to the rule of their sheikhs, and well satisfied when able to collect their taxes more or less irregularly. Much less does it undertake to enforce conscription among them, though, being of a warlike disposition, they would make the best of soldiers if they could be disciplined; but this is impossible, for their ruling passion is independence and the

free life of the desert. Yet, until recent foreign interference broke the prestige and power of the Khedive, he held their great sheikhs responsible for the safety of trade and travel on the deserts, and both were most effectually protected. They are a fine-looking race, of medium height and very well formed, with small hands and feet, and the arched instep of the Arab. In color they range from dark olive to deep chocolate, but their features are equal to the best European types, with aquiline nose, more delicate in shape than the Hebrew, thin lips and splendid teeth, and their hair is long and frizzled. The girls and young women often have really beautiful faces and graceful forms, but they lose their beauty early and become hideous hags. They wear no veils, like the Mohammedan women of Egypt, and their only dress is a few yards of cotton, once white, wound around the waist, hanging to the knees, and leaving the bust and shoulders exposed.

The Bedouin is the most abstemious of men. His food is a little doura obtained from the settlements in exchange for the surplus of his flocks and the skins and charcoal that he prepares for sale. His camels yield him an abundance of excellent milk, and he could live on that alone and its various preparations. He needs but little meat, which is supplied by his sheep and goats, with an occasional camel for some great feast. Those who live in more favored regions breed horses and cattle also. The desert grasses supply him with mats for his tents, and the trees with pack-saddles, ropes, and tan-bark. His water and milk are carried in goat-skins; his drinking-vessels are gourds and grass-woven bowls, which hold water perfectly. Civilized enough to appre-



MOHAMMED IBRAHIM, A KARABEESH GUIDE.

ciate the value of money and a few articles of European manufacture, he wants little else than long, straight, and broad double-edged sword-blades of German or Spanish make, to which he adapts handles and scabbards of his own contrivance. A few possess flint-lock muskets and double-barrel guns. All carry lances made in the country, whose iron or copper heads are generally barbed with such cruel ingenuity that it is impossible to extract them from a wound without the most horrible laceration. Fastened above the left elbow is a curved pruning-knife used to cut twigs of the mimosa for camels. On the right upper arm are one or two small morocco cases containing texts of the Koran as amulets against the "evil eye" and other dangers. Most of them carry round or oval shields of hippopotamus or giraffe hide, and it is a point of honor with them to go always armed, as the following incident illustrates.

On the march, an Egyptian soldier, having let fall the halter of his camel, ordered roughly the Bedouin guide walking in front to give it back to him. The latter replied:

"Am I thy father's camel-driver to be thus spoken to?"

Said the soldier, raising his stick:

"Thou son of a hog, give it here, or I'll strike thee!"

The Bedouin said:

"You call yourself a soldier because you wear the uniform of the Turks. You are nothing but an earth-digger; I am a warrior, as all my fathers were!"

The soldier struck him. In a moment the Bedouin's huge saber flashed out of the scabbard. The other soldiers (whose arms were packed on their camels, for we were in a perfectly peaceful region) jumped from their camels to gather stones to defend their comrade, while other Bedouins ran up with sword and lance to the support of theirs. Hearing the shouts, I rushed on my dromedary, revolver in hand, between the two hostile groups and commanded peace. After hearing both sides, I ordered the Bedouins to deliver up their arms, which were packed upon a camel. They submitted without a word, but three or four days afterward, as we were approaching some wells where they expected to find other Bedouins, they sent me a deputation earnestly praying the return of their arms, saying they would be forever disgraced if forced to appear without them. Their petition was granted upon promise of good behavior, which was faithfully kept.

Their warlike disposition is nurtured by the frequent feuds between neighboring tribes, generally arising about water and the theft of cattle. The unwritten law of the desert forbids any settlements around the wells, which are common to all. But two parties arrive at the same time at a well which is insufficient for both. A dispute arises as to precedence; they come to blows and a man is killed. The murderer flees to his tribe and sends to offer the *price of blood*; for the avenging of blood as practiced by the ancient Hebrews exists in full force here, except that there are no "cities of refuge." If the family of the dead refuse compensation, war begins, and it may last for years, each murder by one side demanding retaliation by the other. Hence it is that even when peace prevails in the desert, if two parties meet, both halt and send out a man or two to reconnoiter and ascertain *if there is blood* between them. When a caravan arrives unexpectedly in the neighborhood of a Bedouin camp, the first impulse of the natives is to vanish instantly, especially if soldiers are seen among the new-comers. The sheep and goats, driven off by the women and children, disappear in a twinkling beyond the next ridge. Having no other encumbrance than a few skins and gourds, their migrations are exceedingly prompt and easy. The tents and other baggage are loaded upon camels, and in





A GIRL FROM CENTRAL AFRICA.

a few minutes a whole encampment disappears. After this precaution is taken, one or two men return, and when they have ascertained the peaceful intentions of the strangers, the others approach to trade and to learn news, of which they are very greedy.

They are all Mohammedans, but their mode of life prevents their giving much attention to the minor practices of their religion. Their women are much more free than those who live in settled habitations, and in some of the tribes this freedom is carried to the most extreme license, while in others great strictness prevails. The customs of marriage and divorce differ but little from those prevailing in all Moslem countries. The Bedouins always go bare-headed, even in the fiercest heat of summer, and, strange to say, some tribes, like the Beggáras, shave their heads. The Ababdehs twist their hair into plaits the size of a quill, thrown straight back from front to rear, while the Bishareens comb all the hair straight up to the height of five or six inches, the rest hanging in braids nearly down to the shoulders. They plaster their heads with suet and camel's tallow, or any other grease they can procure, letting it trickle down upon their naked breasts and shoulders. The tribes are

distinguished also by the form and position of gashes cut in the cheeks in infancy. The Beggáras who inhabit southern Kordofan, near the Nile, are very warlike, and when beyond the reach of Egyptian garrisons are addicted to brigandage. They possess great numbers of splendid oxen, mounted upon which both men and women, riding alike, and all armed with four or five lances, come in hundreds to the market at El Obeid. The great sheikhs of all the tribes usually wear the turbans and flowing robes of the Egyptians, but the common people are satisfied with a few yards of cotton around the waist, and sandals upon their feet.

The Bedouins have a strong feeling of personal dignity, and are quick to resent insults. Duels of a peculiar kind are not uncommon, always supervised by the elders of the tribe, who never permit them to come to a fatal termination. Sometimes the two adversaries, separated by two parallel ropes about a yard apart, are armed with courbashes (a fearful whip, made of hippopotamus hide, which brings the blood with every cut), and they are encouraged to slash each other until their wrath is cooled. In more serious cases the combatants are seated flat on the ground, face to face, and as close as they can get. One single knife is given to the one who wins the first cut, after which he passes it to his adversary, who strikes the second blow, and so on alternately. They are forbidden to strike at a vital part, and while they are slashing each other's arms, legs, thighs, and shoulders,—not without a



JEBEL ARRAWAK, UPPER NUBIA. GENERAL APPEARANCE OF THE ATMOUR.



COLONEL GORDON, 1867. (FROM PHOTOGRAPH MADE IN EGYPT.)

sort of chivalrous courtesy,—the judges of the combat watch each stroke that is given, and when in their opinion enough blood has been shed, they rise and separate the adversaries, who proclaim themselves satisfied, and return quietly to their tents to have their wounds dressed.

A brief sketch of the foremost Bedouin sheikh of the Soudan will illustrate the character of those tribes. Mohammed Hussein Khalifa, the great chief of the Ababdehs and Bishareens, is the patriarchal yet almost absolute ruler of over seventy thousand people. His ancestors were princes for generations, perhaps before the days of the Prophet. He is now about sixty years of age, nearly six feet high, and of dignified presence. His color is dark chocolate. He has excellent features, large black eyes, curved aquiline nose, thin lips, and a fine beard. He is extremely wealthy in silver and gold, jewels and precious arms, camels, horses, and slaves. The Khedive requires him to reside on the

banks of the Nile, where he possesses a princely estate of rich alluvial lands, at El Hoar, near Berber. He is held responsible for the security of trade and travel through the eastern deserts, and receives a large royalty upon the moneys paid his people as guides, carriers, and camel-drivers; for it is one of the privileges claimed by them that no one—not even government expeditions—shall pass through their country without hiring them and their camels. He escorted me for seven months in my explorations of his deserts, having with him ten or twelve dromedaries of his own, and as many burden camels, a large retinue, and five or six large tents furnished for his accommodation. Whenever we came across encampments of his people, they hastened to do him homage as their prince, kissing his hand and the hem of his garment, and submitting their suits for his decision; while he, seated under a tree or at his tent door, administered justice precisely as the kings of Israel are described as doing; and no king or emperor could have a more noble and commanding manner. His father was the Sheikh Kralif. When the Memlooks were exterminated by Mohammed Ali, in 1811, those that escaped the massacre fled to these deserts, and Kralif gave them refuge and hospitality; and when the dreaded Ibrahim Pasha followed in pursuit, Kralif alone was bold enough to avow what he had done, and to vindicate his course. Soon afterward he was murdered by a Turkish governor, and was succeeded by his brother Baráca. The latter waited for an opportunity, and retaliated by assassinating the Turk, and some years later he was murdered by the latter's relatives. Mohammed Khalifa succeeded his uncle, and took up the avenging of blood, and the vendetta did not cease until one or two of the Turks had been killed, and the



HEADQUARTERS OF THE MAHDI AT EL OBEID.

rest fled the country. When, after seven months' wanderings through the eastern deserts, we reached the banks of the Nile, he gave a great feast at his residence to the entire expedition. Many sheep were slaughtered and numberless fowls. The officers had their banquet apart, fifty or more dishes, in the Arab fashion, a sheep roasted whole crowning the feast. The soldiers, camel-drivers, and servants all had theirs seated on the ground and attended by the sheikh's slaves. He, with a courtesy and grace that any prince might envy, commencing with us, went from group to group, breaking bread and eating just one mouthful with each, accompanying the act with some graceful oriental compliment. He reminded me of Abraham, only he is a much more powerful sheikh than Abraham ever was. He has remained faithful in his allegiance to the Khedive, and he is the present Mudeer of Berber, so often mentioned in the dispatches. He has been made a pasha and decorated with the order of the Osmanieh, and is spoken of as the future Governor-General of the Soudan. His alliance is worth as much as an army to the British.

When I was in the Soudan the Mahdi was in obscurity, secluded in a cave in the island of Aba above Duem, transforming himself into a prophet by meditation, prayer, and pretended visions and revelations. What is most striking about him is his pertinacity and his power of holding his followers in spite of defeat. It is nearly four years since he first raised the standard of revolt, and during that time he has suffered nine or ten serious defeats with barely an equal number of successes. After every defeat he has returned to the attack stronger than before. Three times he was repulsed with heavy losses while besieging El Obeid, but he finally captured it. Hicks Pasha inflicted a terrible defeat upon him, but he subsequently destroyed Hicks Pasha and his entire army. It would be a dangerous mistake to suppose that his power is broken. His inaction during the summer is explained by the fact that his followers, many of whom live in Kordofan, had to go home to plant and secure the scanty crop of *dokn* (an inferior kind of doura, which is the only grain that matures during the brief rainy season from June 15th to September 15th), on which their families depend for the next year. Like all commanders of barbarians, who have no regular commissariat, he may have only a couple of thousand men with him to-day and fifty thousand next month. It is certain that he had fully that number or more when he exterminated Hicks Pasha. If all the Bedouin tribes and the people from Kordofan to Dongola were to unite under his flag, he could

muster more than a hundred thousand men. But this is not to be expected, and the British, profiting by the division existing among the tribes, may secure some more or less valuable allies whose fidelity will depend entirely upon success. But in any case the Mahdi is not a foe to be despised.

El Obeid is the present center of his power. I was forced to remain there for six months, having been disabled in the deserts by insolation produced by excessive heat, and I was transported back to Suakim in the winter, nearly a thousand miles across two deserts, in a litter swung between two camels; but during my convalescence I had time and opportunity to observe everything worthy of note in El Obeid. This city is about four hundred miles from the Nile, two hundred of which are through desolate atmoors. It is built on an immense plain, studded with enormous baobabs, which always grow singly one or two hundred yards apart. It is a place of fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants, almost hidden in thickets of heglisks and mimosas, which give it a pleasing appearance from a distance. There are a few substantial, well-built houses belonging to Greek and Egyptian merchants. The telegraph, on iron posts brought from England, connecting it with Khartoum and Cairo, was completed while I was there; and before three days, such is the civilizing influence of commerce, the local traders were using it to ascertain the quotations of gum arabic and ostrich feathers at Cairo and Alexandria. The native dwellings are generally circular, with an earthen wall four or five feet high, surmounted with a conical roof made of *dokn* stalks in regular layers, and quite rain-proof. These habitations, called *tokles*, about twenty feet in diameter, are comfortable enough. A slender pole projects several feet above the roof, and when ornamented with a glass bottle between two ostrich eggs it is considered the height of architectural luxury. Each family possesses a sufficient number of these *tokles* for its use, and the group is surrounded with a thorn-hedge. This inclosure, shaded by heglisks, is often planted as a vegetable garden. The sight of the natives seated around their dwellings at sundown, the men chatting and smoking, the women attending to household duties, and the children playing and rolling about in primitive nakedness, is both curious and picturesque. The market of El Obeid is held daily on a spacious square in front of the Governor's quarters—the main building of which, now the Mahdi's residence, is three hundred feet front with a large square tower in the center. Some three or four thousand people come to this market from all the surrounding villages. Cattle, horses,

camels, sheep, grain, and the identical peanut of Virginia and Carolina are the staples of trade. Near by are covered bazaars containing European goods, and also large warehouses full of gum arabic, hides, and ostrich feathers.

It is very interesting to watch about sunset the groups returning from market. One sees hundreds of people clad in blue or white cotton robes and turbans, riding on donkeys; men and women on camels' back; Beggáras mounted on bullocks, with their hands full of lances; Kababeesh and Haden-dawa Bedouins; soldiers in white uniforms, recruited among the slaves from Central Africa, taken from the traders in order to break up their traffic, and drafted into the black Soudanese regiments. Mingled with all these are Greeks and Egyptians in their national costumes, Bashi-bazouks from Albania and Asia Minor, some on foot, others mounted on their Syrian horses, and Catholic priests and Sisters of Charity in their peculiar dress. Last, not least, hundreds of women venders of merissa (native beer), fruits, and vegetables, with jars, hampers, and baskets piled up on their heads, in impossible structures, apparently defying all the laws of gravitation, yet held up by that astonishing gift of equilibrium common to all African women. They go laughing, chatting, running, leaping, without ever touching the burden with their hands, and yet nothing falls to the ground. The crowd gradually disappears; the tropical moon rises above the horizon; the voice of the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer; and the drums and bugles of the garrison (all Central African negroes) perform very creditably the airs of the French retreat. Then everything is quiet for an hour, after which

the merry sound of the darabukas and native flutes announces the *fantasias*, which follow the day's labors. This picture of El Obeid, the capital of Kordofan, would apply with slight variations to all the large towns of Egypt and the Soudan.

One sight, however, I beheld there, the most peculiar and ghastly that ever shocked my senses. It was the burying-ground, situated almost within the town, and some six or eight acres in extent. The gravelly soil was literally covered with shreds of the white and blue cotton robes in which the dead are wrapped for burial. The graves, never more than two feet deep, are lightly covered with stones and thorns. Every night the hyenas come in and dig up the bodies that have been buried during the day, leaving exposed to view the remnants of their feast. No imagination can realize the horror of this Golgotha. It follows of course that the mortality is fearful. During the sickly season (that of the rains) the deaths averaged ten a day in a garrison of two thousand men, and the proportion was nearly as great among the population.

It is apparently the purpose of the British Government to abandon the Soudan. But if the expedition to bring out Gordon and the garrisons meets with brilliant success, England may determine to occupy Khartoum permanently, as has been so ably and forcibly urged by Sir Samuel Baker. Otherwise, all that country will relapse into barbarism; its vast trade will be lost to the world; and to the comparatively strong and civilized government which enforced good order under Ismail Pasha, will succeed anarchy and the redoubled horrors of unrestrained slave-hunting and slave-trading.

R. E. Colston.

