

THE SCRAMBLE FOR THE UPPER NILE.

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WHEN General Gordon was murdered, and Khartum fell into the hands of the Mahdi, in January, 1885, the whole of the Egyptian Sudan was abandoned to the wild tribes and fanatical Mohammedans who people it. The only parts of Egypt's southern possessions left with any semblance of authority were the Equatorial Provinces, with Emin Pasha as governor. When Stanley brought Emin and Major Casati back to the east coast of Africa, Darfur and the Bahr-el-Ghazal were in consequence virtually given up to the tender mercies of raiding dervishes, who were intent upon obliterating from the minds of the population any good which may have resulted from the effects of civilized rule as represented by Christian officials of the Egyptian government.

Egypt made no attempt to recover this enormous territory until an expedition, under the command of Sir Herbert Kitchener, and composed of Egyptian, Sudanese, and British troops (the latter representing the army of occupation), was, without previous warning, suddenly despatched from Cairo, in March, 1896.

This campaign of recovery has been going on ever since, until now the Egyptian gunboats have reconnoitered the Nile as far south as Metemneh, one hundred miles north of Khartum.

Of Khartum, one of the greatest emporiums of trade in the whole of Africa, splendidly situated at the junction of the White and the Blue Nile, nothing now remains but ruins. Where civilization of the outer world stood boldly in relief against barbarity and savagery, there remain only a few half-starved natives begging succour from passing strangers. The buildings once occupied by the Egyptian officials, foreign consulates, missions, and European traders have all been razed to the ground, and now form the haunt of dogs and hyenas. The Mahdi's successor, commonly called the Khalifa, has moved the Sudan capital to Omdurman, on the left bank of the White Nile, three miles below.

Here reigns this African despot, a Mohammedan of the very worst type, a man born in a lowly state of life, and one absolutely unfitted to rule over his fellow-men. He has now been for years at the head of affairs; but his days are numbered, as numerous expeditions are hurrying forward to take possession of his southern states, and he will be driven out of the country, or will acknowledge the sovereignty of either England or France. These two nations represent the scramblers for the Upper Nile.

Egyptian and British troops are steadily pressing southward. British troops are slowly but surely advancing from Uganda. The road from Suakim to Berber, now effectively occupied by Egypt, is open to the Red Sea. Kassala, in Abyssinia, strongly fortified, and the only place kept intact by the Italians during their last disastrous war, has been turned over, with its full complement of arms, ammunition, artillery, food, etc., to an Egyptian garrison made up of Egyptian, English, and Indian troops.

The Emperor of Abyssinia has signed a treaty with the British government to the effect that he will assist it in every way, and will not, while hostilities last give any assistance to the Khalifa.

In the Kongo Free State, Baron Dhanis has a large expedition scattered over a vast area of country known as the Zone Arabe; but his best officers and men are in the Bahr-el-Ghazal, where every now and then they have a battle with the natives, who are more or less in sympathy with the dervish party. There seems to be not much doubt but that England and the Kongo Free State are acting together.

The expedition coming from Uganda, which started under command of Major Macdonald, and left Mombasa, on the East African coast, north of Zanzibar, some months ago, with the published intention of delimitating the southern boundary of Abyssinia, where it touches British East Africa, had absolutely no intention of doing any such thing, Major Macdonald had orders to march with all possible despatch to the Nile, proceed north, and occupy for Egypt, in the

name of Great Britain, the abandoned territory, thus thwarting Captain Marchand's French expedition, of which I shall speak hereafter. Unfortunately, when four hundred miles (one half the distance) up country, his soldiers, five hundred strong, mutinied, killing four officers, and deserting with rifles and ammunition. England, undismayed by this unlooked-for occurrence, immediately sent to his relief from Mombasa Captain Scott, and two hundred picked men from the Indian Contingent that were stationed at that town, and wired Bombay orders for the Twenty-seventh Bombay Light Infantry, eight hundred and fifty strong, to sail immediately, and proceed up country without delay.

I feel convinced that this regiment will also go to the Nile, and thus, by Major Macdonald's misfortune, England will get the splendid opportunity of reinforcing her African forces without exciting undue comment. These troops have been ostensibly sent to capture and punish the mutineers; and when this has been done, on they will go to the northwest.

We see now, by the above, what England is doing to regain for Egypt her lost provinces. Now we shall examine the proceedings of the French.

About eighteen months ago, the Marquis de Mores, well known in America, a French nobleman of a wildly adventurous turn of mind, conceived the mad idea of entering the Sahara desert from Tripoli, and of making his way to Omdurman, where he was to open negotiations with the Khalifa to get the latter to recognize a French protectorate over the Egyptian Sudan. However, M. de Mores was assassinated by Arabs two days after leaving Tripoli, and a certain portion of the French press began a fierce growl against England, saying that De Mores had been murdered by men in her pay. Of course this is arrant nonsense.

Captain Marchand left Loango last year with another French expedition composed of twenty-three officers and five hundred soldiers, and, by way of the Ubangi River in the French Kongo, arrived finally in the Darfur province, and is now believed to be at Kordofan. When there was talk of sending this expedition three years ago, broad hints were given in the French press that its objective point was the Nile; and these rumors seemed to have such good foundation that Sir Edward Grey, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, put in a most energetic protest to the French government, saying that if this was the intention of France, England would look upon it as an unfriendly act.

If the French have established themselves at Kordofan and claimed the country for France, the foundation for such a claim would rest upon the fact that it belongs to no power, having been abandoned by the Egyptian government when Hicks Pasha's army was slaughtered and Slatin Bey surrendered to the Mahdi, and also that the Egyptian government has never made an effort to reoccupy it. If this occupation is true, it remains to be seen whether England will permit it.

Prince Henry of Orléans has also left, or is on the point of leaving, the West African coast with another French expedition, with the same object in view as Captain Marchand. He expects to meet, near Kordofan, Colonel Leontieff, governor of southern Abyssinia. Last year M. de Bonchamps, another Frenchman, left Abyssinia, when the emperor of that country was being beset by foreign diplomatic missions, and headed for the Nile, to make a junction with Captain Marchand.

If these three French parties come together, England might sit tight, say nothing, and let the three commanding officers get into a row as to which is the representative of France; and when the row is at its height, slip in, take everything in sight, and politely request the others to leave, as her Majesty's government had occupied everything, and did not purpose to have foreign armed forces traveling through British territory and disturbing its peace.

Many will ask, Why this feverish haste to occupy this wretched country in the heart of Africa?

Reasons are many, and most of them are sound. First and foremost, the power which holds the southern countries through which the Upper Nile and its tributaries flow has the fate of Lower Egypt in her hands. It has been stated many times that it would be quite feasible to divert the course of some of these rivers, thus decreasing the annual rise, which means everything to the agriculturist of Lower Egypt. Without her agriculture there would be no future for the country; and unless the river overflowed its banks annually, and made its deposit of rich soil from hundreds of miles south, the situation would be absolutely desperate.

Secondly, the districts of Darfur and Bahr-el-Ghazal are rich in gum-rubber and ostrich feathers, and a certain amount of gold has also been found.

The Bahr-el-Ghazal abounds in elephants, and great stores of ivory are said to be held by native chiefs, only waiting for traders who

will deal honestly with them. The two districts of Dar-Senaar and Dar-el-Fungi are more or less agricultural countries, and before the fall of Khartum Greek planters had been successful there. Therefore, from an agricultural point of view the country is valuable.

Thirdly, the finest soldiers in the Egyptian army, commonly called the Sudanese, come from these southern provinces. These men are in demand as soldiers, not only in Egypt, but on the east and west coasts of Africa. The black battalions of the Egyptian army are composed of Sudanese, and are reckoned among the best soldiers to be found anywhere.

Who will be successful in this scramble for the Upper Nile? I say most emphatically, England, although France seems to have a temporary advantage in the occupation of Fashoda. This occupation England cannot, and will not, permit to remain permanent; and, following up the numerous protests made by Lord Rosebery's government, the present government must, in order that the prestige of England may be undimmed, give notice to France to leave Fashoda and return to her west-coast hinterland.

From the point of view of commerce and progress, it would be preferable for this vast territory to be under the indirect control of England. Her possessions are never encumbered with large numbers of military and civil officials, and she does everything in her power to foster and develop trade on strict lines of partiality to none. With England at the head of affairs in this benighted country, there can be no doubt but it will develop its resources in a comparatively short time, although there has been no semblance of authority of government there for thirteen years.

The French wish to retrieve their error of 1882, when the British fleet bombarded Alexandria, temporarily in possession of Arabi Pasha. Her Majesty's government offered France the opportunity of taking part in the bombardment of Alexandria; but the day before this took place, all Europe beheld with astonishment the French fleet putting to sea, leaving the English sole masters of the situation. In the face of this stupidity, how can France expect the sympathy of Continental powers in her effort to seize what is undoubtedly an Egyptian possession? If she had acted in concert with England in the beginning, we should see to-day, instead of England solely directing Egyptian affairs, a

dual control of the whole of Egypt from Alexandria to the Victoria Nyanza. By sending of these expeditions France will undoubtedly acquire new territory; but England will never allow a claim to any part near the Nile, or near the mouths of its larger western affluents.

If France should finally get possession of Darfur and Bahr-el-Ghazal, what would she do with them? By rude caravan roads trade could be carried on from Loango, on the west coast, and Djibuti, on the Gulf of Aden, with Fashoda as a central point. In order to make such a trade remunerative, hundreds of thousands of human beasts of burden would be required to bring in articles of commerce necessary to purchase the export commerce. No doubt the French would abandon the west-coast route, and, through the influence of Colonel Leontieff, extend the proposed Djibuti Railway to the eastern bank of the Nile; but in order to do this it would be necessary to seize another large district bordering on Abyssinia—Dar-el-Fungi. The probabilities are that France would do nothing to develop the country, but merely maintain a military occupation in order to have a thorn continually in the side of England.

Now, with the provinces under Egypt, what would the Egyptian, or rather the British, government do? Extend the Transcontinental Railway, now at Buluwayo, South Africa, to meet the Cairo Railway, being pushed south by Sir Herbert Kitchener; bring the Uganda Railway, being rapidly built by the British government, from Mombasa, East Africa, to the Victoria Nyanza, up to the Nile, and connect it with the South African system; run a branch line from Suakim to Berber on the Nile; and erect a system of telegraph-lines which would extend from Cairo to the Cape, Mombasa to the lake, and on to the Nile at Wadelai or Lado, and from there connect with the Kongo Free State system now being built from Boma. All the larger towns would be connected, and communication with Europe would be established; gunboats would patrol the river; and when the country had fully realized the benefits of good government, mounted police could be substituted for the military. England knows just how to do these things, and one can be absolutely certain that they would be done properly.

I believe England, and not France, will be mistress of the Upper Nile.